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Religion and Nonreductionism in Nishitani Keiji's Philosophy

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To Joshua.

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Abstract

The present dissertation inquires into Nishitani Keiji's nonreductionism in the context of the conflict between science and religion. Even though it is largely implicit, his nonreductionism proves relevant to the interpretation of his thought, especially in relation to questions about the essence of religion, the nature of science, and the meaning of life and reality. In the middle of revived controversy over religion's reducibility (fueled by recent progress in cognitive science), Nishitani's existential thought provides clues for a critique of reductionism and the disclosure of an alternative wherefrom the relationship between science and religion is not one of conflict, but productive coexistence. It is then relevant to discussing to what extent humanity can both benefit from the progress of science and technology, and fulfill the spiritual need for a meaningful existence.

Keywords: Nishitani Keiji, reductionism, nonreductionism, science and religion.

Resumen

La presente tesis indaga en el no reduccionismo de Nishitani Keiji en el contexto del conflicto entre ciencia y religion. Aunque mayormente implícito, su no reduccionismo demuestra ser relevante para la interpretación de su pensamiento, especialmente en relación con preguntas sobre la esencia de la religión, la naturaleza de la ciencia y el significado de la vida y la realidad. En medio de una reavivada controversia alrededor de la reducibilidad de la religión (alimentada por recientes avances en ciencia cognitiva), el pensamiento existencial de Nishitani ofrece pistas para una crítica del reduccionismo y para desvelar una alternativa al mismo desde la cual sea posible una relación no conflictiva, sino de productiva coexistencia, entre ciencia y religión. Así pues, es relevante discutir hasta qué punto la humanidad puede a la vez beneficiarse del progreso tecnocientífico y satisfacer la necesidad espiritual de una existencia significativa.

Palabras clave: Nishitani Keiji, reductionismo, no reductionismo, ciencia y religión.

Preface

I have tried to approach Nishitani Keiji's thought in a way that simultaneously takes into account his attempt as an author and the questions that we might (or should) ask him from our contemporary condition. In this sense, the main methodological premise underlying the following pages is that asking about what the author meant and asking about what the study of his thought can tell us today are not questions that can be dealt with separately, even though they are different. From that perspective, I hope to contribute to showing the relevance and significance of Nishitani's philosophy in our times.

It is my conviction that there is no future for philosophy without an effort to reach out to other disciplines and fields. This applies all the more in the case of Japanese philosophy. In that line, even though this work belongs to the field of Kyoto School studies, I have tried to make it accessible to a wider audience. Much clarification might then sound already too familiar for specialists (especially in chapter 2), a circumstance for which I beg their pardon and patience.

Concerning format and conventions, relevant Japanese terms are provided whenever necessary, but always accompanied with a transliteration preceded by a "J." The same applies to Chinese (C) and Sanskrit (S) expressions. Transliteration of Japanese follows the revised Hepburn system (the most widely used in Japan studies).

Chinese is transliterated in pinyin. Sanskrit words are written according to the IAST standard. Japanese proper names are always introduced in the traditional order: surname first, name last.

Whenever possible, English translations of Japanese works are quoted first, then the Japanese source (if relevant). If the Japanese text is cited directly (because there was no published translation available), the translation is mine. The abbreviations employed for the works most frequently cited here are indicated in the bibliography.

Barcelona, September 2017

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INTRODUCTION

The topic of this dissertation is Nishitani Keiji's largely implicit nonreductionism in the context of his religious philosophy as well as its relevance for reflection on some of the questions he paid more attention to: the essence of religion, the nature of science, and the conflict between them. As I would like to argue, in the middle of revived controversy over religion's reducibility (fueled by recent progress in cognitive science), Nishitani's existentially inspired nonreductionism provides clues for a scientific approach to religious phenomena that avoids the extremes of being hostile to religion or unproductive for science. Nishitani's work can inspire views wherefrom the relationship of science and religion is not one of conflict, but productive coexistence. That is, it can help to address the question whether humanity can both benefit from technoscientific progress and fulfill the spiritual need for a meaningful existence. In that line, I expect that the inquiry proposed in the following pages can be a dialogical bridge between Nishitani's philosophy and contemporary discussion over reductionism.

Two points of this formulation beg for clarification. As regards the study of Nishitani's philosophy, it is far from obvious that a discussion of reductionism is relevant in his work. His explicit references to reduction and reductionism are scarce and hardly

elaborated. Nonetheless, an inquiry into the role these two concepts play in his thought sheds light on the character of his particular form of existentialism (in his terms, the existential standpoint), especially in relation to his reflection on the problem of science and religion.

That leads us to our second point. It is a common notion in religious studies, as well as in the humanities, that reductionism is a thing of the past. Thus it seems dubitable to bring the topic to the fore again. However, debate in recent decades shows that it is still an issue. In the particular case of religion, reductionism has gained new resources that make the traditional objections against it obsolete, or at least controversial. Let us explain this in further detail.

For most scholars involved in the study of religion, philosophers included, the questions concerning religion's reducibility are well known: Can religion be explained by science? If so, to what extent? Or, to put it in more technical terms, to what extent is it possible to provide a scientific explanation of religious phenomena and religiousness in general? Is it possible to provide a reductionist explanation of religious phenomena and religiousness—that is, a full explanation of these phenomena in terms of something other than themselves? Supposing that one of the previous questions can be answered affirmatively, how would that affect religion? Would

that boil down to undermining it? Would it represent its end, or if not that much, at least a radical reassessment thereof? It is a mainstream view in the field of the History of Religions that these questions should be answered negatively: early 20th-century science, it is claimed, already failed to achieve reduction and nonreductionism has been long established. This is, however, inaccurate. As a revision of the relevant bibliography will show, in recent decades the problem of religion's reducibility has become relevant again (at least in the English speaking world). Besides, the arguments for reductionism in our times are more sophisticated than the classic ones. This is because they find inspiration in new approaches to the scientific study of the human and its subsequent results. Examples of these new approaches include evolutionary psychology, sociobiology, and cognitive science. This way, the scientific study of religion as well counts with new tools and new accounts of religion in terms of other factors (factors such as natural selection or cognition). In a word, the questions concerning religion's reducibility still demand reflection, and such reflection needs to take the recent progress of science into account.

Such being the contemporary scene, I would like to suggest that a critical approach to Nishitani's view of reductionism may provide the elements for a nonreductionist stance wherefrom it is possible to discuss this problem in full depth—that is, not simply as a

methodological issue, but as a philosophical problem with profound implications for our understanding of religion, science, knowledge, and life's meaningfulness. More specifically, the study of his philosophy may help us to better understand the clash between science and religion underlying the problem of religion's reducibility as well as pave the way towards its resolution.

Even though Nishitani wrote and lived in the 20th century, I think that his philosophy provides a useful point of reference for discussing nonreductionism today. The reason for this is not that he provides arguments for classical nonreductionism. Taking the issue at hand seriously requires going much further from simply arguing for or against religion or science. Precisely, Nishitani's reflection calls not only for a thorough reconsideration of the nature of religion. Even more, this reconsideration demands not shielding religion from scientific explanation, but driving both science and religion to a level on which they can coexist. His vision is one in which the relationship of science and religion can be not one of conflict, but coexistence. Even more, I would dare claim that his perspective makes room for a mutually productive relation between science and religion. It is in light of these considerations, I believe, that we should discuss the problem of religion's reducibility as a philosophical problem. All this considered, the contents of each chapter go as follows.

Chapter 1 is an introduction to reduction and reductionism with a focus on the debate over religion's reducibility in recent decades. The main difficulty with the debate is the lack of agreement on, and clarity about what reduction means. In general, it is quite hard to find an uncontroversial account of reduction. Nonetheless, I will present a clear definition that at least works as a starting point. That way it will be possible to make some sense of the dispute over religion's reducibility and, most importantly, understand the motivations of each side involved. My assessment will be that the debate is, in the long run, the clearest reflection in the academic arena of the clash between two cultural ideals: the Enlightenment (with its notion of humanity's realization as continuous progress guided by science-informed reason and materialized by technology) and traditional religiosity (deeply concerned with making room for religious wisdom and transcendence in the contemporary world). In this sense, its relevance and nature go beyond mere methodological or epistemological concerns.

The next two chapters provide a general introduction to Nishitani Keiji's thought. Therein I will try to articulate an interpretation of his philosophy as an existential phenomenology, an approach that will provide the conceptual tools for a discussion of his nonreductionism. **Chapter 2** introduces his philosophical standpoint

in general. It is especially relevant to highlight that Nishitani does not first develop a philosophy wherefrom he then proceeds to reflect on religion, but rather starts doing philosophy from what he would call a religious standpoint. However, this does not mean that he adopts the stance of any faith, church or school in particular. As will be explained in **Chapter 3,** his aim is rather to trace back "the 'home-ground' of religion, where religion emerges from man himself [...]" (RN xlviii). For him, religion is essentially linked to the problem of what is the significance of reality (the "meaning of life") and what is truly real. Thus behind every system of myths, sacred texts and practices lies an existential need for understanding reality. This need triggers a quest that can be interpreted as human being's "search for true reality in a real way (that is, not theoretically and not in the form of concepts, as we do in ordinary knowledge and philosophical knowledge)" (*id* 6).

Chapter 4 focuses on the context where Nishitani's confrontation to reductionism can be found: his works *Religion and Nothingness* (RN) and "Science and Zen" (SZ). We should remark here that his nonreductionist attitude does not drive him to shield religion from scientific scrutiny or criticism. The task for religion is to engage in a radical self-revision in light of modern science, guided by an orientation to the concrete existence of human beings. For science, the mission is to accept the reality of life in its full sense: animacy,

value, organicness. In general, the challenge for both is to find a middle ground between them where they can negotiate the terms of a more harmonious relationship for the sake of humankind.

Chapters 2 to 4 already provide hints of Nishitani's nonreductionist stance. **Chapter 5** goes deeper into his understanding of reduction and reductionism, an understanding which needs to go through a careful critical revision. Interestingly, the analysis reveals that he implicitly reads reduction through the lens of a classic Chinese idea present in some Buddhist as well as Daoist texts: "return to the source," which can be interpreted as the return to the level where reality manifests just as it is, our contact with it is regained, and a sense of purposefulness or meaningfulness of our lives can be established. Such result allows to show how our author's understanding of reduction and reductionism is closely connected to the principles of his existential phenomenology and even sheds some light on them.

On the base of the aforementioned elucidation of Nishitani's nonreductionist stance and the principles that shape it, it is possible to present the case for nonreductionism from an existential standpoint. Such is the content of **Chapter 6** and the goal of the present dissertation. In addition to what has been already mentioned, a central premise of the chapter is the notion that in the

long run reductionism is a worldview, a certain way of understanding how to “return to the source.” We may claim, indeed, that it should be assessed precisely in terms of whether it really helps us to reach such goal of regaining meaningful contact with reality.

1. REDUCTIONISM AND RELIGION

1.1 What Is Reduction (and What Is It Not)?

The very idea of reduction seems familiar in the field of religious studies, but this familiarity is misleading. Even though the discussion on reductionism in the study of religion has a long history that dates back to the very origin of the social sciences in the 19th century, it has been considerably vague and fragmentary. As Richard Jones remarks: “Apparently each scholar assumes the term has an unambiguous meaning, but different scholars in the field, reductionists and antireductionists alike, use the term ‘reductionism’ differently.” (2013 155). Arvind Sharma makes basically the same point (1994 127-8). This way, it is hard to track the debate in recent decades. Therefore, any discussion of the matter ought to start from a precise definition of the concepts involved. In this respect, I will mainly (yet not exclusively) rely on Jones’ work on the matter entitled *Analysis and the Fullness of Reality: An Introduction to Reductionism and Emergence*. His account can be considered sufficiently encompassing and rigorous, but at the same time not too technical as to make it inaccessible to the nonspecialist.

Strictly speaking, reduction means to *fully* explain a certain type of phenomena in terms of another type of phenomena. Reductionism,

in its turn, consists in holding that whatever is real in a phenomenon is to be found by tracing its origin back to the causes and conditions that generate it in the first place. In brief, it means commitment to reduction as the model for knowledge.

More in detail, reductionism's main premise is that all we need in order to understand a certain phenomenon is to know its parts and how they gather together—in other words, that analysis alone is enough for attaining knowledge of reality (Jones 11). Taken to its ultimate consequences, this stance ends in an ideal of unifying all sciences into a single all-encompassing theory of all things. Even though the "Unity of Science" program is not explicitly held by many scientists and was especially associated to logical positivism (ibid. 31), it lives on as an *ideal*. It can be considered the horizon of scientism and other postures based on the "analysis-only" principle mentioned here.

A very clear example of reduction is the explanation of biological phenomena in terms of chemistry. That in itself does not constitute a reduction of biological facts to chemical facts, or of biology to chemistry. All that is shown in this case is that chemical facts are *one* element in the explanation of biological facts, but reducing requires to show that the former are all that has to be taken into consideration for explaining the latter. That last contention is far

from being proven: even if it can be said that all the components of biological beings are chemical (which is hardly disputable), it can still be argued that they have their own nonchemical structures—or that at least explaining them demands not only chemical theory, but also additional concepts and theoretical devices (such as natural selection, reproduction, or ecosystem).

From these remarks, it can be intuited that there are several levels of reduction and reductionism. Typically, it is possible to distinguish three of them: ontological, epistemological and methodological reduction. Nonetheless, according to Jones we can refine this classification into five different types depending on what is reduced in each case: substance, structure, theory, concept, and methodology reductionism (13-7). *Substance* reductionism is the idea that there is only one type of stuff in the universe and subsequently all things existing in the universe are made of this same stuff. As it is important to notice, there is no single answer to what this unique material is. It may well be matter, energy, or mind—or perhaps other unimagined options. However, nowadays most scholars of virtually all disciplines either accept the notion that physical matter/energy is the only stuff the universe is made of, or simply do not need to concern with the problem at all.

Obviously, this does not mean that there is no discussion about substance reductionism at all. Beyond the academia, many still see a clash between matter reduction and traditional religions based on a matter-spirit dualism (Jones 175-7). Nonetheless, the bulk of the discussion starts with *structure* reductionism, namely, the notion that all structures in reality (chemical, biological, mental, sociocultural, and so on) are ultimately of one basic type. If, as widely accepted, one takes the only stuff of the universe to be matter/energy and also commits to structure reductionism, the result is a commitment to the notion that all structures in the universe are physical (i.e. interactions of atoms and molecules). For instance, our emotions and thoughts would be nothing but neural activity. This viewpoint is not universally agreed upon, and it is particularly controversial in the philosophy of mind.

Whatever the case, even if one is committed to structure reductionism, this does not imply *theory* reductionism; that is, even if all structures in reality were nothing but physical structures, this does not imply that all theories should be reduced to physical theory. Different levels of reality may still need different ways of being explained. Moreover, even if one is committed to theory reductionism, that does not imply *concept* or *methodology* reductionism. That is, it does not imply that the concepts of a certain discipline can (or should) be translated into the concepts of a

more basic or encompassing theory (i.e. concept reduction), nor that the methods of the latter need to be substituted for the methods of the former (i.e. methodology reduction).

One of the main sources of opposition to reductionism is emergentism (Jones 3-4). The emergentists claim that as long as matter evolves into higher and higher levels of complexity, new levels of reality correspondingly emerge. According to this view, complex things are not merely bunches of atoms arranged in one way or another. The former have a structure and a set of properties that cannot be “deduced” from the component parts.

The case of religious phenomena goes as follows. Some approaches promise to *fully* explain religion in terms of factors other than itself. Surely, structure reduction does not imply theory reduction, but the contrary does apply. If theory reduction holds in the case of religious phenomena, it cannot be said that they belong to their own level of reality or have any causal power of their own, different to the factors their explanation is reduced to. In other words, if theory reductionists are successful in this case, they will prove that religion is a mere epiphenomenon, a mere byproduct of other factors (be them biological, cognitive, or sociocultural). If they are not successful, it still may be plausibly argued that religion is a factor of human life among others, with its own capacity to produce effects

in reality, and as such requires to be accounted for nonreductively. Yet even if theory reduction applied to religious phenomena, that would not imply concept reduction, that is, it would still be valid to describe the phenomena pertaining religious traditions or groups by means of a specific vocabulary.

Additionally, it should be highlighted that even though empirical results have an impact on the discussion of reductionism, they do not suffice to decide the issue. Whether we agree or disagree with the possibility of reduction depends on how we interpret the empirical data (Jones 172). It is a matter of deciding which interpretations of empirical results are more coherent, make more sense, or are more convenient for the progress of knowledge. Let us explain this by means of an example. Some results point out that religious and mystical experiences are all correlated with activity in the brain's temporal lobe (e.g. Newberg, d'Aquili, and Rause 2002). If this is true, does it *prove* that all religious experiences are nothing but neural firings in the temporal lobe? It seems tempting to answer "yes," but all that the evidence shows is merely a correlation between religious experience and certain neural activity in the brain. To say that one and the other are the same thing is a metaphysical presupposition—i.e. it goes beyond what the evidence provides. Correlation does not automatically imply causality.

However, for the same reasons the possibility of reduction cannot be proven or disproven a priori. What the best theoretical or methodological options are for the progress of science is not a question that can be decided beforehand. In the end, it is highly implausible that philosophical argument can definitively refute or prove reduction. But what philosophy can certainly contribute is an analysis of the conditions that a certain attempt of reduction needs to fulfill in order to be considered successful, as well as an assessment of the impact of several types of reduction on religion's knowledge claims.

Finally, we will have to mention that reduction is related to the contrast between the third-person and the first-person perspectives. There is a difference between the issue of reductionism within the natural sciences (especially physics and chemistry) and reductionism when it is extended to the realm of human life and activities. It is evident that human beings, unlike inanimate objects such as stones or atoms, are endowed with sensations, feelings, thoughts, intentions—in general, they have a mental life. Consequently, here the problem of reduction is whether mental phenomena can be understood from the third-person standpoint (the one that natural science has traditionally adopted). In other words, the problem of reduction here becomes the problem about whether the first-person standpoint can be reduced to the third-person one.

The context where this problem is most thoroughly discussed today is the field of cognitive science and, especially, the philosophy of mind. In this case, our example of the correlation between temporal lobe activity and religious experiences also helps to bring some clarity. In general, neural scientists are finding more and more correlations between mental events and neural activity in the brain. However, as some have pointed out (Nagel 1974; Chalmers 1998, 2010), this does not prove that all our sensations, feelings, passions, and thoughts are merely neurochemical events in the brain; at best, the results would establish that for every single mental event there is a correlative firing of neurochemical activity in the brain. No more, no less. In a word, findings in neuroscience do not establish in and of themselves the reduction of mental realities to neurophysiological ones.

Now that we have elicited a clear concept of reduction, it is also possible to distinguish it from other related concepts. In the case of social science, and most acutely in the study of religion, discussions over reduction are intertwined with several epistemic issues. However, these are all distinguishable and should be distinguished. It is purely a matter of assuring enough conceptual clarity so as to prevent debate from degrading into a dialogue of the deaf.

First of all, reduction is not essentially about the insider/outsider divide. The latter has to do with the contrast between the perspective of an outside observer trying to establish valid judgments on the facts concerning the life of a certain group of believers or practitioners over against the perspective these insiders have of themselves. In such case, the underlying contrast is between a group (the insiders) and all those who do not belong to the group (the outsiders). In anthropology, these two perspectives are called emic and etic. The corresponding problematic has to do with whether these two are compatible, and which one has to be privileged by the researcher. Those who privilege an emic stance insist that the primordial thing is to understand the world the way the group does (to grasp their worldview), hence whatever presuppositions that the researcher introduces alters the result, even if these go unnoticed. Advocates of an etic stance claim that what is primordial is rather objectivity, and since this requires taking a distance from the object studied, observing the group from its own worldview would mean lacking objectivity. Thus, researchers should be allowed to observe from their own perspective. A third view is that both emic and etic stances are relevant and researchers have to solve the problem of how to balance subjectivity and objectivity.

The insider/outsider divide is neither the same as the contrast between the third-person stance and the first-person perspective. The latter has to do with whether one observes or investigates respectively from outside or from within phenomenal experience. In other words, the matter is not about a clash of worldviews (namely, the one of the researcher and the one of the group studied), but about whether it is possible to investigate experience directly from within itself (as what phenomenology attempts) or it rather has to be investigated empirically.

Reduction is not equivalent to taking an etic stance. Etic researchers are not by definition committed to explaining the group's worldview *exclusively* in terms of their own presuppositions; they have such commitment only if they reject any emic element to enter the explanation. However, the controversy reveals an aspect of explanation in the case of social science and the humanities. In these areas, the objects under study are not only facts. They also include perspectives on reality, and as such they may eventually clash with scientific explanations. In the case of religion, scientific explanations of a certain religious worldview may—and often do—clash with claims made from such worldview. In principle, this may happen with reductive as well as nonreductive explanations, yet obviously the former are much more problematic in this respect.

Secondly, explanation and reduction are not equivalent. There are reductive as well as nonreductive explanations. To go back to a previous example, even though biology today is not possible without the theories and concepts of chemistry, that does not mean that it does not need anything else. Biology needs additional concepts and theories in order to successfully explain biological phenomena. Likewise, to the extent that any explanation of religious phenomena claims to need theoretical or conceptual tools that are not presented as translatable to natural or social science, it does not intend to be reductive. Let us put it more clearly in terms of the different levels of reduction elicited before: even conceding that scientific explanation is at all times substance-reductive (i.e., it requires to accept only one type of stuff from which things are made of), that does not automatically make it theory or concept reductive, not even structure reductive.

Third, and finally, reduction is not the same as elimination. Reductionists hold that religion (for instance) is fully explainable as an epiphenomenon, that is, as a byproduct of other factors (such as functions of the social system or cognitive capacities of the brain). But that does not imply denying that religious phenomena exist. This last move is the one that the eliminativists make. Hardly anyone, nonetheless, would go as far as claiming that.

Anyhow, it is still reasonable to ask to what extent explaining religion in a reductive way means proving it wrong. Religions are not simply facts like mental states or behaviors: They provide their own narratives about what reality is like, the meaning of it and the place of us humans in the world. As was mentioned before, eventually a scientific explanation of religion may clash with religious worldviews. This is all the more evident in the case of reductive explanations: Since these intend to be exhaustive, they have to provide an explanation of religion's origin that does not need to coincide with what each religion declares.

So far, I have tried to briefly lay out the basic terms of the discussion of reductionism and religion's reducibility. My main intention with this was to show that, in the case of social sciences in general, several concepts are related to reduction but are not equivalent to it. Reduction is not elimination and does not require it (even though, conversely, the latter does require the former). More importantly, reduction perhaps requires an etic perspective (explanation instead of interpretation) and third-person science, but it definitely requires something more (depending on what type of reduction we are talking about).

The previous work of clarification is quite important in our case because more than a few debaters of religion's reducibility

apparently tend to mix up the aforementioned concepts. As was already mentioned, they often assume that they share a common understanding of what reduction is, but actually use the term diversely or confusingly. Such situation raises the suspicion that much disagreement among them stems from misunderstandings. This makes it hard to follow the debate. However, perhaps some elucidation thereof might be achieved by trying to sift through the history of the main positions. At first, these can grouped in two basic types: the views of those who embrace reduction as the model for knowledge (reductionism), and the views of those who reject it (nonreductionism). An interesting result is that throwing some light on the motivations of both would indicate why the topic's relevance goes beyond sheer methodological preoccupations.

1.2 Reduction and the Study of Religion

In religious studies, the word "reductionism" is traditionally used rather loosely in reference to the mainstream tendency of its early stage (19th and early 20th century). Such tendency consisted in explaining religion by tracing its supposed origin back to a different, completely non-religious factor, be this history, sentiment, or mental dysfunction, among others. There were several representatives of this paradigm. For instance, Max Müller claimed that ancient languages could only represent phenomena anthropomorphically, which led people to believe they were caused

by invisible agents (spirits or gods). Thus, he explained non-Christian religions as a result of a deluded imagination (1882; Jones 154-155). The theorists of what William James called medical materialism (2002 [1902] 7-25) tried to show religious experiences to be at best byproducts of sublimating certain psychical needs, of physiological changes, or as much as signs of mental dysfunction (Sigmund Freud is a paradigmatic example). Émile Durkheim understood religious ritual practice as a mirroring (projection) of the social order onto notions of supernatural entities, while anthropologists such as Edward Tylor attempted to interpret religion as a form of superstition whose nature can be understood by investigating its historical origins (Jones 162). Certainly, the general situation is not as simple as it seems: classics such as Müller and Durkheim were not openly reductionist and can even be interpreted as defending religion's irreducibility (cf. Pals 1994 186-189; Paden 1994 200-1). However, while it is true that many of these classic authors were moved by intentions quite alien to reducing—even less to explaining away—religion, the crucial thing is what their accounts lead to. Perhaps, for instance, Durkheim tried to establish the irreducibility of religion's describability, but to the extent that he locates religion's origin in social order, his account is structure-reductionist (Paden 200-1).

Throughout the first-half of the 20th century, these approaches were questioned for intending to explain religious phenomena by locating its origin somewhere else instead of focusing on religious facts themselves, or for disregarding the role of human agency. But perhaps the main difficulty most of these reductionist approaches faced was that they relied on presuppositions about the historical origin of religion. Evidently, there is no way to empirically verify such hypotheses: no trace of evidence can be found that shows us when and how religion first appeared in human history, even less what its features were. This way, these classic approaches had no hope to become full-fledged scientific theories, even less to establish religion's reduction (Duch 1997 72-3).

Several nonreductionist alternatives echo these criticisms. For instance, Max Weber is famous for his study on the role of Protestantism in the rise of capitalism (1984 [1905]), a case that would exemplify how religion is a distinct factor of human life with its own capacity to bring about effects in history. Differences among them notwithstanding, anthropologists in the line of the *Verstehen* tradition such as Edward Evans-Pritchard and Clifford Geertz opposed the reductionist, generalizing tendencies of early anthropology in favor of an interpretative approach wherein the concepts of believers have a role in the scholar's account of specific

religions. But the most influential paradigm in the nonreductionist study of religious phenomena is what we could label “suigenerism.”

I call here “suigenerism” the nonreductionist (even overly antireductionist) paradigm based on the idea that in its nature religion is so different from every other class of phenomena that it must be set apart as belonging to its own type—i.e. it is *sui generis*. Consequently, it has to be explained in its own terms. As the historical phenomena they are, suigenerism concedes that history, social science, and even biology may have a share in investigating religious phenomena, but only in a secondary way. The core of understanding religious phenomena is understanding the unique aspect that characterizes them, whatever that is.

Remarkable representatives of suigenerism include figures such as Joachim Wach, the phenomenologists of religion (e.g. William Brede Kristensen, Gerardus Van der Leeuw), Rudolf Otto and Mircea Eliade. Particularly the latter two have exerted a strong influence to date. Otto claimed that religion’s characteristic factor is the experience of the sacred, which can only be understood from within itself. As such, it cannot be explained by reducing it to other factors (1979 [1917]). Eliade adhered to this notion, but entertained the more encompassing goal of studying the sacred in all its historical manifestations (1965 15-16). Concretely, the existential

manifestations of the sacred in the lives of human beings, or *hierophanies,* are the key to understanding religious phenomena. As such, the fundamental task of the scholar is to seek their trace in religious texts, symbolic systems, and practices, and then provide an account of their meaning. In a word, the scholar's main task is to interpret religious texts. Accordingly, Eliade did not deny that explanatory approaches from any science may be helpful, but rejected the idea that they would suffice to understand religious phenomena (1991[1949] 11).

The claim that religion is sui generis because it is experience of the sacred has been the target of many critics. Probably the most influential of them has been Robert Segal, due to the controversy he fueled through his several articles against Eliade's antireductionism and in defense of reductionism. For him, Eliade's call to appreciate the viewpoint of believers in their own terms fails, since it is not possible for scholars to do it without becoming themselves believers. The only way researchers can approach a certain religious group, Segal claims, is by means of terms other than the group's own. Otherwise, they would have to endorse the latter (1983 109). What is more, Segal claims that Eliade inadvertently indulges in the reductionism he so much despises because he equates his interpretation of religion with the believer's self-conscious viewpoint (ibid. 99).

As it appears to be, Segal does not understand what the true point of reductionism is, nor even the point of Eliade's view of religion. The mere fact that one provides an explanation of a religious group or tradition in terms other than its own, let us recall, is not enough for reduction. Neither does it mean to equate one with the other. In order to reduce religion, the account provided needs to be based on factors alien to religion itself (be them biological, psychophysiological, sociocultural, etc.), and also needs to be presented as exhaustive (i.e. the theorist has to insist that his account explains all there is to explain about religion). Critics of Segal have already made this point. For instance, Daniel Pals remarks: "An explanation is one thing; a reduction, or reductive explanation, is another." (1986 21).

Segal fails to state explicitly and clearly enough what he understands as reductionism. What is clear nonetheless, as the attentive reader will understand, is that he rejects the idea that a discipline grounded on suigenerism can claim privileged access to religion insofar as a research subject, since he regards such stance as incompatible with the scientific principles of intersubjective verifiability and neutrality. In the long run, he wants to defend that social science is entitled to study religious phenomena from full-fledged etic/explanatory perspectives.

Other scholars have joined Segal in the effort to defend reductionism, even though they do not share all of his views. Donald Wiebe (1994), for instance, is very sympathetic with his colleague's aim, but criticizes him for supposing that one can prove a priori that reductionism is better than other approaches. Russell McCutcheon (1997) accuses the establishment in religious studies (especially the Chicago School that Eliade helped to shape) of trying to monopolize the subject in a way that excludes full-fledged naturalistic approaches to religion. More recently, Edward Slingerland has advocated for openly positivistic approaches to religious phenomena based on sociobiology and cognitive science (2008).

So far, it does not seem clear that scholars on both sides of the dispute are debating at the same level. It is not even clear that all of them are disputing about reductionism as such. For suigenerists like Eliade, the scholar should elucidate the *meaning* of religious texts, symbols, and rituals in terms of the practitioners' experiences of the sacred. The self-appointed advocates of reductionism mentioned above want science to have a say in the study of religion, that is, they demand the rules of scientific investigation to be respected in the study of religion. But at least in principle it is not evident that both tasks are incompatible, as far as hierophanical interpretation

does not exclude explanation beforehand and explanation does not claim to tell everything there is to tell. It can even be claimed that both tasks are not only mutually compatible, but complementary. In the end, how is this about reductionism?—we may ask.

Those circumstances suggest that the *quid* of the controversy is found at another level, namely, the level of what each party intends to defend in the long run—in short, to their *practical* motivations for taking the stances they take. For suigenerists, early reductionist accounts were a symptom of the rationalization of all aspects of human life, an effect that would lead to the loss of the spiritual heritage of humankind. And that would be, they warn, a terrible loss. To this respect, Eliade remarks that the mission of the History of Religions is not only to interpret the variety of humankind's religious creations (symbols, rituals, texts, and so on). It is also its task to extract values from them that can serve the purpose of guiding humankind as a whole in our times. This is why he calls this latter task a "new humanism." (1961 2). In sum, the point of defending this humanism (and suigenerism as well) is to recover the values and teachings of traditional worldviews in ways that can respond to the contemporary urge for meaningfulness.

On the other hand, the critics of suigenerism accuse it of being an arbitrary interdiction of scientific practice and, ultimately, of reason.

For example, McCutcheon remarks: “there must be some sort of publicly accessible criteria whereby a group of researchers can at least debate whether some aspect of human behavior is religious.” (1997 51). It is not hard to tell that behind a defense of science’s “right” to study religion, or any other subject, underlies the spirit of the Enlightenment, which encumbers science and technology. Reason, especially scientific knowledge, turns to be the remedy against superstition (of which religion is considered the main source) and the paradigm for knowledge of the world, while technological progress promises to solve all material problems of humankind. Naturally, the advocates of this ideal reject any attempt of putting limits to science and technology from the outside.

All this suggests that the actual confrontation underlying the controversy over religion’s reducibility is another stage of the clash between faith and reason, or to say it in more accurate terms, between the ideal of preserving wisdom traditions and the ideal of the Enlightenment. The clash is real to the extent that the Enlightenment proclaims that all human problems can be solved through the use of reason, while wisdom traditions tend to claim that something else is needed—namely, a type of revelation, knowledge, or attainment that transcends what normal intellectual faculties can achieve.

It then turns out that the motivations to reflect about to what extent religion can be scientifically explained have a lot to do with another question: Can it be said that scientific explanation of religion, especially if it is reductive, amounts to proving it wrong (i.e. the demise of religious wisdom)? Segal and Slingerland, among others, would answer yes. But many defenders of scientific explanation would not agree. McCutcheon, for instance, considers that there are strong methodological reasons for skipping the discussion of religion's value or truth in the area of religious studies (1997 ix-x). What is more, more than a few scientists feel not entitled to meddle with the issue of religion's truth and consider science neutral about it (e.g. Barrett 2004). Therefore, the conflict is not accurately described as one of science against religion, but between two different ways of interpreting the impact of scientific endeavors on religious claims to extra-rational knowledge. It is a cultural confrontation, and it is within contemporary culture that the clash has its fullest impact.

In sum, when one considers religion's reducibility in its technical sense, it is purely a methodological issue, since it pertains primarily to methodological choices and relations between scientific theories. However, as explained above, it can be interpreted in diverse ways and such interpretations may have an impact on the assessment of religious discourses and ways of life. As such, it becomes a

philosophical problem, namely: Does explaining religion scientifically imply disproving its claims to extra-rational knowledge? Concerning everything we need to know and do as human beings, is that all to be known and done through reason (in general, through cognitive capacities), or is there any other way of knowing and acting?

To the first question, Thomas Ryba would answer affirmatively (1994 36-42). After a discussion of the formal possibilities of reductionism in the study of religion (given that Segal leaves quite unclear what type of reduction he defends and, what is more, what he refers to as reduction), he concludes that the possibility of reducing—in the sense of scientifically explaining—religion threatens its truth claims (Ryba 38-42).

In its turn, Segal tries to weaken his verdict of religion as false by claiming that perhaps there is a real "object" of religion (be it God, Heaven, or any other supernatural being), but still we have no way to know it because if it is truly supernatural, it is utterly disconnected from whatever we can have evidence of (i.e. nature). Thus, there is no connection between the existence of religion's object and the natural conditions that bring about religious belief. The problem is, as Ryba observes, that this scenario would be totally unappealing to religious conscience:

> It is particularly uninteresting for the religious believer to be told that God does indeed exist but you cannot know him and moreover all the grounds for your believing in him are false. The *deus absconditus absolute* has rarely been an object of faith. (39)

Consequently, he continues, the debate over religion's reducibility

> [...] must be redirected away from consideration of whether religion is sui generis or perfectly reducible—two questions which must be decided empirically and not formally—and to the questions of the truth claims of science and religion. (41).

In general, when talking about how religion might be affected by the reductive enterprise, the substance of the debate does not lie in the technical discussion on reduction, but in the issue of the clash between religion's and science's truth claims. This is not just a matter of methodological or metaphysical contention. It is a clash of worldviews.

And the clash lives on: the days of reductionism are not over. New reductionist approaches avoid the problems that earlier attempts used to have because they no longer depend on tracking the historical origin of religion. With the aid of evolutionary theory and cognitive science, it now seems possible to trace back the causal

origin of religious belief and ritual in our cognitive capacities, and can be explained as subproducts of how the latter have evolved through natural selection. That is the aim of the cognitive science of religion, a new scientific field that is experiencing growth scientific field in the onset of our century. Truth be told, not all researchers in this area commit to reduction, neither do they feel forced to. For reductionists, nonetheless, its progress provides new tools.

1.3 Mind and the Scientific Study of Religion

In line with recent scientific progress, a very interesting defense of reductionism comes from Edward Slingerland (2008). The author capitalizes on McCutcheon's (2006) harsh critique of the notion that scholarly accounts of a certain religion cannot be validated if not acknowledged by the believers, to which he opposes the viewpoint that any good scholarly work implies a sort of reduction of the *explanandum* in terms of concepts fashioned by the researcher.[1] Slingerland agrees, but thinks that McCutcheon's commitment to *Verstehen* approaches toward the study of religion still prevents him from being consistent enough with the implications of reductionism —among others, a rejection of the *Verstehen* approach in favor of causal explanatory ones, and a strict physical reductionism (the monistic idea that everything is made of matter).

[1] The discussion is much more complex than what appears expressed here, but considering the details would distract us from our point.

Francisca Cho and Richard Squier (2008) reply to Slingerland that taking physical reductionism literally is the result of confusing words with realities; it is just a theoretical assertion that needs to be judged in terms of its practical results, and precisely the move of taking it literally would be revealed as a mistake by considering its destructive moral consequences. We can add that both McCutcheon and Slingerland fail to distinguish explanation from reduction when affirming that "any explanation worthy of being called an explanation involves reductionism of some sort" (Slingerland 2008 375). To put the point clearly: providing a causal explanation of religion does not imply to do it *only* in terms of factors other than religion itself.

Be that as it may, Slingerland makes the interesting move of appealing to the results of evolutionary biology and cognitive science in order to make his case in favor of reduction. This is precisely the most important trend today in the attempt to reduce the explanation of religion. It would be useful to present some examples.

The earliest example in recent decades is sociobiology, a discipline founded by Edward O. Wilson (1975). In general, it attempts to explain everything about the social and cultural life of humans in

evolutionary terms. The basic point here is that as we are no more than very advanced animals, our sociocultural life must be explainable as the result of drives and capacities favored by natural selection. Nevertheless, Wilson himself did not intend a structure-reduction of sociocultural life to biology (550). However, some of sociobiology's sympathizers have interpreted it as such (e.g. Dawkins 1976).

More robust and recent are the efforts of scholars under the labels "cognitive science of religion" and "cognitive anthropology." Their project is to gather results from cognitive science and evolutionary biology in order to build consistent causal explanations of religious phenomena. Naturally, such accounts are required to be consistent with the model of mind as cognition and with natural selection theory. Although at first glance they look like a sheer revamp of medical materialism, they are actually more sophisticated. The cognitivist does not need to commit to a certain assessment of religious beliefs or practices, nor explain religious experience in terms of neurosis or other mental disorders.

Indeed, some scholars in these fields seek to understand religion as a consequence of the normal (or standard) functioning of the brain, and it is unclear whether they attempt reduction (see Lawson and McCauley 1990; Newberg, d'Aquili, and Rause 2002; Rue 2005;

Wilson 2010). Nevertheless, some of them (especially from cognitive anthropology) endorse the reductionist project and tend to accept that, as a consequence, religion's claim to truth turns out to be illegitimate:

> Today physicalists' anthropological 'cognitive science' denies the reality of any transcendent realities and explains religion away by structurally reducing it to the causal infrastructures of culture or to an epiphenomenal evolutionary byproduct. (Jones 162)

It may then be useful to consider some outstanding cases.

First, Stewart Guthrie (1993) argues that belief in gods arises from our systems to detect human agency. They tend, he claims, to project onto parts of the natural environment that are then deemed to be displays of invisible agents or the agents themselves. Pascal Boyer (2001) attempts to refine the old explanations of religion in terms of animism and projections by means of conceptual tools provided by cognitive science. His point is that religious concepts are the result of how cognitive systems instantiated in our brains have evolved. For instance, like Guthrie, he considers belief in supernatural beings as a result of agent detection functions. Even more, he claims that:

> we can explain religion by describing how these various [cognitive] capacities get recruited, how they contribute to

> the features of religion that we find in so many different cultures. We do not need to assume that there is a special way of functioning that occurs only when processing religious thoughts. (311)

If we do not need to assume it, religion becomes a byproduct of cognitive functions, hence is reduced.

Another interesting case is Scott Atran (2002). He reasons that religion cannot be a particular trait or function of our cognitive equipment, since it tends to be selectively costly to individuals. As such, it could not have been evolutionarily selected. The logical result is that it needs to be explained as a non-adaptive byproduct of several adaptive functions of the human mind.

It should be remarked that, since cognitive science of religion is obviously a branch of cognitive science, it is strongly influenced by the computational model of mind. Under this paradigm, mind is a computer implemented in a brain. Not all versions of the computational model are reductionist. However, it is evident that any nonreductionist rejects understanding mind as purely a product of neurophysiological activity or mechanical computations. This is not to deny that a nervous system is a necessary condition for mental activity to occur. But it is not sufficient, the nonreductionist

might remark. There must be something more to mental life than chemical shots at neurons on fire.

As often suggested in contemporary debate, this additional element would be phenomenal experience (animacy). David Chalmers has clearly stated the case often known as the “hard problem of consciouness:” Not even the most complete physical account of mental phenomena would be useful to explain why we actually have feelings, perceptions, imagination—in general, experience—, instead of being pure evolutionary robots or zombies. Why did evolution not produce mere inanimate creatures? Why do we have an animate awareness of reality, a phenomenal experience of it, if it apparently plays no evolutionary role? (1998, 2010). This case has received the most acrimonious replies not just from reductionists, but from full-fledged eliminativsts. Remarkably, Patricia Churchland (1986) and Daniel Dennett (1998) defend that phenomenal experience is just a “folk psychology” hypothesis that is no longer necessary, given the progress of neurophysiology. The debate over the hard problem of consciousness is, in general, a dialogue of the deaf. But this very fact, it seems, reflects how intense the fear of self-proclaimed advocates of scientific reasonability is that the return of anything smelling like “spiritualism” might bring the rise of superstition and the collapse of rationality.

In sum, the case of mind-nonreductionists is against purely mechanistic models of the mind. Meanwhile, the case of mind-reductionists seems strongly motivated by their views on scientific standards and their role in the triumph of reason. Whatever the case, the controversy bears upon religion's reducibility. Given the trends in contemporary scientific research explained here, if mind-reduction applies, religion-reduction follows.

The debate on reductionism appeared to be a set dispute in the study of religion, and in the humanities at large. Long gone are the times when Durkheim, Tylor or Frazer were the referents to follow. Their methodological ideal of accounting for religion by disclosing its supposed historical origin and from such vantage point to prove its epiphenomenal nature would not be seriously defended by anyone today, hence is merely a chapter of intellectual history. However, today reductionists can count on an enormous and still growing arsenal of sound results (both conceptual and empirical) in evolutionary biology and cognitive science which allows them to build and refine theories that may explain religion away by presenting religious beliefs and rituals as byproducts of hard-wired cognitive capacities modeled by natural selection. In such case, the door is open again to interpret religious doctrines as projections of factors alien to religious experience itself, and as such irrelevant for

knowledge. In sum, the issue of reductionism is still to be discussed. In the pages to follow we will closely examine how Nishitani Keiji's philosophy can make its contribution.

2. NISHITANI'S RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY

This chapter is an introduction to Nishitani's philosophy with particular emphasis on the circumstances where it emerged (context), the basics of his philosophical personality (orientation and style), and an outline of his motivations and contributions. Given the nature of the present dissertation, this will not be an overarching review of Nishitani's philosophy. Rather, I will mainly focus on the role of religion in his thought.

The main points to be made in this regard are the following. First, religion is not only one of Nishitani's main topics but, even more, a fundamental aspect of the standpoint wherefrom he considers philosophical questions in general. Secondly, this does not mean that he makes a theology of any kind. His reflection is not based on the standpoint of any particular religion but is rather intended to spring from the very anthropological conditions where religious motivations, ideas, and practices emerge. Next, he considers the relationship between science and religion in a historical perspective. Concretely speaking, he discusses it from the horizon of the contemporary problem of nihilism, which underlies the progress of modern technoscientific culture. Finally, his approach to both religion and philosophy is markedly existential. He frequently insists that religious and philosophical problems need to be thought

about from our here and now, that is, from the concrete conditions of our existence.

The traditional strategy of studying a philosopher's work by splitting their career into stages or periods does not fit Nishitani's case well enough. There is no clear consensus among scholars about the periods of Nishitani's career, not because of unresolved dispute among diverse answers to the problem, but because the issue itself has not been widely discussed. The main introductions to Nishitani's philosophy do not define what its stages could be (Waldenfels 1980, Heisig 2001a, Heisig 2001b, Carter 2013). Bouso speaks of "periods," but what she attempts is to track the evolution of Nishitani's intellectual career instead of rigorously defining stages (2004 50-79).

For Horio Tsutomu, Nishitani's long lasting career (spanning over 60 years) is the reason that "scholars have yet to arrive at a definitive categorization of the various periods of [his] thought." (1997 19) Horio, indeed, proposes to split it into three periods: early (until 1949), middle (from 1949 to 1961), and later (from 1961 to 1990). His intention, however, does not go beyond focusing on the latter. In any case, a stronger reason suggests that we should not take this attempt as a "definitive categorization." As Heisig declares: "to impose a structure on a thinking as organic as

Nishitani's was, even if only for purposes of résumé, risks obscuring what is most distinctive about it" (2001b 190). Consequently, trying to split his career into stages could mislead us more than it would guide us: it would obscure the development of his main motifs and the connections between them.

For now, suffice to say that, in tune with Heisig's advice, it seems more reasonable to "focus on specific motifs, several of them signaled by a distinctive vocabulary" (ibid.). Such is the strategy I will follow in the present as well as the following chapters.

2.1 Background

a) The Kyoto School

An adequate contextualization of Nishitani Keiji's work and thought requires to introduce the Kyoto School and indicate his place in it. The Kyoto School was an intellectual current in 20th century Japan whose representatives are considered pioneers of (Western style) philosophy in their country, but may also be regarded as trailblazers of world philosophy. Their efforts to put Western European thought in dialogue with Mahāyāna Buddhism count as probably the earliest rigorous attempt in our global age to put diverse philosophical traditions in conversation.

During the Tokugawa period (1603-1868), Japan was mostly closed to the rest of the world. However, during the second half of the 19th century, rising interest in things European as well as the intervention of Britain and the United States to force the opening of commercial relationships precipitated the end of this enclosure. As the regime proved unable to handle the situation and declined, Emperor Jimmu Tennō took control and started a series of reforms. His idea was that in order to preserve Japanese autonomy and identity, it was necessary to learn from the West, keep up with its technological level, and finally outdo it.

Thus started the Meiji period, a time characterized by quick industrial development and enormous efforts toward modernization on all fronts. As part of its policies of cultural and economic openness, the new government sent many young men to Europe to learn everything about Europe's science and culture. Some of these students decided to study philosophy and promote it in their homeland. Very soon, lectures on the matter were open in Japanese universities and mountains of works were translated. The gradual assimilation of European philosophy led initially to two opposite reactions. Some considered that traditional knowledge was outdated and then Japan would have to start over from scratch. Others regarded Western ideas as a threat to Japanese identity and advocated for their suppression. Meanwhile, some scholars

preferred to find a middle point between reform and tradition, thus attempting to benefit from the new ideas while remaining faithful to their intellectual heritage. There, in such (not always friendly) encounter of Europe and Japan, arises the Kyoto School.

As his mentors, Nishida Kitarō and Tanabe Hajime, Nishitani Keiji (1900-1990) was a major figure in this group. But the Kyoto School, it should be warned, was not a school in the proper sense of the term. Unlike collectives such as the Vienna Circle, it was not a group of thinkers who had decided to gather in order to work on the same philosophical project. Moreover, they did not necessarily agree, and there was even strong disagreement between some of them. They are called "Kyoto School" because that was the label put in the early 1930s to a group of students who gathered around Nishida Kitarō (1875-1945), one of the most prominent philosophers of Japan at the time. However, the group, as well as the label, emerged rather spontaneously (*cf.* Heisig 2001b 4-5). It is not surprising that there is much discussion about who belongs to the group and what its central ideas were.[2]

[2] In the entry of the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* on the Kyoto School, concretely in section 2, Bret Davis profusely discusses the problem of definition and membership concerning this group (2014).

Be that as it may, the label “Kyoto School” indicates a real and highly relevant event in contemporary Japanese intellectual history. If not the most adequate, the name refers to a certain philosophical stream in twentieth century Japan that we can somewhat fuzzily recognize thanks to a number of features. First of all, its “founding father” is Nishida: His efforts to create a philosophy that integrated the logically ordered style of European philosophy with the insightful richness of Mahāyāna thought may explain why he attracted the attention of several students who became his pupils. Precisely, his first major work, *An Inquiry into the Good* (first published in 1911) can be considered the Kyoto School’s seminal work. Secondly, the group’s members inherited Nishida’s concepts and reworked them in their own way. Among such concepts, the most influential one is the notion of *absolute nothingness*. Third, at least in its first two generations, the activity of the “school” had Kyoto University’s faculty of Literature—where Nishida was a professor—as its main stage. Fourth, Kyoto School thinkers engage in philosophy from the crossroads of European philosophy and the Japanese Buddhist tradition. They do not try to merely imitate the former or construct an apologetics of the latter (even though both things may happen to a point). Rather, they tend to put these traditions in dialogue and try to come up with something new. As Bret Davis remarks: “Kyoto School philosophy [...] should be understood neither as Buddhist thought forced into Western garb,

nor as universal discourse (which the West happened to have invented or discovered) dressed up in Japanese garb." (2014).

Finally, religion is often their central concern, but their efforts are decidedly philosophical. Their interest in religion (or religiousness) does not make them theologians. Rather, they often intend to reflect upon it critically, and on the ground of such reflective exercise to deal with a great variety of philosophical problems:

> [...] even if, for most of the Kyoto School thinkers, a philosophy of religion is the ultimate *arche* and *telos* of their thought, it is hardly their sole concern. They address a full array of philosophical issues: metaphysics, ontology, epistemology, logic, philosophical anthropology, philosophy of history, philosophy of culture, ethics, political theory, philosophy of art, etc. [...] even when their focus is on the philosophy of religion, they approach this topic in a non-dogmatic and often surprisingly non-sectarian manner, drawing on and reinterpreting, for example, Christian sources along with Buddhist ones. (ibid.)

Whatever the case, the significance of the Kyoto School and its place in the history of philosophy will not depend on deciding the problem of definition (i.e. the problem of defining who, and what, belongs). Rather, it will rely on its contributions to world

philosophy, that is, to modes of engaging in philosophy that, both in sources and participants, are truly open to the diversity of human cultures and take them into account.

Much is to be said about Kyoto School philosophers. However, for the purposes of this dissertation, it is especially relevant to focus on the founder, Nishida Kitarō, who was Nishitani's main mentor as well. Now I will try to provide an overview of his thought, not without warning that his philosophical work is so complex and diverse that any summary easily falls into the trap of oversimplification. However, so as not to steer attention too far away from our main topic, I will assume the risk and try to focus on presenting Nishida's thought with the purpose of contextualizing Nishitani's.

Nishida is considered as the first original philosopher of Japan in the Western sense of the term (Waldenfels 35). And his originality should undoubtedly be attributed to the project he set for himself: to build a philosophy wherein both "Western" conceptual logic and "Eastern" sapiential intuition would find a place and engage in conversation. His first attempt of original thought is his philosophy of pure experience as it appears in *An Inquiry into the Good*. There he develops the intuition that underneath the wide variety of phenomena lies an all-encompassing unity: in its very plurality,

reality is one. When instead of being distracted by external objects one goes back to experience in its purity (before any conceptualization), it becomes clear that all opposites emerge out of a unitary reality whose ultimate form is consciousness.

Now, Nishida was soon criticized for thus disregarding objectivity in favor of subjectivity. Aware of this psychologist bias, he decided to switch his orientation to the latter, but never at the price of abandoning his original intuition. As he acknowledges in a preface to a 1936 re-edition of the work: “As I look at it now, the standpoint of this book is that of consciousness, which might be thought of as a kind of psychologism [...]. I do think, however, that what lay deep in my thought when I wrote it was not something that is merely psychological.” (1990 xxxi-xxxii).

What changed from 1911 to 1936? In that interval (and later on as well), what he did was to re-elaborate his ideas once and again in search of a system that could account for the simultaneously unitary and multiple character of reality. He left the vocabulary of pure experience behind in favor of the concept of absolute will, and later the notion of *basho* (literally “place”): the position or *locus* of the possibility of being within the harmony of unity and plurality, subjectivity and objectivity, noesis and noema.

A critique of Western metaphysics underlies this attitude. Nishida observes that being is traditionally thought of as completely antithetic to non-being, while in the Mahāyāna tradition it is recognized that being and non-being are interdependent. Being is unable to stand on its own (there is no "substance," strictly speaking) and, even more, non-being is not just the equivalent of "nothing at all." In the West, he judges, this "nothing" is ignored, or only regarded as pure negativity—i.e. as the sheer negation of being. In order to overcome the viewpoint of substantial being and relative nothingness, a more encompassing view of absolute nothingness is required. Precisely, the place where being truly becomes possible is not substance, but the place of absolute nothingness.

Nishida remarks that while Western metaphysics is based on being, the Mahāyāna tradition is based on nothingness. In the former, contradiction either has no place in the system of reality or is resolved in a dialectical synthesis, while in the latter contradiction is the very form of reality. The interplay of opposites accounts for the possibility of being in the middle of contingency. As we have already mentioned, he would have stated earlier that the knowing of this reality is possible in pure experience, but later on he prefers to articulate this knowing in terms of self-awareness: the self's awakening to the true form of things beyond oppositions of subject

and object, being and nothingness, immanence and transcendence, knower and known. In his last years, he will declare that this awakening is only possible from a religious viewpoint. However, we should not understand this as an apologetics of any religious system in particular. Rather, Nishida presupposes that underneath all religions lie the human search for contact with the absolute—i.e. with reality in its fullness.

As it is easy to observe, Nishida quotes a high number of Western philosophers, while his references to Asian philosophies are quite scarce. However, it is possible to detect that his pursuit of a cross-cultural "synthesis" is ever present in his work. It is possible to trace the influence of Zen (and also Pure Land Buddhism) in the very development of his thought. As James Heisig remarks, although Nishida did not expect his thought to be in accord with Buddhist ideas, he "[never ceased] to believe that his philosophy continued to be his own appropriation of Zen" (2001b 39). In the long run, he critically appropriates elements from both traditions and builds a philosophy that is indebted to both. In a word, he does philosophy in an intercultural crossroads. This is the attitude that Kyoto School thinkers inherit, even when they oppose him. Among them, Nishitani Keiji was indeed one of his closest disciples. It comes as no surprise that, as we will observe in brief, his philosophical vocabulary is highly influenced by the master. But

apart from touching on this topic, it is relevant to have a broad overview of the authors and schools that exerted a significant influence in Nishitani's thought.

b) Nishitani's Influences

The reading choices that he made and his mode of approaching bibliographical sources show that Nishitani was mainly interested in philosophies and viewpoints that put the focus on individual existence. This is not to deny the diversity of texts—philosophical as well as literary and religious—that he read or studied. At any rate, his appropriation of them is marked by his keen interest in existential matters.

From the Western tradition, Nishitani read German idealists (mainly Schelling), Kant, Hegel, Bergson, and Aristotle. His lively interest in Christian mysticism led him to investigate the works of authors such as Plotinus, Augustine, and Mechthild von Magdeburg. He was also much interested in and influenced by existentialists and writers like Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, and Sartre. From theologians such as Rudolf Bultmann, he took the idea of demythologization, which he tried to apply to both Christian and Buddhist ideas. Nonetheless, judging by the impact they had in his vocabulary and ideas, his main influences were Meister Eckhart, Nietzsche, and Heidegger.

Here the latter two deserve further comment. For Nishitani, Nietzsche stands out among nihilist thinkers for unwaveringly following the consequences of nihilism all the way to the end (1990 6-8). On the other hand, the Japanese author adopts some of Heidegger's vocabulary and seems very close to him in his critique of metaphysics and technology. It has been pointed out, however, that Nishitani would have tried to pursue a more radical response to nihilism and technology than his German *Professor* (Waldenfels 69-79). Indeed, while the latter stopped at claiming that the solution depends on a new disclosure of Being whose occurrence cannot be predicted but merely patiently awaited (Heine 1990 184), the former insists (in Nietzsche's spirit) on the need to go all the way through nihilism as the only way out of nihilism itself.

From the Asian side, Nishitani had a considerable knowledge of the Buddhist tradition, particularly Zen. He was mostly influenced by Dōgen (who established the Sōtō school of Zen in Japan). Besides, he had some knowledge of Shinran (founder of the Shin school of Pure Land Buddhism in Japan), Hakuin (a major figure of Rinzai Zen), and the great haiku poet Bashō, among others. Going further back, Hans Waldenfels claimed that his ideas were influenced by Nāgārjuna, the main representative of classical Madhyamaka philosophy (16). However, it is likely that his thought (and those of several Kyoto School thinkers in general) were rather more

indebted to the Yogācāra school (Ornatowski 1997 97). Whatever the case, it is clear that, unlike Nishida, and especially in his mature works, Nishitani often resorts to quotations from Buddhist poets and monks to illustrate and explain his own philosophical ideas.

This variety of influences marks Nishitani's appropriation of Nishida's thought and philosophical vocabulary. The disciple inherits Nishida's interest in problems concerning the unity of reality in its plurality, but while Nishida (and Tanabe as well) ends in religion, it is there where Nishitani begins (Heisig 2001b 329). Besides, he replaces the master's struggle for metaphysical systematicity with a strong commitment to existential thinking. He reinterprets "Absolute nothingness" in light of Mahāyāna's "emptiness" (śūnyatā). He relates self-awareness and reality's self-realization (in the twofold sense of reality becoming real and knowledge being truly appropriated) while pursuing the overcoming of the subject-object framework from an elemental (originary) subjectivity. The religious demand that Nishida discusses in the last chapter of *An Inquiry into the Good* is studied by Nishitani on the background of the problem of nihilism and interpreted as a quest. Nishida's *place* becomes Nishitani's *field*. Later on, I will explain this terminology. Meanwhile, let us finish our contextualization of Nishitani's philosophy by exploring what his life and style can tell us about his personality as a thinker.

2.2 The Author

a) Life and Career

Nishitani Keiji was born on 27 February 1900 in Ushitsu, a little town in the prefecture of Ishikawa, facing the Sea of Japan, but the family soon moved to Tokyo when the boy was six years old. In 1914, his father died of tuberculosis, a disease that he also suffered. For that reason, he did not pass the medical examination required to enter the prestigious Daiichi High School. He then moved for about a year to Hokkaido and spent time reading the novels of Natsume Sōseki, which fostered in him an interest in Zen that would later lead him to the works of D.T. Suzuki. When his health improved, he turned back and approved the medical examination.

During his school years, he had time to read some classics that would prove highly influential in his philosophical personality: Dostoevsky, St. Francis of Assisi, Emerson, Nietzsche (he said he used to carry a copy of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* everywhere like a Bible, cf. Heisig 2001b 192), among others. During those years he ran into a copy of Nishida's *Thought and Experience* in a library, a reading that stirred up his interest in philosophy to such a point that after high school he decided to conduct philosophical studies at Kyoto Imperial University under Nishida himself. He graduated in 1924 with a thesis on Schelling and Bergson.

Soon after graduation, he started teaching at several high schools until 1932. In 1926 he assumed a post lecturing in ethics and German at Kyoto's Imperial College. From 1928 to 1935 he lectured in philosophy and religion at Ōtani University. In 1932, the same year of publication of his *History of Mystical Thought* (NKC 3, part 1), he returned to his alma mater to assume a lectureship. Soon after, in 1935, he was appointed as professor of religion. His years as a professor at Kyoto University account for a significant part of his work and philosophical career until his retirement. It was also the time he started practicing Zen at Shōkokuji (Kyoto) under Yamazaki Taikō (from 1937 to 1961). The continuity of his practice was only interrupted by an academic stay in Freiburg, Germany, where he studied under Heidegger from 1937 to 1939.

During the late 1930s and early 1940s, his reputation as a scholar seemed well established, not without merit. These years are marked by his attempts to appropriate Nishida's and Tanabe's ideas and develop a political response to the excesses of Japanese militarism, a project that his masters had left unfinished and put on his shoulders. These attempts can be noticed in *A Philosophy of Elemental Subjectivity* (NKC 1, 2), a collection of previously published articles that he arranged as a book released in 1940. In 1945 he obtained his Ph.D. degree with a dissertation entitled

“Prolegomenon to a Philosophy of Religion” (NKC 6: 3-101). In 1943 he earned the Chair of Philosophy and Religion at Kyoto University. He also published several articles and appeared in public conferences.

However, his naive attempts to navigate through the political circumstances of wartime Japan, tainted as they were with governmental militarism and significant official intervention in what scholars could and could not say, brought Nishitani much trouble then and after. From 1941 to 1942, he participated in a series of conferences on the overcoming of modernity hosted by the Chūōkōron journal. There he intended to explain his approach to the problem of how to preserve Japanese identity in the middle of globalizing Westernization while avoiding the extremes of militarism. However, for leftist thinkers his stance sounded too close to absolutist or racist ideologies, while the militaristic authorities found it dangerous for the regime. As a result, after Japan was defeated and the United States occupation authorities took control, in 1946 he was declared “unsuitable” for holding any public position and then expelled from his chair at Kyoto University. A comment he once made later summarizes quite eloquently the whole ideologically stained predicament he endured during those years: “‘During the war [I] had been slapped on the left

cheek and after the war on the right.'" (quoted in Heisig 2001b 185; cf. Davis).

In spite of that, the years after the war he wrote and published some of his most outstanding works. *A Study of Aristotle* (NKC 5), and *God and Absolute Nothingness* (NKC 7) came in 1948. *Religion, Politics and Culture* (NKC 4: 9-59), and *Nihilism* (NKC 8) were issued in 1949. In 1952 he was re-established in his Chair of Philosophy and stayed there until 1958, when he moved to the Chair of History of Philosophy. During those years, he was asked to write an article on the question "what is religion" for the first issue of the *Lectures on Contemporary Religion,* which appeared in 1954. However, his preoccupation with clarifying and expanding the contents would lead him to write three more, published from 1954 to 1955 in the issues 2, 4 and 6 of the same series. Later on, he still added two more chapters, and in 1961 published the whole set as a book entitled *What is Religion?* (NKC 10). The volume comprises and refines all the motifs of his earlier thought (except his reflections on politics) to such a point that it is now considered his *magnum opus.*

Nishitani retired in 1963, but his career was far from over. He was appointed Emeritus Professor by his alma mater in 1964 and continued teaching at Ōtani from 1963 to 1971. He also kept giving conferences, participating in public discussions, publishing several

articles, and promoting East-West dialogue almost until the end of his life. In 1965 he became the chief editor of *The Eastern Buddhist*, a journal founded by Daisetsu Teitarō Suzuki. From 1971 to 1990, he was the president of the Conference on Religion in Modern Society. In the 1980s he still participated in several conferences and symposia and was significantly active in the Kyoto Zen Symposium from its inauguration in 1983.

Moreover, it was during his autumn years that he gained international recognition. His ideas started attracting the interest of some sympathetic students of theology and philosophy of religion in the West, some of whom went to visit him personally in his house in Kyoto. Thanks to those circumstances, from 1964 to 1972 he traveled several times to Europe and the United States to give conferences and lectures. He could witness the publication of the first studies of his philosophy outside Japan as well as the first translations of his work into Western languages (mainly English, but also German and French). Also, he participated actively in the revision of the first full translation of his *magnum opus* into English, which appeared under the title *Religion and Nothingness* in 1982 (Van Bragt 1989 10-11). In 1990, the very year that Professor Nishitani passed away in Kyoto, another of his great works, *Nihilism*, appeared in translation under the title *The Self-Overcoming of Nihilism.* From then on, more translations and studies have been released, and international interest in his thought

keeps growing. Initially recognized abroad only among circles of Christian theologians and scholars of religion, today he is also studied in some philosophy departments.

b) Style

As Heisig points out, Nishitani preferred sharing his ideas through discussion and oral communication rather than writing. What is more, at first he felt discomforted by the idea of being read by people that he did not know personally (Heisig 2001b 189). Out of the 26 volumes comprising his *Collected Works*, 11 are conference transcripts and, additionally, many more of his writings originated in speeches (ibid. 330). This conversational quality appears to exert a strong influence on his style. The not infrequent impression one may have that he leaves his use of many borrowed terms unexplained, particularly Heideggerian terminology, would be due to the fact that he relied on the knowledge he shared with his original audiences.

Such oral quality may have even further effects when combined with the influence of Nietzschean perspectivism. Instead of worrying about constructing a full-fledged system of thought—as his masters Nishida and Tanabe did—, Nishitani rather preferred to develop a standpoint from which to consider a broad range of philosophical problems (ibid. 189). This standpoint is

characteristically existential: Nishitani should not be read in merely abstract or theoretical terms, but always in relation to how philosophical matters emerge from or have an impact on concrete, individual existence.

He does not proceed in a straight line, enunciating and elucidating one thesis or concept after another. Rather, he repeats the same point several times and introduces a manifold of concepts and examples in order to broaden his initial perspective step by step. He ends up connecting many issues together, but the same initial point remains at the center, articulating the whole set together. Heisig compares this procedure to advancing through a spiral staircase. To wit, Nishitani starts from the level of everyday experience and then goes in circles, but after completing every turn, he broadens his perspective until at the end he brings the reader back to the beginning, now enriched by the insight accumulated in the process (2001b 188-9). Meanwhile, Frederick Franck prefers to explain Nishitani's writing by comparing it to a fugue: "For a fugue is a composition in counterpoint based on a general theme, in which different voices enter successively in 'imitation,' as if in pursuit of one another, yet preserving a clear unity of form." (2004 39).

At any rate, his work is a reflection of a very definite style of thinking: Conceptualization is a means for existential realization

and not the other way around; lively conversation precedes fixed written expression; therefore, opening up several conceptual pathways seems preferable to building a closed, consistent system. All this suggests that we should not read his written works as theories or definitive accounts, but as suggested paths, as fields of possibilities for further development of his ideas. More than establishing the "correct" or most coherent interpretation of his thought, it is important to join the talk.

So far I have barely mentioned Nishitani's ideas or main topics and have rather focused on the background from which they arose. Now is time to concentrate on the ideas themselves.

2.3 Starting Point: The Problem of Nihilism

As spelled out in his essay entitled *The Starting Point of My Philosophy,* Nishitani is well aware that his philosophical starting point is nihilism or, more concretely stated, the problem of nihilism and how to overcome it (1986 24). In this context, however, the word does not mean a certain philosophical position or trend, but rather "something prior to philosophy and at the same time essentially including a move to a philosophical dimension" (ibid.). When Nishitani refers to "nihilism" as his philosophical starting point, he means that which resists even the traditional approaches to the problem of how to ground the meaning and value of life and

things in general. In order to explain this more precisely, we will need to expound how he understands this problem.

Today it is commonly considered that circumstances such as depression or despair have to do essentially with people's emotional well-being or mental health. However, those situations when the ground of meaningfulness and value falls are not merely a matter of psychology or well-being. Nishitani argues that depression, despair and the like are at bottom the signs of a deep penetration into, and self-awareness of the true nature of reality. When those feelings arise, it is because one has gained a profound insight into the fact that the being of every single thing and the being of oneself are intrinsically intertwined with their own non-being, that nonexistence is at the very root of existence—in other words, that things and the self are impermanent not merely as a result of any external factor, but due to their own nature. Correspondingly, loss of life meaning is the sign that one has awakened to (as Nishitani calls it) *nihility*: the negativity concerning the being of all things and oneself. This is then an awakening to the fact that the problem of losing the meaning of life is a problem of reality, not merely a psychological matter. When I lose whatever gave meaning to life, my own sense of reality becomes falsified: I live in an utter falsity. Thus, re-establishing the meaning of life must be a re-establishment of my sense of reality.

Now, until our age people have normally coped with the existential confrontation to nihility by means of traditional ethical and religious responses. To explain this, let us use Nishitani's own example (1986 24-25). Let us imagine a widow whose only son goes to war and gets killed. She then loses everything she had in life.[3] Nihility appears here in a way that she cannot evade. However, she might say to herself that her son gave his life for the sake of the nation. His death now makes sense to the woman, as well as all the efforts she made for her son: she helped to raise a man who fought for the nation. This strategy might as well help her to make sense of the past, but it does not help her to make sense of the future. What is she going to do? What can she expect from now on? Here traditional religion comes on the scene: the mother might believe, for instance, that she and her son will meet again after death on a transcendent plane. Thus she can make sense of her present and future existence, hence re-establish her sense of reality.

[3] This example might appear anachronic to us. A woman's life is not only her children, we might remark. Here it is important to remember that Nishitani wrote in a society where women tended to have no other roles than wives and mothers (that has changed, but in contemporary Japan women often feel forced to choose between a professional career and motherhood due to the social expectation that the mother remains at home). The point, however, is to exemplify situations wherein the confrontation to nihility cannot be escaped. Next, I put an example that might appeal more directly to our 21st-century sensibility.

Nihilism is the sort of situation that resists even these traditional responses to nihility. Nishitani explains this by modifying his initial example (1986 26). We may imagine that the son is not in battle but together with his widow mother, and an air raid attacks their town. At a moment of high risk for both, he decides to run away and leaves her mother exposed to the explosions but, out of luck, she survives. Once the air raid is over, they are both alive, but she starts to feel tormented by the fact that her son betrayed her. It is too hard for her to make sense of this, then believing becomes impossible. Even the traditional ethical or religious responses appear doubtful, nothing appears to prevent her existence from becoming a falsity.

Perhaps an additional example might help to clarify this point further. Let us consider the case of a middle-aged married man diagnosed with intestinal cancer. He has only a few months left. Naturally, he falls in despair: His projects are suddenly interrupted by the disease, her hopes to see his children marry and bring him grandchildren are betrayed by life. Nonetheless, he can think about all the things he had achieved: He had time to raise his children, and today they have grown up so that they will be able to provide for themselves. If he is (for example) a Christian, he can also entertain the hope that one day he will meet them and his wife in Heaven. Now, what if we change the example a little bit? This time, husband and wife are very young, they have just had a baby and are starting

their professional careers, but they both have intestinal cancer. For them, the ailment hardly makes any sense. What is the point that they die so young and leave a poor child behind? How can it be fair that God allows this to happen? These questions are a sign that even traditional responses to nihility hardly help the betrayed widow mother or the ailing young couple to cope with the challenge.

So far, it is tempting to conclude that nihilism is just an anthropological matter: It occurs by virtue of human nature, then it may arise in diverse cultures and periods of history. Such perspective, Nishitani judges, reflects part of the truth, but does not show in full depth the nature of nihilism. In *The Self-Overcoming of Nihilism*, he argues that there are three more levels of meaning to it (1990 3-5). The anthropological one (as we may label it here) is the first one. The second is the historical one: Nihilism needs to be understood in light of the fall of the traditional systems and metaphysical models that provided a sense of order and meaningfulness to reality, as well as in light of the corresponding spiritual decay of the individuals experiencing such crisis. In short, it needs to be understood historically.

Now, when these two perspectives are combined, a third one inevitably arises: nihilism as a problem concerning the philosophy of history. Nihilism puts into question the ground of being and value

as it was traditionally conceived. People believed in a universal order that dictated the place and role of us humans in it and thus marked the way to the good. However, today such order is put into question, whereas both being and meaning lose their ground. To that extent, the problem of nihilism becomes a problem concerning the ground of historical human existence.

Nevertheless, Nishitani argues that we cannot stop at this level of understanding. There is, finally, a fourth one. It is not only that nihilism has to be addressed as a philosophical problem. Since we ourselves are the embodiment of the historical human existence that nihilism puts into question, we ourselves are put into question by nihilism. This implies that we cannot deal with it by observing the fact at a distance, that is, objectively or through reflection, as it has commonly been done in the history of thought. The very nature of the challenge rules out the possibility of taking such objective distance. The objective stance presupposes to confidently take the subject as the point of departure and its existence as a premise of the inquiry, but it is precisely the very existence of the subject that nihilism puts into question. The philosophical problem of nihilism demands from the inquiring individual to regard it as a personal matter. Existence can no longer be presupposed as grounded (be it in subjectivity, reason, or whatever else), since only as a groundless and problematic existence can it wake up to its own reality. In a

word, the problem of nihilism must be dealt with existentially. It is a problem of human existence within history. At this level, it becomes finally possible to grasp the full significance of nihilism.

Nishitani judges that the historical context where nihilism—both as a problem and as the self-awareness of the problem itself—achieved its deepest level of development was Modern Europe in the 19th century. There are several reasons for this. Considering it as a problem, it is there that it became the most radical and inescapable due to the effects of the modern scientific worldview in the spiritual condition of European civilization. The science that started to take shape in early modernity considered the universe as completely ordered according to a set of purely mechanical laws, thus absolutely inert and absolutely indifferent to the interests or urges of humans. In the end, life as spirit (animate life, or the life of phenomenal experience, to be clear) was either a delusion or the mere product of those inert, mechanical forces of nature. As a result, any sense of value or meaning whatsoever could not have any ground in the structure of reality and, consequently, turns into the product of impulses or arbitrary effects of history. Everything is the same, from inert matter we come and to inert matter will we return. Whatever we do or achieve makes no difference to the final result. In a word, the universe becomes an utterly absurd ocean of death where life is a mere accident with no meaning or purpose at all. To

such level, nihilism resists any possible attempt at grounding life meaning.

It is also during the 19th century that nihilism developed as a self-awareness of the situation itself (1990 5-8). When in this self-awareness the individual embraces nihilism from an existential stance, the absurdity left by the destruction of all meaning becomes the unlimited freedom to create values and meaning in the very middle of this impermanent existence. Echoes of a Nietzschean *Ja-sagen* can be felt in this perspective because Nishitani indeed regards Nietzsche as the thinker in which the self-awareness of nihility reaches its highest point in European history. Whatever the case, the main lesson Nishitani draws from his inquiry into the matter is that nihilism can only be overcome by passing through nihilism itself because that is the only route left available.

To sum up, nihilism as previously explained is Nishitani's philosophical starting point in the following sense: It discloses the problem to be solved, the need to go through philosophical reflection in order to find a solution, and also the conditions that such solution will have to meet. This has several implications on the way he approaches philosophical issues in general. Two of them will be worth mentioning now because they condition the way that he approaches the diverse problems concerning religion.

On the one hand, any proper understanding of human being and its place in reality must start from an existential standpoint. The only way we can solve the various problems concerning the human condition is to return to the level of our own existence, such as it is in itself. On the other hand, Nishitani undertakes his philosophical project in terms of an inquiry into reality, thus linking the problem of life's meaning to the problem of truth and reality. This is a most relevant point. These two problems are linked and boil down to one thing: We intrinsically need the world to make sense. Besides, this is not simply one need among others. It is indispensable for human life, even though it is not indispensable for physically keeping life.

2.4 Elemental Subjectivity

In our times, the problem of nihilism discloses the problematic of religious life, and religious life itself becomes the key to solving the problem. It is true that nihilism defeats both traditional ethics and religion, but the result is not that religion comes to an end. Rather, it is precisely out of the demise of religious systems that religion finds an opportunity for further development. Such further development discloses the way to the overcoming of nihilism. The place where this development is possible is none other than the awakening to the reality of human existence just as it is. Seen under this light, the essence of religion is the awakening to *elemental subjectivity*.

Nishitani first articulates this idea in the collection of essays entitled *A Philosophy of Elemental Subjectivity.* In order to understand his viewpoint, we have to clarify how he conceives of the subject and what the qualification of “elemental” means.

Concerning the first point, it is relevant to remark that the word “subjectivity” accepts two translations into Japanese. The first one is *shukansei* 主観性, which captures its sense in traditional Western epistemology and metaphysics, to wit, that which is related to the subject (*shukan* 主観) in contrast to the object (*kyakkan* 客観). As is well known, the subject has traditionally been conceived of from the standpoint of substance metaphysics. This means that the question of its essence is interpreted as the problem of defining the invariable characteristics that make it be what it is (and without which it ceases to be what it is). In other words, the key to grasping the essence of the subject is thought to lie in its ground, thus conceived.

In contrast, Nishitani agrees with contemporary critics of metaphysics (such as Heidegger or Sartre) in that we should give up this search for the substantial ground of the subject. The subject is groundless, it has no fully stable ground to rely on, it is fully immersed in the impermanence of phenomena. However, this acknowledgment, he argues, cannot be achieved intellectually. It

can only be the result of directly experiencing life as it is: “The acknowledgment of the reality of life understood as groundlessness would arise from direct contact with life, from a direct experience of the ‘I am,’ hence not from an act of reflection.” (Bouso 56). Nishitani refers to this “new” sense of subjectivity with the term *shutaisei* 主体性. That is the word that he has in mind when discussing *elemental subjectivity*.[4] In brief, *Shutaisei* refers to the character of the subject as it exists, without any reference to a supposedly immutable metaphysical ground—be it called God, reason, matter or whatever else—distinguishable from the subject’s concrete existence (ibid.).

Secondly, the word “elemental” (J. *kongenteki* 根源的) literally refers to the “root” (*ne* 根) and “origin” (*gen* 源) of something. Indeed, the term *kongen* 根源 denotes root, source, origin, principle, base, or foundation. However, in Nishitani it does not mean foundation or ground in its usual metaphysical sense, but quite rather denotes the groundless origination that we have already described above. Precisely, an alternative translation for *kongenteki* is “originary.” Indeed, even though the self has no final ground to rely on, it constantly gushes forth from the root and source (origin) of its own life; and, in the end, it turns out that this root and source is nothing but the self itself in its constant becoming. To put it in

[4] Indeed, he introduced this term into Japanese in order to translate the corresponding word from Kierkegaard’s writings (Heisig 2001b 193).

metaphorical terms, the self can be compared to a wellspring: The material of which it is made and the origin of its being are fundamentally the same "water," granted that it keeps on gushing forth. This standpoint unequivocally shows Nishitani's commitment to a postmetaphysical understanding of subjectivity.

Summing up, elemental subjectivity is what, in its constant becoming, the individual subject is in itself without reliance on any immutable, substantial ground. This concept reflects an effort to conceive of "essence" without relying on "substance." In its turn, such notion of essence is existential: The thing (any given thing) is what it actually is. Nishitani usually refers to this notion with a Buddhist term: suchness (S. *tathatā*).

The relevance of the concept of elemental subjectivity has to do with a contradiction that Nishitani identifies in modern subjectivity (Heisig 2001b 193-5). To say "I am I" means, on the one hand, that I have an inalienable self-identity and enjoy self-grounded freedom, without reliance on anything external. On the other hand, however, the fact that such identity and freedom are self-grounded ensues a sort of self-attachment and isolation. The self becomes a prison to itself. In an effort to break free (as much as possible) from external constraints, the modern individual ends up losing its capacity to connect with the world, and even with its own inner life.

Such contradiction and self-confinement, Nishitani argues, can be solved if the subject recognizes that its supposed ground is not a ground at all, breaks through such an illusion of being grounded, and thus awakens to the elemental life that constantly blooms anew and constantly becomes itself—that is, to the spontaneity of natural life. This awakening renders authentic freedom and subjectivity.

Let us remember that this discussion of elemental subjectivity is related to the notions of religious life and religious awakening. Nishitani discusses both the two related concepts and the relation itself within the context of nihilism in the book considered his masterpiece (*cf.* Heisig 2001b 186, 217): *Religion and Nothingness*. This way, we enter into the topic of the next chapter.

3. NISHITANI ON WHAT IS RELIGION

The awareness of the problem of nihilism helps to disclose the wellspring wherefrom the *religious quest* emerges in us. It discloses that *at root* religion is not about beliefs or institutional facts. At root, it is about the confrontation of each individual with the reality of nihility, and this confrontation cannot be dealt with in terms of utility. Let us explain these observations in more detail.

3.1 The Religious Quest as the Pursuit of True Reality

The six articles composing *Religion and Nothingness* are articulated around one question, straightforwardly formulated in the original Japanese title (which is also the title of the first chapter): "What is religion?" Let us now see the way that Nishitani addresses it. To start, in the book's preface, he explains his existential stance in contrast to objective methodologies—such as those typical of the history of religions. From an objective stance, the researcher "takes his [*sic*] lead from someone else's questions and treats his subjects with scientific *objectivity,* offering conclusions based on the facts of history [...]." In contrast, from an existential standpoint "the attempt [is] to come to one's own conclusions while asking questions of oneself," and "the quest is for the 'home-ground' of religion, where religion emerges from man himself, as a *subject*, as a self living in

the present." (RN xlviii). That is, from an existential standpoint the field of evidence for the inquiry into religion is not purely a collection of facts regarded at a distance (i.e. objectively), but the self's existence just as it is manifest to the self itself. Thus, insofar as religion is concerned, fact and value cannot be investigated separately. To say it in positive terms, the clarification of what *is* (facts) leads to a clarification of what *ought to be* (values, norms), and vice versa.

At this point, we should remember that Nishitani rejects understanding the question in terms of purpose or utility, be it for society or the individual. Religion is certainly not indispensable for sustaining life biologically (as, for instance, food and water are), but that does not imply that its status as a need should be justified in terms of its utility (as is the case with culture or the arts). As we mentioned before, religion emerges as a need at the same level that nihility becomes a problem for human life: It emerges as the need to overcome the confrontation to nihility. Therefore, it is indispensable for life, even if not biologically: "Whether the life we are living will end up in extinction or in the attainment of eternal life is a matter of the utmost importance for life itself." (RN 2). When nihility emerges to awareness, one cannot simply ask "what for?": one cannot simply put this or that into question because *one* is that which is put into question, and religion is about confronting nihility. Thus religion is

an indispensable necessity for life. One can ask "what for?" in ordinary life, but nihility forces us to "take a step back" into the level of elemental subjectivity:

> [I]t is in breaking through [the] ordinary mode of being and overturning it from the ground up, in pressing us back to the elemental source of life where life itself is seen as useless, that religion becomes something we need—a *must* for human life. (ibid.)

According to Nishitani, this initial consideration has two basic consequences. The first one is that religion "is at all times the individual affair of each individual" and, consequently, "we cannot understand what religion is from the outside. The religious quest alone is the key to understanding it." (RN 2). These words eloquently express what we may label as the *first-personly* character of religion.

The second consequence is that asking "What is the utility or purpose of religion for society (or people)?" is a serious mistake: any religious system that justifies itself on the ground of its relevance for the preservation of the social order or public morals implies an essential distortion of religion itself. It is wrong to ask

for what religion is by asking for its purpose, role, or function.[5] The question "What is the purpose of religion?" has to be, Nishitani claims, "broken through by a counterquestion: 'For what purpose do I myself exist?'" (RN 2). That is the religious question. Let us refer to this second point as the *transtelic* character of religion.

So far, the idea has been (to a point) implicit that there is a sort of religious *need* or demand that, correspondingly, triggers a religious *quest*—and, as already mentioned, this inner religious quest is the only key to understanding religion. In order to elucidate this pair of concepts further, it will be relevant to trace back its origin in Nishida's notion of religious demand (*shūkyōteki yōkyū* 宗教的要求) and pay attention to the way that Nishitani appropriates it (cf. Horio 1993).

In *An Inquiry into the Good*, Nishida argues:

> The religious demand concerns the self as a whole, the life of the self. It is a demand in which the self, while perceiving its relativity and finitude, yearns to attain eternal, true life by

[5] This does not necessarily amount to rejecting so called functional approaches in the sociology of religion. Those approaches try to *explain* religion in terms of the role that religious systems *actually* play in a certain society. That does not need to be at odds with Nishitani's viewpoint. What is at odds with it is to leap from functional explanation to reduction, or from functional explanation to functional justification of religion.

> uniting with an absolutely infinite power. [...] True religion seeks the transformation of the self and the reformation of life. (Nishida 1990 [1911] 149, NKZ 1: 169).

Given that this demand concerns the self itself and not simply a part of its interests or requirements, it is a mistake to ask for the purpose of religion: “People often ask why religion is necessary. This is identical to asking why we need to live. Religion does not exist apart from the life of the self, and the religious demand is the demand of life itself.” (ibid. 152).

Now, Nishida explains this demand in terms of his metaphysical system. In his book, reality is conceived as inherently unified: The plurality of things, only apparently separated, develop towards higher and higher levels of unification. Likewise, unity unfolds in the form of the diversity of individual things. When someone thinks from the subject-object framework, a separation has already occurred, then a process of unification is required. When someone desires something—i.e. entertains a certain goal—, that fact means that achieving the goal leads to a higher degree of unification between the subject (the desire) and the object (the goal desired). However, the culmination of will is only possible in a state of absolute unity of reality, a state that an individual self evidently cannot achieve, unless it unites with this absolute reality. What is of particular interest to us here is that the religious demand must

develop as a process of will that involves the self as a whole, and as such aims at the transformation of the self itself (Horio 1993 110-28, Nishida 1990 149-52, NKZ 1: 169-73).

Nishitani inherits this notion of religious demand, but his version contains two significant differences. First, in light of the problem of nihilism, he considers it as ensuing from the profound commotion and doubt that arises in the self as the result of the confrontation to nihility: “in Nishitani’s case, the self’s existence becomes a question to itself [...]” (Horio 1993 129).

The second difference has to do with an analytical distinction. The Japanese term *yōkyū* (要求) may generally be translated as “(strong) request” or “demand.” However, it contains a double nuance. In some cases, it surely connotes a need (whatever is demanded), while in some other cases it connotes the drive (i.e. the driving force) that is triggered in the individual by the need. For the first meaning, Nishitani uses the term *hitsuyō* 必要 (need), while for the second one he adopts *yōkyū*.

This lexical digression is relevant because it helps to make explicit that Nishitani’s concept of “religious quest” implies an understanding of religious life as inherently processual. The process of religious life has a beginning (the confrontation to nihility), a

particular way of development (which depends on each individual) and a direction (the overcoming of the confrontation). The need leads to a quest. Now is the moment to expound more clearly how Nishitani interprets this quest and the crucial role it plays in his interpretation of religion.

So far, Nishitani's perspective on religion can be summarized as follows. From an existential standpoint, religious life is to be understood as an elemental, first-personly, transtelic quest for life's meaningfulness which starts at the point that the subject as a whole becomes a question to itself ("Why do I exist at all?"), and unfolds as the inherently individual pursuit of an answer. Now the question is: From this existential framework, how does he interpret religion? The answer is: He intends "to approach religion [...] as the *real* self-awareness [*jikaku* 自覚] of reality," or in other words, as the self-realization of reality (RN 5). Let us clarify what this concept means.

Nishitani chooses the English word "realization" because it accepts both the connotations "becoming real" and "getting to understand," and these correspond to the two aspects of his concept.[6] The self-realization of reality is simultaneously the actualization of reality and our real appropriation (understanding) thereof. On the one hand, it is a process of self-*actualization*: through it, things become

[6] Indeed, he had already made this choice in Japanese (cf. NKC 10: 8-9).

actual, that is, they get to manifest their own being. On the other hand, realization is a process of *appropriation* (understanding) through which things get to be known as what they are in themselves. True actualization and true appropriation are one: Self-awareness is the "place" where things become themselves (i.e. where they become actual) and get to be known as what they are in themselves. In other words, it is the place where becoming real and becoming understood are the very same process. Likewise, by this very same process, the self becomes what it is: "The real perception of reality is our real *mode of being* itself and constitutes the realness that is the true reality of our existence." (RN 6).

In order to make sense of this twofold concept of realization, it is important to recognize that it goes in line with a nonsubstantialist understanding of being. Things do not have a substance or a proper nature that impinges upon the senses, thus producing representations thereof in the intellect. Rather, the being of things unfolds in a continuous process, so that the moment they become manifest to self-awareness they are simultaneously manifesting and actualizing their being in a particular way.

Accordingly, our author seems to go in line with nonsubstantialist accounts of the mind and mental phenomena such as enactivism. It is wrong to start by assuming that the mind exists apart from the

external world, and subsequently proceed to ask how they can get in contact with one another. Much differently, we should start by considering mind and world as an elemental (originary) unity, and then ask how the cognition of objects is constituted out of such background. Consequently, real self-awareness is neither a sheer ontological concept nor a sheer epistemological concept, that is, it would be pointless to ask whether the concept of self-awareness refers to an event occurring in reality, or rather to a mode of knowledge. It is both.

In this line, Nishitani interprets the religious quest as a quest for reality. In his own words:

> [...] I should like to try to interpret the religious quest as man's [sic] search for true reality in a real way (that is, not theoretically and not in the form of concepts, as we do in ordinary knowledge and philosophical knowledge), and from that same angle to attempt an answer to the question of the essence of religion by tracing the process of the real pursuit of true reality. (RN 6)

At this point, the reader might wonder: If the religious quest is a pursuit of meaningfulness (an answer to the problem of the meaninglessness that nihility brings to the fore), how can it be interpreted as a search for reality? Are we not talking about two

different types of pursuit here? Meaningfulness is a matter of my inner satisfaction with life, whereas finding reality is a matter of knowledge of the world. The former has to do with value, while the latter is about facts.

However, as we have already observed, Nishitani would not take this split for granted. Let us remember that, for him, nihility is real. Despair or anxiety over the greatest hardships of life are not simply psychological conditions, but the signs of a deeply embodied insight into the nature of reality itself. It is an insight into the impermanence of things and the self: All things and the self disclose that their very reality presupposes its unreality. Hence the urge for meaningfulness is the urge for order and permanence in the middle of chaos and impermanence. Seen under this light, it is not surprising that many people who have lost the meaning of their lives report feeling as if everything was unreal, or rather as if they were having a nightmare or "living a lie."

Nishitani would remark that such way of speaking makes sense. It indicates that the individual's urge for meaning is an urge for a true life—in other words, a real life. After all, nihility is real and confronting it is thus a problem concerning reality. As religion and the religious quest begin with the confrontation to nihility, then religion and the religious quest are to be interpreted as a matter of

reality. Thus any approach that treats them as purely a matter of psychology, culture, or in general as merely subjective fails to see the sort of challenge that individuals face when the religious urge arises in them.

It is true that at a conceptual and objective level, life's meaning and reality can be distinguished. So can the problem of life's meaning and the problem of reality. However, we should remember that when the individual subject faces them in the form of the confrontation to nihility, they are not the type of problems that the self can ponder over "at a distance" (i.e. objectively). In other circumstances, like solving a puzzle or doing research, I am not the matter in question—or even if I am, I can abstract my own self from my actual existence and thus treat it as an object. When the problem is life's meaning or nihility, I am the matter in question. And I cannot abstract from the matter in question because I cannot abstract my own self from myself (so to speak). Precisely, the level where the self cannot abstract itself and thus engage with itself objectively is the existential one: The place of elemental subjectivity. There the question is not how to *define* the meaning of life or what the correct *account* of reality is. The question is rather how to recover life's meaning itself in the face of meaninglessness and how to reconstruct one's own sense of reality in the face of nihility. At the existential level, we can understand that finding life's

meaning and finding reality are the same thing, to wit, encountering one's place in the cosmos (the order of things) despite chaos. That is just what the problem of life's meaningfulness is about.

This view of meaning and reality is related to the fact that Nishitani adopts the apparently redundant expression "true reality" when interpreting the aim (direction) of the religious quest. Here "true" does not mean propositionally true, but rather means pertaining to reality just as it is. He explains that "true" reality pursued in a "real" way is reality in that sense. Concepts and representations, he claims, do not render reality just as it is: They are only a projection of reality in intellect. This is not to say that they are utterly false, but just that they never reach the fullness of the thing's suchness—they can only reflect it partially. For this reason, in order to arrive at a point wherein true contact with the suchness of things (J. *nyojitsu* 如実, S. *tathatā*) can occur and the problem of meaning can be solved, a type of apprehension beyond the intellect's reach is necessary. This means an appropriation that is at one with things manifesting their suchness in our awareness—in a word, realization.

It remains to examine how the interpretation of religion as realization may lead to a subsequent interpretation of the religious quest as the pursuit of true reality. Nishitani articulates his approach to this question by means of a certain "topological" language.

Insofar as its appropriation of reality is concerned, the self may "stand" in one of three different "fields," already insinuated in what has been discussed so far: consciousness (understood as the realm of intellectual abstraction), nihility, or emptiness.

In phenomenological terms, the fields of consciousness, nihility, and emptiness may be interpreted as the different modes in which the self can constitute itself as well as its relation to reality. Nonetheless, before elucidating them in greater detail, it will be necessary to introduce Nishitani's topological framework.

3.2 The Topology of the Quest

In general, the topological vocabulary present in several Kyoto School thinkers plays a central role in their attempts to articulate an understanding of being without relying on a metaphysics of substance. Its origin can be traced back to Nishida's logic of *basho* (Heisig 2001b, Bouso). Nishida first articulates it in an article eponymously entitled "Place" (*basho* 場所), included in his book *From That Which Acts to That Which Sees*, published in 1927 (NKZ 4 208-289). As Davis explains it (2014, specifically section 3.3), in the logic of place beings are conceived of in terms of how each of them is "situated" in relation to other beings. Nishida proposes that we should not think about being by asking how each individual thing is what it is, and then ask how it relates to other things. We

should rather proceed the other way around: We should first question in which context is the relation between two things possible, and then we can inquire what each individual thing is. The point is that the being of individual things is not to be understood *qua* substance and in isolation, but rather has to be comprehended in their interrelatedness from the very beginning. Thus, the crucial question is in which "place" is the relation between thing and thing possible. Nishida's answer is absolute nothingness.

If interpreted literally, this language is spatial. However, it involves much more than space. In general, the "place" where the relatedness and being of things are possible is the context in which all the determinations that make up the essence of all interrelated individual things (location, shape, color, etc.) occur. This way of thinking about being is not unlike field theory in physics—indeed, this parallel has been already suggested elsewhere (cf. Van Bragt 1982 xxx, Heisig 2001b 72).

Nishitani follows the spirit of Nishida's logic of place. Indeed, through the influence of Nietzsche, the Christian mystics, and Heidegger (among others), he "developed, in his own highly original manner, existential and phenomenological aspects of Nishida's topology of absolute nothingness." (Davis). However, he prefers not to express it as a logic, but as a *standpoint* (J. *tachiba* 立

場, literally “the place where one stands”), this understood as the “place” where one “stands” and reality manifests itself. This way of speaking, somehow close to Nietzschean perspectivism, better expresses the existential character of the self-awareness of reality: “the ground one stands on changes and the horizon of what one can see broadens” (Heisig 2001b 222). Besides, he prefers to use the term “field” (*ba* 場) rather than Nishida’s *basho* (Van Bragt 1982 xxx): the latter commonly denotes a particular or punctual location, while *ba* rather denotes, more ambiguously, an area or region. This way, a *field* or *standpoint* is the “region” wherefrom one’s relation to reality becomes established, and according to which a certain *horizon* of understanding expands.

We may suggest that this topological vocabulary fits the demand for articulating a nonsubstantialist account of being and existence. It is also reasonable to claim that it helps to articulate a certain way of doing “phenomenology” whose point of departure is not transcendental subjectivity (consciousness) but elemental subjectivity (existence). That is, it is not a phenomenology in the sense of an *epoche* aimed at finding the transcendental conditions underlying the constitution (noesis) of objects (noemata) out of subjectivity, but the identification of the existential conditions underlying the emergence of experience as such (i.e. before the subject-object split).

At any rate, Nishitani's topological vocabulary is the terminological basis for his thematization of the religious quest as a quest for true reality. In light of his attention to the problem of nihilism, "Nishitani was concerned with the question of how to think the topological pathway leading to [the] breakthrough to non-duality" (Davis). What is, then, the pathway toward such breakthrough? Our author refers to it as a trajectory through the three fields mentioned earlier: consciousness (intellectual cognition), nihility (relative nothingness) and emptiness (absolute nothingness).

a) The Field of Consciousness

The field of consciousness is the realm of the subject-object split, where the self conceives of reality in terms of concepts and representations (RN 9). This mode of conceiving of and relating to reality contains two fundamental problems. First of all, as we have already mentioned in the discussion of elemental subjectivity, it is doomed to utter self-contradiction (RN 6-7). There are several views of what the self and reality are. From the viewpoint of daily life, reality is the manifold of things and facts outside us and the manifold of thoughts and other mental events within us. Meanwhile, from a reductionist interpretation of physics and chemistry, things and the self are nothing but combinations of atoms and configurations of energy regulated according to certain laws. Still, if

we observe it from the standpoint of social science, the real consists of economic forces or social constructions. And these are just a few examples.

In general, all views of reality standing on the field of consciousness are plausible and reveal one aspect of reality or another. The problem is that they do not fit together. For instance, scientists may conclude that we do not actually touch anything because atoms never come into contact, whereas in daily life we cannot deny the realness of a tender caress. Even if the accepted theories of neurophysiology imply that perception does not show us the world as it is because the brain constantly alters the content of sensory inputs, there is no way around the fact that we could not have attained any knowledge of brain functioning without using those very perceptive powers. Current neuroscience and ordinary perception might be mutually contradictory, but we cannot throw away the one or the other.

The second problem underlying the life of consciousness is that relating to things in terms of concepts and representations implies to have reality always at a distance. That is, it implies that the relation to it is indirect (RN 9-10): “On the field of consciousness, it is not possible really to get in touch with things as they are, that is, to face them in their own mode of being and on their own home-ground.”

(RN 9). It is the same with our understanding of ourselves as subjects with properties such as will, intellect, and emotions:

> Precisely because we face things on a field separated from things, and to the extent that we do so, we are forever separated from ourselves. Or to put it in positive terms, we can get in touch with ourselves only through a mode of being that puts us in touch with things from the very midst of those things themselves. (RN 10)

Correlatively, the field of consciousness is the realm where action is not truly free action, but reactive behavior: conditioned by habits, fears, or prejudices—in a word, by self-attachment (RN 102-4). In the field of consciousness, all intellectual operations necessarily presuppose a fixed distinction between sameness and difference in one concrete form or another. They presuppose a certain static image of the world and cannot critically surpass it beyond the point of just jumping into another static image of the world.

Likewise, the intellect always presupposes one static image of the self or another. It is thus always blind to the fact that things impinging upon the self do not impinge upon it at the moment that the self, along with its faculties (perception, intellect, will, and so on), is already constituted, but at the very moment of the constitution of the self itself. This, let us note, is basically any

instant: At every instant, the self is being constituted by and in its relationship with things. Accordingly, knowledge does not emerge from the subject nor in the object considered separately, but from the dynamic relation between them. In the end, the isolated intellect never reaches reality itself. In its suchness, reality always eludes the intellect's snare.

The most representative form of this standpoint is the modern subject, whose paradigmatic philosophical model is the Cartesian subject (RN 10-13).[7] Cartesian dualism caused a split in our sense of reality: the world of the self-confined self (*res cogitans*) on the one hand, and the dead world of matter (*res extensa*) on the other. The result of Cartesian metaphysics is that the bond of life gathering all living things together at bottom, acknowledged by all cultures till then, was taken out of the picture. No connection remained between us humans and the rest of nature.

However, Nishitani argues, this bond of life (this "sympathy" and interconnection among all creatures) accounts for something real (RN 12-3). The fact that we can no longer conceive of it in terms of

[7] Whether Nishitani interpreted Descartes fairly is a matter of debate (Heisig 1997 257-9). For our purposes, however, it is not necessary to take issue with the French philosopher himself, but with the way his ideas were assimilated in Western culture. Thus, with the word "Cartesian" I refer to the latter.

a dualistic metaphysics of soul and body is another matter. The multiple problems this obliteration has brought about is clearer in our century, when the ecological crisis triggered by the industrial revolution has become evident enough.

However, Nishitani does not find any solution to the set of problems brought forth by "Cartesian" subjectivity in going back to "the viewpoint of preconscious life." The past does not go back. We rather have to *break through* the field of consciousness to open up a new perspective (RN 13).

b) The Field of Nihility

When we realize that underneath being there is always non-being, we realize nihility. This amounts to grasping the impermanence of being, an impermanence that makes the world constantly escape from full conceptualization. Generally speaking, Kyoto School's discourse of "nothingness" aims at highlighting such a point. In particular, we should recall Nishitani's remark that impermanence can be fully acknowledged only at an existential level. Only when nihility becomes present as a reality to us can we truly understand what it is about. To this respect, we may recall the examples previously mentioned: the widow and her only son, and the family guy facing cancer. Of course, there are many others. Such situations of existential confrontation when the self becomes a question to

itself are the moments when the self can begin to realize the inherent illusoriness of consciousness. However, as we will see, this is not yet the breakthrough that clears the way to the overcoming of such an illusion. We can explain this point by means of Nishitani's assessment of 20th-century atheist existentialism, whose representatives attempted to overcome the standpoint of consciousness by decidedly taking a stand on nihility.

Let us remember that, for Nishitani, the contemporary need to overcome the illusion of traditional metaphysics and open up new ways of grounding human life that have nihility into account is framed within the problem of nihilism. This way, the need amounts to a radical challenge to traditional religious worldviews. It is natural, therefore, that atheism appears as a serious alternative to them. Indeed, 20th-century existentialist atheism presented itself as an alternative to religiousness and an attempt to radically overcome the modern subject's self-attachment.

A paradigmatic example of this trend is Jean Paul Sartre (RN 30-4). "For Sartre, existentialism is nothing other than an attempt to draw out all the consequences of a coherent atheistic position." (RN 30). One of the consequences is that God's nonexistence is "embarrassing:" if God does not exist, everything is permitted. But why is this embarrassing? Because it means we have nothing to rely

on. Our ground is nothing at all, that is, our ground is nothingness (in French, *nèant*). Likewise, there is no basis in reality for justifying any moral standard whatsoever. This is why Sartre remarks that we human beings are condemned to be free: Without any real ground for our behavior, the only rule of our choices is our very choice itself.

However, at the same time such new freedom points to the emergence of modern subjectivity: a subjectivity that is not bound to any external transcendence—indeed, to nothing outside at all. That is, Nishitani concedes, a major achievement:

> With this freedom each individual, from within his [sic] actual situatedness, chooses his own mode of being. By his every action he casts himself ahead of himself toward the future, as a series of undertakings and in so doing continually chooses himself as a self. Man [sic] is a "project." (RN 31)

This "constantly casting oneself ahead of oneself" is what being a project means. Sartre claims that by virtue of this projection, when one makes a choice, one creates an image of what humanity ought to be. This is because nowadays there is no *imago Dei* that we can morally aspire to become or even resemble: Individual choice is the only image available of what humankind ought to be. Embarrassing

as this might result, it makes no sense to try to rescue our traditional ground and re-establish the old God. We have to accept that our existence is grounded on nothingness and assume full responsibility for our inescapable freedom. This is, Sartre claims, the only standpoint compatible with human dignity.

To some extent, Nishitani agrees with the French philosopher: The past does not go back, we have to face nihility as it manifests in our historical conditions—i.e. in the age of nihilism. However, Nishitani also claims that Sartre did not truly get to overcome the standpoint of self-attachment because he still stands on (Cartesian) self-consciousness, although in a different manner. His *néant* is still a "thing" called "nothingness," that is, the nihilist individual conceives of it as if it was a "wall" at the bottom of itself, thus as some "thing" that the individual relates to at a distance from its own present existence. Therefore, this nothingness is not deep enough. This "wall" is still regarded as a cognizable (conceptualizable) object, thus it turns into a form of self-confinement. As Nishitani argues:

> Sartre considers his nothingness to be the ground of the subject, and yet he presents it like a wall at the bottom of the ego or like a springboard underfoot of the ego [hence immanent to the subject]. This turns his nothingness into a basic principle that shuts the ego up within itself. (RN 33)

In a word, Nishitani's objection to Sartre goes as follows. The latter still does not overcome the view of the subject (the unique and individual "I") that defines itself as an "inside" in contrast to an "outside"—that is, the subject that defines itself in terms of what is within itself in contrast to what is "without" (i.e. the "external" world). Sartre's subject still conceives of nothingness as as an object present to consciousness which, as such, can be regarded at a distance. Consequently, the subject-object split remains, and nothingness is yet understood as a "thing" called nothingness. This way, the subject remains glued to self-attachment. It remains confined within itself, walled off from reality by the bubble of conceptualized nothingness.

In order to break through consciousness, there is no way to avoid the confrontation to nihility. In this sense, contemporary existentialism goes in the right direction. It is necessary to "take a leap" from being to nothingness, hence to withdraw attention from external reality as ordinarily experienced in the field of consciousness, and bring it to our own existence just as it is manifest. Indeed, Nishitani acknowledges that 20th-century existentialists, "out of a sense of honesty to their own self-being, have decisively and of their own accord set their feet firmly on

nihility." (RN 88). However, it is not really possible to stand on nihility and remain there:

> The essence of nihility consists in a purely negative (antipodal) negativity. Its standpoint contains the self-contradiction that it can neither abide in existence nor abide being away from it. It is a standpoint torn in two from within. Therein lies its transitional character. We call it the standpoint of nihility, but in fact it is not a field one can stand on in the proper sense of the term. lt is no more than a spot we have to "run quickly across." (RN 137)

The field of nihility cannot shake free of itself. It is essentially "torn in from within," hence essentially transitional. It reflects a leap beyond the field of consciousness to the extent that it becomes present to the self and overturns the realm of beings. Still, the self faces this nihility as if it were external to it, as a sort of "thing" that it faces. Even though the self sees it at the bottom of its own existence, it still represents it as "something else". In sum, the field of nihility is located halfway between consciousness and the breakthrough of consciousness, without never completely abandoning the former and reaching the latter. It is then impossible to linger there. After the movement from being to nothingness, we have to make the opposite movement (from nothingness to being) so as to complete the quest for true self and true reality. Only by

making a move from nothingness to being does the projection or *ek-stasis* of the self toward reality become possible in such a way that the utter self-contradiction of consciousness and the illusion of substantiality can be overcome.

c) The Field of Emptiness

What does the individual require to complete the transition through nihility? This question needs to be answered from the existential uncertainty that takes place in such field. Nishitani calls this transitional uncertainty "the Great Doubt." When the self completely becomes this doubting, when the doubting fully encompasses its existence, a new field opens up: the field of emptiness. As he claims: "Doubt and uncertainty show up in the vestibules of religion." (RN 15-6)

Existential doubt, as we have already mentioned, arises in moments of great despair or anxiety. For instance: "Contained in the pain of [e.g.] losing a loved one forever is a fundamental uncertainty about the very existence of oneself and others" (RN 16). That is, circumstances of utter despair are not simply an issue of psychological well-being. More fundamentally, they are the psychological expression of a radical uncertainty about what is reality and what matters in life (RN 19). Such radical doubt is then a

major concern for human life. We are faced with a fundamental question and pressed for an answer.

In those circumstances, we attain no true answer unless we go all the way through the "Great Doubt," that is, unless we follow it until the last consequences. Frightening as it may seem, only this way can we fully break through the field of self-consciousness into elemental existence. The shell of self-consciousness must be broken so that the doubt encompasses the existence of the self and all things (RN 18). In this sense, it is neither merely subjective nor a sheer psychological event, but rather "a real presentation of what is actually concealed at the ground of the self and of everything in the world" (RN 17). As Nishitani explains:

> Self-being and the being of all things combine to make one question; all being becomes a single great question mark. This elementally subjective realization goes beyond the evidence of self-consciousness to an awareness of what is on the *near side* of the subject. (ibid.)

Nishitani means that the existential doubt arising in the despairing individual facing nihility should be radicalized: Instead of evading it or trying to stand on it, the individual needs to let it unfold completely. Once it unfolds, the realization of reality can take place, and nihility, so far pure negativity regarding the being of the self

and all things, becomes affirmative. More precisely, the affirmative side (being) and the negative side of existence (nihility) appear as a unity. Briefly stated: In consciousness we ingenuously take the being of all things for granted, in nihility we deeply doubt it, and in emptiness we get it back. Nihility first appears as a purely transcendent (a purely “other”) negativity that disrupts the basis of our ordinary experience. But once we stop resisting it, it discloses as the very force of affirmation that affords being to every particular thing and to our own self as well—in a word, it reveals as emptiness.

Indeed, the capacity to conceive of impermanence under a positive light would be the sign of the transition to the field of emptiness: the point where the self becomes the place for the realization (actualization/appropriation) of reality, and simultaneously affirms its true identity. Once such transition occurs, impermanence reveals as an elemental interconnection of all things. Things do not exist separately, but as a whole network of interdependence. Reality is not made of individual atoms out of whose combinations the plurality of things emerges. Rather, the plurality of separate, individual things emerges out of an elemental (originary) undifferentiation that always remains in the background.

Thus it is crucial to underscore here that “emptiness” does not refer to sheer voidness or lack of being. In Nishitani’s words, it is not sheer nihility. Instead, the standpoint of emptiness represents a middle point between an existence that innocently takes being for granted and an existence that naively tries to find its ground on the negation of being. The former implies to ignore the fact of nihility, whereas the latter misses the fullness of being (and the fullness of life as well). Meanwhile, “emptiness” indicates the intuition that the only way to find the fullness of being and overcome nihilism is through nihility because in the long run nonbeing is the root of being. Impermanence is the annihilator of things, but also its creator.

Still, is it really possible to have a direct grasping of such reality, i.e. beyond conceptualization? How can the direct experience of the fullness of being in the middle of impermanence be achieved? In a word, how can the field of emptiness be reached? Such question does not accept a brief answer and, to a point, underlies the problems we will touch upon in further chapters. Still, two points should be made now to that respect.

First, given that nihility compromises our whole existence, the realization of emptiness is not possible for the intellect. The intellect is only a part of our existence. If the difficulty radically

compromises our entire existence, the answer must implicate our entire existence as well:

> [...] realization in its sense of "appropration" differs from philosophical cognition. What I am speaking of here is not theoretical knowledge but a real appropriation (the *proprium* taken here to embrace the whole man [sic], mind and body). (RN 6)

The fact that realization as appropriation embraces the whole individual, "mind and body," can be taken to mean that such appropriation can only be an embodied knowledge of reality. This is a type of knowledge that cannot be exhausted by any picture of reality we may entertain because the real is constantly becoming. The capacity to have a knowledge of reality in its suchness, therefore, can only be the continually exercised skill to attune to facts just as they manifest.

This brings us to our second point. The realization of reality as emptiness (the constantly flowing interconnectedness of all things, the formlessness that brings about all form) is the result of exerting the skill of attunement to facts. This is an exertion that involves our whole existence, "mind and body" (RN 6). Thence, knowledge of actual reality (i.e. in its suchness) cannot be "said"—it can only be *embodied*. That is, our whole being (mind and body) is involved in

the practice of actualizing ("realizing," Nishitani would say) attunement to facts. Once we realize that in consciousness we have lost contact with reality (and our own selves), the demand to recover such primary contact arises.

Nishitani would state this as the demand to find elemental reality and elemental subjectivity. "Elemental," let us remember, means the "groundless ground" of things and the self. He paradoxically calls it "groundless" because in the end there is no unchanging "ground" where the being of things stands. Hence it is better to speak of the "root" or "source" of being, instead of the "ground." Indeed, as mentioned before, the concept of elemental (J. *kongenteki* 根源的) already contains this allegory to the "root" (*ne* 根) or "source" (*minamoto* 源) of being. In these terms, the exertion of recovering primary contact with reality can be interpreted as the exercise of returning to the source of being. In this line, Nishitani constantly refers in *Religion and Nothingness* to the field of emptiness as the home-ground of things, that is, the place where things can be truly themselves. "Home-ground" (*moto* 元) is, indeed, the term he most often uses in reference to the "source" or "root" (the "groundless ground") of things.

In light of interdependence, the home-ground of things and the self, the place wherefrom they emerge, is the constantly flowing

undifferentiation of actual reality which simultaneously manifests as the manifold of individual things—i.e emptiness. In his use of this originally Buddhist word, Nishitani takes into account its etymology (1999 179-80, NKC 13: 114-5). The word used in classic Chinese to translate the Sanskrit *śūnyatā* (emptiness) is *kōng* 空 (J. *kū*), which may also mean sky. The empty sky (J. *kokū* 虚空) evokes a boundless expanse that can contain all particular things precisely because it is not a definite thing. Even more: Since it has no particular form, it can engender all forms.

Nishitani has this image in mind when he conceptualizes the field of emptiness as the place where all real things can emerge in their suchness. Precisely, emptiness does not denote sterile nothingness (that would amount to mere nihility), but rather indicates reality's inherent potential to produce all standing things by virtue of its very impermanent nature. It is not a passive container. Rather, it is the creative energy of the universe, the "force" that keeps all things gathered together and simultaneously lets them be themselves in their individuality (RN 150).

Now, how can this force keep all things together while preserving their individuality? If seen from the standpoint of emptiness, this is possible only if things are intrinsically linked together. It is evident that, in a general sense, each existing thing can be distinguished

from others but does not stand in absolute isolation from them. It is also evident that each thing interacts with other things. What should be added here in light of dynamic emptiness is that these connections are not external to beings, but inherent to them. In order to be what it is, any thing whatever must be connected to other things. No thing stands on its own: It depends on the others to exist. Nishitani thematizes this interdependent existence of things as circuminsessional interpenetration (J. *egoteki sōnyū* 回互的相入; RN 147-50)[8]: Every single thing is so intrinsically connected with the others that it participates in grounding their being and, in its turn, its being is grounded on them. This way, the totality of things conform a single dynamic network of intrinsic interrelatedness by virtue of which each of them is sustained by the others and simultaneously sustains them.

Once Nishitani's interpretation of religion as a quest for true reality has led us this far, a question naturally arises: What does it all tell us about the character of religion? Now, I would precisely like to pick

[8] Van Bragt chose "circuminsessional" in order to translate *egoteki* 回互的 because he deemed it to be the only good approximation in Western thought to the notion of "thorough reciprocity" that the Japanese word conveys. As he acknowledges, the term is originally used in Christian theology "to describe the relationship between the divine persons of the Trinity" (1982 294-5). However, it should not be interpreted here in any theological sense.

up the clues obtained so far and, through critical discussion, attempt to summarize the contents of Nishitani's interpretation of religion.

3.3 Concluding Remarks

In Nishitani's words, "the unique and characteristic mark of religion can be seen as the existential exposure of the problematic contained in the ordinary mode of self-being." (RN 15). Or to put it another way: In the religious way of life, the self is exposed to existential uncertainty about the reality of itself and all things, and the development of this way of life depends on how far the self can push in the direction of letting such doubt present as a reality (RN 18). Therefore, the religious demand is a demand for true contact with reality. The religious quest is the trajectory of the individual departing from self-confined consciousness, going through nihility, and all along striving for true contact with reality. Such contact, Nishitani argues, is only possible in the field of emptiness.

Nishitani's perspective on religion thus seems to suggest that the subject matter of all religious experiences, beliefs, and aspirations is the deeply urgent quest for something "more Real" than ordinary (profane) life. Besides, this search is indissolubly connected to the problem of life's meaning. The pursuit of meaning is not simply a

matter of psychology, mental health, or well-being. It is much more than that. In the end, it has to do with our pursuit of reality.

In this line, I believe, we can even take a step further and claim that the quest for the meaning of life and the quest for reality are not separate undertakings. They are two sides of the same coin. On the one hand, we find the individual person wondering: “What is the purpose of (my) life? What is the point that I exist? What ought I to live for?” On the other, the question is: “How does the universe make sense? What is the point of this all?” The former questioning pivots around purposefulness, while the latter turns around cosmic order. But when we look for a purpose to our lives, we look for our place in the cosmic order. And whenever we seek the underlying order of phenomena, we seek answers to what we can expect and what we ought to do. Those are two sides of the same *question of meaning*. Thus religiousness is the self-aware and committed endeavor to resolve the problem of meaning.

In no way is this an intellectualist picture of human life. The matter at hand here is quite different. Indeed, the question of meaning emerges out of the profoundly existential confrontation to nihility. It does not necessarily reach a self-aware, verbal formulation, and it often does not. However, it manifests in our natural drive to search for order and reject chaos (disorder), to regard things in general as

making sense (having meaning) and to feel at a loss when they seem not to. It all boils down to one thing: We intrinsically need the world to make sense. And this is not simply one need among others: It is indispensable for human life, even though it is not indispensable for physically keeping life.

Now, unlike suigenerists, Nishitani does not deal with “the Real” as a certain “object” or level of reality (the sacred) opposed to the world of ordinary experience (the profane). Instead, he considers it from the level of that very ordinary experience itself. The way he analyzes it is existential: The problem of our pursuit of the Real can only be understood from the place of our existence itself.

This unwavering commitment to an existential standpoint is a significant reason not to interpret his discourse on reality and emptiness as metaphysics. His approach is better understood, I suggest, as an elemental phenomenology. It is phenomenological to the extent that it starts from existence just as it is manifest to us and always remains there. It does not consist at all in postulating any set of hidden realities that would explain phenomena (appearance), but rather in describing phenomena (appearances) as they manifest. However, it does not presuppose any bracketing of the question about what is real. Instead, it thematizes appearances as manifestations of reality itself. It is an ontological phenomenology.

On the other hand, it is elemental since it does not ask about the "ground" where each being stands (as understood in classic metaphysics), but for the home-ground wherefrom it continually emerges.

In general, Nishitani is concerned with how to encounter things on their own *home-ground* and what things are like therein, a concern he alludes to very often throughout the pages of *Religion and Nothingness*. Still, he does not try to establish a system of emptiness that would account for reality as a whole, but rather intends to elucidate from which standpoint we can awake to the actual nature of things, just as they concretely disclose to us. What is primordial in his discourse on emptiness is precisely to elucidate such standpoint.

As a final remark, it is probably relevant to raise an additional question: Is not Nishitani's view of religion too individualistic? Does he not forget or disregard the collective aspect of religion? It should be acknowledged that he does not pay much heed to it and focuses mostly the individual aspect, at least in *Religion and Nothingness*. In my view, this is because the home-ground of religion is to be found in human existence as such: Religions emerge out of the existential exposure of the individual to nihility and doubt, and continues to find its life from there all along.

Indeed, when devotees start losing “fervor” or lacking “devotion,” the root of the problem might be that the religious life emerging out of existential exposure has stopped flowing through their religious institutions. In light of this consideration, it seems fair to suggest that fluctuations in fervor can be observed throughout the history of all religions. New prophets, masters, saints—in general, individuals with a reputation of high spiritual achievement—thus seem necessary in some moments in history for fervor to revive among the masses. Nonetheless, whereas sometimes their effect might support the religious establishment, sometimes it might disrupt it.

Be that as it may, what I would like to emphasize is that, as I understand it, Nishitani’s perspective does not amount to reducing the collective aspect of religion to the individual one. He does not need to neglect the co-configuration of the collective and the individual in social life. The point is that the existential exposure experienced by each individual is what accounts for the life of religion. Without it, religion as such dies and religious institutions petrify or become something other than religiousness.

Those being the circumstances, Nishitani’s discussion of religion focuses on its individual aspect, although it does not exclude the possibility of an existential approach to its collective aspect. As he

does not appear to elaborate on the latter with the same detail and depth of insight, we should recognize here a limit to the scope of our discussion of religion's reducibility. Still, his approach proves sufficient in order to carefully consider the topic that constitutes the context for that discussion in our age: the problem of how to deal with the often conflictive relation between science and religion.

4. THE PROBLEM OF SCIENCE AND RELIGION

Nihilism, as already mentioned, underlies the progress of science and technology. To the extent that the scope and influence of the mechanistic worldview expand, less room is available for grounding value in reality. This is why Nishitani judges the conflict between science and religion to be the most serious problem of humanity in our times (RN 46, 77, SZ 113). The resolution of such clash is crucial for the overcoming of nihilism and the future of religion. Naturally, then, the problem of science and religion is the proper context for a discussion of reductionism and religion from Nishitani. In the following pages, we will explore how he approaches this problem and how he envisions its solution.

4.1 The Conflict

As mentioned earlier, science has overturned the metaphysical, mythical or teleological worldviews that have traditionally grounded religion. It comes as no surprise that the relation between them is marked by conflict. As science and the Enlightenment went on expanding its influence and power throughout the 18th and 19th century, many efforts were made in order to reinterpret the doctrines of Christianity in terms of (Enlightened) reason. These efforts led to the development of the philosophy of religion (18th century) and the history of religions (19th century), which in general had an attitude of tolerance toward their subject of study. Nonetheless,

within the Enlightenment there was simultaneously another tendency: an attitude of outright rejection of religion as the putative source of superstition and intolerance, and a call for its elimination. Today, the view of history as progress seems to mainly follow the latter orientation (RN 210). To this, some religious people have reacted with a hostility that at times has even escalated to physical violence. As it is easy to observe, this tendency continues in our century. For instance, now the advocates of New Atheism aggressively argue against religion while diverse fundamentalist movements harshly "counter-attack" with an openly anti-scientific discourse.

However, it has been suggested that this conflict is the type of philosophical problem that needs not to be solved, but rather dissolved. Nishitani does not ignore this suggestion. We can recognize at least two types of "therapeutic" solution he was familiar with. On the one hand, some people accept that science has undermined the traditional worldviews of metaphysics and teleology, but reply that these have nothing to do with religion as such: Myths and metaphysical systems have nothing to do with the life of religion (RN 77). This approach points to part of the truth, but it is not complete. A concrete religion needs a "philosophical" or doctrinal foundation, and such foundation cannot be changed at will

as one can change clothes whenever one pleases. An analogy helps to make this point clearer:

> [Its world view or ontology] is to [a concrete] religion what water is to a fish: an essential condition for life. Water is neither the life of the fish as such nor its body, and yet it is essentially linked to both of them. A change of world view or ontology is a matter no less fatal to a religion than a change from salt water to fresh is to a fish. (ibid.)

In a word, the life of religion is not equivalent to a certain religious ontology (expressed as myth or dogma), but it does need to have one. It is true that an excessive dogmatism can suffocate religious life, but if the latter is left on its own, it loses its way. Nishitani illustrates this with another image. Religious life can be compared to a kite (2006 35). It certainly needs a string and a tail, otherwise it will go astray. Yet if the string is pulled too hard or the tail is too heavy, the kite will fall down. For a religion, its worldview is precisely like a string and a tail. If it becomes too rigid and dogmatic, it ends up blocking development, but it is necessary to have it in order to guide judgment and decision.

The other type of “therapeutic” solution to the conflict of science and religion is the even more typical idea that each one has perfectly distinguishable roles, so that they do not need to clash as

long as they keep restricted to their own domain. Religion belongs to the private lives of individuals, where these can hold whatever beliefs or adopt whatever way of life they choose for their own sake. Meanwhile, science fits well in the public sphere, where only reasons and evidence (and never statements of faith) are acceptable as valid criteria of correctness. This rationale is evidently a well-established component of secular discourse in our age.

Turning back to Nishitani, he recognizes that this alternative exists, but he judges it inadequate. The way he words his argument for this seems a bit perplexing at first sight. According to him, if we start from the viewpoint that science and religion have each their own domain and role, we have to accept that "[a] boundary separates one area from another and yet at the same time belongs to both of them. The foundations of the conflict between religion and science lie surely concealed in just such a boundary." (RN 77-8)

What does Nishitani mean? As I understand it, his point is that these two areas interact more and are thus more tightly interconnected than usually supposed. Consequently, the distinction between the domains of science and religion cannot be made completely sharp. This way, as they begin to part ways in modern times, the border that separates them becomes disputed territory. There is no denying that they look clearly different when observed "at a distance" (so to

speak). But once we get closer to the boundary between them, it becomes blurry.

On the one hand, sometimes religiously motivated individuals meddle with science. More than occasionally, minds as scientifically oriented as Newton or Kepler were guided in their research by religious motivations. As Nishitani argues, they "regarded their own research and pursuit of the laws of nature as a quest for the secrets of a divine cosmic economy" (RN 48). Indeed, recent research in the history of modern science highlights that "the leading thinkers in the Scientific Revolution clearly recognized a need to turn themselves into what we might call amateur theologians and to develop their own theological positions alongside their new natural philosophies" (Henry 2010 41). Thus they did in order to achieve religious goals—for instance, to demonstrate how their particular approach to natural philosophy better fitted the principles or aims of the Christian faith than others (ibid. 47-50). In general, "Christianity set the agenda for natural philosophy" in the 17th century (Gaukroger 2006 506, quoted in Henry 43).

On the other hand, sometimes science encroaches into religious territory. More than a few religious questions have been triggered by scientific discoveries. For instance, it has been argued that

developments in Indian astronomy led to new deterministic cosmologies, which in its turn brought about great spiritual unrest and skepticism toward the traditional Vedic religion. New religions such as Buddhism or Jainism were a response to this civilizational predicament (Thanissaro 2013 17-9). What is more, the progress of science from the 18th century onwards, as far as it has gone hand in hand with the emergence of modern nihilism, is the clearest historical evidence of how a radical transformation in science may lead to profound spiritual unrest and how it inevitably triggers transformations in religious ideas.

In sum, even though science and religion generally operate in different domains, they have more than occasionally "broken into" the other's. And this mutual encroachment can hardly be avoided. In the context of modernity, it is no surprise that they end up clashing. What is at stake in modernity is not simply the survival of certain theologies or certain religions over others, but the survival of religions in general.

Understandably, this perspective seems utterly unacceptable to (already) traditional secularism, which demands for religion to be strictly confined within the private sphere. However, this fundamental premise of secularism can no longer be taken for granted. What is more, the very distinction between public and

private sphere needs a careful revision. Indeed, more than a few scholars now question that such a restrictive confinement of religion to the private sphere is factually possible, and therefore call for a thoughtful revision of the private/public dichotomy in light of the historical events of recent decades (Casanova 2010 19-24, Habermas 2006).

Of course, the debate does not stop there. The relation of science and religion is a very complex issue that has been discussed quite extensively, hence it is impossible to provide here a full assessment of Nishitani's viewpoint. Nonetheless, I should insist that at least it has to be considered seriously. In brief, as I would assess it, his main contribution to the debate can be summarized in three points.

First, given that our age is marked by the rule of science and technology as well as the problem of nihilism, traditional religious systems cannot avoid undergoing a radical revision if they intend to survive. However, and secondly, it is not reasonable to go as far as asking religion to give up its truth claims. Essentially, religion is about re-establishing one's link to reality and then being able to live an authentic life—i.e. a *true* life. Therefore, if these dogmas have any hope to be guides for the re-establishment of the link between the individual and reality, they will need to imply (or directly be) claims about reality—hence they cannot be *pure* value judgments.

In addition, no matter how much religions need to revise their guiding dogmas, they cannot simply get along without any. As for the third and final point, scientific discoveries inevitably have had (and will continue having) effects on the way people conceive of value and meaningfulness. Conversely, researchers' views of value and meaningfulness have an influence on how they choose their scientific interests and questions.

If Nishitani is right in his evaluation, from the side of religion the outcome of the clash tends to be negative. As he points out, the viewpoint of science does not need to set limits to itself: It expands freely and tends to encompass virtually every reality (RN 78). Thus, given its success in the later centuries, the result is clear: Historically, the advance of science tends to erase religion.

It is quite another matter whether this historical tendency can be changed. Whatever the case is (or will be), the point is that the conflict of science and religion is a historical reality whose effects stretch to our days. It is a real problem that, as such, requires a real solution (and not a sheer dissolution). The point now, of course, is how to diagnose the conditions that make it persist, and how to deal with them.

4.2 The Diagnosis

If we concede that there is a conflict between science and religion, how should we diagnose it? How did humanity fall into this predicament? What are the extents of its effects in our lives and in society at large? One possible approach to these questions is to seek for culprits. Perhaps religion is to blame due to its stiff dogmatism, or perhaps it is science because it has disregarded the relevance of traditional values and human spiritual needs. Perhaps both are to blame. From Nishitani's perspective, as I understand it, this approach inevitably oversimplifies a significantly more complex state of affairs.

To start, Nishitani does not deny the advantages of science and technology or in any way adopts an antiscientific stance. He is well aware that life is more comfortable and easier today thanks to the results of this progress. Thus he observes in a 1966 essay entitled "Science and Religion" ("kagaku to shūkyō" 「科学と宗教」, NKC 6: 327-51). As a result of the astoundingly fast "tempo" of technoscientific progress, he claims, we can easily solve many problems that were very difficult to handle in earlier times. For instance, more efficient modes of production have made it easier to tackle poverty while advances in medicine have saved many lives (NKC 6: 327).

As an example of this, Nishitani refers to the treatment of malaria (ibid. 327-8). In earlier times, it was so unsurmountable a problem that it may have contributed to the fall of the Roman Empire. Traditionally, it was deemed to be, for example, the result of an evil force, or perhaps a divine punishment, but in the end its cause was not understood. Today we understand that the disease is transmitted by a mosquito. Thanks to this discovery, a cure could be found and millions of lives have been saved. This is, of course, only one of many possible examples. In general, we can agree with Nishitani when he concludes:

> In this regard, it goes without saying that the progress of science and technology, for instance in medicine and medical technology, is very important for humanity. Likewise, economic productivity has increased enormously, thus our lives have become wealthier. (ibid. 328)

There is no doubt about Nishitani's acknowledgment that science and technology have brought enormous benefits to humanity. Yet, as he warns, this does not mean that the blessing comes without a price. He continues:

> Nonetheless, as regards our contemporary age, an enormous problem simultaneously breaks out. To say it right, in current society the outlines of the human are continuously

> fading. At different levels, that which is typically human is vanishing." (NKC 6: 327)

Indeed, this serious problematic has much to do with the problem of nihilism (explained in chapter 2). The vanishing of the human is ultimately the form that nihilism takes when analyzed in terms of the problem of technology. But how to explain it more precisely? Nishitani attempts to provide such explanation by tracing the relationship of this "loss of the human" to the historical process of the destruction of the teleological worldview (what is often referred to as the "Death of God").

To start, the technoscientific worldview has overturned the grounds of traditional religions and consequently has disclosed the problem of nihilism. This is because it has overturned the viewpoint of "spirit" and *eidos* and the viewpoint of teleology that grounded not only religion but also metaphysics. But what did this viewpoint of spirit and *eidos* consist of? Nishitani explains it in relation to the viewpoint of the "bond of life," common to all ancient cultures: all living things were thought to be linked together in one way or another, and in this interdependence they shared of the same "spirit" or "life." (RN 12-3, SZ 109) This commonality of "spirit" was conceived of in terms of teleology: a pre-established harmony of the mental phenomena (the internal) and the physical world (the

external). Traditionally, such harmony made up the ground for explaining all phenomena of life and mind: animacy, will and value. The problem is that, from a modern scientific standpoint, this notion is regarded as phantasy: Only the external properly exists, so that what accounts for the nature of living beings is not a ghost-like spiritual "force" or principle infused to each of them, but certain physicochemical configurations of carbon-based molecules. There is no "soul" or "spirit" as anything apart from the material basis of life—i.e. matter as describable in terms of a mechanical law completely devoid of any normative value.

These considerations provide the context for understanding the content of the "loss of the human." Along with the demise of the spiritual worldview comes, as another inevitable effect of modern technoscientific progress, a continuous mechanization of human life. For Nishitani, this amounts to losing what makes us characteristically human because no stable place for grounding value or purpose can be found in a purely mechanistic worldview, itself instrinsically devoid of any sense of value or purpose. This is what he calls the "loss of the human" (RN 89, Nishitani 2006) or the "absence of the human" (NKC 6: 327-33 et passim). This "loss" consists of the following: Nature becomes purely mechanized, reducible to inert matter ruled by laws absolutely indifferent to value or meaningfulness (let us remember what was said earlier

about the relation of science and nihilism), and thus we as truly living human beings expel ourselves from nature. Yet a contradiction shows up here: Even though there is no room for the life of mind in the scientific worldview, scientists, no less than any human being, work and live within the life of mind (SZ 111).

Understandably, in response to the "fatal blow" that science has inflicted upon the teleological worldview that has made up the foundation of traditional religions, the latter have rejected science. Such abhorrence would lead to the conclusion that science is to blame for the doom of tradition and the loss of the human. However, this attitude is too simplistic: It blocks our understanding of the situation in its full complexity. First of all, Nishitani judges, the contradiction mentioned above "derives from the nature of the scientific standpoint" (ibid.). Secondly, and more importantly: in the face of their predicament, religions have no choice but to engage in a radically critical self-revision. As he argues:

> [I]s the attitude of religions correct when they try to challenge science by holding on to their old teleological world view? Is it not first necessary for religions to reexamine the basis for their own world view in order to meet science on equal terms and to confront it competently? (SZ 113)

However, it might be skeptically asked: Did not Nishitani exaggerate the danger that he calls loss of the human? To state it otherwise, did he not underestimate the stamina of many individuals and organizations that have tried to recover meaningfulness in the times of scientific rationality? Indeed, there is much more resistance to the loss of the human than what Nishitani apparently recognized. In this sense, his predictions sound exaggerated today. This does not mean, however, that his diagnosis and solution should not be considered. What underlies contemporary forms of resistance to the loss of the human is a great yearning for answers and much anxiety over the spiritual effects of scientific progress. The people of our century strive for answers to the questions that Nishitani took very seriously, yet it remains to be seen whether the radicality required by the task is achieved. In such circumstances, what "the resistance" needs more than anything is, indeed, philosophical and spiritual resources.

In sum, if we want to deal effectively with the complex problematic involved in the relation of science and religion in our age, we will have to diagnose how *each side* contributes to the clash and to the problematic. This is the only way to start if we want to find a solution. For Nishitani, this diagnosis goes as follows. Traditionally, religions have mainly based on one aspect of reality, to wit, the aspect life or "spirit." They have oriented toward life. Meanwhile,

modern mechanistic science has oriented toward the aspect of death (inert matter). Let us take a look at the contents of this diagnosis from each side.

a) Religion

Traditional religions have tended to emphasize the aspect of "life," thus basing their views of the soul, personality and spirit in this aspect only (RN 50). Nishitani has observed how this is reflected in the case of the way that Christianity and other theistic religions conceived of the relationship between God and humans as a vertical axis going upwards (in the direction of life) (RN 49-50), but I think that this scheme can be generalized. Most religions have pivoted around a vertical axis with us humans at the base and orienting toward the Transcendent (be it God, Heaven, or whatever else). Apparently, this seemed to work well until modern times. The problems begin when modern science appears on the scene and cuts the vertical axis with the horizontal axis of dead, worldly matter. Thus, the relationship between humans and the Transcendent is also cut through. We can notice here a problem that all religions must face today:

> A religion based merely on the old teleological view of nature is, to say the least, inadequate for our day and age. But is it possible for us to regard that natural order so indifferent to our *human* mode of being as to rub it out, as

> belonging to a greater divine order? Or is such an indifferent natural order altogether incompatible with the concept of God? (RN 49)

It is there that religion has to question its old notions and confront science. And this implies that religion must incorporate the aspect of mechanical law (death) into its own viewpoint. Either the aspect of the cold indifference of nature to human interests is somehow contained in "a side to God other than the personal," or God loses its absoluteness. We need to reexamine the notion of personality as conceived so far in terms of the God-human vertical axis (53).

b) Science

Science has failed to recognize the aspect of "spirit" (life). Despite all the progress and apparent self-evidence of the scientific view of the universe as sheer matter with no spirit in it, it is an undeniable fact that there are "spiritual" realities such as life, consciousness, mind, personality and so on. Materialistic-mechanistic explanations then fail to account for these realities.

This is not to say that we should go back to the traditional worldviews of metaphysics, teleology or mythology. To this respect, as Nishitani acknowledges, the criticism ought to be fairly accepted

(RN 12-3): Insisting on the notion of "spirit" as something completely different from matter seems to rely on highly dubitable metaphysical grounds and appears to lack any empirical support. Yet the idea of the bond of life points to a reality that we have no other name for than "soul" or "mind." (ibid.). I would interpret this point as follows: it is indeed the case that there are sentient things, in the sense of entities with the power of experiencing a world, entities with sensations and perceptions. And it is the case as well that some of those entities (namely, us) have the urge to find a ground for their purposes, values and norms. These facts have to be accounted for, not dismissed or eliminated, even if we do not yet have a theory that satisfies such explanatory need.

The difficulty of modern science with the facts of life (in the sense just highlighted) comes from the very beginning. Even though early modern scientists diverged in their views, they shared the conviction that ordinary perception and feeling were unreliable as grounds for knowledge because they are too variable and deceptive (no doubt we can trace this distrust of perception back to Plato). In the long run, modern science adopted another conviction: The only reliable forms of knowledge are rather theories expressed in mathematical terms that only answer to evidence rigorously obtained through experimentation.

As a result, the field of individual feeling and perception was denied any authority or validity for the scientific enterprise along with everything that can be considered subjective as over against the objective world of facts independent from any individual perspective. Thus, a couple of centuries later, when science intended to explain the facts of life, it tended to explain them in terms of that which is not life and quickly falls into the sphere of the objectively observable and explainable—in a word, of matter. Today, this approach to the explanation of life is still part of mainstream scientific culture. Yet again, is such an approach satisfactory? Doubts can come from the philosophy of mind—more concretely, from the discussion of the so-called hard problem of consciousness.

c) Reality as Double Exposure

To sum up, from Nishitani's viewpoint it is fair to judge that science and religion, as they have come down to us, each underscore one side of reality and, in this sense, have a partially (and only partially) adequate grasping of it. Naturally, the next step is to disclose a viewpoint that encompasses both.

Reality is, Nishitani claims, "two-layered:" a non-dual "double exposure" of life and death. All existing things are destined to come to naught because in their own existence lies nonexistence—better said, nonexistence is the back page of existence (RN 51). But there

are living things nonetheless. Life and death are “equally real,” whereas reality “is *both* life and death, and at the same time it is *neither* life nor death.” (52).

At face value, the claim that life is an aspect of reality might sound like attributing life to reality, thus a form of animism. But this is problematic. As scientific results make it clear, most of the universe is hardly suitable for life, which seems only possible within very restrictive conditions. However, in the spirit of elemental phenomenology, we should interpret Nishitani’s idea otherwise.

The point of the claim that reality is two-layered is to underscore that life is a fact, whatever reductionists or (what is more) eliminativists might say. It is a fact that deserves explanation from its own level. After the rise of mechanical science, we should concede, it would be uncritical to presuppose that animate factors make part of the basic structure of reality. At the same time, however, to simply assert that such structure is inert falls short of what needs to be accounted for. Either “inert” matter intrinsically has the potential to produce life under certain favorable conditions, or life is impossible at all—which is obviously not the case. In this sense, reality is not simply “alive,” neither simply “dead.” It must include both possibilities in such a way that they depend on one another. In his own words:

> This kind of double exposure is true vision of reality. Reality itself requires it. In it, spirit, personality, life, and matter all come together and lose their separateness. They appear like the various tomographic plates of a single subject. Each plate belongs to reality, but the basic reality is the superimposition of all the plates into a single whole that admits to being represented layer by layer. (RN 52)

In these terms it is easier, I would argue, to understand Nishitani's claim that the viewpoint of double exposure contains the key to the solution of the conflict between science and religion.

4.3 The Solution

The diagnosis of the conflict of science and religion has finished with the following conclusion: overcoming the conflict requires to bring both religion and science to a standpoint beyond pure form and value (aspect of life), and beyond pure measurable fact (aspect of death) by integrating both. The obvious question is: How to attain this? The twofold aim requires a *demythologization* of religion and an *existentialization* of science. This means, on the one hand, that religion should take in science's view of reality as reducible to inert (dead) matter as a form of mediation toward a new form of development. And, on the other, it means that science should acknowledge that it is intrinsically bound up with (human)

life (SZ 120). Religion needs to revise its own foundations in order to make room for the aspect of death. It needs to find a way to appropriate mechanical law existentially. Meanwhile, science needs to make room for the aspect of life. It needs a critical reinterpretation of its essence and viewpoint so as to recognize that "spirit" (i.e. the realm of life, value and personality) is part of reality.

For religion to pass through the "purgative fires" of the mechanistic worldview means for it to negate the representational content of myth—it must be negated precisely because the narratives of myths contradict many solidly established scientific results. But after doing this, will any positive content remain in it? Nishitani believes that it does. What remains is the existential content of myth (RN 173-4). This is, indeed, the only way to recover myth in our age. That is why the "purgative fires" of the mechanistic worldview may allow religion to achieve a further stage of development.[9]

For science to acknowledge its intrinsic bond to human life or, more concretely put, in order to "think *existentially* of the essence of science [...]" (SZ 116), means the following: Science's notion that

[9] The experts will easily recognize that Nishitani takes the notion of demythologization from Rudolf Bultmann. Indeed, he openly acknowledges this borrowing (RN 173-4, NKC 6: 295).

the universe is essentially a material process and a “world of death” (inert, hardly an environment for life) needs to be reinterpreted. We need to stand on the world of life (existence), by means of this find how scientific theories and concepts can be experienced (lived, embodied) in existence, and thus find their existential significance.

In the end, these two “operations” are two sides of the same process of *existential demythologization*. However, Nishitani does not provide much detail concerning how to understand the specifics of this process. How can it be performed? What is the consequently discovered existential content of myth? And what is (or can be) the existential content of scientific theory? We do not find in his work a rigorous description of a *methodology* for existential demythologization that answers these questions. This lack of detail may be caused, in part, by the fact that existential demythologization is embedded in his way of discussing philosophical problems in general. Consequently, we will need to rely on the examples that he introduces every time he illustrates it or directly applies it. As I believe, three of them are especially illustrative instances of existential demythologization in Nishitani: the kalpa fire (appearing in *Science and Zen*), the love of God (*agape*), and the concept of natural law (the latter two discussed in *Religion and Nothingness*). It will be inevitable to present them in an oversimplified fashion, since they are part of broader discussions

within Nishitani's work. A more exhaustive explanation of these matters would drive us too far from our current topic.

a) The Kalpa Fire

In relation to the problem of how to overcome the clash between science and religion in our age, Nishitani formulates the following question: What would happen if we follow Nietzsche's project of thinking about science existentially, that is, what if we uncompromisingly pursue the consequences of the establishment of modern science all the way to the end? (SZ 116-7). Nishitani's answer goes as follows:

> For a thinker who faces science existentially, i.e., who accepts it as a problem for his own existence as such, that the usual state of the universe is explained by science in terms of lifeless materiality means that the universe is a field of existential death for himself and for all mankind. (ibid. 117)

For Nishitani, this point can be exemplified by means of a traditional Buddhist image: the kalpa fire. In traditional Buddhist cosmology, it is said that our universe has a beginning and an end. It is one in a series of universes that have been created and destroyed one after another. The lifespan of a certain universe is called

"kalpa," and each kalpa ends with the death of that universe in a conflagration, which can come in various shapes—for instance, fire.[10] Precisely, our author quotes a story about the kalpa fire featured in the *Hekiganroku* (C. *Bìyánlù*), a collection of Chan (Zen) koans of capital importance within that Buddhist tradition:

> A monk asked Da-sui: "When the kalpa fire flares up and the great cosmos is destroyed, I wonder, will 'it' perish, or will it not perish?"
>
> Da-sui said: "It will perish."
>
> The monk said: "Then will it be gone with the other?" [...]
>
> Da-sui said: "It will be gone with the other."
>
> (Case 29, quoted in SZ 118)

According to Nishitani, if we interpret this dialogue existentially, the myth of the kalpa fire that will consume both the universe ("the other," the external) as well as the I ("it," the internal) does not merely mean a cosmic conflagration to literally come one day, but an actuality in the individual's life. The monk's question is not about the distant future, but about his present existence. The kalpa fire is first and foremost a matter for him, a matter for his own

[10] It should be remarked that kalpas may be divided into smaller kalpas, or even be part of bigger ones. Nishitani observes this complexity of the conception of time in Buddhist cosmology (RN 218-9). However, we do not need to touch upon those levels of complexity here.

actual existence, independently of whether, how, or when the universal conflagration will occur. If we interpret the mechanistic worldview in the light of this koan, we can conclude that inert materiality is an absolute death, that is, an inescapable actuality inherent to human life itself. To recall the terms used in the previous chapter, this actuality is nihility. Yet at the same time nihility is the very (and only) place for the realization of the Great Death, which is in turn the only way out of nihilism. Thus, "[r]eligious existence in the Great Death makes possible at once the demythologizing of the myth of eschatology and the existentializing of the scientific actuality of the cosmos." (SZ 120). In the context of the relation of science and religion in our times, the scenario for the Great Death is the mechanistic worldview, hence it is also the only place through which a path toward an overcoming of nihilism can be found.

b) The Nondifferentiating Love of God

In traditional religions, it has been commonly presupposed that there are gods (be it one God or many) who account for the forces of nature and whose action is connected to human lives: Gods are concerned with our actions, hence we can influence theirs by means of ritual or prayer. In the case of Christianity, it is said that God's concern with his creatures comes in the form of love. However, as noted before, the mechanistic worldview debunks this idea: It presents the universe as ruled by lifeless laws completely devoid of

any value or purpose (i.e. of any *telos*). The universe turns out to be completely indifferent to any human purposes, endeavors or worries. This way, notions such as the love of God (for his creatures) appear to make no sense whatsoever.

Nevertheless, Nishitani would insist that we can take a second look at this notion from an existential standpoint. As he interprets it, there is a clue for this in the Gospel:

> You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you salute only your brethren, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matt. 5: 43-8, quoted in RN 58)

Notably, Jesus asks his disciples to follow a certain ethical ideal and presents God as the model for it. In contemporary terms, this recognizably Christian ideal of "loving one's enemies" means that we should not discriminate who to love in terms of who would (or

does) reciprocate. We should love people not because they love us, but because that is what we ought to do. And that is what we ought to do because it is what God does: He does not decide who to send sunlight or water, but *indifferently* sheds sunlight and pours rain (in general, all conditions for life) for everyone to take.

As a result, the interpretation of natural law as indifference of nature appears to be just partially right, because it only regards natural law from the aspect of death. According to Nishitani, once we regard it from the aspect of life, this utter "indifference" can be interpreted as the nondifferentiating love of God (portrayed in the previous biblical passage). However, there is still a problem: Can the concept of natural law and the ideal of nondifferentiating love fit together? Or to put it in ontological terms, can natural law (despite its aspect of mechanical inertness) be a home-ground for value after all? In order to address this issue, it is not enough to experiment with the demythologization of traditional religious images and teachings: we will have to consider the very concept of natural law and explore whether, from an existential standpoint, it might make room for value. Indeed, this problem is carefully investigated in *Religion and Nothingness* and "Science and Zen" as follows.

c) The Concept of Natural Law

To start, Nishitani asks in a clearly existential fashion: “The first question we face, if we accept the objectivity of the laws of nature as beyond doubt, is this: on what horizon are these laws encountered and on what dimension are they received?” (RN 79). Briefly stated, his answer is that there are three different horizons wherein natural law can be received: inertia, instinct and technology (79-82).

In the first case, we simply receive natural law as sheer passive objects—let us observe that this is what happens, for instance, when we lose equilibrium and fall, or when we are inside a vehicle in motion. However, and secondly, we are also animated beings that, as such, can receive natural law under the form of instinct. In this case, we do not experience law as an outer force that imposes its power upon us, but rather *actualize* the law through our actions. By means of this process, appropriation of natural law turns into capacity for autonomous action—that is, freedom. Now, and finally, for us humans this freedom expands even more thanks to technology. When we exercise our power of abstraction, we can conceive of a certain set of laws independently from their concrete manifestation in us or in any physical object. Thus, we can use the resulting abstract knowledge in order to build machines that, by means of actualizing laws in such pure (i.e., abstract) fashion,

increase our power to act on nature according to our needs or wishes. In other words, when we appropriate natural laws in the form of machines—i.e. in the horizon of technology—, these laws achieve their most abstract form, hence we attain our purest knowledge of them, and by means of this knowledge our freedom expands.

However, Nishitani warns, this liberation is in a process of inversion. In modern times, technology is grounded on mechanistically scientific knowledge, which, as we have already observed, has expelled animacy and value from the realm of natural law. At the same time, technology becomes more and more powerful and occupies more and more aspects of our lives. As a result, we are left with no place in our lives where this inert, meaningless order does not operate. No room is left for grounding value or meaning. The final outcome is that we are thrown to the sway of our drives and desires, which we pretend to know but actually do not because they cannot be really present to the field of consciousness. We become slaves to our drives, which can find progressively more satisfaction thanks to technological progress. Our freedom is thus lost.

Unsurprisingly, Nishitani's analysis reminds us of Heidegger: both thinkers take the problem of technology quite seriously and attempt

to track its effects in modern life.[11] Whatever the case, such line of reflection seems even more relevant in our century. We live surrounded by a large number of gadgets that every time become more effective and efficient at pleasing our wishes and covering our needs. But all this technological paradise comes at a high price: there appears to be no limit to the satisfaction of our greedy whims, even no limit to our ability to imagine new objects of desire. However, as we are trapped in self-consciousness, our drives remain hidden from view, and thereby operate beyond our control. The result is that we become slaves to our drives. Emancipation from the rule of law inverts, hence becomes its opposite. The challenge today is thus to return to the point at which subordination to the rule of law is emancipation from it.

The challenge can only be met by means of an existential appropriation of natural law. As can be observed at least in *Religion and Nothingness* and "Science and Zen," Nishitani ventures a path toward that realization. When viewed under the light of the problem of our relation to natural law, the problem of the overcoming of nihilism can only be fully confronted within the realm of that very natural law and, consequently, we cannot avoid the problem of how to find meaning therein. If this is possible, then "the law" cannot be a purely inert, value-less order (whose appropriation would hence

[11] The proximity of Heidegger and Nishitani on the topic of technology is explored in detail by Heine (1990).

condemn us to nihilism), but a measure (*ratio*) for valuable action (and, more generally, for valuable life).

To this respect, he quotes two passages that appear to contain an existential clue for such response. The first one comes from the Gospel of Matthew. He only cites a couple of lines (Mtt. 6: 31, 34, in RN 182), but it will be useful here to recall the whole passage:

> And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. (Mtt. 6: 28-34)

The second excerpt belongs to Dōgen's first discourse to his disciples after his return from China:

> I had not gone around to very many Zen monasteries. I only happened by chance to encounter my last master T'ien-t'ung Ju-ching [Tiantong Rujing], and readily apprehended that eyes are horizontal and nose vertical. Totally free from any deception by others, I returned home with empty hands. Therefore, I do not have a single strand of the Buddha's Dharma. I now while away my time, accepting whatever may come.
>
> Every morning the sun ascends in the east,
> every night the moon descends in the west.
> Clouds retreat, the mountain bones are bared,
> rain passes, the surrounding hills are low.
> How is it after all? [...]
> We meet a leap year one in four.
> Cocks crow at four in the morning. (*Eihei Kōroku* I, quoted in RN 187-8)

Both masters, Jesus and Dōgen, ask their disciples to give up any worries and anxiety about what the future may bring, and trust that something will be provided for them. Jesus appeals to the way God has provided for his creatures by means of the workings of nature, while Dōgen points out directly to the regularity of natural

phenomena. Yet in relation to the problem at hand, both converge in the same advice: to trust the order of things. To express in more detail: to trust that within the realm of natural law there is a place for us to find purpose and conditions to live, even though at present we may not know what that place exactly is. The only way to attain such knowledge is, after all, to have faith. However, here faith is not to be understood as blindly believing this or that (belief here is barely the point), but as the *attitude* of being willing to give up our particular expectations and *attune* our will to the order of nature. The promise is that, by these means, we will find a ground for meaning and value in the middle of transience.

Even though Nishitani only takes the cases of Christianity and Buddhism into consideration, it seems possible to apply his existential "re-enchantment" of natural law, *mutatis mutandis*, to many other religious traditions. In general, it has often been pointed out in religious studies that most religions have traditionally relied upon one or another notion of "cosmic law," that is, the idea that a certain order rules over all things in the cosmos and simultaneously constitutes the ground for what is right and wrong to do (e.g. Campbell 1960 48-50, Long 1987 88).

It is then a reasonable suggestion that, in light of existential demythologization, the intuition underlying all these traditions can

be interpreted as follows. Even though universal order (as expressed by natural law) appears indifferent to me and my existence seems utterly transient, I somehow have a place in that order, I somehow fit in that order and can then find something for me, there is something for me within this universal order. If this is possible, then it is possible to find meaning and value within the world of natural law despite its dark face of inertness and indifference. Nishitani's idea is that this is possible precisely because at the other side of this dark face lies a bright face of nature. Within the inertness that threatens life lies the very ground that makes life possible. The other side of the indifference of nature that annihilates any value or meaning is the nondifferentiating "love" that provides conditions for life and meaning.

d) Existential Demythologization

Together, the previous examples help to elucidate what existential demythologization consists of. First, its point of departure is to embrace the mechanistic worldview (the "kalpa fire") and consequently to negate the representational content of myths and sacred stories. Once this is done, there is yet a remnant of meaning in the sacred narrative, to wit, its existential content. In order to retrieve it, it is necessary to ask: What does the myth imply for our concrete existence as human beings? What does it amount to for our concrete lives? Answering this question amounts to disclosing the

existential content of myth. At the same time, the answer provides the clue for a reinterpretation of natural law in such a way that we may find meaning and purpose within it without stepping back into traditional teleology.

Still, from a methodological viewpoint the previous summary seems too sketchy. The details of how existential demythologization can be articulated as a methodology are yet unclear in Nishitani. However, perhaps that is not the point. The key point is not how to proceed in order to retrieve the existential content of myth, but rather what mode of being, what mode of the subject's self-constitution, makes such retrieval possible. Nishitani emphasizes this latter question, and this might explain why he does not pay much attention to the former: It would be pointless to explain a methodology if we are not prepared for it. Perhaps there is not even a unique methodology.

Thus, what is such mode of being that discloses the possibility of existential demythologization? It is no other than our mode of being on the field of emptiness—the same field of emptiness explained in chapter 3. In sum, the solution to the conflict of science and religion can only occur by leaping into the field of emptiness. Naturally, the leap will depend on the possibility of such mode of being.

Such possibility is related to Nishitani's confrontation to reductionism, which—as already mentioned—proclaims that analysis is necessary and sufficient as a method for reaching knowledge. This approach would be incompatible with any attempt to root meaning in reality. Therefore, it is Nishitani's task to show that there is a form of knowing and a mode of being that go beyond the standpoint of analysis-only and disclose the possibility of solving the problem of meaning. Only this way can he show why and how reductionism should be overcome. However, his philosophy can meet the challenge only after a careful reassessment of the terms in which he articulates his view.

5. REDUCTION AND REDUCTIONISM IN NISHITANI

There are two key points for an assessment of Nishitani's understanding of reduction and reductionism. These are the relation between reductionism and science and the terminology he uses in reference to reduction. As we will see, they correspondingly involve two problems. First, Nishitani's view that reduction is in the essence of science appears doubtful in light of an accurate clarification of the former. Next, his use of terms in reference to reduction and reductionism contains a significant and potentially misleading ambiguity. However, as I will argue, the ensuing critique of his viewpoint is beneficial for an existential approach to reductionism: it helps to disclose a critical assessment thereof. Even more, it helps to clarify Nishitani's philosophy in the following sense: it sheds light on the notion of the elemental and its central role in the response to reductionism.

5.1 Science, Reduction, and Reductionism

How does Nishitani understand the relation of science and reduction? Is mechanistic science necessarily reductive? Apparently, for Nishitani science, mechanicism, and reductionism are closely—what is more, intrinsically—related. But how to assess this view? To what extent is it correct?

Nishitani thinks that it is in the essence of the scientific enterprise to explain things in terms of mechanical (hence "spiritless") laws. Due to its very essence, he argues, sciences "present material processes without life and spirit and devoid of *telos* and meaning as the true features of the world." (SZ 111). In this sense, science is by its very essence reductionist: "Inherent in all [...] sciences is only an orientation to reducing man finally into a material process of the world." (SZ 132)

However, how is it possible to conciliate science and religion under those conditions? If such conciliation requires science to make room for "spirit" (the aspect of life), then it requires science not to be unavoidably reductionist. If Nishitani intends to call for a reinterpretation of science from an existential standpoint (which cannot be reductionist), it seems that he asks science to become something it cannot be. Thus, either he accepts that science is (or may be) not essentially reductionist, or accepts that an existential reinterpretation of science is not possible. There must be a way to conceive of science that avoids an intrinsic commitment to reductionism.

It might be replied that he tries to include the viewpoint of mechanism and reduction within a broader standpoint that also makes room for the world of life and spirit. In this sense, then, there

would be no problem in presupposing an intrinsic link between science and reduction. However, in this respect he does not seem to fully catch the point of the latter: mechanical/material explanation is not reduction *per se*—reduction requires, as an additional step, to claim that such is the only possible and full explanation of things. Just the latter stance is incompatible with any standpoint that attempts to include the aspect of life in the picture.

Our clarification demands, as well, a distinction between mechanistic and mechanicist. While the former merely denotes explanation in mechanical terms, the latter adds the nuance of explanation in *exclusively* mechanical terms. Therefore, from an existential viewpoint we might as well accept that science is intrinsically *mechanistic*, but reject that it is intrinsically *mechanicist*, hence reductive. It might be unavoidable for science to offer explanations that present phenomena in mechanistic terms, but that would not commit it to present them *fully* in those terms. Such way it makes more sense to speak of a viewpoint that embraces both the mechanistic ("death") and the animate ("life") aspect of phenomena.

These considerations call for a critical reconsideration of Nishitani's view of science in light of contemporary debate. However, that would lead us too far away from our topic. Here we would do well

to keep discussion within a minimal perspective of the nature of science, which in general terms can be judged uncontroversial if expressed as follows. First, science's subject matter is, strictly speaking, fact (i.e. whatever is the case, to put it in Wittgensteinian terms). Secondly, its operation is ruled by the principle that claims and theories about facts can only be accepted if they can be tested through empirical evidence.

This twofold viewpoint has two main consequences for out topic. First of all, science can be nonreductionist as long as there is a way to interpret it so that commitment to the principle of evidence just stated does not require commitment to reductionism. Secondly, even though it is historically clear that the development of modern science led to its clash with religion, the problem at bottom may not lie in science itself, but in the mechanicist/reductionist worldview that has so far accompanied it. It is possible to claim that the former does not need the latter, and that reductionism is what we need to adjust and find an alternative to. Nishitani's too quick identification of science and reductionism leaves such possibility invisible and thus blocks the way to conceiving of the alternative to the latter. This is a difficulty which, as I expect to make clear next, derives from his somehow uncritical understanding of reduction. However, like a snake's venom is the key ingredient to its antidote, that very weakness in Nishitani's account is the key to its solution.

More in general, a critical examination of Nishitani's largely tacit understanding of reduction and reductionism will help to clarify why it would be more prudent to differentiate reductionism from the scientific enterprise despite their having been closely linked to one another in their historical development. This way, perhaps science may one day declare its independence from reductionism. Perhaps science can be nonreductionist, as well as harmonious to religion. Yet it should be asked, of course, how that can be. Is it possible to reach a nonreductionist understanding of science that makes room for religion in our age?

5.2 Nishitani's Terminology

What do we find if we peruse Nishitani's pages in order to assess his use of the terminology related to reduction and reductionism? First of all, he presupposes much more about reduction than what he explains. Apparently, this is a case wherein he takes for granted that his audience already understands what he means. To complicate things even more, his use of the term (and reduction terminology in general) seems ambiguous. There is no way to avoid the conclusion that, in this sense, he participates in the general confusion surrounding the philosophical discussion over reductionism. However, as I will argue, there is a more positive finding. In the context of Nishitani's philosophy, reductionism can be understood as a worldview, a way of being-in-the-world. There is a way to

make sense of the various loose and often imprecise references to reduction in Nishitani's work which, as I will attempt to explain later on, discloses the possibility of a critical analysis of reductionism from an existential standpoint.

For a reconstruction of Nishitani's concept of reduction, I have adopted the following criteria. First, what is relevant here is reduction in relation to religion in the context wherefrom it emerges: the problem of science and religion. In general, then, the priority is to explore Nishitani's use of the term "reduction" (or synonyms) within such framework. As a consequence, and secondly, the main sources for Nishitani's notion of reduction (and reductionism) are *Religion and Nothingness* and "Science and Zen," the works where references to reduction (both direct and indirect) are most frequent and most closely related to its context. Still, other sources provide additional interesting clues. Finally: to the extent that *Religion and Nothingness* is not simply a translation but a re-edition of the Japanese original and serves as a model for the translation of "Science and Zen," both the Japanese originals and its corresponding translations need to be analyzed and compared.

With these three criteria in mind, my strategy has been to scan the selected sources for the relevant references to reduction, analyze which vocabulary Nishitani uses in order to make such references,

study their meaning in their context, and finally assess whether (or to what extent) they altogether converge into a coherent concept. Now I would like to present the results of this procedure.

Most often, the term that Nishitani uses for reduction in his Japanese works is *kangen* (還元), which can be either a noun or a verb (in the latter case, *kangen suru* 還元する). In several opportunities, he also uses other expressions which Van Bragt also translates as "reduction." Given that Nishitani supervised and edited *Religion and Nothingness*, it is reasonable to suppose that he approved of this translation and then considered all those terms as synonyms. Indeed, such synonymity is confirmed by Kenkyusha's *New English-Japanese Dictionary* (cf. 1980 1771-2).

In its modern use, *kangen (suru)* means reduction (to reduce). It also means to lead something back to its original shape, nature, or state. As it is apparent, the Japanese expression reflects the latin etymology of "reduction" (*re* + *ducere*, "lead back"). In any case, it is the term used in Japanese to translate its technical sense.[12] It appears profusely in "Science and Zen," oftentimes in *Religion and Nothingness*, once in *The Self-Overcoming of Nihilism* (184, NKC 8: 278) and once in "Science and Religion" (NKC 6: 348). It also

[12] The entry for *kangen* in Iwanami's *Tetsugaku shisō jiten* 『哲学思想辞典』 (Dictionary of Philosophy and Thought) confirms this (Yokoyama 1998 279-80).

appears once in “On Awareness” (“Kaku ni tsuite” 「覚について」, NKC 13: 107) and twice in “Emptiness and Sameness” (180, 293, NKC 13: 112, 128), but not strictly in reference to science and religion. Sometimes Nishitani uses it in reference to ontological reduction, and sometimes in reference to epistemological reduction. At face value, it seems that he ignores methodological reduction. Besides, he correctly associates reductionism to physicalism (e.g. RN 79).

An alternative rendering of *kangen* that Nishitani uses is *gengen* 還源. He employs it once in “Emptiness and Sameness” (201, NKC 13: 139). Both *moto* 元 and *minamoto* 源 are roughly synonyms, as they both convey the meaning of origin or source. The latter, however, takes the nuance of well, spring, or fountain. Later on, this detail will be relevant for our analysis.

Some other synonyms of *kangen* emphasize the nuance of “returning” or “sending (something) back (to its origin).” One is *kichaku* 帰着 (to return), featured once in *Religion and Nothingness* (94, NKC 10: 103). A second one *Ki suru* 帰する (to settle down into a given place), featured once in “Science and Zen” (110, NKC 11: 228). *Kiitsu suru* 帰一する, meaning two separate things to be reduced (*kichaku*) and unified into a single thing, appears once in

Religion and Nothingness (145, NKC 10: 162). Finally, we should mention *kaesu* 還す (to return something somewhere), seen twice in Religion and Nothingness (RN 173-4, 253, NKC 10: 195, 279).

Here it is interesting to notice that this terminology seems related to Dōgen's language in the *Shōbōgenzō*, a work that Nishitani knew very well. *Ki suru* 帰する (歸する in traditional form) and *kaesu* 還す/歸す appear often in several chapters of this work: Genjōkōan, Daigo, Ryūgin, Daishugyō, and Kiebuppōsōhō (cf. 2007 33, 332, 827, 1006). Thereby Dōgen means "return (to)," and often in reference to returning to the Source (*moto* 元、also rendered as 本). Interestingly, he relates this idea with the Buddhist notion of taking refuge, which he labels *kie* 歸依 (Kiebuppōsōhō, cf. 2007 1006).

In Buddhism, the act of taking refuge in the "three jewels" (the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha) is of utmost importance, even though its interpretation might diverge from school to school. For our purposes, it is relevant to focus on the very meaning of "refuge:" it refers to the "place" or "thing" upon which one relies, i.e. one's point of support in life. To this respect, Dōgen explains:

> The term *kie*, "to take refuge," is made up of two characters. The first, *ki*, means "to keep returning to" and the second, *e*, means "to submit ourselves devotedly to." Thus, kie, "to take refuge," more literally means "to devote oneself to

> returning to." The form of this returning is like that of a child returning again and again to its parent. "To submit ourselves devotedly to" is like people depending on their leader. In other words, this term is synonymous with "to be rescued by," "to be freed by." (ibid.)

In sum, *kie* 歸依 literally denotes "to return to (one's point of) reliance," but more profoundly it connotes liberation. This suggests that Nishitani might have inherited this interpretation of return as returning to one's refuge so as to be rescued.

It should also be noticed that sometimes Nishitani uses several Japanese grammatical endings literally equivalent to "(X) is nothing but (Y)" or "(X) is only (Y)" in the sense of reduction (of X to Y). Consequently, in English they are translated with the verb "to reduce" (cf. RN 138, 226, SZ 109).

Finally, two other terms akin to reduction appear in *Religion and Nothingness*: *Kaishō* 解消, which signifies to dilute (RN 24, 79, NKC 10: 29, 89-90); and *shūren* 收斂, meaning to converge (RN 249, NKC 10: 274). However, their meaning as well as the translations chosen by Nishitani and Van Bragt suggest that these are instead related to

elimination, not to reduction as such. Thus we can read in the first two passages just referred (emphasis added):

> When morality and ethics are *diluted and reduced* [*kaishō* 解消] to social and cultural questions, the so-called environmental conditioning theory of crime and evil appears. (RN 24)
>
> Seen from [a physicalist] point of view, the concrete particularities of [...] things and their movements are *dismissed, or rather dissolved* [*kaishō* 解消] into a homogeneous and uniform set of relations among atoms and particles. One might then conclude that the real Form of these concrete things and their movements is to be found precisely within those relationships and the laws that control them. (RN 79)

It is intriguing that in both cases they decided to use a disjunctive pair for translating a single Japanese term. This suggests that they would have intuited the distinction between reduction and elimination, but did not get to fully grasp it.

The third passage adds to the puzzle:

> Karma is freedom determined by causal necessity within the whole infinite nexus, a freedom of spontaneity in "attachment" and, therefore, a freedom totally *bound* by fate. At the same time, having *reduced* [*shūren* 收斂] the

> whole causal nexus to its own center, it is a freedom altogether *unbound*. (RN 249, emphasis added on "reduced" only)

Here it seems that Van Bragt and Nishitani chose again a misleading translation. It can be conceded that reduction implies a convergence of the reduced phenomena into the reducing one, but that does not mean that reduction and convergence are the same. Still, this arouses the question why Nishitani paid attention to this connection. This way, even though *kaishō* and *shūren* should not be considered as synonyms of reduction (*kangen*), they are still related to it.

In sum, the various nuances expressed by these terms (excluding any reference to elimination/dissolution) can be summarized into the following: (i) return (*kaesu* 帰す/還す) or lead something back to its *origin*; (ii) unify (*issho ni suru* 一緒にする) a certain fact with its origin and make it converge (*shūren* 収斂) with it; (iii) take refuge; (iv) ontological reduction ("X is nothing but Y"); (v) epistemological reduction ("X is explained fully in terms of Y").

Now, do these different connotations converge into a single concept? From the perspective of authorial attempt, it seems that they do. As already mentioned, in *Religion and Nothingness* Van Bragt translates all these expressions as "reduction/reduce" and Nishitani must have approved that choice. Besides, in a couple of

additions that the latter introduced in the translation, he keeps his use of the term “reduction/reduce” consistent with the rest of the text, generally speaking (RN 53, 54). In sum, there is evidence that he quite likely meant to have a single concept in mind. As for “Science and Zen,” the same trait can be observed. Even though it was not translated by Van Bragt, he (along with Heisig) revised the translation. It is then reasonable to suppose that the criterion for translating “reduction” and its synonyms was quite similar in *Religion and Nothingness* and in “Science and Zen.” Indeed, we can observe some continuity between both works concerning the translation of such vocabulary.

All of the above considered, what Nishitani would have had in mind with the use of his reduction terminology—in other words, the content of his concept of reduction—can be roughly defined as a certain thing “returning” to its origin in the sense of manifesting that it indeed comes from that origin and must be conceived of in terms of such origin. In terms of convergence and unification, for several things to return to their common origin means that they gather (converge) into one.

It is clear now that Nishitani puts in *kangen* (reduction) much more content than what the technically restricted concept of reduction conveys. Precisely, an inquiry into the word’s etymology suggests

that he reads into it a variety of Buddhist nuances that the term used to have in classic Chinese texts.

According to Takano Shigeo (2004 98), the term *kangen* 還元 was used by Utagawa Yōan 宇田川榕菴 in order to translate the chemical concept of reduction from Dutch. Utagawa does so in his book *Seimi kaisou* 『舎密開宗』 (1847), a manual of modern chemistry. Still, he did not invent the word. As we will see later on, it appears in some classic Chinese texts. The *Grand Ricci* dictionary of Chinese defines it as "return to its primitive state." What is more, it is not unreasonable to think that *kangen* and *gengen* 還源 were synonyms in their pre-modern use. Indeed, the characters *minamoto* 源, *hara* 原 and *moto* 元 (in Japanese words of Chinese origin, they all can be pronounced *gen*) are semantically related: They all convey the nuance of origin or source. At least in Japanese, it is not rare to find them used interchangeably. Indeed, for instance, the word for reduction in Chinese is 還原 (pronounced huányuán).

Both *kangen* and *gengen*, appear in several Daoist and Buddhist texts written during the Tang and Song dynasties in China (c. 8th to 12th century) with the meaning of return(ing) to the source. One example is the treatise 『妄尽還源観』(C. Wàngjǐn huáihuán guān), attributed to Fǎzàng (643–712), the third patriarch of the Huayan school of Chinese Buddhism. Even though this attribution

is uncertain, suffice it to notice that the Huayan school exerted a strong influence in Chan Buddhism, which would be transmitted into Japan as Zen. As for the Daoist sources, *gengen* 還源 appears in the titles and contents of several alchemical works, including "Awakening to Reality" (C. Wùzhēnpiān 悟真篇) by Zhāng Bóduān, the most representative work of Daoist alchemy (v. 1987 for its English translation). Another text of his deserving mention is "Four Hundred Words on the Gold Elixir" (C. Jīndānsìbǎizì 金丹四百字) (v. 2001).

Another noticeable example is the classical narrative associated to the famous ten Ox-Herding Pictures, a fable that explains the Buddhist path by comparing it to a peasant (the practitioner) taming a wild ox (the ignorant mind). The ninth picture is entitled *henpon gengen* 返本還源, an expression that Robert Carter translates rather literally as "'Returning to the Origin, Back to the Source'" (105). This stage is depicted as the final awakening to reality's true nature, only followed by the peasant's return to the world of common life.[13]

As a result, it is not surprising that these words had entered Japan through Chinese Buddhist texts around the 12th to 13th century, as evinced in the case of the *Ten Ox Herding Pictures* or the teachings

[13] Interestingly, Carter uses the Ox-Herding Pictures as a tool to explain Nishitani's philosophy (ibid. 98-108).

of Dōgen. Nishitani's ambiguity in his use of terminology in reference to reduction might be due to this fact. He had in mind the modern concept of reduction as well as the classical idea of return to the origin. As we will see next, this ambiguity has an impact on the interpretation of Nishitani's thought.

5.3 Return to the Source

The result of our etymological examination is interesting enough. Nishitani would have been misled by the etymology of *kangen* 還元 when he interpreted reduction. The problem is that such interpretation of reduction as "returning to the origin" has to do with reduction as it is understood today only in a very general sense, but does not convey its proper meaning. What is more, it appears to go right in the opposite direction. To point out that a certain thing or phenomenon A originates in, say, B, does not imply that A is reduced to B (that is, it does not imply that A is nothing but B, or that A is fully explained in terms of B). For instance, it may well be proven that feelings originate in biochemical reactions in the nervous system, but this is not enough to prove that feelings are nothing but biochemical reactions, or that the psychology of feeling is nothing but a chapter of neurophysiology. However, both meanings seem to collide in the same word as Nishitani uses it.

This ambiguity can be most clearly noticed when these two different senses of *kangen* clash. Generally, in "Science and Zen" it is clear that reduction is related to scientism and to the project of reducing everything in the universe to mechanically-ruled, inert matter (SZ 109, 122, 124, 126, 128, 131-2, 133). In *Religion and Nothingness*, this seems to be the case in several passages (RN 13, 94, 103, 144-5, 193), but in some others the meaning conveyed is different. For instance, in the fourth chapter of the book Nishitani declares that from the field of emptiness "we could even take a second look at conscious or intellectual knowing and see it reduced finally to nothing other than a 'knowing of non-knowing.'" (121). This seems impossible to reconcile with the following idea:

> Multiplicity and differentiation, that is, the fact that it is impossible to substitute any one given thing for any other, the fact that each thing has its being as something absolutely unique, become really apparent only when the field of nihility opens up at the ground of the system of being [...] One might say that only when a thing *has lost any point to be reduced to*, only when it has nothing more to rely on, can it be thrown back upon itself. (144-5, emphasis added)

Let us consider that scientism and the mechanicist worldview are only possible from the field of consciousness, whereas so-called "reduction" to the knowing of non-knowing occurs in the field of

emptiness. Therefore, they cannot be the same. An additional consideration strengthens this point. Physicalist reduction diminishes the ontological weight of those phenomena that are reduced. For instance: while the claim that life is nothing but biochemical processes does not mean to negate its existence, it does imply that life becomes merely a supervenient product of biochemical processes. Those processes are, hence, "more real" than life. On the other hand, one of the purposes of Nishitani's account of reality is to reaffirm the very being of each individual thing: he unequivocally claims that in the field of emptiness each and every thing is fully itself, and each and every thing recovers its reality. At this point, it cannot be more clear that he uses the same word for talking about a standpoint that makes us lose sight of the being of things, and another one that does exactly the opposite.

However, by the very fact of being in opposition, physicalist reduction and existential "return" appear to be different paths for the same goal, or rather different views of the same aim. Such aim is what resonates in Nishitani's terminology: to "lead" things back to its origin or, in other words, to trace the thing's home-ground, the place (*basho*) where it emerges as the thing it truly is. He judges that the former fails in what the latter succeeds: affirming and explaining things in their suchness without losing sight of their particularities.

Therefore, the solution for the terminological difficulty, I propose, is that we should keep the word *reduction* (*kangen* 還元) for its modern technical sense. The other concept, more in line with true "return" to the source, can be rendered by classic expressions such as *gengen* 還源, *henpongengen* 返本還源, *kaesu* 帰す/還す, and so on. It is hard to find a word in English that conveys all the relevant nuances. The closest one, it seems, is *apocatastasis* because in classic Greek it connotes restoration, restitution, or re-establishment of things to their primordial or originary condition. I should clarify, however, that the term was used by Stoic, Neoplatonic, and Christian thinkers with diverse meanings, some of them related to doctrines of the final restoration of creation at the end of time. However, in no sense do I mean to refer to any of those concrete doctrines. My intention is to use the word strictly as a translation of *gengen*. I somehow try to do with "apocatastasis" what Van Bragt did with "circuminsession," to wit, give a new meaning to an old expression in the spirit of helping to convey concepts of Japanese philosophy to Western audiences.

In light of that, we can claim that reduction is the view that apocatastasis is possible through analysis-only, that is, the notion that leading a certain thing back to the source of its being—to the place where it truly becomes itself—implies proving that its being is

merely supervenient to its source (i.e. a sheer epiphenomenon thereof). It is then Nishitani's intention to affirm that reduction is an incorrect conception of apocatastasis. This way, once we dispel the aforementioned ambiguity in the terminology studied in this chapter, that very terminology becomes the point of departure for an existential critique of reductionism—the subject of the next chapter.

Another interesting result is that apocatastasis is closely linked to the notions of home-ground and elemental, explained in chapter 2. The first concept can be defined as leading a thing back to its origin, that is, the *place* where it emerges as the being that it is. Origin thus understood is what Nishitani calls home-ground (J. *moto* 元). And the adjective referring to the home-ground of things (or of a thing in particular) is "elemental" (J. 根源的). Consequently, these two notions are central to the relation between Nishitani's topology and apocatastasis.

Apocatastasis is also linked with reattunement to non-differentiating nature, while reduction can be deemed as hindering such possibility. In this respect, Nishitani recalls Dōgen's words:

> To practice and confirm all things by conveying one's self to them, is illusion: for all things [dharmas] to advance toward and practice and confirm the self, is enlightenment.

(Shōbōgenzō Genjōkōan, quoted in RN 107, square brackets therein added)

Reduction would be the first attitude: to convey one's self to things. That is illusion because it belongs to self-confinement. It belongs to the self that blocks its contact with actual things. Meanwhile, apocatastasis follows the second attitude: to let things advance and confirm the self. That is, knowing is not the result of imposing a priori, subjective conditions on these data, but an imprint of the participation of things in the constitution of the self.

In this direction, Nishitani quotes Dōgen again:

> To learn the Buddha Way is to learn one's self. To learn one's self is to forget one's self. To forget one's self is to be confirmed by all things [dharmas]. To be confirmed by all dharmas is to effect the dropping off of one's own body-and-mind and the mind-and-body of others as well.
>
> (ibid., quoted in RN 107-8, square brackets therein added)

The re-attunement to natural law mentioned in chapter 4 is possible in the way just indicated. We re-attune to actual things and the laws that govern them when we just let them manifest to us without obstruction from our expectations or preconceptions. Truth be told, it is impossible not to have expectations or preconceptions about what things would or should be like. Still, they can be disrupted by things and facts, that is, things might happen in ways that we are not

prepared to expect. When that happens is the moment to accept “to be taught” by things, hence readjust our preconceptions.

So far, the clarification just achieved does not yet suffice to answer why to reject mechanicist reduction and embrace existential apocatastasis instead. Nonetheless, it paves the way toward that answer. A reinterpretation of Nishitani in light of the distinction between reduction and apocatastasis turns out to be the thread that weaves together the scattered pieces of his critique to the former and his defense of the latter.

6. THE CASE FOR NONREDUCTIONISM

What is problematic about reduction? How is it a deviation from true apocatastasis? In general, the problem with reduction is that it always defers the solution to the question of meaning. It so defers it because it relies on the ideal assumption that it is possible to finally understand reality by means of tracing back the origin of everything to its primary cause. But this task never ends: no matter how far back we go, we never reach the beginning. The question will always come up: So, what was there before the "beginning"? There are *prima facie* two possible answers to this question: either there is no such beginning because the universe has always existed, or there was one but it emerged out of nothing. Both answers are inconceivable. Therefore, quite paradoxically, reduction has the ultimate effect of leaving meaning shrouded in mystery.

The same happens if we try to ground meaning in a *telos*. Interestingly, the "reductionist project" (so to speak) is justified in practical terms by modernity's *telos par excellence*: progress. Progress is the ideal that one day all human problems will be solved thanks to the advance of science and technology. The aspiration is that a perfectly integrated and purely analytic knowledge of everything will contain all that we will need to know in order to ground the solution to all problems of humankind. Yet again, in this way the question of meaning is always deferred: the end is never

reached. How long should we wait in order to find a solution to the problems we need to face now, in our very present? How can we afford to wait given the urgency of overcoming nihilism?

In sum, reduction condemns us to a double deferral of meaning. If we want to avoid such deferral, we need to stand firmly in our here-and-now and find meaning there. The only way this can occur is the way of apocatastasis. In what follows, I will further explain how this assessment of reductionism can be rooted in Nishitani's philosophy. In order to do so, I will distinguish three different levels of discussion: reality in general, mind, and religion. Even though (as will be noticed) this differentiation cannot be made completely sharp, the discussion at each level varies in terms of the concepts and specific controversies involved. Still, there is a central discursive thread that goes through the three levels, which I expect to recapitulate in the conclusions.

6.1 The General Level: Reality

a) General Reductionism

Is it possible to explain everything as a mere byproduct of interactions between physical particles governed by purely mechanical laws? Can it then be shown that all the qualitative features of things are simply a fiction produced by our fantasizing brain? It seems that such is the case if we consider the astounding

progress of science in our days. Today it seems possible to analyze a constantly growing range of phenomena to the point of isolating and observing the particles that compose them and the types of physical patterns and mechanical operations linking these particles. Color turns into electromagnetic waves within a certain range of the spectrum, feelings or memories become nothing but neural states, and so on and so forth.

The first objection to this analytical perspective is, at face value, logical. Nishitani formulates it as follows:

> The world seen from a teleological outlook, the world of concrete things like mountains and rivers, animals and trees, with their various "forms" (*eidoi*), can be reduced in a mechanistic world view to material processes which can, in turn, be described in terms of mathematical formulas. But it can never, in all its eidetic variety, be *deduced* from material processes. (SZ 124)

This remark is not unknown in the philosophy of science. For instance, as Richard Jones paraphrases, Charles D. Broad had observed that

> the properties and behavior of any whole (including mechanical devices) cannot be deduced, *even in principle*, from even complete knowledge of the properties and

> behavior of its parts, taken separately or in combination or in the structural context. (28; cf. Broad 1925 61, 77)

Even if we can isolate the "building blocks" of all that exists and the physical laws that govern them, it does not follow that we can deduce all that emerges from these building blocks and laws. These two steps (reduction and deduction) are logically different. It might perfectly happen that once a manifold of "blocks" gather together and form a compound thing, new properties emerge that cannot be explained merely by reference to the properties of the elements (this is, indeed, the point of emergentism, as we observed in chapter 1). If reality happens to be that way, then even the most exhaustive analysis would not render a satisfying explanation of all things, and analysis-only would not satisfy the real pursuit of reality.

Nishitani does not stop at denying that reduction renders deduction (i.e. the claim that a full analysis of reality would automatically render all there is to know about it). Even more, he would claim that analysis can never be completed. Indeed, he considers such ideal an illusion—as he calls it, an "optical illusion" (RN 224-7). No matter how far we trace back the beginning of time, it interminably eludes our grasp. Therefore, it is impossible to build a single, all-encompassing "theory of everything." In his own words:

> My existence stands against the backdrop of [...] a network of [familial] relationships whose beginning and end are beyond comprehension, and comes into being from out of its midst. From this perspective, questions regarding the source of my existence remain ultimately unanswerable. No matter how much progress is made in the scientific explanation of the "history" of inanimate beings on the earth and the history of the universe as a whole, such history can only step backward endlessly into the past and open up endlessly into the future, without ever being capable of learning the secret of the beginning or the end. (RN 223)

However, is it really so? Can we not simply reply, given the current state of science, that everything started with the Big Bang? The problem is that, even if granted that the Big Bang theory has enough evidential support, the theory itself is not precisely about the origin of everything. It can give us the big picture of what has happened to the observable universe from its subatomic stage (when it was about 10^{-32} seconds old) to the present. But there is no evidence yet of what happened before (cf. Terzić 2008; Ryden 2003 196). And even if one day the theory could be improved to describe the very moment our universe was born, we can still ask: What happened before? Analogously, no matter how far our predictions will reach, we can always ask: And what will happen later?

Yet the optical illusion does not consist in relying on science. Scientific progress in itself could be perfectly advantageous for us depending on how we stand in relation to it. The error lies in the assumption that scientific knowledge will one day be so complete that it will afford all the answers about where we come from and where we are going. The problem becomes more serious when we additionally presuppose that this knowledge alone will be the key to solve all our problems. This way, our focus drifts away from the present, be it in the direction of analysis-only (indefinitely moving back into the past) or in the direction of progress (moving indefinitely forward into the future). It makes our minds overlook our present situation and our actual condition, the only place where it would truly make sense to attempt to solve any problem we may have. In this sense, the problem with reductionism is that it pushes us to ground our existence in ultimate answers that refuse to fall within our reach. It leaves us in a state of existential wandering (so to speak).

b) The Alternative

What has just been observed already indicates the alternative. The only place where we could ever find an answer to our problems is our very here and now. But Nishitani goes even further. Right after

explaining (as quoted above) how the answer to the beginning and end of time seems to constantly elude our grasp, he continues:

> Even so, the unshakable fact remains: I am actually existing here and now. [...] Therefore, although it is a contradiction and an impossibility to ask about the beginning or the end of time (or about the beginning or end of our "being" as actual existents) within a time that has neither beginning nor end, the beginning and end of that time in itself can be sought within this actual presence itself. This is the quest for the beginning and end of time and being at a more elemental level, one that draws closer to the elemental home-ground and asks about the essence of time and being. (RN 223-4)

That is, even though our existence becomes a mystery due to the impossibility of finding its causal beginning or end in *linear* time, it is still a fact that whatever causal factors are relevant to my present existence, they somehow must be there in the present, underlying my existence. The genetic and sociocultural load of my ancestors conditions my being only to the extent that such inheritance is still at work in my present (otherwise, why bother?). Likewise, whatever occurs in the future is relevant to my existence only to the extent that its causes are already at work within me. Briefly stated, my own present existence already contains the key for answering where I came from and where I am going. In sum:

> The beginning and end of time in itself lie directly beneath the present, at its home-ground, and it is there that they are to be sought originally. To look for the home-ground of time (or being) by tracing time interminably backward or pushing it interminably ahead is to fall victim to a sort of optical illusion, a confusion of dimensions. It is an error of orientation in the pursuit of the home-ground. (RN 224)

This is the existential attitude, and the point of apocatastasis. The origin (home-ground) of being needs to be sought in actuality: the here-and-now, this very moment and this very place where the thing exists in the present moment.

Now, what do we find if we analyze the thing's present existence as exhaustively as possible? As already mentioned in chapter 3, we find that the thing can only exist in a relation of interpenetration with the rest of things, that is, in *circuminsession*. A certain thing is not what it is solely by virtue of its effective cause, but also by virtue of its intrinsic and dynamic relatedness to the rest of things. The thing's being is not provided by its cause alone. Rather, it is in constant becoming: it continually emerges out of interrelatedness. This helps to explain why if we move away from the thing's present existence—be it in the direction of the past (reduction) or in the direction of the future (progress)—, we lose sight of its actuality.

In order to further explain circuminsession, we need to point out that, as the reader probably noticed already, it contains two dimensions: a spatial one and a temporal one. In terms of space, the home-ground wherein a thing emerges and can be what it actually is, is the place of its very interconnection with the rest of beings. In terms of time, the thing's home-ground is not in the past nor in the future, but in the present moment. That is, the thing's suchness is found right now, in the very present. It is not to be found in its first cause (past / reduction) nor in its *telos* or final destination (future / teleology). Let us further explain these two dimensions of the circuminsessional relatedness that, from a viewpoint of apocatastasis, makes up the home-ground of being.

c) Spatial Dimension of Circuminsession

In its spatial dimension, circuminsessional interpenetration can be briefly articulated as follows: "All things that are in the world are linked together, one way or the other. Not a single thing comes into being without some relationship to every other thing" (RN 149). Any existing thing only exists in intrinsic relation to other things. In other words, the thing's being is *in* interconnectedness: Relations are essential for things to come into being. If we follow this to its ultimate consequences, we obtain that there is not a single part of the thing's being that is not connected to something else. In a word, everything is *in* interconnectedness because everything is

interconnectedness. Negatively expressed, substances are not a given: They emerge out of the potential of reality to form new things through all-encompassing relatedness.

Yet, and precisely, things do not lose their unique identity nor fuse into a "fuzzy oneness." Circuminsession is not incompatible with the entity's individuality, but is rather the condition for it. What it excludes is the notion of substance as an invariable given. Whatever the thing is varies from moment to moment as a function of the inevitably impermanent character of its relations to the rest of things, as well as the relations between its components. This is, let us remember, nihility in its full ontological sense. Indeed, nihility as a reality manifests in the middle of circuminsession as the movement from concentration to dispersion (of different components). Things constantly emerge as different components gather together, and fade away as these components disperse. At a cosmological scale, all things gather together in an all-encompassing dynamic unity, but at the same time they tend to disperse in all directions (cf. RN 122-3, 128-9). Such movement is circular: After dispersion, a new gathering (concentration) arises, and so on. This way, reality is a dynamic interplay of unity and multiplicity.

In the long run, the form of reality is circuminsessional interpenetration. No thing stands in itself, but only insofar as it relates to others. That is, any given thing whatsoever can only stand on the rest of things as its ground: It cannot exist as the entity it is if the rest of reality does not exist. Yet conversely, and simultaneously, that very thing participates in the ground of all other things. Nishitani relates this mutual relation of being grounded and grounding to individuality (the uniqueness of each individual entity). In a somehow poetic way, he remarks:

> That a thing actually *is* means that it is absolutely unique. No two things in the world can be completely the same. The absolute uniqueness of a thing means, in other words, that it is situated in the absolute center of all other things. It is situated, as it were, in the position of *master*, with all other things positioned relative to it as *servants*. (RN 147)

Conversely, at the same time the thing is positioned as a "servant" for all other things.

Now, to affirm that circuminsession is the true form of reality means that there are no immutable forms making up ultimate reality. The world of contingency that we can observe and are immersed in is itself ultimate reality—nothing else. Yet in this transient world there are forms. Consequently, the law of noncontradiction does not apply to reality as such. In order for it to operate, noncontradiction

requires that the identity of each individual thing is fully distinguishable from every other thing. Circuminsession does not exclude each thing having its own identity, but it excludes that such identity can be fully distinguished apart from everything else. Thus, the law of noncontradiction can operate to a certain point, as much as analysis can. But it can never reach the true form of reality:

> Behind all scientific thinking based on causality and law, all mytho-poetic imagination perceiving organic connection, and all philosophical contemplation of an absolute One, there is a "system of circuminsession," where "each thing is itself in not being itself, and is not itself in being itself" [...]. (RN 149)

Here we should point out an important consequence related to knowledge: It is not that logic establishes what the fact is—that is, its truth cannot be fully expressed in terms of logic. Rather, the fact may present itself (to us) in a logical shape, that is, as having a certain structure and content/meaning. It is only then that logical reason helps to expand knowledge. Therefore, the dream of a "logical reconstruction of the world" amounts to putting the cart before the horse. Such enterprise inevitably falls prey to the optical illusion.

d) Temporal Dimension of Circuminsession

Considered from its temporal dimension, circuminsession occurs between all the moments of time. That is, moments of time do not exist separately, but are all joined together. Now, how does this specifically occur? How come that the beginning and end of time "can be sought within this actual presence itself"? That is, how is it possible that "[t]he beginning and end of time in itself lie directly beneath the present"? (RN 224) For an answer to this question, Nishitani obtains a clue from an existential interpretation (what is more, an existential demythologization) of *samsāra* (in Buddhism, the cycle of rebirth kept in motion by ignorance): "Existence as suffering is able to clarify its true Form only by 'taking hold of' its own acts. [...] One may explain this as a deeply existential prehension of being lying beneath the surface of this way of looking at birth and death [...]." (RN 169) This is prehension of "[t]he finitude of man's being-in-the-world" as "unbounded and unending in its essence." That is, as "infinite finitude." (ibid. 170). In sum, time is infinite finitude.

Obviously, such notion is contradictory at face value. But this contradiction in our prehension of our existence in time is unavoidable. Naturally, I realize that my existence is limited in time

(that is, finite): I was born and I will die. However, as it was mentioned before, I can also realize that I come from an indefinitely long chain of causes and the consequences of my actions will project indefinitely into the future. Even more, I can realize that this process is not entirely linear, but also cyclical: The initial conditions of my existence are strengthened or weakened by the outcome of my own actions and my present circumstances. My very existence continually emerges out of this enormously complex process. This way, my existence is sustained by causes and conditions that exceed my grasp, and its effects extend into the future beyond my control. But to the extent that I act, these causes and conditions, as well as these effects, lie within my very existence—hence in this sense they are within my grasp. My own being then transcends me, but it is also immanent to me. I exist in transcendence and immanence at the same time. In reference to this simultaneity of transcendence and immanence, Nishitani uses the term *transdescendence*:

> [...] what sort of *ratio* of what sort of Existenz is meant by saying that finitude is seen as infinitely finite in its essence, and that this is a radical revelation of finitude? It consists in man's [sic] grasping of his own finitude on a dimension of [...] "*trans-descendence*," [...] that breaks through the

> standpoint of discursive understanding and speculative reason to the depth of his own existence. (RN 171, emphasis added)

Here we arrive at the temporal dimension of circuminsession. Past, present and future are all circuminsessionally connected. This way, in virtue of the intrinsic connection between all moments of time, they all gather together in a dynamic unity, but simultaneously preserve their independent existence. When we contemplate time from the perspective of multiplicity, we obtain the common view of time as an irreversible stream of moments. But if we contemplate it from the perspective of unity, we cannot help finding an intrinsic connection that makes them inseparable. From an existential standpoint, both aspects are indissolubly joined together and experienced simultaneously.

Let us consider this point from another angle. As mentioned before, whatever happened in the past is still causally active in the present, and whatever will happen in the future must have any causal ground on what is happening now. From a viewpoint of circuminsession, this is possible because every instant of time is intrinsically

connected to all earlier and all later moments. From the field of consciousness, we conceive of every moment of time as different and distinguishable. However, were this distinction absolutely sharp, there would be no way to explain how each moment passes and makes room for another one. Now, when time discloses in the field of emptiness, it reveals its internal unity, the internal unity by means of which every instant is still distinguishable from the others, yet at the same time internally connected to all of them.

Such intrinsic connection linking all the different moments of time constitutes the form of time as a whole. Thus it is manifest as an ever-present transience at every moment (past, present or future), since it makes every moment possible. Yet it is not a noumenal "force" beyond our experience. Time as a series of moments and time in its ultimate form make up an indivisible unity. Therefore, we can experience both: We can experience the finitude of time and its infinity simultaneously. That is, every moment goes quickly away, but time continues running. This is why, as I understand it, Nishitani claims that the beginning and the end of time "lie directly beneath the present:" The beginning and end of time are just two different

expressions of the everlasting transience (infinite finitude) that constitutes the form of time.

e) The Qualitative and the Quantitative

To summarize: The thing's being is not merely a function of its causes (reductionism), nor a function of its final form (teleology). Neither does it solely depend on itself (substantialism). In the long run, *being is in circuminsessional relatedness.* A thing is what it is only in *ek-stasis* (i.e. "out of itself," in transcendence), yet only in virtue of this very *ek-stasis* can it stand in itself (immanence). Likewise, the fact as it is in its home-ground—in Nishitani's terms, the "primal fact" (RN 125-7)—exists in such transdescendence. Therefore, multiplicity and unity are mutually interdependent: There is unity in multiplicity, and multiplicity in unity. Thus multiplicity cannot be reduced to unity, nor the latter negated by the former.

Now, in light of circuminsession, let us recall a certain aspect of our initial question (formulated at the beginning of this section). Is there any room for claiming that the qualitative properties of things are real? Indeed, circuminsession makes room for it to the extent that quality emerges in the relation between the observing subject and the observed fact. And no less with quantity. That is, the fact is only manifest in perspective.

In general, it is possible to claim here that each and every perception, image, or idea, no matter if it is fictional or not, must have arisen from a concrete relationship between an individual mind and a certain fact. Every appearance comes from somewhere. And given interrelatedness, it must come from our relationship to some other (real) thing. In this sense, every appearance is an expression of some thing. If this is so, then every appearance (manifestation) of a thing reveals the reality of the thing in one way or another (RN 72-4, 129-30). In other words, there is no appearance that does not reveal some aspect of the fact. Yet, conversely, there is no single manifestation that fully reveals to sensation or intellect the suchness of the thing.

In sum, only to the extent that the primal fact projects (J. *utsusu* うつす) onto sensation or reason does it manifest in terms of quality or quantity. But in itself it is beyond them because it encompasses them. Reality is not only quantitative. Nor is it only qualitative. It contains both aspects.

This means that it is not necessary to postulate the qualitative properties of objects (qualia) as ontologically separate from their quantitative properties (RN 125-7). Here we should mention that the

postulate of qualia is a reaction against the neurophysiological and computational model of the mind, which tends to put all the emphasis on the syntactic properties of mental states, but seem to assign no role to their semantic side. Several thinkers have thus made the case that there must be some "qualia" (a correlative to "quanta," i.e. the quantitative properties of things) that account for reality's qualitative character. A certain thing or phenomenon has a quantitative aspect and, correlatively, a qualitative aspect, so that we need to seek the type of stuff in nature that makes the second one possible (as for the first, we assume that science already knows: matter and energy made of particles).

If we bring Nishitani's perspective to the discussion, we may accept the first postulate, but do not need the second one. Each and every thing, as it is in itself, is qualitative. Quantity itself is qualitative. We may even move a step forward and claim that no quantity exists purely (i.e. without its concrete quality) and no quality exists purely (i.e. without a mathematizable form). As it is—in its suchness (S. *tathatā*)—, the thing is beyond quantity and quality.

In order to explain this more concretely, let us resort to an example of Nishitani. As he goes, heat is beyond "quality" and "quantity." It is neither a measurable temperature nor a sense datum determinable as "hot." In his words: "The fact of heat manifests itself ecstatically

as a primal fact on the yonder side (actually the hither side) of the categories of quality and quantity." (RN 126). That is, the primal fact of heat (what heat actually is, in its suchness) is not reducible to a number (temperature) nor a sensation ("it is hot"). Rather, quantity and quality emerge out of the fact of heat, but only to the extent that the fact of heat enters in relation to us can there be a temperature and a sensation. That is, temperature and hot sensation are only manifest as projections of heat into our minds.

But how can we say that the qualitative is real, if it varies from individual to individual? Even more, how can we so counter-intuitively say that appearances are truth-revealing? How dare we hold that the quantitative properties of things are no less perspective-dependent than the qualitative ones? The answer to these questions inevitably leads us to a reflection on the nature of mind and knowledge from the approach of interrelatedness.

For now, suffice it to finish this section with a summary of its conclusions. From an apocatastatic perspective, things are not solely a function of their effective cause nor fully describable in mechanical-quantitative terms, since they exist in interpenetration with the rest of things. In virtue of this interpenetration (circuminsession), reality is a dynamic unity that simultaneously

allows for irreducible multiplicity. In the long run, the home-ground of any particular thing is the whole of reality.

This is not to deny that there is some truth in the reductionist standpoint. Apocatastasis is not “ascent” to spirit or “reduction” to materiality, yet it includes both: personality and materiality, life and death (RN 94). In other words, it discloses reality as a double exposure. While reduction attempts to lead everything to inert materiality, and traditional, teleologically oriented religion aimed at leading everything to a transcendent realm “beyond this world,” apocatastasis exceeds both: It leads things back to themselves.

6.2 The Intermediate Level: The Human (Mind)

a) Reduction of Mind

In agreement with most mind-nonreductionists, Nishitani rejects the idea that mental life is nothing but neurophysiological activity or mechanical computations. Even more, he judges it insufficient to fully explain the mind in terms of any factor, or combination of factors, immanent to the individual. To this respect, two passages where Nishitani explicitly makes such case deserve our attention.

On one of the first pages of *Religion and Nothingness*, he remarks that the "bond of life" or "sympathy" and connection among all creatures ("spirit") accounts for something real:

> [...] on the basis of the life that linked individual things together at bottom, a sympathetic affinity was thought to obtain between one man's soul [sic] and another's. This "sympathy" was meant to bespeak a contact prior to and more immediate than consciousness. It was meant to point to the field of the most immediate encounter between man and man, at the ground of the instincts and drives that underlie all thought, feeling, and desire. More than that, this same sympathy was thought to exist not only among men, but among all living things. In other words, the vital connective that bound individual beings to one another was thought to appear as a field of "psychic sympathy" between souls. Of course, this view seems to have all but been wiped out completely by the modern mechanistic view of nature. But is that cause enough to simply dismiss it as antiquated? (RN 11-2)

We may (and should) demythologize the traditional view that all living things are provided with a soul and are all bound together in a field of "sympathy." If we pass it through the "purgative fire" of science, the result is clear: there seems to be no room for reasonably

believing in souls as entities apart from bodies, or, in any case, there might be no place for beliefs in a “mental substance” apart from matter. Yet the notions of “soul” and “sympathy” were posited in an effort to answer, correspondingly, two problems that must be taken seriously, instead of being ignored.

The first one is: some entities appear to have intentions and feelings, and seem to figure out the world around them to be one way or another—in a word, they seem to have a mind. Meanwhile, other entities simply move with no apparent will, do not react when we act upon them, seem not to feel anything at all. What accounts for the difference? What do the former things have that the latter lack? We may not know which factor or condition accounts for this difference, but at any rate it has traditionally received names such as soul or spirit.

The second problem goes as follows. It is evident that we human beings can predict the reactions of other creatures and act accordingly. On this basis, we play, communicate, cooperate, fight, etc. Even more, this all occurs without previous planning, great intellectual efforts, or language. We know it because we experience it as such and because it seems that other animals have this capacity, too. What makes it possible? What accounts for this capacity to understand the mental state of creatures of whom I can only

perceive their bodies and behavior? We may not perfectly understand what makes it possible, but at least one thing is certain: There must be a condition that makes it possible. Following Nishitani, we may label it "sympathy." To summarize, whatever we do with the traditional notions of soul and sympathy, they do not simply signify delusions to be discarded. More fundamentally, they indicate facts that need to be explained (SZ 131-2).

The second passage to highlight from Nishitani's *Religion and Nothingness* appears a few pages below. There he remarks that the *cogito* should not be explained from its own standpoint (RN 13)—which amounts to the field of consciousness—, but that does not mean that we may well explain it as a function of something else:

> I do not have it in mind for the *cogito* to be *explained* through anything else at all, from "above" it or "below," and ultimately *reduced* to that something else. Rather, I want to turn to the ground of the subjectivity of the *cogito* and there to consider its origin from a point at which the orientation of the subject to its ground is more radical and thoroughgoing than it is with the *cogito*. (RN 14)

Nishitani rejects an explanation of mind based on reducing it to any outer reality. As an existential attitude demands, mind must be

explained from the level of the fact it is. But if we consider it in isolation, we cannot catch what it truly is, since its true being can only be manifest in interrelatedness. Both reduction and self-confinement block our understanding of the fact of mind.

After having commented on the two passages just quoted, we can briefly articulate Nishitani's nonreductionism of mind and attempt an interpretation. Mind should be acknowledged from the fact of mind itself. Such fact includes animacy (i.e. phenomenal experience). Animacy is not a delusion, but part of what must be explained. Now, this proper acknowledgment is not possible from the standpoint of self-confined consciousness, which inevitably cuts itself off from the field of relatedness wherein mind becomes possible at every instant. It must be observed and acknowledged from the field of ciruminsessional interpenetration. Naturally, this standpoint excludes eliminativism, which unequivocally denies the existence of animacy. Even more, it is incompatible with mind's reduction to matter. Even granting that mental phenomena have a material base (substance reduction), they are not sheer epiphenomena (structure and theory non-reduction).

b) The Alternative

Now, if eliminativism and reductionism should be rejected, how should we conceive of the mind? What is the alternative? The

answer is suggested in the previous lines. As it seems from Nishitani's observations regarding this subject in *Religion and Nothingness*, he presupposes a relational view of mind. Given that each thing exists in interpenetration with the rest of things, the mind is no exception. Mind and world are not two previously separate realms that at some point come together and thus generate mental life. Instead, they are linked from the very beginning and out of this relatedness does mental life emerge. An elaboration of this perspective can be found around the notion of understanding as living co-projection of mind and thing.

Let us remember that, for Nishitani, a true understanding of reality goes beyond the intellect. Truly getting to understand and know the "meaning" of a certain thing or fact requires a profound engagement with it. To this respect, he remarks that in Japanese the meaning of a thing can also be called its "mind" (*kokoro* 心): "In solving a riddle, for instance, we say that we have 'obtained its mind' when we have understood what it means." (RN 178). As it seems, he interprets that this expression is not simply a metaphor, even though he does not mean to attribute a "soul" to things. More subtly, the point is that in the subject's activity of understanding the meaning of a given object, both the subject and the object project onto one another and in this way emerge together into being. That is, mental life emerges

out of the circuminsessional interpenetration of mind and things from the very beginning. As Nishitani expresses it:

> To "obtain the mind" of the "meaning" of a given *koto* ("matter"), to apprehend its *ratio* or *logos*, is for the reality that has become manifest as that *koto* [...] to transfer essentially, just as it is and in its suchness, into the man [sic] who understands it; and for the man who understands it to be transferred into that reality. (ibid.)

This way, meaning is nowhere "out there," but it is not "within" either. It constantly emerges out of the intrinsic relationship between mind and koto. In this sense, "meaning" understood as cognitive content is just an abstraction of the living co-projection of mind and thing. Likewise, "cognition" insofar as understanding in terms of concepts is the result of the live activity of the individual as it engages with things. In this sense, knowing does not consist in grasping the substance of a previously existing thing by means of the previously existing workings of a mind. Instead, it emerges out of the incidence of the thing in the mind and the mind in the thing.

Therefore, cognition is not the elemental form of understanding and knowledge, but rather the result of the latter. When active engagement with reality stops, and the individual retreats in self-confinement (for instance, when we start wondering and connecting

ideas without paying attention to what is actually happening), cognition tends to lose value as knowledge.

In positive terms, the root of knowledge is not cognition, but the living co-projection of mind and thing: “This living transmission of minds being projected onto one another just as they are, and the obtaining of mind that this effects, is the elemental mode of the understanding of meaning.” (RN 178). Thus, only to the extent that cognition remains anchored in awareness does it truly have contact with reality in the form of co-projection. Otherwise, it runs dry.

In terms of knowledge, this is what the “knowing of non-knowing” mentioned in the previous chapter consists of: Knowing can only emerge out of the co-projection of mind and thing. It is in this sense that from the field of emptiness we can “take a second look at conscious or intellectual knowing” and see it returned (not reduced!) to “a ‘knowing of non-knowing.’” (RN 121). The latter is not the reduction point of cognition, but rather the place of its *apocatastasis*: the home-ground where cognition (science included) regains its power to know reality. True knowledge is not *episteme* (i.e. intrinsically mediated by concepts), but *noesis* (in the sense of direct contact with things).

Likewise, Nishitani's claim that from the field of emptiness "we could even take a second look at all of our activity and see it as nothing other than an 'action of non-action.'" (RN 121-2) means that action emerges elementally from our direct engagement with things in the world, hence the action of non-action is the *apocatastasis* of action. And his affirmation that from the field of emptiness "knowledge and praxis are one" (RN 122) means that by virtue of apocatastasis knowledge and action are at root bound together: True knowing requires active engagement, while effective action requires living co-projection. Knowledge without action is numb, action without knowledge is blind.

The viewpoint of co-projection might sound like relativism. However, Nishitani does not suggest that all viewpoints and opinions are equally valid and there is no criterion or middle ground to discern which of them are better. Quite the contrary, we can know things as they are. But we can only know them in perspective. Therefore, every articulation of the thing into concepts is incomplete. If we substitute our concept of the thing for the thing itself, we miss the latter. Still, the thing itself, in its suchness, is the very criterion for discerning which accounts of it are better than others.

Our articulation of things (our conceptual account of them) will be correct to the extent that we let them manifest, i.e. impinge upon us as they come. In other words, the elemental criterion for knowledge is *attunement* with the thing. We learn, understand and know to the degree that we are attuned with reality. Nishitani exemplifies and explains attunement through a reference to the famous haiku poet Bashō:

> From the pine tree
> learn of the pine tree,
> And from the bamboo
> of the bamboo. (quoted in RN 128, NKC 10: 145)

According to Nishitani, Bashō's poem expresses the idea that we learn about things like the pine tree or the bamboo only if we committedly engage with them, only if we attune ourselves to the suchness of these things.

To summarize: In the case of mental life, circuminsessional interpenetration consists in the living co-projection of mind and things. It is living because it can only manifest as a continuous activity within the world—thus never in isolation. That is, mental activity requires engagement with concrete things and attunement with their mode of being. It is co-projection because engagement and attunement with things shape our mind and simultaneously condition the mode in which things present their suchness to us.

Mind and world continually co-emerge. In its turn, meaning emerges out of this co-projection as a reality: the reality that expresses the relatedness between mind and things. True knowledge can emerge out of this relatedness to the extent that mind is in attunemenent with things. That is, knowledge requires our full engagement with things in the world. Precisely in the level of co-projection can self-awareness be understood as the twofold realization (actualization/appropriation) of reality.

c) The Study of Mind

An existential approach to mind as the one just presented evidently opposes reductionism. Mind is not reducible to computational, neuronal, or any other type of purely mechanical processes, necessary as they may be. Even more, an existential approach opposes the computational paradigm. The reason why such paradigm does not work is that it fails to acknowledge mind's relational character and all the consequences thereof. It presents the mind as a computer which can be defined rather independently of any environmental factors. Likewise, no self-confined model of knowledge can aspire to elucidate its nature. Mind is the activity of the whole individual consisting in its engagement with things in the form of attunement to them. The form of this attunement is the co-projection of mind and things.

None of this, however, should lead us to think that an existential approach is incompatible with science. Nishitani's perspective seems close to some approaches in cognitive science that also take distance from the computational paradigm. For instance, Francisco Varela's enactivism is based on basically the same point that we have often repeated above. Mind and world, he argues, do not pre-exist mental life, but incessantly co-emerge throughout the course of it (cf. Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 2017). More interestingly, he recognizes and briefly explores the affinities between his perspective and Nishitani's thought (ibid. 239-43).

As another example, researchers such as Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi argue that the basic awareness of our own experience is not reflective (hence does not emerge out of self-conscious cognition), but rather precedes reflection. That is, it is found at the root of experience, hence of cognition as well (2014). In general terms, we have observed how Nishitani makes the same claim and, even more, analyzes self-awareness in ontological terms: It is, to its full extent, an event belonging to reality.

Finally, Peter Hobson's approach to the development of cognition makes relatedness central. In his book entitled *The Cradle of Thought. Exploring the Origins of Thinking* (2004), he attempts to conjoin results from natural selection theory, cognitive science, and

even psychology and psychoanalysis in order to build up an empirically testable, relational account of the development of cognition. His basic hypothesis is that human cognitive capacities develop out of the relationships that we establish with other human beings from the first days of our lives. Average cognitive abilities cannot develop properly if those relationships are disturbed. This implies that the emotional features of such social relatedness, especially empathy, bear upon the development of cognition. In words that at first sight appear to echo Nishitani's knowing of not-knowing or action of non-action, Hobson declares: "It is only because of what happens before thought that thought becomes possible." (29). To be fair, he refers to the early years of human life, but it is still suggestive that he situates in a middle ground between subjectivity and objectivity in order to explain the emergence of cognitive activity, as Varela or Nishitani do.

In general, it sounds tempting to continue exploring the possible connections between Nishitani's approach to mind and scientific models as the ones referred above. Such exploration, however, would distract us from our main point. Turning back to our discussion of reductionism and nonreductionism, we should now finish with the specific case of religion. As we will be able to observe, religion's nonreducibility is based on the nonreducibility of reality and mind.

6.3 The Specific Level: Religion

In a few opportunities, Nishitani makes his opposition to religion's reduction explicit. Let us see how these passages can be articulated and where such nonreductionism leads.

The first passage appears at the very beginning of *Religion and Nothingness* (in the book's preface). There he claims that religion should not be explained only by appeal to something immanent in the human (as earlier philosophies of religion did):

> All philosophies of religion up until now [...] have based themselves on something "immanent" in man such as reason or intuition or feeling [...]. Consequently, our considerations here take their stand at the point that traditional philosophies of religion have broken down or been broken through. In that sense, they may be said to go along with contemporary existential philosophies, all of which include a standpoint of "transcendence" of one sort or another. (RN xlix)

Religion involves, as he remarks, *transcendence*. Indeed, if the religious quest pushes the individual forward in search of an answer to the question of meaning, then it is only satisfied through means that transcend the searching individual's limited understanding (appropriation) of reality. Were religion reducible to some factor (or combination of factors) immanent to the human, then it could not

have any value as understanding—even less as knowledge. Clearly, Nishitani would never accept that result: For him, within our religious life lies the key to the disclosure of the knowledge that can resolve the problem of meaning.

However, religion should neither be explained in terms of anything external, be that economic factors, utility, or whatever else (1990 184, RN 1-2). As much as the mind should not be reduced to anything external or immanent to it, religion should not as well. This correlation, we might add, is not casual. The transcendence of religion is intrinsically linked to the nature of understanding as mind-thing co-projection and the nature of reality as relatedness. The religious quest is the yearning of the confinement-stricken individual for re-attunement and reconnection with reality.

In another passage, Nishitani expresses his rationale for rejecting religion's reduction in more positive terms. Its main point is what we referred to in chapter 3 as the first-personly character of religion:

> [R]eligion is at all times the individual affair of each individual. [...] Accordingly, we cannot understand what religion is from the outside. The religious quest alone is the key to understanding it; there is no other way. This is the

> most important point to be made regarding the essence of religion. (1982 2).

Therefore, there is something to know about religious life that can only be known *within* religious life itself. And that something is no less than its essence. This does not mean, however, that religion is *sui generis*. In general, let us remember, any particular thing can only be known from its own actuality. More precisely, it can only be known if returned to its own home-ground. It is no different in the case of religion.

Moreover, observing from within is not introspection or any other form of subjective self-confinement. The contrast of the "within" over against the "without" does not mean inside over against outside our private mental lives. Instead, the perspective from "within" means from inside the place where the fact can be known. And it can be known only from the place of its emergence, i.e. from its home-ground. In our present case, the fact is religious life and its home-ground is the individual itself insofar as it is shaped by its relatedness with the rest of reality. Such is the point of the first-person perspective in existential terms. Likewise, observing religious life "without" means to regard it either outside such elemental relatedness or in isolation from it.

A third passage is related to religious doubt (which is intrinsic to the religious quest). The Great Doubt, says Nishitani, is a real occurrence. It produces its own psychological state, but it is not reducible to it:

> [...] it would be an error to regard the self-presentation of the Great Doubt as a kind of psychological state that takes place in the course of religious practice [...]. In the state of Doubt, the self is concentrated single-mindedly on the doubt alone, to the exclusion of everything else, and *becomes* the pure doubt itself [...]. Of course, the fact remains that when doubt is concentrated on and brooded over, it produces its own psychological state. When we speak of a grief "deep enough to drown the world and oneself with it," or of a joy that "sets one's hands a-flutter and one's feet a-dancing," we have this same sense of single-mindedness or of *becoming* what one experiences. But it [...] is not to be interpreted as a mere psychological state. (RN 19, cf. ibid. 17-20, 21-2)

Nishitani, let us remember, remarks that this doubt is a reality. In the Great Doubt, the self does not simply feel the anxiety or despair of great difficulties of life, but becomes aware of the nihility underlying its own existence and the existence of all things. That is the first step towards the *realization* by means of which the self awakes to its true suchness, and simultaneously things present in

their true suchness to the self. To recall the terms of the previous section, the Great Doubt discloses the path toward understanding as attunement between mind and thing. This attunement, as already mentioned, is the basis of knowing. This way, the religious quest can be interpreted as having a *noetic* character—not epistemic, since *episteme* is just cognitive knowing.

Indeed, if religion is the real self-awareness of reality, then it is the realization of knowledge. But what is the matter of knowledge here? It is reality as a whole to the extent that we face it as finite creatures. In other words, the subject of religious knowledge is the grasping (or understanding) of meaning. Now, as we have discussed it in earlier pages, meaning encompasses not only what reality is, but also what it ought to be. Fully *engaged* in the place where knowledge can emerge (co-projection of mind and things), fully *attuned* to facts just as they are, the individual can aspire to understand not only what it is indeed the case, but also to find therein the key to resolving what ought to be done.

Summing it all up, religious wisdom is an existential transcendent noesis. The religious quest is a demand for such type of knowledge. As I believe, this is the cornerstone of the apocatastatic case against religion's reduction. But now we should further clarify such case. In

brief, we can distinguish between two sides thereof: the pragmatic and the theoretical.

In pragmatic terms, the main problem with reduction is that it does not satisfy the religious demand because it excludes the "ought" from its picture of reality. The religious quest, let us insist, is the human pursuit of reality *as a whole*: *is* and *ought*, fact and value, matter and form, the inert and the animate, the universal and the particular. It is not an ordinary search (i.e. a search for a particular object or goal). Its point is not to make sense of a certain thing or fact, not even of a certain class of facts, but *to make sense of this all*, of reality itself, of life itself. The answer to this quest needs to be normative. It is not enough to know the facts. Thus it seems impossible that science explains all there is to explain about religion.

I think this can be evinced not only in situations of evident loss of meaning (like those that Nishitani refers to as examples). As already explained, the religious quest is not simply a quest for a happy life or peace of mind. It is not about the self-confined self looking for something it now lacks. It is about the self confronted with losing *everything*: losing its own being and the being of all things (in a word, losing the sense of it all).

This may well be enough to ground the claim that reduction is not satisfactory in practical terms, but still not enough to hold that it does not work. What if it is the case that all there is to know about religion is facts, and any normative content it may have is arbitrary? If that is so, there might still be room for reduction to work in theoretical terms. Yet we can plausibly argue that it does not, either.

The theoretical side to the existential case against reduction goes as follows. Religion is irreducible *to the extent that* its knowledge claims can be deemed valid, i.e. to the extent that the religious quest can in one way or another lead to genuine existential transcendent noesis, hence to *transrational knowledge* (of reality). It does not seem that any a priori argument is enough to prove the validity of religious noesis or to establish, once and for all, its possibility. Still, we can argue for its plausibility.

What we can add in that direction is that nonreductionism of reality and mind imply nonreductionism of religion, as well as the other way around. If we accept the first two, we cannot help conceding the latter as well. On the other hand, religion, as we have interpreted it here, depends for its fulfillment on reality and mind not being entirely analyzable and reducible to purely mechanical, inert factors. Two correlative consequences follow. First, if there is any room for religious claims to truth as we have interpreted in light of

Nishitani's philosophy, then there is no room for reductionism. Conversely, if reductionism is correct, then there is no place for religious claims to truth. In brief, nonreductionism of reality, mind, and religion are inseparable. They belong to the same project of returning to the home-ground of being, essentially incompatible with reductionism. Still, whether such project is possible, let us insist, can only be proven by giving it a try.

CONCLUSIONS

Nishitani shares with the suigenerists the lack of a technical understanding of reduction. However, as we have seen before, he is not concerned with it as a methodological issue (i.e. the question “Is it legitimate to conduct the study of religion using reductionist approaches? If so, which approaches?”), but rather with a more fundamental level of the topic, to wit, reductionism as a worldview. At this level, it can be observed how the controversy over reductionism and religion consists at root in the clash between two incompatible perspectives on what it means to understand reality: the perspective of analysis-only (reductionism) and the perspective of religion.

From such line of inquiry, whatever we should say about the logical or epistemological problems it may entail, the main objection to reductionism is existential. It defers solution to the problem of meaning. It pushes us to trace meaning back into the past or onto the future, but by this very movement it forces us to permanently push it out of our reach. It leaves us in existential wandering.

However, we have suggested that, from an existential perspective, reduction is misguided apocatastasis. Then reductionism is not entirely wrong. Reductionists, no less than religious persons, are

motivated at root by the intention of returning to the home-ground of being, where it is possible to regain contact with reality. This return can then enable us to truly understand reality and, on that base, help us to guide our action in a way that we can find worth in it and solve our problems. However, as they find themselves in the predicament of continually displacing (deferring) resolution, reductionists become their own obstacle. Meanwhile, they lose sight of the possibility that here and now we can find the conditions for solving the problem of meaning. By means of a reorientation to the here and now, reductionists can reorient their course toward genuine return to the home-ground. The whole case of the present dissertation can be then taken as the need of such reorientation and transformation of reductionism in the direction of genuine apocatastasis.

In this scenario, the challenge for religion is deeper than showing the validity of its truth claims. Moreover, it needs to accept mechanical science as a mediation toward a form of development that sets it free from dependence on the metaphysical content of myth and belief, and at the same time releases their existential content. Only then can religion find its way in the modern world.

On the other hand, the challenge for science is to embrace the fullness of reality. Not only inertness and mechanism, but also animacy and relatedness. Not only quantity and measure, but also quality and form. Only this way can science elude the trap of reductionism described above and, at the same time, prove that its development does not threaten the aspiration of so many people to make sense of reality as a whole and find their place in it.

Indeed, one of the characteristic marks of the existential critique to reductionism is that while it does not surrender in its fearless critique of science, it does not fall to the temptation of antagonizing with it. Science and religion alike are treated here not as allies to defend or enemies to defeat. Rather, they are treated with a "medical" conscience: The crucial thing is to detect the diseases that affect them, diagnose them, and show the cure.

Science, therefore, ought to be returned to an authentically attuned knowledge of reality. But if we follow this reasoning, religion ought to be thus returned as well. In the long run, none of them have any privilege over the other, except that attuned knowledge of reality

can only be recovered through the religious quest. Still, it would be fair to judge that, at least in our times, religion without science is naive, and science without religion is meaningless.

However, in which place can science and religion encounter? Is it possible for us to both benefit from technological progress and spiritual fulfillment? We have earlier explored an answer of these questions in terms of existential demythologization. By means of existential demythologization, we find in the very indifference of nature, which may take everything that is meaningful to us without distinguishing between the fair and the unfair, the nondifferentiation that affords all the conditions whereby each of us without discrimination can construct meaningfulness. Within the very mechanical operation of natural law, which itself has no purpose or significance, can we find the clues to solve the problem of meaning. It is possible as long as we fully engage in existential attunement with these laws (in the long run, with reality itself), in the very here and now, so that we can embody them and, to put it somehow poetically, become the incarnation of the free creator of values that Nietzsche envisioned, or of the one who comes empty-handed and

accepts whatever may come in full hope that every single instant is an opportunity for realization.

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