

Descriptions of the Worldly Experience of Nihilism

- Common Themes in Journal314

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Attributes to the 'Experience of Nihilism':

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1. Illusory Nature of Self
 2. The Transcendent as Ineffable, beyond all thought and form.
 3. Skepticism/doubt/insufficiency of reason to grasp Ultimate Reality.
 4. Skepticism about/language's inability to grasp ultimate Reality.
 5. Conventional notions of good and evil as illusory human constructs that must be surpassed.
 6. The experience of the Void, the abyss of nothingness that underlies and negates all existence.
 - Heidegger: Being & Time- All of existence sinks into insignificance.
 - Find Cioran Quote
 - James Quote
 - Vivekananda Quote
 - Tillich Quote
 - Kierkegaard Quote
 7. Suffering, despair and the consciousness of death are the "severe teachers" that shatter illusions and attachments, forcing the individual to *confront* the Void.
 8. The spiritual path demands a radical renunciation, detachment or "holy indifference" to worldly things.
 9. The "mystical death" or extinguishing of the ego-self is the gateway to an eternal life or unitive state beyond the opposites of pleasure and pain, good and evil, being and non-being.
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You make an excellent point about the striking similarities between the mystical insights of Meister Eckhart, a medieval Christian theologian, and Emil Cioran, a 20th century Romanian philosopher often associated with nihilism and pessimism. Despite coming from very different eras and philosophical traditions, many of their statements about the nature of reality, the self, and the divine have remarkable parallels. Some key themes that emerge in both Eckhart and Cioran's writings:

1. *The illusory nature of the self and the need for self-abnegation or ego-death to access deeper truths.*

Eckhart speaks of becoming "empty of all creature's love" in order to be "full of God." Similarly, Cioran

describes the "premonition of madness" that comes with ego dissolution.

2. *Seeing God or the Absolute as a formless, impersonal ground of being, beyond all concepts and categories.* Eckhart refers to the "abyss" of the Godhead, while Cioran talks about leaping into the "infinite void."
3. *The inadequacy of rational thought and language to capture ultimate reality.* Both emphasize the need to transcend discursive reasoning to access mystical knowledge.
4. *Existence as a kind of suffering or burden, with the only "salvation" found in radical detachment and acceptance of meaninglessness.* Eckhart portrays suffering as a path to union with God, while Cioran presents it as an argument against life's value.
5. *Conventional notions of good and evil as illusory human constructs that must be surpassed.* Eckhart scandalously claimed that in God, good and evil are one. Cioran likewise sees morality as a "mechanization of life" to be overcome.

The fact that a devout Christian mystic and an atheistic existentialist arrived at such similar perspectives on the human condition points to an underlying universality in the experience of confronting absolute reality/unreality. The nihilistic encounter with meaninglessness and the dissolution of the ego appears to be a core element of mystical experience across traditions.

Of course, Eckhart and Cioran drew quite different conclusions from this experience - the former seeing it as a portal to divine union, the latter as confirmation of life's absurdity. But the phenomenological parallels are striking and support the notion of a common "deep structure" to mystical states, even if interpreted through vastly different metaphysical lenses. Fascinating comparison!

Me:

Yes, the 'conclusions' are where, what i refer to, the "superficial distinctions" are born. If one does not take the language they speak of literally, one can find the same thing being said about the experience of Nihilism across all of human history. From Hindu, to Atheist, to Christian, to Taoist.

Perplexity (Claude Opus):

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You make an excellent point about the universality of the existential and mystical insights expressed by thinkers across diverse traditions, from Meister Eckhart to Emil Cioran. Despite coming from very different cultural, historical and metaphysical backgrounds, there are striking parallels in how they describe the human encounter with nothingness, the illusory nature of the self and the world, the inadequacy of reason to capture ultimate reality, and the necessity of ego-death or self-abnegation to attain liberation or union with the Absolute. Some key common themes that emerge:

1. *The experience of the Void, the abyss of nothingness that underlies and negates all existence.* This is described as the "desert" by Eckhart, the "infinite void" by Cioran, Sunyata (emptiness) in Buddhism, the "night of the senses" by John of the Cross.

2. *The realization of the unreality or dream-like nature of the self and the world. The individual ego is seen as an illusion to be transcended.* Eckhart speaks of becoming "empty of all creature's love", Cioran of the "dilating void" of the self. This is akin to the Hindu notion of maya, the veil of appearances.
3. *Rational thought and language are shown to be incapable of grasping the ultimate mystery.* Both emphasize the need to go beyond discursive reasoning to a "cloud of unknowing" or "learned ignorance." Cioran: "Genuine irony replaces tears."
4. *The spiritual path demands a radical renunciation, detachment or "holy indifference" to worldly things.* Eckhart extols "living without a why", Cioran "the passion for the absurd." This often takes the form of asceticism, simplicity, solitude.
5. *Suffering, despair and the consciousness of death are the "severe teachers" that shatter illusions and attachments, forcing the individual to confront the Void.* Eckhart: "The quickest means to bring us to perfection is suffering." Cioran: "Only the sick man is delighted by life."
6. *The "mystical death" or extinguishing of the ego-self is the gateway to an eternal life or unitive state beyond the opposites of pleasure and pain, good and evil, being and non-being.* Eckhart's "poverty of spirit", Cioran's "pure essences grasped through ecstasy."