

The Uncanny Illusion of Naturalism (Edit)

-Awaken, Material Nightmare-

** #edits **

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#Nihiltheism , #naturalism

"I know that I must either find a way to move beyond the theistic patterns of the past in search for a new way to speak of and to engage the ultimate reality that I call God, or be honest about living in a godless world." Spong

"...even if God did exist, that would change nothing." Sartre

"...practical men tell us, 'don't bother your heads with such nonsense as religion and metaphysics. Live here; this is a very bad world indeed, but make the best of it.' Which put in plain language means, live a hypocritical, lying life, a life of continuous fraud, covering all sores in the best way you can. Go on putting patch after patch, until everything is lost, and you are a mass of patchwork. This is what is called practical life. Those that are satisfied with this patchwork will never come to religion. Religion begins with a tremendous dissatisfaction with the present state of things, with our lives, and a hatred, an intense hatred, for this patching up of life, an unbounded disgust for fraud and lies. He alone can be religious who dares say, as the mighty Buddha once said under the Bo-tree, when this idea of practicality appeared before him and he saw that it was nonsense, and yet could not find a way out." Vivekananda

Many have spoken of the Nihilistic experience properly, but almost all turn their back from Nihilism and flee into some activity of distraction. As Heidegger says, one is always falling back into the world.

"Throwness is neither a 'fact that is finished' nor a fact that is settled. Dasein's facticity is such that as long as it is what it is, Dasein remains in the throw, and is sucked into the turbulence of the 'They's' inauthenticity." pg. 223

"In everydayness Dasein can undergo dull 'suffering', sink away in the dullness of it, and evade it by seeking new ways in which its dispersion in its affairs may be further dispersed. In the moment of vision, indeed, and often just 'for that moment', existence can even gain the mastery over the "everyday"; but it can never extinguish it." Heidegger

"Nothing is so plain from the course of the existential analytic so far, as the Fact that the ontology of Dasein is always falling back upon the allurements of the way in which Being ordinarily understood." Heidegger pg. 439

This divided-self, this double-mindedness, is one in which there is no escape. To make clear, this 'always falling' has been, at least within Western, Christian cultures, painted with the mythological language of 'original sin' (or with a scientific, evolutionary tale that reduces consciousness and all of its phenomenons as a mistake or accident). This unbridgeable disconnect between the finite and the Infinite has been excepted only 'intellectually' while shunned, in action, by almost all with their 'solutions' and 'answers', except the rare few who have the 'stamina' to renounce the world in its entirety and who hold that reality is simply an unreality.

"Meanwhile time passes. If outward help comes, then life returns to the despairer, he begins where he left off; he had no self, and a self he did not become, but he continues to live on with only the quality of immediacy. If outward help does not come, then in real life something else commonly occurs. Life comes back into him after all, but "he never will be himself again," so he says. He now acquires some little understanding of life, he learns to imitate the other men, noting how they manage to live, and so he too lives after a sort. In Christendom he too is a Christian, goes to church every Sunday, hears and understands the parson, yea, they understand one another; he dies; the parson introduces him into eternity for the price of \$10 -- but a self he was not, and a self he did not become." Kierkegaard

"A thinker erects an immense building, a system, a system which embraces the whole of existence and world-history etc. -- and if we contemplate his personal life, we discover to our astonishment this terrible and ludicrous fact, that he himself personally does not live in this immense high-vaulted palace, but in a barn alongside of it, or in a dog kennel, or at the most in the porter's lodge. If one were to take the liberty of calling his attention to this by a single word, he would be offended. For he has no fear of being under a delusion, if only he can get the system completed...by means of the delusion." Kierkegaard

"In spite of the fact that a man is in despair he can perfectly well live on in the temporal, in fact all the better for it; he may be praised by men, be honored and esteemed, and pursue all the aims of temporal life. What is called worldliness is made up of just such men, who (if one may use the expression) pawn themselves to the world. They use their talents, accumulate money, carry on worldly affairs, calculate shrewdly, etc., etc., are perhaps mentioned in history, but themselves they are not; spiritually understood, they have no self, no self for whose sake they could venture everything, no self before God -- however selfish they may be for all that." Kierkegaard

"Is not despair simply double-mindedness? For what is despairing other than to have two wills?" Kierkegaard

"Thus did my two wills, one new, and the other old, one carnal, the other spiritual, struggle within me; and by their discord, undid (tore) my soul (apart)." St. Augustine

"...give me beauty in the inward soul; and may the outward and inward man be at one." Plato

"Two enemies- the same man divided." Cioran

"Natural good is not simply insufficient in amount and transient, there lurks a falsity in its very being. Cancelled as it all is by death if not by earlier enemies, it gives no final balance, and can never be the thing intended for our lasting worship. It keeps us from our real good, rather; and renunciation and despair of it are our first step in the direction of the truth. There are two lives, the natural and the spiritual, and we must lose the one before we can participate in the other." James

"I and You drown; humanity that but now confronted the deity is absorbed into it; glorification, deification, universal unity have appeared. But when one returns into the wretchedness of daily turmoil, transfigured and exhausted, and with a knowing heart reflects on both, is one not bound to feel that Being is split, with one part abandoned to hopelessness?" Buber

"Nature her self, apparently, will torment thee, she being always an Enemy to the Spirit, which in depriving her of sensible Pleasures, remains Weak, Melancholy, and full of Irksomeness, so that it feels a Hell in all Spiritual Exercises, particularly in that of Prayer, hence it grows extremely impatient to be at an end of it, through the uneasiness of Thoughts, the lassitude of Body, importunate Sleep, and the not being able to curb the Senses, every one of which would for its own share, follow its own Pleasure." Molinos

A Jew, a Christian, a Nihilist. There's a 'Hindu' in there too somewhere.

The naturalistic side of humanity, which constantly pulls one down into the world, into the concerns of the finite, into taking serious the transitory nature of all worldly things, cannot be overcome. The divided-self, the falling nature of man, the 'pulling' in contrary directions as existing as both simultaneously natural and Transcendent, is one that comes with great insights as part of the human condition. This split within the human consciousness helps explain the way in which people cannot live up to the ideals of philosophy/theology/religion etc. and are doomed to be pulled back down, in all its depravity, into the world leaving one with a feeling of 'being guilty'.

"The common sense of the "They" knows only the satisfying of manipulable rules and public norms and the failure to satisfy them. It reckons up infractions of them and tries to balance them off. It has slunk away from its ownmost Being-guilty so as to be able to talk more loudly about making "mistakes"... Though the call gives no information, it is not merely critical; it is positive, in that it discloses Dasein's most primordial potentiality-for-Being as Being-guilty.." Heidegger

There is a never ending frustration within the divided nature of human consciousness for which the consequence is described as guilt. The conception of 'guilt', under Heidegger's analysis, gets rescued from a worldly stuckness of a feeling of owing something to someone else or not living up to another's worldly ideals or 'oughts'. 'Guilt', in its existential sense, stems from the 'always falling' condition, as being dragged around by a pure naturalism, as not even attempting to recognize the possibility of one's True-Self. Guilt is not for others, guilt is directed at oneself in the frustrated state of the Natural man who, as Becker puts it, is both 'worm and god'; a 'god who shits'. In Nihilism, others become insignificant and the Original Self becomes one's fascination; there is no longer a feeling of 'owing' anyone or anything. How

different, then, is this Self, this inner Transcendent intuition that 'separates' itself from the purely Natural side of man, from the Other? Are they one in the same?

“on the heights of despair, the passion for the absurd is the only thing that can still throw a demonic light on chaos. When all the current reasons- moral, esthetic, religious, social, and so on - no longer guide one's life, how can one sustain life without succumbing to nothingness?” Cioran

This 'fascination' with the Transcendent side of the Self takes the form of a renunciation of the world and a turning inward. Only those who are trapped in the game of human morality attempt to 'save' others. Non-movement, a negative 'morality', is left in place of the denial of material concerns. Vivekananda puts it this way:

“Charity is great, but the moment you say it is all, you run the risk of running into materialism...You Christians, have you found nothing else in the Bible than working for fellow creatures, building hospitals?...The architect of the universe is going to be taught by the carpenters! He has left the world a dirty hole, and you are going to make it a beautiful place! That sort of practical religion is good, not bad; but it is just kindergarten religion. It leads nowhere.”

“To have faith one must remain passive vis-a-vis the world. The believer must not do anything.” Cioran

“I know hereby what advantage belongs to doing nothing (with a purpose). There are few in the world who attain to the teaching without words, and the advantage arising from non-action...Heaven and earth do not act from (the impulse of) any wish to be benevolent; they deal with all things as the dogs of grass are dealt with. The sages do not act from (any wish to be) benevolent; they deal with the people as the dogs of grass are dealt with.” Tao Te Ching

And Luther maybe puts it most damningly, paraphrasing the influential figure of 'Jesus': “How far different from this is the instruction of Christ: that, we should rather despise the whole world!”

St. Seraphim Rose is emphatically against any sort of 'utopian' thinking or 'doing good': “First and foremost I radically question the emphasis upon “action” itself, upon “projects” and “planning,” upon concern with the “social” and what man can do about it—all of which acts to the detriment of acceptance of the given, of what God gives us at this moment, as well as of allowing His will to be done, not ours.” He reiterates contrary to human morality: “...it lies, not in the area of “political commitments” and “social responsibilities...If, in so doing, we help to ameliorate or abolish a social evil, that is a good thing—but that is not our goal.”

“The philosophical portion denounces all work however good, and all pleasure, as loving and kissing wife, husband or children, as useless. According to this doctrine all good works and pleasures are nothing but foolishness and in their very nature impermanent. "All this must come to an end sometime, so end it now; it is vain.” Vivekananda

"...it proceeds to 'disvalue' together with the self the tribe to which the person belongs, and indeed, together with that, all existence in general." Otto

"Heaven and earth do not act from (the impulse of) any wish to be benevolent; they deal with all things as the dogs of grass are dealt with. The sages do not act from (any wish to be) benevolent; they deal with the people as the dogs of grass are dealt with." Taoism

"The slime of personal and emotional love is remotely similar to the water of the Godhead's spiritual being, but of inferior and of insufficient quantity...human beings can do something to mitigate the horrors of their situation by 'keeping one another wet with their slime.' But there can be no happiness or safety in time and no deliverance into eternity, until they give up thinking that slime is enough and, by abandoning themselves to what is in fact their element, call back the eternal waters...the modern idolaters of progress...prefer an agonizing and impossible existence on dry land to love, joy and peace in our native ocean." Huxley

"what should i do? work for a social and political system, make a girl miserable? hunt for weaknesses in philosophical systems, fight for moral and esthetic ideals? it's all too little." Cioran

"No one has power over the body or over the world. That means there is nothing we can do: let the world exist for itself as it pleases or as it thinks best; we shall learn, and teach others, to do without the world and without the body that belongs to this world." Shestov

"All these experimented virtues make a brilliant showing; for an instant they are enchanting like an oriental poem: such self-control, such firmness, such ataraxia, etc., border almost on the fabulous. Yes, they do to be sure; and also at the bottom of it all there is nothing." Kierkegaard

The positive outlook is pathetic. 'Positivity' is giving up, a fleeing from Nihilism. The Pathetic person wants to say that everything is alright, that every thing is "just fine". It's to ignore our condition. In other words, it's to ignore existence. It is the truly lazy mentality, which the non-movement of the Nihilist is so often accused of. The Nihilist does not like what she sees around her. She shuts down, since there is no ultimate difference in her actions. There is no such thing as "progress", only mere change from one state of affairs to the next; the definition of arbitrary. The Pathetic person is trying to hold on to their secret. The Pathetic person, instead of retreating into despair pretends to conquer existence by never fully facing it; most of the time running away from it as fast as their distractions will take them.

The Pathetic person has surrendered, yet continues to pretend, to go through the motions, day after day, with that forced smile upon their face. What kind of existence is worse than this? What a sham! The person who acts out in the world, promotes "progress", actually helps others, etc., is still nothing more, regardless of all the kicking and screaming, than the frozen figure of "positivity". There is nothing but fake, inauthentic movements that simulate a life. There is nothing but insignificant change in an insignificant life. Progressive movements are nonsensical.

The negative appropriation of Nihilism simply exemplifies that the distractions of life have not broken down for such a person; the stranglehold of illusion that worldly meaning has is cancerous to the Transcendental. Worldly meaning spreads into and infects all aspects of our existence, allowing even the most mundane and ridiculous actions to be experienced as 'meaningful'. Assuming an intrinsic value to their being, the finite, nonsensical, ignorant existence of the human is put forth as an ideal with what seems as a complete disregard for the horrific consequences of such a perspective. The words of Kempus have still not traveled far enough: "He is the truly wise man, who counteth all earthly things as dung...". Ligotti makes this point in his unrelentingly pessimistic tone when he declares: "As a threat to human continuance, nihilism is as dead as God." A participation with, rather than a fleeing from, is necessary to bring out Nihilism's uttermost forms. Why would anyone want to 'participate' in Nihilism?

"I am wrong in saying 'security,' for there is no security in this life; understand that in such

cases I always imply: 'If they do not cease to continue as they have begun.' What misery to live in this world! We are like men whose enemies are at the door, who must not lay aside their arms, even while sleeping or eating, and are always in dread lest the foe should enter the fortress by some breach in the walls. How canst Thou wish us to prize such a wretched existence?" Theresa of Avila

"The general acceptance of a doctrine that denies meaning and value to the world as a whole, while assigning them in a supreme degree to certain arbitrarily selected parts of the totality, can only have evil and disastrous results...We have thought of ourselves as members of supremely meaningful and valuable communities – deified nations, divine classes and what not – existing within a meaningless universe." Huxley

Instead, the unreality of the world is pushed forth in a form of either an ironically morbid 'optimism' or a blindfolded indifference. One sees this everyday as he confronts another unthinking robot who projects a labored smile as he speaks through his teeth about 'how great it is to be alive.' Or the restrained shudder of inconvenience that comes from one who has just heard the news that a relative or friend has died.

"only the sick man is delighted by life and praises it so that he won't collapse." Cioran

"Once a fishwife was a guest in the house of a gardener who raised flowers. She came there with her empty basket, after selling fish in the market, and was asked to sleep in a room where flowers were kept. But, because of the fragrance of the flowers, she couldn't get to sleep for a long time. Her hostess saw her condition and said, 'Hello! Why are you tossing from side to side so restlessly?' The fishwife said: 'I don't know, friend. Perhaps the smell of the flowers has been disturbing my sleep. Can you give me my fish-basket? Perhaps that will put me to sleep.'" So with us. The majority of mankind delights in this fish smell — this world, this enjoyment of the senses, this money and wealth and chattel and wife and children. All this nonsense of the world — this fishy smell — has grown upon us. We can hear nothing beyond it, can see nothing beyond it; nothing goes beyond it. This is the whole universe." Vivekananda

"The soulish-bodily synthesis in every man is planned with a view to being spirit, such is the building; but the man prefers to dwell in the cellar, that is, in the determinants of sensuousness. And not only does he prefer to dwell in the cellar; no, he loves that to such a degree that he becomes furious if anyone would propose to him to occupy the bel etage which stands empty at his disposition- for in fact he is dwelling in his own house." Kierkegaard

"And this corporeal element, my friend, is heavy and weighty and earthy, and is that element of sight by which a soul is depressed and dragged down again into the visible world..." Plato

"...each pleasure and pain is a sort of nail which nails and rivets the soul to the body." Plato

"They shall wear elegant and ornamented robes, carry a sharp sword at their girdle, pamper themselves in eating and drinking, and have a superabundance of property and wealth;— such (princes) may be called robbers and boasters. This is contrary to the Tao surely!" Taoism

The illusory, subjective nature of all value judgments that pushes us forward, damning us to constantly make value judgments within a valueless world, with our inability to refrain from valuations, is Absurd. As 'solutions' to the Absurd, there are some who put forth a sense of irony, as suggested by Nagel, while others assert various forms of 'indifference'. And while these may be the closest conception of 'equanimity' that one can seemingly grasp in the face of Nihilism, this is still only a process of reasoning about Nihilism, and therefore will be drowned in the encounter with Nihilism. Irony or indifference are effectual to those who are still only 'intellectualizing', rather than actualizing Nihilism. An 'attitude' cannot be reached through a process of one inference to another. The suggestions of irony or indifference not only fail as a 'response' due to lending itself as a distraction from any 'message' that may be found within Nihilism, if there is one to be found, but it is as derisory as requesting the healing of a bullet wound by means of deduction.

"Humanist stoicism is possible for certain individuals for a certain time: until, that is, the full implications of the denial of immortality strike home. The Liberal lives in a fool's paradise which must collapse before the truth of things. If death is, as the Liberal and Nihilist both believe, the extinction of the individual, then this world and everything in it—love, goodness, sanctity, everything—are as nothing, nothing man may do is of any ultimate consequence and the full horror of life is hidden from man only by the strength of their will to deceive themselves..." Seraphim

"The absurd man thus catches sight of a burning and frigid, transparent and limited universe in which nothing is possible but everything is given, and beyond which all is collapse and nothingness. He can then decide to accept such a universe and draw from it his strength, his refusal to hope, and the unyielding evidence of a life without consolation." Camus

The majority of unthinking humans retreat into a superficial-selfish interpretation of the religious languages of their time, into the proximity of their family relations, into the distractions of their worldly pleasures. Or as Kierkegaard puts it: "The sectarians deafen one another with their noise and clamor, keep

anxiety away with their screeching.” Heidegger says that within the noise and hustle of the world, by avoiding a confrontation with the Authentic Self, the 'They' are 'rewarded' with the illusion of 'ascending' and 'living concretely'.

“We fear that if theism is dismissed, only a bottomless pit remains...Many forms of religion are little more than cultural manifestations of the fear of nothingness. That is why people become hysterical when theism is challenged.” Spong

“for them there is only one kind of agony, the one immediately preceding the fall into absolute nothingness. only such moments of agony bring about important existential revelations in consciousness. that is why they expect everything from the end instead of trying to grasp the meaning of a slow revelatory agony. the end will reveal too little, and they will die as ignorant as they have lived.” Cioran

Nihilism is wholly-destructive to the world. The one who experiences Nihilism cannot retreat back into the world of 'things'. 'Things' are all too transparent. The world is dead. I wish to quote Tønnessen once more at length, due to both the unfortunately relative obscurity of his paper and for the clear example in which he describes the human situation:

“The world is what it seems to be to a dry, unimaginative, down to earth, square-headed stuffshirt about mid-morning after a good night's rest. And as for such questions as what it means to live and die – there's nothing to it, it is commonplace, almost everybody does it. We are thrown into an absurdly indifferent world of sticks and stones and stars and emptiness. Our “situation” is that of a man who falls out of the empire state building. Any attempt at “justifying” our brief, accelerating fall, the inconceivably short interlude between our breath-taking realization of our “situation” and our inexorable total destruction, is bound to be equally ludicrous; i.e. whether we choose to say: (a) “This is actually quite comfortable as long as it lasts, let's make the best of it.” or (b) “Let us at least do something useful while we can,” and we start counting the windows on the building. In any event, both attitudes presuppose an ability to divert ourselves from realizing our desperate “situation,” to abstract, as it were, every single moment of the “fall” out of its irreparable totality, to cut our lives up into small portions with petty, short time-span goals.”

“It is infinitely comic that a man can understand the whole truth about how wretched and petty this world is, etc. -that he can understand this, and then cannot recognize again what he understood; for almost in the same moment he himself goes off and takes part in the same pettiness and wretchedness, takes glory in it and receives glory from it, that is, accepts it.” Kierkegaard

“We cannot hide a carrion with roses; it is impossible. It would not avail long; for soon the roses would fade, and the carrion would be worse than ever before. So with our lives. We may try to cover our old and festering sores with cloth of gold, but there comes a day when the cloth of gold is removed, and the sore in all its ugliness is revealed.” Vivekananda

A relevant example of this sort of 'unthinking', or lack of realization of Transcendence, can be found within the mindset of a majority of practicing scientists today. Science, assuming some form of 'realism', as describing 'reality' with physical laws, allows one to predict and 'know' what is or will happen within the world. However, to stop at this formal description of reality is unphilosophical. The Philosopher wants to ask why the descriptions of science are the way they are. It is 'understood' that 'particles' and 'molecules' bump into one another in a particular pattern which produce the physical objects that we see around us, including ourselves. To comprehend a description of things is not to comprehend the 'Why?', i.e. what are the motives that drive seemingly mindless particles and molecules in acting in the ways in which they do? Why are there 'things', why are these 'things' following a particular rational structure, and why is there a 'building' process found within these 'living things'? These philosophical questions are shunned by a majority of mainstream scientific 'intellectuals' who are satisfied with the 'How?'. This sort of 'unthinking' is what has produced the 'optimistic' scientism of the current times.

"A "scientific" interpretation of the world as you understand it might consequently still be one of the stupidest, that is to say, the most destitute of significance, of all possible world-interpretations:-I say this in confidence to my friends the Mechanists, who today like to hobnob with philosophers, and absolutely believe that mechanics is the teaching of the first and last laws upon which, as upon a ground-floor, all existence must be built. But an essentially mechanical world would be an essentially meaningless world! Supposing we valued the worth of a music with reference to how much it could be counted, calculated, or formulated -how absurd such a " scientific " estimate of music would be! What would one have apprehended, understood, or discerned in it! Nothing, absolutely nothing of what is really "music" in it!" Nietzsche

"One would think that neuroscientists and geneticists would have as much reason to head for the cliffs because little by little they have been finding that much of our thought and behavior is attributable to neural wiring and heredity rather than to personal control over the individuals we are, or think we are. But they do not feel suicide to be mandatory just because their laboratory experiments are informing them that human nature may be nothing but puppet nature. Not the slightest tingle of uncanniness or horror runs up and down their spines, only the thrill of discovery." Ligotti

"Generally speaking, science has dulled people's minds by diminishing their metaphysical consciousness." Cioran

"If I had only to learn how an apple falls to the ground, or how an electric current shakes my nerves, I would commit suicide." Swami Vivekananda

"To pursue science, scientists must be justified by something that, strictly speaking, is not science itself, i.e. curiosity, wonder, faith in science, the will to master all knowledge, belief that

it will benefit the world, belief in pure knowledge for its own sake, or some other breach of objectivity. Because science, apparently, cannot consistently justify itself, something else must if it is to exist at all." Heisman

“In respect to science, which concerns us especially here in the university, the situation of the last few decades, a situation which remains unchanged today despite some cleansing, is easy to see. Although two seemingly different conceptions of science are now seemingly struggling against each other—science as technical and practical professional knowledge and science as a cultural value in itself—nevertheless both are moving along the same decadent path of a misinterpretation and disempowering of the spirit. In all its areas, science today is a technical, practical matter of gaining information and communicating it. No awakening of the spirit at all can proceed from it as science. Science itself needs such an awakening.”
Heidegger

“The only question is whether we are willing to fall victim to this cheap look of things and thus take the whole matter as settled, or whether we are capable of experiencing a provocative happening in this recoil of the why-question back upon itself.” Heidegger

There is a similar criticism of 'unthinking' to be made against traditional 'religious' interpretations of the human condition. Many religious interpretations of the human experience are replete with theological assumptions that are not necessarily grounded in human experience; these take the forms of rituals, prayers, moral declarations, metaphysical claims, and so on. However, a language that prepares 'answers' or 'rational defenses' rather than opening up the mystery of the Ground of all things must be labeled as a lower form of idolatry.

These assumptions, as with many religious languages, are the reason why Heidegger proclaimed that a 'Christian philosophy' was the equivalent of a 'round-square'. Heidegger's thought is that the religious languages that have so far been developed are restrictive of the human experience in that they are attempts to go beyond said experience; any descriptions of the Other is wrongheaded. In other words, religions and their subsequent theologies contain too many assumptions and 'answers' that shun the mystery of existence. Philosophy, on the other hand, as the relentless 'Why?', is what is needed in order to open up the mystery of Being, instead of closing it off and pushing it into a closet. One cannot turn the Other into the worldly, whether that attempt is through reason or myth. And while we are all idolaters, there are simpler, lower forms of idolatry, since they are not confrontations with Nihilism.

“So the despairing self is constantly building nothing but castles in the air, it fights only in the air. All these experimented virtues make a brilliant showing; for an instant they are enchanting like an oriental poem: such self-control, such firmness, such ataraxia, etc., border almost on the fabulous. Yes, they do to be sure; and also at the bottom of it all there is nothing. The self wants to enjoy the entire satisfaction of making itself into itself, of developing itself, of being itself; it wants to have the honor of this poetical, this masterly plan according to which it has understood itself. And yet in the last resort it is a riddle how it understands itself; just at the instant when it seems to be nearest to having the fabric finished it can arbitrarily resolve the whole thing into nothing.” Kierkegaard

“...philosophies and doctrines say almost nothing about death. the only valid attitude is absolute silence or a cry of despair. some people maintain that the fear of death does not have a deeper justification, because

as long as there is an i there is no death, and once dead there

is no i any longer...what comfort does this artificial distinction between the i and death offer a man who has a strong premonition of death? what meaning can logical argument or subtle thought have for someone deeply imbued with a feeling of the irrevocable? all attempts to bring existential questions onto a logical plane are null and void. philosophers are too proud to confess their fear of death and too

supercilious to acknowledge the spiritual fecundity of illness. their reflections on death exhibit

a hypocritical serenity; in fact, they tremble with fear more than anyone else. one should not forget that philosophy is the art of masking inner torments." Cioran

The lack of questioning concerning the Ground of all things, as witnessed within both the scientific community and religious community is, yet, also found (maybe most astonishingly) in the philosophical community. The lack of the experience of Nihilism, the 'intellectualizing' and worldly perspective of most philosophers is obvious when one hears discussions on The Moral Argument for God's existence, Pascal's Wager, and the Allegory of the Cave, just to name a few instances.

Right away, in the first of these examples, it should be obvious that this is not to say that one must agree with the soundness of such an argument. Rather, it is that many philosophers do not grasp the ontology, or the ground, that such an argument is attempting to bring forth. The ontology of values is shown to be misunderstood when there is an epistemological response of: "I can be a good person without God". Knowing the Good, if there were such a thing, is different from the metaphysical grounding of the Good; to not be able to make a distinction between epistemology and ontology is another example of unthinking.

"No matter how educated you are, if you don't think intensely about death, you are a mere fool. A great scholar – if he is nothing but that – is inferior to an illiterate peasant haunted by final questions." Cioran

"...he who hasn't experienced a full depression alone and over a long period of time— he is a child."
Ligotti quoting Jens Bjørneboe

"One who never thinks of the hour of his death cannot make really spiritual decisions during his life. He will never be anything more than a short-sighted opportunist whose decisions will have no lasting value."
Merton

If an observer hypothesizes death then, from that perspective, the observer has no vested interests in life and thus possible grounds for the most objective view. The more an observer is reduced to nothing, the more the observer is no longer a factor, the more the observer might set the conditions for the most rigorous objectivity...It is likely that most people will not even consider the veracity of this correlation between death and objectivity even if they understand it intellectually because most will consciously or unconsciously choose to place the interests of self-preservation over the interests of objectivity. In other words, to even consider the validity of this view assumes that one is willing and able to even consider

prioritizing objectivity over one's own self-preservation. Since it not safe to simply assume this on an individual level, let alone a social level, relatively few are willing and able to seriously address this issue (and majority consensus can be expected to dismiss the issue). In short, for most people, including most "scientists", overcoming self-preservation is not ultimately a subject for rational debate and objective discussion." Heisman

The nightmare of existence that Pascal describes so vividly, with his unrelenting claims of the utter futility of reason, as he prefaces his 'wager' is inevitably turned into some strange sort of math equation concerning probabilities. I believe a quote, at length, from Pascal is not only worthy, but necessary, since it reiterates this point directly, and also lays the groundwork for the need for a further development of a Nihilistic language...

"And if besides this he is easy and content, professes to be so, and indeed boasts of it; if it is this state itself which is the subject of his joy and vanity, I have no words to describe so silly a creature. How can people hold these opinions? What joy can we find in the expectation of nothing but hopeless misery? What reason for boasting that we are in impenetrable darkness? And how can it happen that the following argument occurs to a reasonable man? "I know not who put me into the world, nor what the world is, nor what I myself am. I am in terrible ignorance of everything. I know not what my body is, nor my senses, nor my soul, not even that part of me which thinks what I say, which reflects on all and on itself, and knows itself no more than the rest. I see those frightful spaces of the universe which surround me, and I find myself tied to one corner of this vast expanse, without knowing why I am put in this place rather than in another, nor why the short time which is given me to live is assigned to me at this point rather than at another of the whole eternity which was before me or which shall come after me. I see nothing but infinities on all sides, which surround me as an atom, and as a shadow which endures only for an instant and returns no more. All I know is that I must soon die, but what I know least is this very death which I cannot escape...Such is my state, full of weakness and uncertainty. And from all this I conclude that I ought to spend all the days of my life without caring to inquire into what must happen to me. Perhaps I might find some solution to my doubts, but I will not take the trouble, nor take a step to seek it; and after treating with scorn those who are concerned with this care, I will go without foresight and without fear to try the great event, and let myself be led carelessly to death, uncertain of the eternity of my future state." Who would desire to have for a friend a man who talks in this fashion?"

This is Pascal's Wager. The 'intellectuals' who mutate Pascal's insights into the human condition into a strange math problem concerning probabilities misses the entire environment in which the wager is put forth. This is not a casual decision made from acute calculations of 'finite losses' and 'infinite gains'. That is propaganda language on Pascal's part. As you can see from his own words above, all finitudes fall under the category of 'lost'. There are no winners here. One cannot find what one is looking for in this nightmarish existence. This is Pascal's Wager.

Another example is Plato's Allegory of the Cave when it is taken as no more than 'myth' that has no direct correlation to reality and seen with no more 'validity' than any another story contained within a 'religious' text. For instance, with reference to Plato's Cave, the same can be said about roller-coasters. Imagine there

is a builder who constructs a roller-coaster. The builder, however, never actually steps foot on the ride. If one was to ask the builder what his roller-coaster was like, what an experience of riding the roller-coaster was like, any attempt to explain the experience, regardless of the builder's knowledge of every dip, turn, curve, and flip, would lack any particular substance.

This is the exact situation most philosophers are in when they speak of Plato's Cave as 'only' a 'myth', while up at their 'prestigious' lecterns. Their lack of direct experience turns any words spewed out to be covered in ignorance at best, and dogmatism at worst. This is an empirical example of how the worldly, materialistic thinking has affected even the ones who are supposed to be the 'questioners of truth' on its deepest levels

As we will see when we come to our fuller discussion of mysticism and Entheogenic experiences, the cave allegory, as a transcendent reality, is not the type of thing that is 'believed in' or to be taken as a mere metaphor, rather it is something to be experienced first hand. When used in the proper set (environment) and setting (proper psychological preparation for participation in the experience of the Other) an uncanny world opens up that leaves any naturalistic interpretation feeling inadequate, if not utterly wrongheaded. Without making claims about the mystical-type experience 'proving' a Transcendent reality, there is a correlation between the experience and the knower that may be useful for our purposes.

This sentiment may be able to be made more clear with a mentioning of 'uncanniness'. The feeling that one is 'at home' here in the world is one that is the most common view of human experience. The casual nature in which humans scurry from one project to the next, one pursuit of 'happiness' after another, is the way the world operates on the whole. The question that a philosopher might ask is something along these lines: what is there to be 'casual' about with regards to flying around on a rock at 40,000 miles an hour, around a fireball 'about' to explode causing utter annihilation, in the 'middle' of a possibly endless void, in a possible infinitude of space and time?

That there are 'miles per hour', that there are physical 'things', that one has hands to type, made of what we refer to as 'flesh', and on and on...these are all assumptions taken as 'normal'. That you are reading these words and that they are impregnating your brain immediately as each word, one after the other, is read. Put simply, there is nothing to be casual about. Zapffe finds this 'casualness' counter to the fundamental human condition. He writes: "Such a 'feeling of cosmic panic' is pivotal to every human mind." Conversely, a fleeing from such panic, without any questioning of a deeper "Why?", is also 'pivotal' to every human mind.

In the life-story of Buddha, one hears Kierkegaard's echo: "Oh worldly men! how fatally deluded! beholding everywhere the body brought to dust, yet everywhere the more carelessly living; the heart is neither lifeless wood nor stone, and yet it thinks not 'all is vanishing!'" Then turning, he directed his chariot to go back, and no longer waste his time in wandering. How could he, whilst in fear of instant death, go wandering here and there with lightened heart!"

"Certain facts of which too keen a perception would act detrimentally to the life-force are, for most men, impossible of realization: i.e. , the uncertainty of life, the decay of the body, the vanity of all things under the sun. When we are in good health, we all feel very real, solid, and permanent; and this is of all our illusions the most ridiculous, and also the most obviously useful from the point of view of the efficiency and preservation of the race." Underhill

To overcome would be to be a god. Nietzsche's Übermensch, Kierkegaard's Knight of Faith, Heidegger's Equanimity, Vivekananda's wholly unselfish being, all are ideals that cannot be reached, at least in the form of which human beings presently exist. The mystics also attempt to claim a 'reconciliation', but this is only done in the possibility of forgetting the human situation in their fleeting moments of ecstasy. Regardless of the validity of mystical-type experiences, which do seem to hold as a foundational element of human experience, these experiences are drowned in the experience of Nihilism. Meaninglessness subsumes mysticism. Tillich expresses this precisely as an aspect of his philosophy: "The experience of meaninglessness is more radical than mysticism. Therefore it transcends the mystical experience."

Tillich, with all his comprehensive words on Nihilism, is still working within his brand of Christianity. This undue emphasis on worldly 'courage', both by himself and his readers, comes off, at best, as suspect. Is Tillich's worldly conception of 'courage' only to be held by those who have only either 'intellectualized' Nihilism or who are attempting to flee it? Tillich's own words suggest something is being lost in translation when he describes the role of meaninglessness as fundamental to the 'meaning of life':

"The answer must accept, as its precondition, the state of meaninglessness. It is not an answer if it demands the removal of this state; for that is just what cannot be done. He who is in the grip of doubt and meaninglessness cannot liberate himself from this grip but he asks for an answer which is valid within and not outside the situation of despair. He asks for the ultimate foundation of what we have called the 'courage of despair.' There is only one possible answer, if one does not try to escape the question; namely that the acceptance of despair is in itself faith. In this situation the meaning of life is reduced to despair about the meaning of life."

How does one square an emphasis on 'courage' with the rest of Tillich's philosophy that is built, one could argue entirely, upon despair and meaninglessness, as anything more than a conjuring illusion for everyday people? Does Tillich believe his own words? Is Tillich preaching a 'happy' message for the masses, instead of a 'truth' that he in the end holds to? As he was preaching 'courage', did he forget the Protestant King's words? "God forbid! Even if God were to offer me paradise in order that I might last forty more years in this life, I wouldn't want it. I'd rather hire a hangman to knock my head off. That's how bad the world is now. It's full of nothing but devils, so that one can't with anything better than a blessed end and to get away. Nor do I bother with physicians."

And how about Vivekananda, who Tillich shares a great part of his philosophy with? "I hate this world, this dream, this horrible nightmare with its churches and chicaneries, its books and blackguardisms, its fair faces and false hearts, its howling righteousness on the surface and utter hollowness beneath, and, above all, its sanctified shopkeeping." Does Tillich actually believe that this 'courage' of facing the

necessary idolatrous nature of concrete religious symbols takes priority over suicide? Is this just a facade or another example of fleeing from Nihilism? Does he truly believe in it? Or, even if all are touched by the Nihilistic experience, however lightly, is he preaching to the masses who are mostly ignorantly fleeing from the experience of Nothingness?

“See how we are flying like hunted hares from all that is terrible, and like them, hiding our heads and thinking we are safe. See how the whole world is flying from everything terrible.” Vivekananda

Ultimate skepticism and doubt are built in to the syntax of Nihilism, even in the instances of those few who have experienced something mystical and wish to interpret their experience as Transcendent. This interpretation of Nihilism is essentially locked into the human situation which is, at least in part, naturalistic. Even if one is let out of this 'prison-house' for a short period of recreation, one must be thrown back into the cell of the Nothing of the world; this is until death allows for a full escape into the Nothingness. As Pascal realized: “scepticism helps religion.”

“If you believe in God, you are mad without having gone mad.” Cioran

“Those who believe that they believe in God, but without any passion in their heart, without anguish of mind, without uncertainty, without doubt, without an element of despair even in their consolation, believe only in the God-Idea, not in God Himself.” Unamuno

'Who wants God? That is the question. Do you think the mass of people in the world want God and cannot get him? That cannot be...A disciple went to his master and said to him, "Sir, I want religion." The master looked at the young man, and did not speak, but only smiled. The young man came every day, and insisted that he wanted religion. But the old man knew better than the young man. One day, when it was very hot, he asked the young man to go to the river with him and take a plunge. The young man plunged in, and the old man followed him and held the young man down under the water by force. After the young man had struggled for a while, he let him go and asked him what he wanted most while he was under the water. "A breath of air", the disciple answered. "Do you want God in that way? If you do, you will get Him in a moment," said the master. Until you have that thirst, that desire, you cannot get religion, however you may struggle with your intellect, or your books, or your forms. Until that thirst is awakened in you, you are no better than any atheist; only the atheist is sincere, and you are not." Vivekananda

Extra Notes and Quotes

“The burden is not a local one, peculiar to those first hearers, but one which is borne by the whole human race. It consists not of political oppression or poverty or hard work. It is far deeper than that. It is felt by the rich as well as the poor for it is something from which wealth and idleness can never deliver us. The burden borne by mankind is a heavy and crushing thing.” Tozer

“You may do good works all the time. All the same, you will be the slave of your senses, you will be miserable and unhappy. You may study the philosophy of every religion. Men in this country carry loads

and loads of books on their backs. They are mere scholars, slaves of the senses, and therefore happy and unhappy. They read two thousand books, and that is all right; but as soon as a little misery comes, they are worried, anxious.... You call yourselves men! You stand up ... and build hospitals. You are fools!" Swami Vivekananda

"There is so much said now about people being offended at Christianity because it is so dark and gloomy, offended at it because it is so severe, etc. It is now high time to explain that the real reason why man is offended at Christianity is because it is too high, because its goal is not man's goal, because it would make of a man something so extraordinary that he is unable to get it into his head." Kierkegaard

"...anxiety- the stirring of the creature between the realms of plantlike security and spiritual risk." Buber

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