***The Abyssal Experience of Nihilism***

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**-Philosophy and Direct Experience-**

(#direxperience)

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“...the most important question is whether there is an important question. The only serious question is whether there is anything to take seriously.” Heisman

“To study philosophy is nothing but to prepare one's self to die." Cicero

“Only because no-thing is manifest at the heart of existence can the full strangeness of being come over us. Only if the strangeness of being impresses us does it waken us and open us up to wonder. Only on the basis of wonder, that is, the manifestness of no-thing, does the "Why?" come up.” Heidegger

The Nothing of the world must be seen through the filthiest of lenses. The meaninglessness of human activity is found, not within a subjective value judgment, but rather in the ignorant finitude of all human activity. The 'pushing forward' of most human mindsets is one that is built upon the ignorance of the experience of Nihilism. Distractions and diversions are written into the language of 'normal' human beings. What does one do when these distractions and diversions fail, when the natural mechanisms of consciousness that keep a human 'sane' break down? What does one do when one comes 'face to face' with Nihilism? Is suicide a 'rational' option in the face of Nothingness? Is there a 'path' that allows one to live alongside the Nothing? Is the 'naked anxiety' found within human experience too much of a burden for one to endure, never mind pursue, in the constructing of a world-view? Can one build a philosophy of religion based upon the Nothing of the world? Beyond the question of 'possibility' with regards to constructing such a philosophy of religion, is there some demand to do so? Does the Nihilistic experience contain any 'constructive' content that may allow itself to be interpreted as a 'religious' experience?

“All great conversions are born from the sudden revelation of life's meaninglessness. Nothing could be more impressive than this sudden apprehension of the void of existence.” Cioran

Humans are damned to philosophize, whether this is done in the unlearned fashion of the everyday person who is fooled into thinking he is 'free', 'smart', and 'comfortable' while in the chains of his cliches, or whether done in the style of the lofty analytic philosopher who believes that he is 'making a difference' when he puts on his suit and tie, stands up in front of a room of seven, and delivers his paper on 'counter-factuals'. As it is practiced in the American Universities, philosophy has become seemingly nothing more than a fancy Sudoku puzzle used to satiate the boredom of 'intellectuals'. The claims of Nihilism (taken in their overlapping declarations concerning the 'negative' status of moral, existential, epistemological, and metaphysical 'truths') have been dispelled, at best, as 'unanswerable', and at worst, as 'unworthy' for concern, within most of the analytical tradition. Ultimate questions have been diminished into a clash of one incomplete argument against another.

“When he has not a book between his fingers he cannot think. When he thinks, he responds to a stimulus (a thought he has read),-finally all he does is to react. The scholar exhausts his whole strength in saying either " yes " or " no " to matter which has already been thought out, or in criticising it-he is no longer capable of thought on his own account... In him the instinct of self-defence has decayed, otherwise he would defend himself against books. The scholar is a decadent.” Nietzsche

Listen to a scholar speak; within the first few words, at best sentences, the name of another thinker will come out of their mouth. They will then begin to sketch this thinker’s ideas or concepts. They will then input some small amount of their own thoughts, that rarely constitute much more than a smearing around of the other thinker’s thoughts.

The atheist philosopher's with their so-called 'problem of evil' act as if their rejection of a ‘god’, one that can be boxed into the finite human intellect, is somehow the 'intellectually superior' position while conveniently forgetting the fact that they themselves lack any non-pragmatic ground for trusting human reason within a wholly naturalistic worldview. Why believe that your inductive inferences about 'God's existence' ought to be grounded purely in reason? In other words, why be 'rational'? Why value reason over Absurdity in an Ultimately purposeless universe that has no 'end' or goal?

“We are all atheists, and yet we try to fight the man who admits it. We are all in the dark; religion is to us a mere intellectual assent, a mere talk, a mere nothing. We often consider a man religious who can talk well. But this is not religion.” Vivekananda

It is no better on the other side, where one finds 'religious' philosophers shelling out their hubris filled 'theodicies' in a pathetic effort to defend their small god by diminishing the Other into some conception of human 'oughts' or a self-satisfying version of skepticism that never goes far enough to stop all their babble about the Other. The scene is as pathetic, if so much so as to be comical, as to be equivalent to a sleep-walker, with a scalpel in his hand, strutting with confidence into the operating room 'ready' to perform surgery. Philosophy does all this while working under the guise of a Socratic Method, yet without a mindset that even remotely resembles that of a Doubting Socrates.

“Philosophy can never directly supply the forces and create the mechanisms and opportunities that bring about a historical state of affairs, if only because philosophy is always the direct concern of the few. Which few? The ones who transform creatively, who unsettle things.” Heidegger

“Only the small begins small—the small, whole dubious greatness consists in diminishing everything...” Heidegger

“To look upon healthier concepts and values from the standpoint of the sick, and conversely to look down upon the secret work of the instincts of decadence from the standpoint of him who is laden and self-reliant with the richness of life-this has been my longest exercise, my principal experience. If in anything at all, it was in this that I became a master.” Nietzsche (The entire point of philosophy. A position and its counter)

“First, I attack only things that are triumphant-if necessary I wait until they become triumphant. Secondly, I attack only those things against which I find no allies, against which I stand alone-against which I compromise nobody but myself...I have not yet taken one single step before the public eye, which did not compromise me: that is my criterion of a proper mode of action.” Nietzsche

“Understanding has revealed to us that there is nowhere to flee from Nothingness.” Shestov

Philosophy is hanging itself.

This paradigm in philosophy, of the 'supremacy' of reason, is based upon a false interpretation of the Socratic Method that has been deformed by the positivistic, scientism style of thinking that philosopher's, disregarding Heidegger's warnings, attempt to 'follow' along distorting philosophy into a false counterpart of science. Philosophers have ambitiously 'elevated' reason, as the sole characteristic of human beings that separates us from other animals, to an exaggerated degree. Is the 'Socratic Method' to be used as a tool for knowledge or is it a way to open up the mystery of human existence? Is this bizarre method of analytic philosophy the explanation for why philosophers are constantly talking past one another, cloaking philosophy into a 'rationalization' for beliefs that are held on other grounds besides 'reason'? Whatever 'philosophy' actually is, if pursued honestly and fully, does it not lead to skepticism and doubt? Does it not leave one with the question 'Why?' Is philosophy's false 'elevation' of reason the drive behind the criticisms coming from the scientistic community? The analytic tradition of philosophy is too distant from the existential conditions of man. The 'intellectual' trappings on the philosophers have eliminated the direct experiences of certain forms of human consciousness, in turn giving these 'thinkers' the false impression that they are 'doing something' with their existence.

“yet other 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. these people have forgotten about the very strange phenomenon of gradual agony. 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

'Intellectual' notions of Nihilism are always stillborn. No one knows

what is going on here. No one knows the 'Why?' to existence. Why is it, then, that philosophers move forward with an attitude of self-assurance, in a purely pragmatic or worldly fashion, without any ground beneath them? Why do they build these philosophical systems in the air? Does the equivalent of a 'One has to live' tag-line suffice, amongst all the convoluted jargon, for today's philosophers? Why not simply blow your brains out the back of your head? Are the fleeting 'joys' and transitory 'attachments' of your life worth keeping you within the nightmare of human existence?

“And the most tragic problem of philosophy is to reconcile intellectual necessities with the necessities of the heart and the will. For it is on this rock that every philosophy that pretends to resolve the eternal and tragic contradiction, the basis of our existence, breaks to pieces. But do all men face this contradiction squarely?” Unamuno

“only the organic and existential thinker is capable of this kind of seriousness, because truth for him is alive, born from inner agony and organic disorder rather than useless speculation. out of the shadow of the abstract man, who thinks for the pleasure of thinking, emerges the organic man, who thinks because of a vital imbalance, and who is beyond science and art.” Cioran

“Some people, it is true, can live contentedly with a philosophy of meaninglessness for a very long time. But in most cases it will be found that these people possess some talent or accomplishment that permits them to live a life which, to a limited extent, is profoundly meaningful and valuable. Thus an artist, or a man of science can profess a philosophy of general meaninglessness and yet lead a perfectly contented life...artistic creation and scientific research are absorbingly delightful occupations...They are proclaimed to be ends absolutely in themselves – ends so admirable that those who pursue them are excused from bothering about anything else.” Huxley

Schopenhauer wrote that “Philosophy can never do more than interpret and explain what is given.” Philosophy is the unending 'Why?” in an attempt to open up the mystery of being, to reach out towards the ground of all things. Philosophy lacks any authoritative, normative prescriptions in and of itself; philosophy is only concerned with the 'logical' consequences of a particular proposition, regardless of the ontology of any specific consequences or their starting point. Philosophy, then, if it is to contribute anything to our project, must derive an analysis, or a 'map of consequences', that are drawn out and put into a new language that is grounded in the direct human experience of Nihilism. This is the preambles of such a task. (Maybe this needs to be the opening paragraph)

“The mind is not to be ruffled by vain arguments, because argument will not help us to know God. It is a question of fact, and not of argument. All argument and reasoning must be based upon certain perceptions. Without these, there cannot be any argument. Reasoning is the method of comparison between certain facts which we have already perceived.” Vivekananda

Does philosophy, as defined, therefore, have any contribution to make concerning the experience of Nihilism? Our 'philosophy' is not a series of 'arguments', nor a system of knowledge seeking a 'rational' justification. The experience of Nihilism, in its distinct yet relational forms of boredom, anxiety, depression, ecstasy, despair, and so on, for those who have felt Its presence, are taken as a 'reality'. We must seek to discover whether there is some 'message' to be found within Nihilism and to draw out any 'constructive' content, even if, in the end, it is ultimately illusory.

“Even if the experience of the void were only a deception, it would still deserve to be tried. What it proposes, what it attempts, is to reduce to nothing both life and death, and this with the sole intention of making them endurable to us.” Cioran

The 'truth' of the suggested consequences of Nihilism will be left to subjectivity. We will follow the sentiment of Heisman when he states that “Nihilism is where science and philosophy meet.”

While we are specifically looking to explore whether there is any sort of 'constructive' content, any sort of 'message', to be found within Nihilism for which we may build a language, 'philosophy' as we have defined it, although without demanding any one authoritative interpretation or absolute vocabulary. With regards to the experience of Nihilism, one may choose a reductionist, materialist explanation as easily as one may choose what we may refer to as Transcendental. The former is found within the worldly philosophy/psychology and metaphysical naturalism of science and psychology, while the latter normally falls under the domain of religion or theology and the subsequent dying 'languages' developed within these disciplines.

The Philosopher, Heidegger, and his analysis of the human condition will be paramount for exploring Nihilism as the universal human experience. Heidegger makes definitive distinctions in his analysis of the human condition to ensure there is no added confusion by a placing of any particular, definite, structures onto or into his language. This 'separating from' is put in terms of disallowing any general 'atheistic' or 'theistic' accounts.

“The ontological analysis of conscience on which we are thus embarking, is prior to any description and classification of Experiences of conscience, and likewise lies outside of any biological 'explanation' of this phenomenon (which would mean its dissolution). But it is no less distant from a theological exegesis of conscience or any employment of this phenomenon for proofs of God or for establishing an 'immediate' consciousness of God...we must neither exaggerate its outcome nor make perverse claims about it and lessen its worth.” Heidegger pg. 313

“If the interpretation continues in this direction, one supplies a possessor for the power thus posited, or one takes the power itself as a person who makes himself known- namely God. On the other hand one may try to reject this explanation in which the caller is taken as an alien manifestation of such a power, and to explain away the conscience 'biologically' at the same time. Both these explanations pass over the phenomenal findings too hastily.” Heidegger pg. 320

“Only when death is conceived in its full ontological essence can we have any methodological assurance in even asking what may be after death; only then can we do so with meaning and justification. Whether such a question is a possible theoretical question at all will not be decided here.” Heidegger pg. 292

“This demands that we transform our human being into its openness (dread effects this transformation in us) so that we can grasp the nothing that shows up in dread exactly as it shows up. It also demands that we expressly avoid all characterizations of the nothing that do not come from a corresponding experience of the nothing. (my emphasis)” Heidegger

This suggests that the term 'religious' must be avoided, or re-defined, due to its necessary vagueness, and due to its inevitably of being dragged down into the world of pragmatism and self-concern that goes by the name of 'religious' today. Furthermore, it must also reject a sort of 'lyricism' of that found within mystic traditions. Rather, the more 'neutral' term 'Transcendence' will be substituted in its place. 'Transcendence' here need not be concerned with anything accept that which can be referred to as Wholly-Other. In other words, as suggestive of a feature of human experience that is not entirely deconstructive or naturalistic. It must also be made clear that Transcendence is not associated with the 'supernatural', in any 'spooky' sense, due to this term also containing many specifically mystical/mythical 'religious' connotations, e.g. heaven, hell, demons, angels, and so on, that need not concern us here. The Nihilistic experience is one, we claim, that holds, or lends itself, to a Transcendent interpretation, yet is equally founded, with equal powers of convincing, within the dogmas of Naturalism.

“The void allows us to erode the idea of being; but it is not drawn into this erosion itself; it survives the an attack which would be self-destructive for any other idea.” Cioran

“If the myth is understood literally, philosophy must reject it as absurd. It must demythologize the sacred stories, transform the myth into a philosophy of religion and finally into a philosophy without religion.” Tillich

We claim the various depths of Nihilism are the ground of all Transcendent interpretations of human experience. This perennial experience is found in abundance, yet any particular 'path' or 'solution' proposed by any individual, when confronted with Nihilism, will be ignored and seen as a distraction from any 'message' that may be found within the 'reality' of Nihilism. There is no escaping from Nihilism, there is no 'completion' within this world. The finite is indefinitely separated from the Infinite. All confusions, whether philosophical, naturalistic, or religious, stem from attempts of moving past the Nihilistic experience. It would therefore be prudent to heed Heidegger's words.

Behind all the dogmas, rituals, ceremonies, and assorted 'practical' modes of behavior normally found within most of the worlds religions, there is a common ground that is, for the most part, consciously or intuitively covered up (no one is completely free from experiencing Nihilism). The 'practical' behaviors end up as another distraction from the universal nature of Nihilism. The worldly forms of religion, when taken as ends in themselves, when taken literally, are indistinguishable from a wholly materialist, naturalistic worldview. The finite language

of human beings cannot ever be in complete grasp of the Other. The misguided presumption of 'sacred', as is given the label to such 'religious' movements, must be recognized solely in their subjectivity; and even then within the acknowledgment of a complete skepticism. The same criticism holds for philosophy and everyday life with its worldly pursuits. Any 'meaning' that is built upon a material, transitory structure will inevitably collapse as illusory (regardless if it collapses for any one individual).

“Any fool can talk. Even parrots talk. Talking is one thing, and realising is another. Philosophies, and doctrines, and arguments, and books, and theories, and churches, and sects, and all these things are good in their own way; but when that realisation comes, these things drop away.” Swami Vivekananda

“In true faith the ultimate concern is a concern about the truly ultimate; while in idolatrous faith preliminary, finite realities are elevated to the rank of ultimacy. The inescapable consequence of idolatrous faith is 'existential disappointment,' a disappointment which penetrates into the very existence of man!” Tillich

For those who have not suffered the overwhelming experience of Nothingness, for those who still find 'something' within the world, these words will more than likely be tossed away and labeled as 'whining and pouting'. To interpret a Taoist saying into the relevance of Nihilism: the common people will laugh at it, the 'intellectual' will understand but not experience, and the one who experiences will be left to the Nothingness of the world.

“the It world...one has to live and also can live comfortably- and that even offers us all sorts of stimulations and excitements, activities and knowledge. In this firm and wholesome chronicle the You-moments appear as queer lyric-dramatic episodes.” Buber

“But along with this tranquilization, which forces Dasein away from its death, the “they” at the same time puts itself in the right and makes itself respectable by tacitly regulating the way in which one has to comport oneself towards death. It is already a matter of public acceptance that ‘thinking about death’ is a cowardly fear, a sign of insecurity on the part of Dasein, and a sombre way of fleeing from the world. The “they” does not permit us the courage for anxiety in the face of death.” Heidegger

“This ‘movement’ of Dasein in its own Being, we call its “downward plunge”. Dasein plunges out of itself into itself, into the groundlessness and nullity of inauthentic everydayness. But this plunge remains hidden from Dasein by the way things have been publicly interpreted, so much so, indeed, that it gets interpreted as a way of ‘ascending’ and ‘living concretely’.” Heidegger

If Nihilism is, as we claim, the ground for all Transcendent thinking, we must first put an emphasis on the direct experience of Nihilism. Swami Vivekananda's words speak to this:

“In one form or another, we are all in it. It is a most difficult and intricate state of things to understand. It has been preached in every country, taught everywhere, but only believed in by a few, because until we get the experiences ourselves we cannot believe in it (my emphasis). What does it show? Something very terrible. For it is all futile. Time, the avenger of everything, comes, and nothing is left. He swallows up the saint and the sinner, the king and the peasant, the beautiful and the ugly; he leaves nothing. Everything is rushing towards that one goal, destruction. Our knowledge, our arts, our sciences, everything is rushing towards it. None can stem the tide, none can hold it back for a minute. We may try to forget it, in the same way that persons in a plague-stricken city try to create oblivion by drinking, dancing, and other vain attempts, and so becoming paralysed. So we are trying to forget, trying to create oblivion by all sorts of sense-pleasures.”

Nietzsche, the so-called 'Nihilistic-Prophet', also stresses the need for the experience of Nihilism. In his words: “...because nihilism represents the ultimate logical conclusion of our great values and ideals— because we must experience nihilism before we can find out what value these 'values' really had.”

”It might seem frightful to any one who does not realize the nothingness and absurdity of an isolated personal life, and who believes that he will never die. But I know that my life, considered in relation to my individual happiness, is, taken by itself, a stupendous farce, and that this meaningless existence will end in a stupid death.” Tolstoy

“Suddenly every vain hope became worthless to me.” St. Augustine

Tønnessen supplies a vivid example of the primacy of experience:

“Another question...is the question of whether such insights can be taught...The so-called 'engaged' discourse introduced in heart-philosophy admits of a third component which we may tentatively designate the degree of integration of knowledge. An example will indicate what may be meant by the expressions “integrated” and “integration”...the Finns caught a Russian spy...He knew the outcome...When finally the death sentence is pronounced, he completely collapses. What on earth happened? He knew the outcome with absolute certainty. We should want to say the spy knows about his immanent death now, in a new and terrifying way. He has suddenly obtained an insight, a knowledge which penetrates him, goes through bones and marrow and violently shakes up the total personality structure into its deepest and darkest labyrinths. Unfortunately, this “integration” of knowledge cannot be taught in any ordinary sense of teaching.”

There is a hidden meaningless throughout all of the worlds activities that are drawn out from such an experience of Nihilism. But before going too far, what do we mean when we speak of an 'experience of Nihilism'? We must first lay out the ontological basis of this Nothingness, which can be done in various forms. Only then will there be any possibility of conceiving the development of a language of Nihilism. Due to my lack of creativity, I will quote, at length, Tønnessen's graphic depiction of such an experience:

“They have a feeling of integral selfhood, of personal identity, and of the permanency of things. They believe in their own continuity – in being made of good, lasting stuff – and in meaning and order and justice in life and in the universe. In the most fortunate cases, there is a good, healthy unconditional surrender and submission to the norms of nicety and normalcy of the average, square-headed, stuffed-shirted, sanctimonious, middle-class North-American church-goer and bridge player, with his pseudo-intelligent, quasi-progressive, simili-cultured, platitudinal small-talk. Happy days! In this the best of all possible worlds. One doesn't notice until too late. In short: All is well (since nobody notices the end of 'all that is well') until one night: the day's work is well done and all the ships' crapulant fools frantically engulf themselves in a deadly serious game of bridge (till it is time for the night-cap and the tranquillizer). One of the 'dummies,' a champion brass polisher, suffering from an acute case of uncaused depression, goes to lie down for a while; he doesn't have a dime for the jukebox; the room is painfully satiated with embarrassing silence. Instantly and unexpectedly he is struck by an execrative curse of inverted serendipity. He suddenly, in unbearable agony, sees himself as an upholstered pile of bones and knuckles, with the softer parts slung up in a bad on the front side, and his whole like as a ludicrously brief interlude between embryo and corpse, two repulsive caricatures of himself. As for this flying farce, this nauseatingly trivial burlesque in a whirling coffin, and its aimless, whimsical flight through the void: 'What is it all about?' The question permeates him with dread and anguish, with 'ontological despair' and 'existential frustration.'”

“In dread, as we say, "something is uncanny." What do we mean by "something" and "is"? We cannot say what the uncanny something is about. There is something like this about the "as a whole”: all things and we ourselves sink into indifference. (my emphasis) Not in the sense of merely disappearing, but rather, in its very moving away, it turns to us. This moving away of be-ing as a whole that closes in on us in dread pressures us. There's nothing to get a hold on. All that remains and comes over us in the slipping away of be-ing is this "no-thing. "Dread reveals no-thing.” Heidegger

“In particular, that in the face of which one has anxiety is not encountered as something definite with which one can concern oneself; the threatening does not come from what is ready-to-hand or present-at-hand, but rather from the fact that neither of these 'says' anything any longer. Environmental entities no longer have any involvement. The world in which I exist has sunk into insignificance (my emphasis); and the world which is thus disclosed is one in which entities can be freed only in the character of having no involvement. Anxiety is anxious in the face of the nothing of the world (my emphasis); but this does not mean that in anxiety we experience something like the absence of what is present-at-hand with-the-world. The present-at-hand must be encountered in just such a way that it does not have any involvement whatsoever, but can show itself in an empty mercilessness.” Heidegger

We may also express Nihilism in the form of a question: first, put into your mind the most meaningful 'thing' of your existence, whether this is family, a project, a cause, a nation, or even 'oneself'. Now, can you imagine what you hold to be most meaningful, the thing that makes your existence come across as a real possibility, as being worthless, as utterly void of all meaning? I have yet to meet a person with even a slight indication of what this question is referring to. To answer in the affirmative is to have experienced a deconstructive-terror that runs through one's entire being. There is a vanishing of any ground that one has placed under the feet of existence.

William James puts it this way: “Conceive yourself, if possible, suddenly stripped of all the emotion with which your world now inspires you, and try to imagine it AS IT EXISTS, purely by itself, without your favorable or unfavorable, hopeful or apprehensive comment. It will be almost impossible for you to realize such a condition of negativity and deadness.” And although Nihilism is found universally within the human condition, the experience is still only to be received in piecemeal, which informs us on one possible reason for why its extreme forms are so rare.

“In great despair, for example, when all weight tends to dwindle away from things and the sense of things grows dark, the question looms.” Heidegger

“If existence only relates itself to being by being aimed in advance at no-thing in order to be able to exist, and if no-thing originally becomes manifest only in dread, must we not then remain permanently suspended in this dread in order to be able to exist at all? Yet have we ourselves not already admitted that this original dread is rare? But above all, all of us exist and relate ourselves to being which we ourselves are not and which we ourselves are—without such dread. Is this not an arbitrary finding and the no-thing attributed to it an exaggeration?” Heidegger

“Now what does it mean that this original dread happens only in rare instances? Nothing other than this: no-thing is at first and for the most part disguised in its originality. But how? By our getting lost in being in certain ways. The more we turn to being in our dealings, the less we let being as such slip away, the more we turn away from no-thing. Thus all the more certainly are we forced into the public superficialities of existence.” Heidegger

'but why is the experience of agony so rare? Can it be that our hypothesis is entirely false and that sketching a metaphysics of death is possible only by accepting death's transcendental nature?” Cioran

“No one is continually subject to the obsession with this horror. Sometimes we turn from it, almost forget it...” Cioran

“Now, the great majority of mankind endure life without any great protest, and believe, to this extent, in the value of existence, but that is because each individual decides and determines alone, and never comes out of his own personality like these exceptions: everything outside of the personal has no existence for them or at the utmost is observed as but a faint shadow.” Nietzsche

“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.” Matthew 7:13-14

Even the one who experiences Nihilism in a deeper form is left with a sense of suspicion, a suspicion that this 'Nihilism' is still too foreign. All must ask a question concerning the actual 'reality' of Nihilism along with the intuition of 'a something' that lurks behind all Nihilistic experiences. The busyness of the world, the conscious fleeing from the human condition, the 'taking serious' of any particular worldly endeavor, the lack of uncanniness within the material world, these are ways in which one drives out, consciously or instinctually, and misses Nihilism or any 'message' within that it may convey. The path may be narrow, but why does it seem to also be 'obstructed' to such an extreme degree? The 'falling' nature of human beings as being wrapped up within the world, combined with the rarity of Nihilism, is an unbearable weight for the one who is seeking authenticity, for one attempting a participation with Nihilism.

(maybe Kierkegaard “double-mindedness” and James “divided-self” quotes here?)

“When anxiety has subsided, then in our everyday way of talking we are accustomed to say that ‘it was really nothing’.” Heidegger

“Compared to philosophers, saints know nothing. Yet they know everything. Compared to Aristotle, any saint is illiterate. What makes us then believe that we might learn more from the latter? Because all of the philosophers put together are not worth a single saint. Philosophy has no answers. Compared to philosophy, saintliness is an exact science. It gives us precise answers to questions that philosophers do not even dare consider. Its method is suffering and its goal is God.” Cioran

One way in which Nietzsche speaks of Nihilism comes from a term he referred to as the 'Absurd Valuation'. He puts his description in the mouth of his Zarathustra: “What is your greatest experience? It is the hour of the great contempt. The hour in which even your happiness becomes repulsive to you, and even your reason and virtue. The hour when you say: "What good is my happiness! It is poverty and dirt and wretched contentment. But my happiness should justify existence itself! The hour when you say: "What good is my reason! does it long for knowledge as the lion for his food? It is poverty and dirt and wretched contentment!" The hour when you say: "What good are my virtues?! As yet they have not made me rage with passion. How weary I am of my good and evil! It is all poverty and dirt and wretched contentment!”

I prefer the term 'Absurd Perspective'. This is the 'revelation' of the paralyzing nature of Nihilism that comes from the absence of values, hence making all judgments, movements, efforts, concerns, and offenses as baseless as any other; we are left with any response or action being reduced to Absurdity, since humans are necessarily forced to make value judgments in a valueless universe. All human movements are motivated by a value judgment. Without moral values, no non-arbitrary human action can be made. With all possibilities 'equivalent' there is no right or wrong, there is no up or down, all possibilities drop off, there is only Nothing...yet humans act in the world.

An aspect of the Absurd Perspective can in fact be described in an empirical context found within the consequences of the 'multi-verse' or 'world-assemble', a view that many modern physicists postulate as a description of 'reality'. Regardless if the multi-verse is the 'correct' view of reality, assuming it is 'true', there are consequences that follow from such a position, which, seemingly, go unnoticed by a majority of both scientists and philosophers of science.

In short, if there are an infinite number of 'universes' and, in theory, an infinite number of 'you’s’, then any decision, in any given situation that is possible, will be, or more precisely, has already been made by one of 'you'. Therefore, it is only an illusion when one finds themselves 'caught' in some form of a 'moral crisis', since no matter which option is chosen, whether you believe it to be the 'right' decision based on intuition, feelings, or from philosophical contemplation, all other options will also be chosen, by 'you'. This turns every 'important' choice or decision into a triviality.

Subjective morality and meaning are utterly empty, when choice is simply illusory. This is to refrain from getting stuck in the cobwebs of 'free will' and 'determinism'. If an infinite world-assemble is in fact our reality, then determinism is as true as it ever could be, even if 'free will', if this concept can even be made sense of, is granted in each individual universe.

The reply is anticipated: 'Regardless if all choices are made elsewhere, my decision still matters here, to me, in this world!” Let's also not digress into details concerning the 'A' and 'B' theories of time. But, we may suggest, in passing, that if we assume that the 'B' theory of time is correct, and there is no temporal becoming, then there is no privileged 'now'. Therefore, your birth is as 'real' as your death; your existence is equivalent to a movie reel that has already been shot, produced, and is sprawled out across the ground, frame by frame. Even with that said, hapless as it is, there is no doubt that this still *does* matter to you. Regardless if the ‘ending’ of the movie, which in this case is your life, not only has the ending ‘written’, but fully acted out, there is still the echos of the stubborn “matters to me!”

We can put forth Nihilism in yet another way. The insatiable credulity in which most humans force an elevated sense of subjective meaning on to one's life, within the context of a conscious denial of objectivity. This expresses a lack of The Experience concerning the paradoxical nature of human subjectivity and 'deep-time'. Human minds have not 'evolved' in a way in which to properly handle the exorbitant amount of time in which science has so far discovered about the universe and the human situation within it. Within the billions of years of evolution, the almost fourteen billion year old observable piece of space-time, humans have developed a local, restricted, 'small world' understanding of the situation they find themselves in. This 'small world' understanding allows for most to live safely, 'out of sight-out of mind', shielded from the horrors that underpin self-conscious existence.

(maybe use a version of this- To put self-aware creatures in the situation that we find ourselves in, on a rock, flying around an exploding fireball, in the middle of a possibility infinite universe, inside an infinite amount of universes, without actually having ‘knowledge ‘ about anything regarding this situation, does not call for a sense of ‘awe and wonder ‘ when one looks up into this vast void of God knows what. The Human situation, if one looks up into the vast cosmos, should be a sense of sheer panic and disarray. The Human situation is one that humans wish they could have invented as a torture device for other humans. If one takes a step back, maybe multiple steps, one can see the sort of genius torture technique this actually is. But here we are, with our dumb little flesh turned up, or as we call them “smiles”, being ‘happy’ about this thing, or getting ‘angry’ about that thing. It’s really one of the few times I wish my disgust meant anything at all, but it can be added along with the other meaningless motions I’ve just listed.)

The 'problem' of the denial of Nihilism, followed by the proposing of a meaning within the world of 'deep time', comes from the fact that most of human existence has been completely erased without a trace of their even 'being here', except if one wants to count what can be found of 'them' in the strands of our DNA.

“All civilizations become defunct. All species die out. There is even an expiration date on the universe itself...the universe as nothing in motion.” Ligotti

“A thousand varieties of man -- Piltdown, Neanderthal, Chellean, Acheulean, Mousterian, Aurignacian, Cro-magnon, Rhodesian, Pekin man -- lived for thousands of years, fought, thought, invented, painted, carved, made children, and left no more to posterity than a few flints and scratches, forgotten for millennia and found only by the picks and spades of our inquisitive day.   A thousand civilizations have disappeared under the ocean or the earth, leaving, like Atlantis, merely a legend behind...” Durant

“All the power of knowledge and wealth once made has passed away — all the sciences of the ancients, lost, lost forever. Nobody knows how. That teaches us a grand lesson. Vanity of vanities; all is vanity and vexation of the spirit.” Vivekananda

“...everything in the instincts that is beneficial, that fosters life and that safeguards the future is a cause of suspicion. So to live that life no longer has any meaning: this is now the "meaning" of life...Why be public-spirited? Why take any pride in descent and forefathers? Why labour together, trust one another, or concern one's self about the common welfare, and try to serve it?” Nietzsche

To pronounce everything as 'meaningless' is to show zero appreciation for every human struggle, the billions of years of conflict found within all sentient creatures, down to every replicating cell; what a big responsibility to take on, if there was any such thing as 'responsibility'. Is the most hubris filled act that of embracing of Nihilism? Is the Saint, the one who renounces the entire world, nothing but the most selfish of creatures?

All actions will be erased. All accomplishments will disappear. All cares, concerns, achievements, disappointments, and failures will be as if they never occurred. With this fact of existence, why is it that humans still insist on thrusting a sense of worldly meaning onto their individual lives? Why can someone sit there with a smile on their face, proclaim 'But my life is meaningful!', in the face of the consequences of 'deep time', and not be seen as psychologically or intellectually deficient? The only way to justify such thought and behavior, in a universe that itself will eventually die in ruins, is to maintain some neurotic form of justification for the value of being alive. How does one justify their stance of intrinsic value on life, no matter what (for now stepping back from the proponents of euthanasia or the proclamations of many 'theistic' believers)? The 'logic' of life, that existence is 'better' than non-existence, has not only proceeded without justification, it is rarely even questioned. Worldly 'meaning' is dead. Yet there is no 'argument' to convince another against being able to find meaning within the world. One must experience the Nothing of the world directly.

“...there are two inevitable conditions of life, confronting all of us, which destroy its whole meaning; (1) death, which may at any moment pounce upon each of us; and (2) the transitoriness of all our works, which so soon pass away and leave no trace...And therefore, however we may conceal it from ourselves, we cannot help seeing that the significance of our life cannot lie in our personal fleshly existence...” Tolstoy

An illustration may bring some additional clarity, even if it does lack any force of convincing. Imagine you wake up one day and find yourself inside of a gated tennis court. You are there with another person, racket in hand, and the gate to the court cannot be opened, there is no escape. Your partner happens to mention that there is no tennis ball, yet insists on 'playing'. Would you consent to this game of 'tennis'? Would you 'go through the motions' of swinging mindlessly at a phantom ball that does not exist? Would you argue with your partner who takes a swing at the 'ball' and asserts on his scoring a point? Would you regard the 'meaning' that your partner finds in this game worthy of the label 'meaningful'? If you could invent some form of subjective meaning to this 'game', how long would it keep you content? And can you change your mind, many times over, on the 'meaning' of this game? How long would you stay motivated to participate? At what point would you give up? Would anyone want, or be able, to participate in such an obscene activity? Can anyone, who's not simply being argumentative or denialistic, claim any 'meaning' behind such an activity? Anyone perceiving the situation properly would have to insist on not participating in such a ridiculous situation. But, then, what?

“Genuine boredom has not yet arrived if we are merely bored with this book or that movie, with this job or that idle moment. Genuine boredom occurs when one’s whole world is boring. Then abysmal boredom, like a muffling fog, drifts where it will in the depths of our openness, sucking everything and everyone, and ourselves along with them, into a numbing sameness. This kind of boredom reveals what-is in terms of a whole.” Heidegger

Nihilism takes the 'ball' away from the game of life. Each new 'game' that is invented eventually succumbs to absurdity and boredom. One constantly finds new things 'to do', yet are they ever fully satisfied? To wonder as Pascal did: why can't humans sit alone in a room? I'll let Pascal expand on this observation:

“Nothing is so insufferable to man as to be completely at rest, without passions, without business, without diversion, without study. He then feels his nothingness, his forlornness, his insufficiency, his dependence, his weakness, his emptiness. There will immediately arise from the depth of his heart weariness, gloom, sadness, fretfulness, vexation, despair.”

This fact, that man is always attempting to do something, shows that there is some search he is on. Is this purely a natural instinct to survive and reproduce? A 'will to live' for no Ultimate reason? This Transcendental yearning, this pull towards the Infinite, instead of being confronted, is almost always translated into some worldly activity. There is nothing to find in this world. People want Simple Salvation; no one wants to participate in the Nothingness.

“Hiding facts is not the way to find a remedy. As you all know, a hare hunted by dogs puts its head down and thinks itself safe; so, when we run into optimism; we do just like the hare, but that is no remedy.” Vivekananda

“Everything that we do to make our existence secure is like the act of the ostrich, when she hides her head in the sand, and does not see that her destruction is near. But we are even more foolish than the ostrich.” Tolstoy

I see a world of human bodies, scampering around in ignorant-confusion, within the illusion of confidence, all with their own little, black cloud of death hovering over their heads. “What a Meaningful life!”, shouted the man who's heart only seconds later unknowingly delivered him into Nothingness. He's already a memory.

Tolstoy captures his realization of Nihilism as follows:

“I was only astonished that this had not occurred to me before, from premises which had so long been known. Illness and death would come (indeed they had come), if not to-day, then to-morrow, to those whom I loved, to myself, and nothing would remain but stench and worms. All my acts, whatever I did, would sooner or later be forgotten, and I myself be nowhere. Why, then, busy one's self with anything? How could men see this and live? It is possible to live only as long as life intoxicates us; as soon as we are sober again we see that it is all a delusion, and a stupid one! In this, indeed, there is nothing either ludicrous or amusing; it is only cruel and absurd.” (pg. 282 journal, Buddha, Pascal, Vivekananda)

If the world is Nothing, and is experienced as such, what is left? Madness, suicide, or the Other. The 'message' of Nihilism may not be wholly deconstructive, yet, at the same time, is the 'More' of Nihilism essentially unknowable? What is the 'More' of Nihilism? Are 'madness, suicide, and the Other' all that distinct? Does madness lead to suicide, or to the Other? Does the Other lead to Suicide? To develop a language or philosophy of Nihilism leaves open the possibility that it may indeed lead to, or find no distinction in, madness, suicide or the Other.

“And indeed the Christian is, in a certain sense--in an ultimate sense--a "Nihilist"; for to him, in the end, the world is nothing, and God is all. This is, of course, the precise opposite of the Nihilism we have examined here, where God is nothing and the world is all; that is a Nihilism that proceeds from the Abyss, and the Christian's is a "Nihilism" that proceeds from abundance.” Fr. Sarephim Rose

“in such moments you will be severed from life, from love, smiles, friends and even from death. and you will ask yourself if there is anything besides the nothingness of the world and your own nothingness.” Cioran

“But then, Nothingness is only Nothingness. How did it happen to turn into Something? And once having become Something, how did it acquire such limitless power over man, and even over all existence?” Shestov

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**Extra Notes and Quotes**

Figure out where the two quotes directly below fit in-

“Anyone who gives himself up to writing believes- without realizing the fact- that his work will survive the years, the ages, time itself...If he felt, while he was at work on it, that it was perishable, he would leave of where he was, he could never finish. Activity and credulity are correlative terms.” Cioran

“Retire, reader, into yourself and imagine a slow dissolution of yourself—the light dimming about you—all things becoming dumb and soundless, enveloping you in silence—the objects that you handle crumbling away between your hands—the ground slipping from under your feet—your very memory vanishing as if in a swoon —everything melting away from you into nothingness and you yourself also melting away—the very consciousness of nothingness, merely as the phantom harbourage of a shadow, not even remaining to you. I have heard it related of a poor harvester who died in a hospital bed, that when the priest went to anoint his hands with the oil of extreme unction, he refused to open his right hand, which clutched a few dirty coins, not considering that very soon neither his hand nor he him self would be his own any more. And so we close and clench, not our hand, but our heart, seeking to clutch the world in it. A friend confessed to me that, foreseeing while in the full vigour of physical health the near approach of a violent death, he proposed to concentrate his life and spend the few days which he calculated still remained to him in writing a book. Vanity of vanities!” Unamuno

“Not for nothing did he give the name The Concept of Dread to one of the most remarkable of his works. He had discovered in himself and others a fear that was unaccountable, unjustifiable, and unreasonable, and moreover, as we shall presently see, a fear of Nothingness. And to anticipate what will be explained later, it must here be said that in his struggle with his fear of Nothingness, he remained as before in the power of Nothingness. I must add that the fear of Nothingness, in the sense given it by Kierkegaard, is not a personal, subjective trait of his. Owing to the special conditions of his existence, he merely exposed this fear and the Nothingness that gives rise to it with a precision distinguished by its clarity and its great vividness. Or perhaps we might put it this way: that which exists only potentially, and therefore invisibly, in the souls of other men became for him an actuality, an everyday reality. This is why he maintained that the beginning of philosophy is not wonder but despair. As long as a man wonders, he has not yet touched on the mysteries of being. Only despair brings him to the brink, to the limits of the existing. And if philosophy, as we have always been told, seeks the beginnings, sources, and roots of everything, then whether it wishes to or not it must pass through despair.” Shestov

“...God only is wise; and by his answer he intends to show that the wisdom of men is worth little or nothing; he is not speaking of Socrates, he is only using my name by way of illustration, as if he said, He, O men, is the wisest, who, like Socrates, knows that his wisdom is in truth worth nothing.” Plato

“This "anxiety" and this "abyss" are precisely the nothingness out of which God has called each man into being” Seraphim Rose

“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?” St. Theresa of Avila

“St Augustine says. "the strong attraction of the soul to the Divine reduces everything to nothingness.” Eckhart

“But then, Nothingness is only Nothingness. How did it happen to turn into Something? And once having become Something, how did it acquire such limitless power over man, and even over all existence?” Shestov (I like this quote because denotes the power of the experience. However, it seemingly flies in the face of our prior observations of the rarity of the experience)

“in such moments you will be severed from life, from love, smiles, friends and even from death. and you will ask yourself if there is anything besides the nothingness of the world and your own nothingness.” Cioran (On the Heights of Despair, Cioran speaks of “Nothingness as a revelation”, and describes the experience of subjectivity “falling” out from underneath one’s self. Get more of his quotes in this section, if I haven’t already put them in “Naturalism”.

“When the centre of gravity of life is placed, not in life itself, but in "the beyond"--in nothingness--then one has taken away its centre of gravity altogether. The vast lie of personal immortality destroys all reason, all natural instinct--henceforth, everything in the instincts that is beneficial, that fosters life and that safeguards the future is a cause of suspicion. So to live that life no longer has any meaning: this is now the "meaning" of life. . .. Why be public-spirited? Why take any pride in descent and forefathers? Why labour together, trust one another, or concern one's self about the common welfare, and try to serve it?” Nietzsche (I know Nietzsche is arguing against this, as he sees Christianity the cause for this, but it is still a good description of Nihilism; maybe use it somewhere)

Where James’/‘imagining meaningful as meaningless’ quote is, speak on the ‘spectrum’ of the experience of Nihilism. Uncanny, where there is a sense of ‘unease’, yet it leaves as quickly as it came to you. You can usually think to oneself: “No, that isn’t right. That’s a ridiculous idea..” and then proceed to nervously chuckle it off, as if it was a strange instance of ‘deja vu’, and continue upon with your existing.