# The Religious Experience of Nihilism

-Nihilism Preface-

“…turn us into melancholy metaphysicians. The pride of life and glory of the world will shrivel. It is after all but the standing quarrel of hot youth and hoary old. Old age has the last word: the purely naturalistic look at life, however enthusiastically it may begin, is sure to end in sadness. This sadness lies at the heart of every merely positivistic, agnostic, or naturalistic scheme of philosophy. Let sanguine healthy-mindedness do its best with its strange power of living in the moment and ignoring and forgetting, still the evil background is really there to be thought of, and the skull will grin in at the banquet. In the practical life of the individual, we know how his whole gloom or glee about any present fact depends on the remoter schemes and hopes with which it stands related. Its significance and framing give it the chief part of its value. Let it be known to lead nowhere, and however agreeable it may be in its immediacy, its glow and gilding vanish.” James

“To this extent, nihilism, as the denial of a truthful world, of being, might be a divine way of thinking.” Nietzsche

“And to come back again to our first question, ”What is the meaning of a philosopher paying homage to ascetic ideals?” We get now, at any rate, a first hint; he wishes to escape from a torture.” Nietzsche

This is a work of infinite ambition and utter worthlessness; a work of questions rather than answers. This is an interpretation of Nihilism that finds the ‘everyday’ view, the mainstream ‘philosophical’/intellectual definitions, misguided at best.

I will unapologetically quote from a variety of thinkers at length. Why do people have to ‘defend’ the use of other authors? Are you offended for having to ‘re-read’ something you already ‘know’? Do you simply crave ‘originality’ from an author? Every *one* wants to pen their name into ‘eternity’; every *one* wants to have their words heard; utter garbage. You’ve most likely interpreted these authors in a different way than in this work, so any quotes that seem ‘familiar’ should take on a new life for the reader.

“The fact that ‘They’, who hear and understand nothing but loud idle talk, cannot ‘report’ any call, is held against the conscience on the subterfuge that it is ‘dumb’ and manifestly not present-at-hand. With this kind of interpretation the ‘they’ merely covers up its own failure to hear the call and the fact that its ‘hearing’ does not reach very far.” Heidegger

“Nothing reveals more an extreme weakness of mind than not to know the misery of a godless man.” Pascal

I fight a battle between smug confidence and complete humility; both are equally paradoxical. The experience from which this work stems is as ‘real’ as anything that pertains to my existence. And yet doubt is at the forefront of every word that is written, every thought that comes into this stream of consciousness. I want to claim ‘Truth’ and I want to ask for ‘help’. This work will include differing tones, and may even seem as if, at least, two authors are writing.

“The neurotic exhausts himself not only in self-preoccupations like hypochondriacal fears and all sorts of fantasies, but also in others: those around him on whom he is dependent become his therapeutic work project; he takes out his subjective problems on them. But people are not clay to be molded; they have needs and counter-wills of their own. The neurotic’s frustration as a failed artist can’t be remedied by anything but an objective creative work of his own.” Becker

“I have all the defects of other people and yet everything they do seems to me inconceivable.” Cioran

When I imagine some kind of mythical encounter with any of the thinkers whose ideas I’ve quoted within this work, I am under no illusions -I’m sure I would perceive even the simple act of being in their presence as something utterly unbearable.  The ideas expressed inside these pages are not born from within any worldly, mundane existence of the thinkers, as something intrinsic to their being.  Regardless, whether they left behind a vast corpus of ‘influential works’, nor if any managed to endear a great number of admirers, holding the *unthinking*within an almost hypnotic possession, none of this is of concern surrounding the possibility of a *message,* of any kind*,* that is revealed by Nihilism.

Furthermore, I will quickly, and resolutely, deny any such claims of responsibility as to the origin of the coalescent revelations that are spoken of here.  Not a one, including myself, shall be elevated up onto a pedestal.  There is no finite authority emerging from within the humility inducing visions that are here within expressed as a fundamental experience, across time, space, culture, race, philosophical background, and religious tradition, within the human situation.

As Freud proclaimed:

“I have found little that is ‘good’ about human beings on the whole. In my experience most of them are trash, no matter whether they publicly subscribe to this or that ethical doctrine or to none at all. That is something that you cannot say aloud, or perhaps even think.”

A sentiment with which I emphatically agree with.  And why am I carrying on about this?  For one simple, and what should be unambiguous, reason:

*There are no heroes here.*

 However, what *is* important concerning these thinkers is the way in which they all, each from their own unique backgrounds and perspectives, articulate a description of the same insights, as they are revealed through a specific, abstract experience - the experience of *Nihilism*. When these revealed insights of Nihilism are expressed, and further, made possible to be perceived as a unified ‘voice’, they take on a form that represents irrefutability.

 This is particularly useful for one, such as myself, who does not have a predominantly strong ‘way with words’. Even though names are given, the purpose of the quotes is to show a description of a particular experience, regardless of whether the person writing is a ‘proclaimed’ Christian, Hindu, ‘Nihilist’, or Saint, etc. If names were not given, it would be of no consequence, as the quotes attempt to show that there is no distinction; one should not be able to intuit the thinker’s ‘background’, their words should all converge, leaving one with the perception that every thought has emanated from a single, solitary mind.

          As Cioran says: existence is plagiarism. I am not stating any ‘new’ information here. There is nothing to ‘know’. Their words are my words, and my words are their words. I hope that my ‘voice’ gets lost within these pages. There are too many people wanting to be ‘heard’. There are too many mouth-noises from those thinking they have something to actually say. Paradoxically, even with the quoting of many others, no one deserves to be heard; yet, as a member of the human species, the present author wishes to not have a ‘voice’.

Pascal, Kierkegaard, Cioran, Vivekananda, Nietzsche, Buber, Heidegger, Tillich, etc. all say the same exact thing within their own idiosyncratic language games. It ought to be considered plagiarism after one goes down the list of names in that each author describes a universal experience that is, seemingly, available to any human consciousness that is willing to participate.

“Sometimes I think that I am right when I agree with all the ancient teachers, at other times I think they are right when they agree with me. I believe in thinking independently. I believe in becoming entirely free from the holy teachers; pay all reverence to them, but look at religion as an independent research. I have to find my light, just as they found theirs. Their finding the light will not satisfy us at all. You have to become the Bible, and not to follow it, excepting as paying reverence to it as a light on the way, as a guidepost, a mark: that is all the value it has.” Vivekananda

          How is any piece of writing considered ‘scholarly’? Moreover, why would any one want to be restricted by the arbitrary characteristics of ‘scholarly’? Any person who has written a book, or written down any substantial amount of their own thoughts, and who looks back on these words, and does not wish for everything to be either burned or re-written has become a worthless ‘philosopher’, not an authentic thinker. Any one who is ‘proud’ of their work is pathetic. If your work is ‘incomprehensible’ in style or verbiage, then all the more to it. Reading and ‘working out’ the author’s inner most thoughts is priceless, in comparison to the ‘polished’ versions we find in ‘Academia’ today.

“When you know quite absolutely that everything is unreal, you then cannot see why you should take the trouble to prove it.” Cioran

          The most important, yet elementary, sentiment is this: No one knows what is ‘going on here’. What am I? Where did I come from? Where am I going? What is the purpose of existence? And so on. Taken as ‘silly’ questions by the *unthinking* and as ‘game’ for most ‘intellectuals’.

“What astonishes me most is to see that all the world is not astonished at its own weakness. Men act seriously, and each follows his own mode of life, not because it is in fact good to follow since it is the custom, but as if each man knew certainly where reason and justice are.” Pascal

“There is no doubt that creative work is itself done under a compulsion often indistinguishable from a purely clinical obsession. In this sense, what we call a creative gift is merely the social license to be obsessed. And what we call “cultural routine” is a similar license: the proletariat demands the obsession of work in order to keep from going crazy. I used to wonder how people could stand the really demonic activity of working behind those hellish ranges in hotel kitchens, the frantic whirl of waiting on a dozen tables at one time, the madness of the travel agent’s office at the height of the tourist season, or the torture of working with a jack-hammer all day on a hot summer street. The answer is so simple that it eludes us: the craziness of these activities is exactly that of the human condition. They are “right” for us because the alternative is natural desperation. The daily madness of these jobs is a repeated vaccination: against the madness of the asylum. Look at the joy and eagerness with which workers return from vacation to their compulsive routines. They plunge into their work with equanimity and lightheartedness because it drowns out something more ominous. Men have to be protected from reality.” Becker

          There are no universal claims besides that of Nihilism (expand upon the ‘universal’ nature of the subjective ‘truth’ of Nihilism, quotes from Kierkegaard, find others). A self-refuting statement? Nihilism exists within paradox and contradiction. One could sum up Nihilism’s paradoxical nature in a sentence: Nihilism is Nothing and therefore Everything. Nihilism is nonrational.

          There are only suggestions and observations here. Some who claim the characteristic of ‘authority’ will demand meditation, others will rail against it. Some will claim fasting is a must, others say make sure you eat plenty. Some will claim the natural world is all there is, others will swear that there is an Ultimate Reality. And on and on, everyone spewing a particular nonsense, all proclaiming the ‘path’ or the ‘truth’.

          Nihilism as described in these pages is the only ‘truth’ that is and can be ‘known’, rather, experienced, by all humans who participate in the confrontation. There are no ‘paths’ (answers); if there are paths (answers), then there are infinitely many. Anyone who claims any ‘knowledge’ beyond the experience of Nihilism is simply pushing their subjectivity onto you and can be taken or left at one’s discretion.

“If we have broken discursive reason’s power over the question about the nothing and about being, then we have also decided the fate of the dominance of “logic” within philosophy. The very idea of “logic” dissolves in the vortex of a more original inquiry.” Heidegger

“That existence is pervaded by nihilating behavior attests to the permanent and indeed obscured manifestness of no-thing that dread originally discloses. But this means original dread is suppressed for the most part in existence. Dread is there. It’s only napping. Its breath permanently trembles in existence, only slightly in the apprehensive, and inaudibly in the”Uh húh!” and “Húh uh!” of those who are busy; best of all in the reserved, surest of all at the heart of existence that is daring. But this happens only in those for whom it expends itself in order to preserve the ultimate greatness of existence.” Heidegger

“So then he despairs, that is to say, by a strangely preposterous attitude and a complete mystification with regard to himself, he calls this despair. But to despair is to lose the eternal – and of this he does not speak, does not dream. The loss of the earthly as such is not the cause of despair, and yet it is of this he speaks, and he calls it despairing. What he says is in a certain sense true, only it is not true in the sense in which he understands it; he stands with his face inverted, and what he says must be understood inversely; he stands and points at that which is not a cause of despair, and he declares that he is in despair, and nevertheless it is quite true that despair is going on behind him without his knowing it. It is as if one were to stand with one’s back toward the City Hall and the Court House, and pointing straight before him were to say,”There is the City Hall and the Court House.” The man is right, there it is . . . if he turns around. It is not true, he is not in despair, and yet he is right when he says it. But he calls himself “in despair,” he regards himself as dead, as a shadow of himself. But dead he is not; there is, if you will, life in the characterization. In case everything suddenly changes, everything in the outward circumstances, and the wish is fulfilled, then life enters into him again, immediacy rises again, and he begins to live as fit as a fiddle. But this is the only way immediacy knows how to fight, the one thing it knows how to do: to despair and swoon – and yet it knows what despair is less than anything else. It despairs and swoons, and thereupon it lies quite still as if it were dead, like the childish play of “lying dead”; immediacy is like certain lower animals which have no other weapon or means of defense but to lie quite still and pretend they are dead.” Kierkegaard

          Criticisms will be misdirected, necessarily. As the experience of Nihilism is rare, so are pertinent critiques. These are the interpretations of the insights that are produced from the experience of Nihilism. I ask no one to believe in, or adhere to, them. I will report what I experience without censorship. I will ‘unjustifiably’ condemn all of human thought and activity. I will contradict myself, sometimes intentionally and other times for lack of care. If I am perceived as ‘wrong’, and one assumes some sort of ‘worth’ in their criticism, then I believe the quotes used throughout this work will at least show that I am in good company. You are welcome to not read any further.

          I don’t believe anything I think or say. There is no seeking of ‘approval’, there is no justification, as I am only the messenger, not the author.

“With regard to a poet people speak of his having a call; but as for becoming a priest, it seems enough to the generality of men (and that means of Christians) that one has taken an examination.” Kierkegaard

“This will seem to some a silly fiction.” Theresa of Avila

          These are thoughts discovered within the mystery of existence that will not settle for anything that has so far been spoken by other humans. Nihilism, even with all its ‘glory’, has been the one concept that has been ‘ignored’, superficially fought against, or ignorantly dismissed as unworthy by almost all human beings. You can speak about how life is a ‘mystery’, but do you experience what it is like to be in a mystery? Or do you rather keep busy chasing the phantom of ‘happiness’? What could ever make you ‘content’ in this world? Contentment within the world is a sign of weakness and sickness, and you’re welcome to it. This is for those who are at the brink of madness, suicide, or are already ‘dead’.

          I want to pursue what will make everyone else uncomfortable. I want to pursue madness. I want to work up the courage for suicide. Why attempt to ‘spoil’ another’s enjoyment, if I do not know what I am talking about, nor do I know the end, assuming there was an end to human existence? I am exhausted from the abrasive ‘optimism’ that surrounds all human interaction and activity. Existence is a nightmare with a few doses of ‘ease’ mixed with foolish conceptions of companionship.

          There are no, or very few, real philosophers in the world. Would this fact add or subtract to the worthlessness of the world? Ha! True philosophers are like children always asking “Why?”. Everyone else is the unthinking robot who either spews their unquestioned, prepackaged ‘story of existence’, or even better, scolds the child for asking such ‘stupid’ questions. Like children, philosophers get stripped of their original, Platonic recollection and therefore become trapped within the world as unthinking robots. Ask most ‘philosophers’ about their ideas, instead of another thinkers, and watch them scramble for words.

“Memory reminds the soul how all earthly joys end, recalling the death of those who lived at ease; how some died suddenly and were soon forgotten, how others, once so prosperous, are now buried beneath the ground and men pass by the graves where they lie, the prey of worms, while the mind recalls many other such incidents.” Theresa of Avila

“The questions seemed so foolish, so simple, so childish; but no sooner had I begun my attempt to decide them than I was convinced that they were neither childish nor silly, but were concerned with the deepest problems of life, and again that I was, think of them as I would, utterly unable to find an answer to them.” Tolstoy

          I would like to think of this work as a ‘story’ rather than an argument. This work will never be complete, as Nihilism contains no ‘solution’.

“There is no way of reaching the infinite.” Tillich

          Is this work too ‘serious’? Is taking Nihilism serious some sort of criticism or defect? Logic? Nihilism dissolves its relevancy. Along with it any discomfort that stems from a meager ‘contradiction’. Saint Cecilia was sentenced to death by suffocation in her own bathhouse…she survived. An effort at beheading came as a consequence. Three attempts at her head were taken; she again survived. She died three days later from her wounds, singing all the time songs of praise for God. Can there be any accusation of taking Nihilism too seriously?

“The following is an experiment in nihilism. Already I have contradicted myself! How can one believe in disbelief?” Heisman

“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

          A prominent cosmologist states that he doesn’t very often ‘look up’ into the universe. Why is he pursuing his knowledge of the universe while behind a desk? He has not questioned what his subjective interest in ‘cosmology’ is even worth. He has not questioned why ‘knowledge’ ought to be pursued for its own sake. There is simply a curiosity that is slavishly driving him forward on a path that itself is not questioned.

“When I fancied that I stood alone I was really in the ridiculous position of being backed up by all Christendom. It may be, Heaven forgive me, that I did try to be original; but I only succeeded in inventing all by myself an inferior copy of the existing traditions of civilized religion. The man from the yacht thought he was the first to find England; I thought I was the first to find Europe. I did try to found a heresy of my own; and when I had put the last touches to it, I discovered that it was orthodoxy.” Chesterton

“You certainly have command of elegant and excellent similitudes, and sentiments: but, when you are engaged in sacred discussions, you apply them childishly, nay, pervertedly: for you crawl upon the ground, and enter in thought into nothing above what is human.” Luther

“One method, which everyone knows, is very common, and that is: ‘It may be very true, but do not think of it. ’Make hay while the sun shines,’ as the proverb says. It is all true, it is a fact, but do not mind it. Seize the few pleasures you can, do what little you can, do not look at the dark side of the picture, but always towards the hopeful, the positive side.’…It is put forward in the strongest way at the present time; but it fails, as it always must fail. 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

“This is the voice that is leading us forward. Man has heard it, and is hearing it all through the ages. This voice comes to men when everything seems to be lost and hope has fled, when man’s dependence on his own strength has been crushed down and everything seems to melt away between his fingers, and life is a hopeless ruin. Then he hears it. This is called religion.” Vivekananda. **(The ‘Indefinite’ voice, compare to Heidegger)**

          I feel that I should be writing something, but I have nothing to say.

“This simple observation has nothing to do with cultural pessimism—nor with any optimism either, of course; for the darkening of the world, the flight of the gods, the destruction of the earth, the reduction of human beings to a mass, the hatred and mistrust of everything creative and free has already reached such proportions throughout the whole earth that such childish categories as pessimism and optimism have long become laughable.” Heidegger

With this absurd endeavor of description before us, with its supposed ‘clarification’ of things that are beyond the scope of human comprehension, we are left stagnant in the realm of suggestion, with the smallest of possibilities that we will be able to *leave,* having poisoned the well.­­­

**The Abyssal Experience of Nihilism**

***-Philosophy and Direct Experience-***

(#direxperience)

“…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 onself; 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 go seemingly unnoticed by both scientists and philosophers of science. In short, if there are an infinite number of ‘universes’ and, in theory, an infinite number of ‘yous’, then any decision, in any given situation that is possible, will be 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 comtemplation, 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, there is no privileged ‘now’. Therefore, your birth is as ‘real’ as your death; your existence is equivalent to a movie reel that 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.

We can put forth Nihilism in yet another way. The insatiable credulity in the way in which most humans force an elevation of subjective meaning on to one’s life, with a conscious denial of objectivity, shows 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.

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

# The Uncanny Illusion of Naturalism

-Awaken, Material Nightmare-

“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’ inauthenticty.” 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 it 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’ thatd ‘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 a 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 G\_round\_ 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 g\_rounding\_ 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 infinites 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 Uberman, 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

# Madness, Nonexistence, and The Other

-The Suicide of the Renouncer-

“Our ultimate concern can destroy us as it can heal us.” Tillich

“It is perfectly possible that a person with ‘existential frustration,’ ‘ontological despair,’ or simply ‘sub-clinical depression’ may, because of his abnormal position, be in a better position to look through the camouflage of life that still is deceiving the ‘healthy’ psychotherapists.” Tønnessen

“It may be that in a certain sense, i.e.,”practically speaking,” men are right: but they have not the strength to reduce madness and death to silence. Madness and death can be driven away temporarily, but they will return, and, having returned, will carry out their purpose: they will ask man questions which he would rather forget forever.” Shestov

I believe that those who

speculate that a full apprehension of man’s condition would drive him insane are right, quite literally right.” Becker

“Human cowardice, as Kierkegaard said more than once, cannot endure what madness and death have to tell us.” Shestov

“A man who has become conscious of the absurd is forever bound to it.” Camus

“The situation becomes farcical only when the hobby-man attempts to “unsick” the lifetime devoted philosopher, to cure him, as it were, of being insalubriously pessimistic!” Herman Tonseman

“In life, man proposes, God disposes.” Huxley (Kempus)

“Now more than ever, we should build monasteries…for those who believe in everything and for those who believe in nothing. Where to escape? There no longer

exists a single place where we can professionally execrate this world.” Cioran

“Thus I, a healthy and a happy man, was brought to feel that I could live no longer, that an irresistible force was dragging me down into the grave.” Tolstoy

“We have invented happiness.” Nietzsche

“Men are so necessarily mad, that not to be mad would amount to another form of madness.” Pascal

“…the ascetic ideal has meant so much to man, lies expressed the fundamental feature of man’s will, his horror vacui [horror of a vacuum]: he needs a goal - and he will sooner will nothingness than not will at all. - Am I not understood? - Have I not been understood? -”Certainly not, sir?” - Well, let us begin at the beginning.” Nietzsche

“Thinking of God and not religion, of ecstasy and not mysticism. The difference between the theoretician of faith and the believer is as great as between the psychiatrist and the psychotic.” These words by Cioran lay out the mindset of this entire work. The rejection of the worldly is one that is necessary for these words to have any resonance, yet it is the most difficult position to comprehend; the experience of Nothing is so rare.

“…under the ascendancy of falling and publicness, ‘real’ anxiety is rare.” Heidegger

"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?" Heidegger

"One problem: Human beings are rarely so sensitive to the woes of this world that they feel a pressing need to reject all cravings for the pleasures of this world, as Buddhism would have them do. And it seems that any amount of pleasure is pleasure enough to get us to keep the faith that being alive is all right for everyone, or almost everyone, and will certainly be all right for any children we cause to be delivered into this world.” Ligotti

“Vanity.—How wonderful it is that a thing so evident as the vanity of the world is so little known, that it is a strange and surprising thing to say that it is foolish to seek greatness!”  Pascal (Vivekananda speaks of the rarity of the Nihilistic belief, Kierkegaard, Ligotti, Cioran, Otto ['recently read'- about six years ago now- 10/11/23], all state about the rare instances of this 'true' religious experience)

Nihilism must be properly distinguished from mental illness, more specifically from being represented in some form of worldliness. Although there is much more that needs to be said regarding this issue, the sentiment can at least be acknowledged in the words of Becker: “Full humanness means full fear and trembling, at least some of the waking day…When you get a person to look at the sun as it bakes down on the daily carnage taking place on earth, the ridiculous accidents, the utter fragility of life, the powerlessness of those he thought most powerful—what comfort can you give him from a psychotherapeutic point of view?” St. Seraphim Rose expresses the distinction this way: “Nihilism is, most profoundly, a spiritual disorder, and it can be overcome only by spiritual means; and there has been no attempt whatever in the contemporary world to apply such means.”

Mitchell Heisman also damns any attempt at relating psychology or ‘religion’ to Nihilism. Nihilism expresses the fundamental, ‘incurable’ ground of the human condition:

“Can the meaninglessness of existence be cured with therapy? Lie therapy, whether religious or secular, is overwhelmingly the normative state of the human race. Put another way, there may be sound psychological reasons why radical nihilism is not a condition prescribed by therapists. Yet if psychologists are scientists, and their own methodology confirms the scientific view of human beings as material things in motion, on what grounds can they criticize nihilism in itself? Only insofar as psychologists are not scientists; insofar as they are non-objective partisans of the ‘life party’, psychologists fundamentally are irrevocably biased against consideration of my point of view. Psychological explanations can be used, not only to evade the nihilistic, but to evade the scientific equation of the larger material world with a material view of one’s own mind — and thus to misunderstand the problem.”

How does madness and suicide relate to Nihilism? Are madness and suicide necessary consequences of Nihilism? If madness is related to Nihilism, is it to be welcomed, or even pursued? Is there a difference between a worldly suicide and a suicide resulting from Nihilism? Is there a difference of a particular ‘irrational’ neurosis and the terror that comes from the insights of an experience of Nihilism?

There is one well-documented case of suicide due to Nihilism in the writing of Mitchell Heisman who lived out Nihilism. seemingly, in its lack of Transcendence. Heisman asks: “Can one live a philosophy of the nihilistic, reconciling meaninglessness with every thought and emotion at every moment? If active unbelief were the highest organizing principle of a life, would the consequence be rational self-destruction? Could suicide represent the pinnacle of the rational life realized?” His suicide suggests the impossibility of such an existence; or rather the utter rationality of suicide in a non-rational world.

In his two-thousand page suicide note, Heisman expresses a propulsion towards a new language of Nihilism that though he may have been seeking after, he could not find. He describes his ambitions accordingly: “The implications of life’s meaninglessness have not been elicited with sufficient ruthlessness. My methodology is honesty to the point of absurdity; honesty without mercy; honesty unprejudiced by morals, aesthetics, faith, or hope. When all illusions have been dispelled, at the end of overcoming subjectivities, biases, and prejudices towards life, one encounters the possibility of rational negation of self-interest; rational self-annihilation; rational self-destruction. The experiment in nihilism is to seek out precisely those truths that are most deadly and destructive to me. To will death through truth and truth through death.” (‘possibility’ of rational self-destruction? Ha! Isn’t that adorable?)

Underhill, a hundred-years earlier, describes the seemingly necessary nature of an undertaking such that Heisman pursued: “But the true intellectualist, who concedes nothing to instinct or emotion, is obliged in the end to adopt some form of sceptical philosophy. The horrors of nihilism, in fact, can only be escaped by the exercise of faith…” All the same, Heisman lacked such a applicable language of ‘faith’. Is there anything behind this thought that drives two thinkers, as seemingly as diverse as Heisman and Underhill, that has been forgotten amongst the busyness of the world, which suggests something fundamental about the human condition?

Moreover, there is the issue of whether ‘something’ is missing in Heisman’s interpretation of Nihilism or whether Underhill is ‘guilty’ of falling pray to the fear of an uncompromising Nihilism. One is driven to ‘faith’ (‘faith’ here is used in relation to the Nothing of the world, ‘beyond good and evil’, beyond a human morality. One of the most accurate definitions of ‘faith’ in relation to Nothingness comes from Kierkegaard: “…the opposite of sin is not virtue but faith.” ‘Faith’ is the experience of something ‘beyond’ the Nothingness of the world) and the other to suicide. Does one of them one of have a fuller conception of Nihilism? Is one of them ‘right’?

Throughout Heisman’s expansive suicide note one finds it replete with many other sentiments that have been put forth by both ‘saints’ and other ‘religiously’ minded people, although stated in a wholly naturalistic interpretation of a Nihilism that lacks any notion of Transcendence. Heisman speaks of denying the self, the wretchedness of human life, the contradictory nature of human emotions, the nothing of the world, a possible transcendental aspect of human consciousness (which he found in the music of Bach), yet the saints lived out their lives under an umbrella of a religious language (regardless of how porous the umbrella), while Heisman was drowned in the naturalistic language of the 21st century. Nihilism is all-powerful in its experience, regardless of the human limitations of interpretation.

And even though he expresses, at least in part, some desire to move past a strictly naturalist viewpoint, he was unable to do so. The following quote from Heisman shows at least a hint for the possibility of a language that moves Nihilism past a wholly-naturalistic view, while not entirely escaping its grasp. Worth mentioning is that we shouldn’t take what Heisman has to say here in its simplest form, which is tempting to do with the words that he has chosen (reducing his ‘discovery’ down to an ‘evolutionary basis), i.e. the common criticism of ’God’ as arising from some pragmatic function which stems from a place of ‘desperation’, as a need for an ‘escape’ from the human condition. This would be to miss the deeper interpretation of grounding ‘God’ within and essentially as Nihilism, rather than as an answer derived for comfort or as some sort of ‘conclusion to the problem’.

“When all choices are equal, equality is compatible with total randomness. If all choices are equal, then the choice of death is equal to the choice of life. If life is meaningless, then God is nothing. But a funny thing happened on the way to nihilistic self-destruction. It was precisely through radical disbelief that I discovered an evolutionary basis for God. Most secular people in the West are simply not ruthless enough in their nihilism to vivisect belief to death. Yet vivisecting belief to death exposes how the original monotheistic conception of God likely arose out of ruthless realism. Monotheism may have originated out of a skeptical, nihilistic, materialistic objectivity that annihilated the biologically based subjectivity of the self, and thus created something ‘out of nothing’.”

Now, this is not to say that Heisman was necessarily ‘wrong’ in his action of suicide, that he should have been saved, or that even a Nihilistic language that I am envisioning could have stopped his suicide. The question is: is suicide the answer? Would a language that encompassed and embraced the kindred words of Heisman and the saints allow for Heisman to live as a saint? (Does one even want to live as a saint?) Conversely, would a Nihilistic language/symbolism/method/etc. entail suicide?

The Suicide is not one to be judged in any particular manner. There is a question of how to think about the suicide of the businessman who just lost his job or the person who has just been broken up with by the ‘love of their life’ and the Nihilist engulfed in Nothingness. Is there such a thing as an authentic suicide? Is the suicide of the one who has lost

a (all) ‘worldly’ distraction(s) that they relate their ‘entire’ selves to the same as a Heisman who has already discovered the Nothing of the world? The person who is a slave to the world seemingly has a slight ‘opening up’ of Nihilism with the destruction of what they hold as meaningful, with the loss of a job or a relationship, for instance, yet they seem to flee into suicide as a relief. (I don’t like this last sentence)

But what about the one who has experienced Nihilism and knows that the material positions, even the ‘person to person’ connections/interactions are inevitably the iquevalent to the walking dead? These worldly groundings have already died for the Nihilist. Do we stop the worldly suicide and not the Nihilistic suicide? If one has not experienced the death of the world, then can that person be dragged back into the world, talked off of the ledge? Conversely, if the world has died for a person, and everything within the world is insignificant (Heidegger, obviously), then what is there to drag such a person back to? Is the development of a Nihilistic language of transcendence even ‘worth’ the effort?

Is the Nihilistic suicide not the ‘optimal’ set of movements? Is the Nihilistic suicide authentic in the sense that it is not a ‘fleeing’ or escaping from the world, but rather a movement that is the inevitable decision to release oneself into the Divine? The strange aversion to one following the ‘logic of suicide’ is almost as universal as the unquestioned following of the ‘logic of life’.

“When a human being takes his life in depression, this is a natural death of spiritual causes. The modern barbarity of ‘saving’ the suicidal is based on a hair-raising misapprehension of the nature of existence.” Zapffe

The issue is way more complex than this black and white illustration. The ‘jumping’ suicides of 9/11 are one such example of the complexity of ‘suicide’; there is a possibility that these are not even ‘suicides’ in any ‘real’ sense. With that said, there does seem to be something missing from the common suicide that is not lacking in Heisman’s. This ‘something’ seems to be that the common suicide is worldly and concerned with the ego, rather than the transcendent-self (although one could forcefully argue that Heisman was driven by his ego). This distinction of suicides, and the mindsets and motivations, can be interpreted in a similar way via Kierkegaard-

“It is almost as though the Christian must be puffed up because of this proud elevation above everything men commonly call misfortune, above that which men commonly call the greatest evil. But then in turn Christianity has discovered an evil which man as such does not know of; this misery is the sickness unto death. What the natural man considers horrible – when he has in this wise enumerated everything and knows nothing more he can mention, this for the Christian is like a jest. Such is the relation between the natural man and the Christian; it is like the relation between a child and a man: what the child shudders at, the man regards as nothing. The child does not know what the dreadful is; this the man knows, and he shudders at it. The child’s imperfection consists, first of all, in not knowing what the dreadful is; and then again, as an implication of this, in shuddering at that which is not dreadful. And so it is also with the natural man, he is ignorant of what the dreadful truly is, yet he is not thereby exempted from shuddering; no, he shudders at that which is not the dreadful: he does not know the true God, but this is not the whole of it, he worships an idol as God.”

The one who sees the Nothing of the world, loses interest with it. This or that activity is received as a distraction from this Other that seems to be nagging at their conscience. When one experiences the meaninglessness of the world, this is the experience that one wants to surround oneself with. The patchwork is no longer going to work. Some people are trying to carrying buckets of water from a river to a campground. Some people’s buckets have one hole, another has two holes, another’s completely dilapidated. The one who has the least holes, is able to get through life, is able to hold onto life, onto the water. This is how most people seem to get through life, utterly blind of their condition, i.e. the chasm of death whose opening awaits every step, thought, breath. The person who has a few more holes in his bucket is grasping to hold on, trying ever so hard to get at least some of the water to the campground, yet he may not make it. The last example seems to stand no chance. Is there an authenticity in the final person ‘giving up’? (I don’t know if I like this, I’ll have to reread).

There are a lot of people like this who are struggling to keep themselves distracted, to keep the water in their bucket, sort to speak, with their work, wealth, family, hobbies, etc. They feel a sense of dissatisfaction, yet they keep plugging along in what they halfway recognize as a necessary failure. All the water, from all the buckets, will eventually be lost. Then there are the people with Swiss cheese buckets. These people cannot be held up by any of life’s distractions anymore. Everything has slipped through their fingers. All meaning has left the temporal realm.

“When death is the greatest danger, one hopes for life; but when one becomes acquainted with an even more dreadful danger, one hopes for death. So when the danger is so great that death has become one’s hope, despair is the disconsolateness of not being able to die.” Kierkegaard

“i want to die but I am sorry that I want to die. this is the feeling experienced by those who abandon themselves to nothingness.” Cioran

“He points to those who ‘do not want to live and do not know how to die.’” Tillich quoting Seneca

There is a dichotomy between the logic of life and the logic of suicide. One will always speak past the other. There is no communicating the logic of suicide to one who has not even questioned, never mind experienced the Nothing of existence; the experience of Nothingness is not within their frame of reference. The vast majority of the human species follows the logic of life. They feel at home here in the world; there is nothing to worry about here. The one who has been brought to Nothingness has no way of ‘arguing’ away the ‘meaning’ put onto the lives of those within the world.

“Psychiatry even works on the assumption that the ‘healthy’ and viable is at one with the highest in personal terms. Depression, ‘fear of life,’ refusal of nourishment and so on are invariably taken as signs of a pathological state and treated thereafter. Often, however, such phenomena are messages from a deeper, more immediate sense of life, bitter fruits of a geniality of thought or feeling at the root of antibiological tendencies. It is not the soul being sick, but its protection failing, or else being rejected because it is experienced – correctly – as a betrayal of ego’s highest potential.” Zapffe

Is there even any point to ask why others are so uncomfortable with thinking?! Reason leads you to skepticism. Skepticism brings you to despair. Despair drives you to Nihilism. Nihilism opens up the Other. The Other is terrifyingly strange. My misery seems unbearable at best. What is this feeling of meaninglessness, if not Divine? What could possibly cause this experience? The fear of madness is one hindrance along the path to the Other; how demanding ‘thinking’ can be. Wouldn’t to be stolen by madness be the realization of an ideal? Or why not the ‘never-ending’ adventure into madness?

“Humanly speaking, he is mad and cannot make himself understandable to anyone. And yet ‘to be mad’ is the mildest expression. If he is not viewed in this way, then he is a hypocrite, and the higher he ascends this path, the more appalling a hypocrite he is.” Kierkegaard

“He stands outside human concerns and draws close to the divine; ordinary people think he is disturbed and rebuke him for this, unaware that he is possessed by god…he would like to fly away, but he cannot; he is like a bird fluttering and looking upward and careless of the world below; and he is therefore thought to be mad.” Plato

St. Francis de Sales warns of the consequences that come from the world when one takes on a ‘journey’ such as Heisman’s: “DIRECTLY that your worldly friends perceive that you aim at leading a devout life, they will let loose endless shafts of mockery and misrepresentation upon you; the more malicious will attribute your change to hypocrisy, designing, or bigotry; they will affirm that the world having looked coldly upon you, failing its favour you turn to God; while your friends will make a series of what, from their point of view, are prudent and charitable remonstrances. They will tell you that you are growing morbid; that you will lose your worldly credit, and will make yourself unacceptable to the world; they will prognosticate your premature old age, the ruin of your material prosperity; they will tell you that in the world you must live as the world does; that you can be saved without all this fuss; and much more of the like nature.”

And then, as if to mock them back, he calls out what he sees as their superficiality or unthinking: “We have all seen men, and women too, pass the whole night, even several in succession, playing at chess or cards; and what can be a more dismal, unwholesome thing than that? But the world has not a word to say against it, and their friends are nowise troubled. But give up an hour to meditation, or get up rather earlier than usual to prepare for Holy Communion, and they will send for the doctor to cure you of hypochondria or jaundice!”

Elsewhere, he puts the disaster of an unthinking life that ought to resonate with anyone who considers themselves ‘human’: “Again, while you were dancing, many a soul has passed away amid sharp sufferings; thousands and tens of thousands were lying all the while on beds of anguish, some perhaps untended, unconsoled, in fevers, and all manner of painful diseases. Will you not rouse yourself to a sense of pity for them? At all events, remember that a day will come when you in your turn will lie on your bed of sickness, while others dance and make merry.”

“Moreover, it is largely customary to mock at the melancholy; and in good society it is an unwritten law that every one shall bring a certain quota of contentment and gayety, or else remain in chambered solitude.” Saltus

Suicide need not be necessary even when it is not taken as an abomination. The indefinite, ‘constructive’ nature of the content that is found within Nihilism is something that is easily ‘confused’ due to its unknowability. One may be brought to suicide, yet it may bring another to a ‘Some Thing’.

The Startling Encounter with Infinite Nothingness

-The Remembering of the Recollected Self-

“Why does evolution, as we ascend the ladder of life, foster instead of diminishing the capacity for useless mental anguish, for long, dull torment, bitter grief?” Underhill

“One simply lacks any reason for convincing oneself that there is a true world.” Nietzsche

“How is such an experience possible if the ultimate is that which transcends all possible experience?” Tillich

“It grasps the mind with terrifying and fascinating power. It breaks into the ordinary reality, shakes it and drives it beyond itself in an ecstatic way.” Tillich

“It is the emotion of a creature, submerged and overwhelmed by its own nothingness in contrast to that which is supreme above all creatures.” Otto

“This is no doubt why modern life, weary of positivism and disillusioned by it, but possessed of neither the strength nor the desire to go beyond the boundaries it has established, has made such a fierce attack upon the work of the mystics.” Shestov

“The initial revelation of any monastery: everything is nothing. Thus begin all mysticisms. It is less than one step from nothing to God, for God is the positive expression of nothingness.” Cioran

“The last step towards nihilism is the disappearance into divinity.” Cioran

“This is a practical philosophy that needs to be applied experientially to be known.” Swami Rama

Is there some form of empirical data that coincides with the suggestion that the Nihilistic experience has both a Naturalistic and a Transcendent component? How, then, is Nihilism with its Transcendental interpretation to be, in any substantial sense, distinguished from Naturalism? Is Nihilism necessarily to be reduced to naturalism? Are there characteristics of Nihilism that separates itself from, and go beyond, naturalism? Is there any way to ‘touch’ the Transcendent aspect of Nihilism or are we stuck in the situation of naturalism that Underhill summarizes so succinctly:

“It says in effect: The room in which we find ourselves is fairly comfortable. Draw the curtains, for the night is dark: and let us devote ourselves to describing the furniture.”

Is this our reality? Even with all the strong descriptions of Nihilism that are found within a Tillich, a Cioran, a Heisman, a Kierkegaard, and so forth, there seems to be something missing. Was Nietzsche right when he stated that there was no reason to convince oneself of a ‘true world’? Would, or should, Heisman have blown his brains out all over the Harvard library steps if he encountered something more within Nihilism? Maybe. Maybe not.

The claim is that the Nihilistic experience is in part ‘mystical’. The groundwork for a wholly Transcendent experience is laid within in the experience of the Nothing of the world which allows for the further possibility of an ‘opening up’ of the Other. The experience of Nothingness within (and of) the world does not bring forth any ‘concrete’ forms of the Other. However, an inexplicable, haunting sensation lingers within, creating a suspicion, intensifying to the point of a “pushing”, for one to confront the Other by a ‘clearing of the path’, a renunciation of the distractions of the world, a pursuit and participation with the Nothingness.

“since i will not die right away, nor regain my innocence, going through the same routine motions every day is sheer madness. banality must be overcome at all costs and the way cleared for transfiguration. how sad to see men bypass themselves, neglect their own destiny instead of rekindling the light they carry within them or getting drunk on their abysmal darkness!” Cioran

“If we truly want to follow God we must seek to be other-worldly.” Tozer

What is lacking from its seemingly omnipotent character, is that the Naturalistic (World) interpretation of Nihilism is the ‘fuller’/‘concrete’ expression of that suspicious echo, which is heard, yet has no message to interpret. Allowing for only the looming of a suspicion that will not seem to completely fade. The descriptions found in even the most ‘profound thinkers’ is what we may refer to as the ‘diminished’ or Worldly versions of Nihilism, i.e. the Nothing of the world.

There is another aspect of the Nihilistic experience that is seemingly ‘beyond’, but one is not in a position to say whether this suspicious whisper exists solely within, or whether it is incoherent with, or something totally separate and unrelated from the Worldly form of Nihilism. Regardless of the ascendant nature of the ‘other half’(?) of the experience, this form is even still subsumed by the Nothing of the world. In other words, the ‘deeper’ experiences of Nihilism that may or may not be entirely worldly are as rarely explored or experienced as its Naturalistic counterpart. With that said, there is a ‘wider’ experience of Nihilism, there is a more direct confrontation to be had. This is found in what is normally referred to as the psychedelic experience.

**(I need to rewrite the above paragraph, as it mentions/describes “too much” or goes too far, as it almost foreshadows the consequences of the Transcendent experience, before it has even happened)**

The psychedelic experience can be mystical. What is a ‘mystical experience’? Broadly stated, the mystical experience eradicates the ego. The worldly ‘I’ is erased from its entirety, yet there is something that remains. There is a disconnect from the worldly flesh-body that is experienced as wholly incorporeal. While there is no ego to be found, this ‘something’ that resembles a ‘you’ remains; yet this different sort of ‘you’ is not all there is either. There is a ‘bigger something’; there is a meeting with.

Nihilism in its fully Transcendent forms is experienced in such a way that it can be described as an Augmented version of experiencing the Nothing of the world. The Nothing of the world and the Transcendent experiences of Nihilism are simply variants of each other. The Transcendent form of Nihilism coincides with what is normally labeled as ‘mystical’. This Augmented form of Nihilism is a true ‘opening up’ of the Transcendent. There is close similarity in the comparison to the ‘two-sided’ experiences of Nihilism, as Transcendent and as Naturalistic, as is found within human consciousness as the divided-self as part Transcendent and part Natural.

The ‘external’ appearance of Transcendent Nihilism is one that is indeed taken as an encounter with the Other, while the naturalistic aspect of Nihilism is one that ‘hears a ’message’ that is coming ‘from me and beyond me’, yet within the world. And although they differ in pure experience, they are not in conflict with one another; they lend themselves to each other in a cohesive fashion.

“It is a mistake to supposed that mysticism derives from a softening of the instincts, from a compromised vitality…To get a sense of them, imagine a Hernando Cortez in the middle of an invisible geography. The German mystics were conquerors too.” Cioran

“Quietism”: the difference between the tense stillness of the athlete and the limp passivity of the sluggard, who is really lazy, though he looks resigned. True “Quiet” is a means, not an end: is actively embraced, not passively endured. It is a phase in the self’s growth in contemplation; a bridge which leads from its old and uncoordinated life of activity to its new unified life of deep action–the real “mystic life” of man.” Underhill

“He calls suffering the “gymnastic of eternity,” the “terrible initiative caress of God”; recognizing in it a quality for which the disagreeable rearrangement of nerve molecules cannot account. Sometimes, in the excess of his optimism, he puts to the test of practice this theory with all its implications. Refusing to be deluded by the pleasures of the sense world, he accepts instead of avoiding pain, and becomes an ascetic; a puzzling type for the convinced naturalist, who, falling back upon contempt—that favourite resource of the frustrated reason—can only regard him as diseased.” Underhill

“Believe me, children, one who would know much about these high matters would often have to keep his bed, for his bodily frame could not support it.” Tauler

The Transcendent aspect of the Nihilistic experience stays mostly hidden due to a lack of participation or pursued confrontation with the Other. Many don’t even know that it exists; or if they do, they have misconceptions about it due to the babble from people who have never experienced it themselves. Most ‘spiritual’ journeys consists of meditation, contemplation, various mortifications, and so on. Yet, even though these practices are performed with the aim of attaining a mystical experience, most fail at ever achieving this end (at least in such an awe-inspiring fashion).

“In order to go into it, man must empty himself of all the finite contents of his ordinary life; he must surrender all preliminary concerns for the sake of the ultimate concern. He must transcend the division of existence…The ultimate is beyond this division, and he who wants to reach the ultimate must overcome this division in himself by meditation, contemplation and ecstasy.” Tillich

“First Bach fugues, a bore…But training changes the structure of our spiritual experiences. In due course, contact with an obscurely beautiful poem, an elaborate piece of counterpoint or of mathematical reasoning, causes us to feel direct intuitions of beauty and significance.” Huxley

These traditional practices need not be necessarily ridiculed as either inefficient nor as hindrances; these practices are seemingly beneficial. But is there something more? Is there another way that ‘guarantees’ a confrontation with the Other? We believe there is a way and that it does not take years of study, ritual, and practice in order to achieve this state (although these practices cannot be ignored as they are useful tools for the experience, even if they do not, in themselves, produce an encounter).

The psychedelic journey is one that, if properly prepared for, can open up the abyss of existence in which no words, thoughts, systems, religions, and so forth, can prepare one for.

If one one wants to pursue, if one wants to confront and participate with the Other, with Transcendent Nihilism, then one only needs a few grams of psilocybin for their worldview to be irreconcilably disrupted.

For those who have experienced this Mystical Nothingness, there is an unthinking enthusiasm involved which pushes one into a frenzy of confusion due to the uncanny and terrifying nature that is like nothing found within the world. As with the ‘Temporal’ forms of Nihilism, there is still a strong motivation to proclaim the unreality of the experience of the Transcendent. And, again, in the form of retreating back into the world, and taking the meaningless as meaningful, to cover up the horrid experience of Nothingness.

This ‘moving past’ is the birth of all confusion and discord. When one grasps and misuses finite language as a literal description of the Wholly-Other the experience of Nihilism is inevitably obfuscated. One must speak to oneself when discussing the Other. Finite human language is necessarily symbolic in nature with regards to speaking of the Other.

“…any experience, no matter how spiritual, could only yield us an It.” Buber

These words are only a distraction, worthless nothings which are only written out of cowardice to confront the Other. I begged to be ‘kept’ where I was as I experienced a timeless, Ultimate unity; I felt ‘at home’ and infinitely satisfied. With that said, it has been over a year and I have not been able to push myself into another encounter; terrifying bliss like nothing I have ever experienced before. I feel both unworthy of ‘Its’ presence and I also cannot escape the pathetic, naturalistic side of my divided-self from being paralyzed with fear from another encounter.

What if one does ‘meet’ this Other and yet is still not convinced? What if one meets this Other and still does not know what to do? The real question is this: what if one ‘meets’ this Other and still cannot hold to any delusion set forth by other humans who have supposedly gone through this experience, nor develop any symbols that show relevance to the Other? All concrete symbols of Transcendence are dead.

What do we say about this unspeakable world? Is it purely illusory? A misinterpretation of a trick that is played on us by our mind? For one who has not experienced, this may pass off as an ‘explanation’. For those who have experienced the Transcendent forms of Nihilism, it cannot be dismissed so easily. There is a something that one encounters within this Transcendent experience of Nihilism. One may rush to call it ‘God’. Others may dismiss it as the workings of the ‘subconscious’. Whatever the explanation, it is peculiar that the Nothingness found within the world is magnified to unmeasurable heights when in the face of this Other, this ‘something’. This Other world is experienced as more real than the mundane, everyday world. The ‘true’ illusion becomes what all consider the ‘real’ or ‘only’ world.

“Mescalin opens up the way of Mary, but shuts the door on that of Martha. It gives access to contemplation— but to a contemplation that is incompatible with action and even with the will to action, the very thought of action. In the intervals between his revelations the mescalin taker is apt to feel that, though in one way everything is supremely as it should be, in another there is something wrong. His problem is essentially the same as that which confronts the quietest…” Huxley

There is a terrifying bliss that surrounds your entire Being, without you being who you are. There is a dissolution of the ego, the worldly self that is concerned with security, money, relationships, and so on. All human aspects of worldly-consciousness drop out; they do not simply become insignificant, as with experiencing the Nothing of the world, rather they utterly dissipate, they are no where to be found.

“Absence, extinction, and unoccupancy–these are not the Buddhist conception of emptiness. Buddhists’ Emptiness is not on the plane of relativity. It is Absolute Emptiness transcending all forms of mutual relationship, of subject and object, birth and death, God and the world, something and nothing, yes and no, affirmation and negation. In Buddhist Emptiness there is no time, no space, no becoming, no-thing-ness; it is what makes all these things possible; it is a zero full of infinite possibilities, it is a void of inexhaustible contents.” Suzuki

To confront, there must be a dissolution of the ‘I’ or of the ego; this is what psylocibin does with utter ease. There must be renunciation. The Other demands that we renounce. If you are do not reduce yourself into as pure a form humility as one can achieve, if you do not renounce the ego, the self, if you hold on, well, then, you will bring a nightmare upon yourself like never experienced before. The preparation of renunciation begins with the experiencing the Nothing of the world. One must give up holding onto the deadness of the world. The transitory nature of all things within the world are nothing but distractions that deflect the Other. What is it to experience oneself as Nothing, if it is not a dissolution of the ego? To renounce worldly desires, ambitions, and any other form of illusion, is to embrace the Nothing of the world, which allows for a ‘clearer’ experience of the Other. The dissolution of the ‘I’ brings forth the greatest sensation of Unity. A feeling of pure consciousness that is One with all of existence; it is pure existence.

“To the extent that there is attachment to ‘I,’ ‘Me,’ ‘Mine,’ there is no attachment to, and therefore no unitive knowledge of, the divine Ground.” Huxley

“The ultimate abandonment of one’s role is not to have a self as a fixed point of reference; it is the freedom to manifest God through one’s own uniqueness. This monk had hit bottom. But the bottom in the spiritual journey is also the top. To be no one is to be everyone. To be no self is to be the true Self. To be nothing is to be everything. In a sense, it is to be God.” Keating

“…it would seem that there is within each of us an enemy which we tolerate at our peril. Jesus called it”life” and “self,” or as we would say, the self-life. Its chief characteristic is its possessiveness: the words “gain” and “profit” suggest this. To allow this enemy to live is in the end to lose everything.” Tozer

“The void- myself without me- is the liquidation of the adventure of the ‘I’- it is being without any trace of being, a blessed engulfment, an incomparable disaster.” Cioran

“I am sorry sometimes that God no longer fills us with dread. If only we could feel again the primordial quiver of dread in front of the unknown!” Cioran

When is one truly ready to confront something Infinite, something wholly Other? This is not a ‘meeting’ with another object within the world, this is a confrontation with Existence itself, in the fullest sense of the term. This confrontation is so different that it can easily push one into a state of panic that will be unrecognizable. The naturalistic side of the divided-self, the side that pulls us down into the world, turns produces a fear that is unimaginable. The ‘Hellish’ confrontation with the Other, the terrifying bliss of the experience, is something that cannot be boxed away within human language or dismissed as illusory or ‘natural’.

“Some people talk as if meeting the gaze of absolute goodness would be fun. They need to think again.” C. S. Lewis

“…terror fraught with an inward shuddering such as not even the most menacing and overpowering created thing can instil.” Otto

“The infinite depth repels and horrifies me; the infinite height attracts and satisfies me.” Tolstoy

“Although this painful martyrdom of horrible desolation and passive purgation be so tremendous, that with reason it hast gotten the name of Hell amongst mystick Divines, (because it seems impossible to be able to live a moment with so grievous a torment; so that with great reason it may be said, that he that suffers it, lives dying, and dying lives a lingring death) yet know, that it is necessary to endure it, to arrive at the sweet, joyous and abundant riches of high contemplation and loving union: and there has been no holy Soul, which has not passed through this spiritual martyrdom and painful torment.” Molinos

“Mysticism revolves around the passion for ecstasy and a horror of the void. One cannot know one without the other…Once it has totally rejected the world, the soul is ripe for a long-term and fecund emptiness…One sees nothing except nothingness. And the latter has become everything. Ecstasy is plenitude in a void, a full void. It is an overwhelming frisson which convulses nothingness, an invasion of being in absolute emptiness.” Cioran

Is there a way to ‘guide’ oneself through this confrontation? Music, with its abstract nature, is suited best for such a journey. For assistance with the death of the ‘I’, to release from the naturalistic side of the self, the abstract nature of music, with its strange use of plucking sounds from ‘nowhere’ with the equally important ‘rests’ in between each note, as a form of language, allows one to more-fully dispense with the natural-self. Music without words will do best, since any human voice may cause a distraction and pull one down and away from the Other. Bach’s organ music, a God-like instrument with God-like tones, will guide one through the journey with the Other. Bach’s organ works express fully his meditations on death. Focus on the bass/pedal notes, let the highs and mids come at you, and allow for the Bach, who speaks fluently the ‘language of God’, to show you the Other.

“…and yet it does not matter that he’s all in bits. The whole is disorganized. But each individual fragment is in order, is a representative of a Higher Order. The Highest Order prevails even in the disintegration. The totality is present even in the broken pieces. More clearly present, perhaps, than in a completely coherent work. At least you aren’t lulled into a sense of false security by some merely human, merely fabricated order. You have to rely on your immediate perception of the ultimate order. So in a certain sense disintegration may have its advantages. But of course it’s dangerous, horribly dangerous. Suppose you couldn’t get back, out of the chaos…” Huxley

“…the Schopenhauerian theory in majorem musicae gloriam [for the greater glory of music] - that is to say, by means of the sovereignty of music, as Schopenhauer understood it; music abstracted from and opposed to all the other arts, music as the independent art-in-itself, not like the other arts, affording reflections of the phenomenal world, but rather the language of the will itself, speaking straight out of the”abyss” as its most personal, original, and direct manifestation.” Nietzsche

“Bach’s music is the medium of heavenly transfiguration.” Cioran

“…Bach often meditated on death…Handel compared to Bach, is of this world. Bach is divine…” Cioran

“Listening to Bach, one sees God come into being. His music generates divinity. After a Bach…one feels that God must exists. Otherwise, Bach’s music would be only heartrending illusion. Theologians and philosophers wasted so many days and nights searching for proofs of his existence, ignoring the only valid one: Bach.” Cioran

“If humans are emotion machines, then music must work, in some sense, like a machine. Music could be a form of emotional technology to control my own behavior intelligently. In other words, if emotions are the products of material processes, then art could be viewed as a form of technology. From the standpoint of this musical materialism, as one of the most extreme implications of an unadulterated materialism, lay a possible solution to dominance of my own analytic and objective tendency to materialize everything. I began to listen to music, especially German music (and especially Wagner and Bach), as a form of technology to counter my own tendencies to view everything as material or technology.” Heisman

“Bach is ground from outside of myself that makes up for the nihilistic lack of ground within myself. Bach counters my material self-consistency and its tendency towards self-decomposition with a form of holistic-mind order.” Heisman

Plato describes Transcendent Nihilism and the seemingly ‘true’ mindset to have in the face of this Nothing:

“…the entire soul is pierced and maddened and pained, and at the recollection of beauty is again delighted. And from both of them together the soul is oppressed at the strangeness of her condition, and is in a great strait and excitement, and in her madness can neither sleep by night nor abide in her place by day. And wherever she thinks that she will behold the beautiful one, thither in her desire she runs. And when she has seen him, and bathed herself in the waters of beauty, her constraint is loosened, and she is refreshed, and has no more pangs and pains; and this is the sweetest of all pleasures at the time, and is the reason why the soul of the lover will never forsake his beautiful one, whom he esteems above all; he has forgotten mother and brethren and companions, and he thinks nothing of the neglect and loss of his property; the rules and proprieties of life, on which he formerly prided himself, he now despises, and is ready to sleep like a servant, wherever he is allowed, as near as he can to his desired one, who is the object of his worship, and the physician who can alone assuage the greatness of his pain.”

At the same time, two-thousand years ago, Plato describes the divided-self, and the fleeing into the world of constant distraction, of the human condition as if he is speaking of one of our contemporaries: “Now he who is not newly initiated or who has become corrupted, does not easily rise out of this world to the sight of true beauty in the other; he looks only at her earthly namesake, and instead of being awed at the sight of her, he is given over to pleasure, and like a brutish beast he rushes on to enjoy and beget; he consorts with wantonness, and is not afraid or ashamed of pursuing pleasure in violation of nature.”

As has been said, the Nihilist cannot turn to the dead world of distractions. Everything has died. How does one begin to interpret this experience that no words can grasp? The world’s religions may be of some help, but they can never settle the issue. Is there some language that can be developed in order to help one properly address the Nothing? Huxley sums up this need quite well:

“…the ultimate Reality is not clearly and immediately apprehended, except by those who have made themselves loving, pure in heart and poor in spirit. This being so, it is hardly surprising that a theology based upon the experience of nice, ordinary, unregenerate people should carry so little conviction. This kind of empirical theology is on precisely the same footing as an empirical astronomy, based upon the experience of naked-eye observers.”

Philosophy, or conceptual thinking, seems to help pave the way to allow for a better ‘understanding’ of the ineffable, but, even still, there is no new ‘knowledge’ gained. The universe will dissipate before your very eyes. The flow of ‘information’ will come at you at an infinite rate. You will be demanded to renounce, to let go, to show true humility. The non-movement as a result of a total lack of values, of an utter insignificance of the human world, goes hand in hand with a Quietist contemplative existence within the Nothing of the world. Why is it that the psychedelic experience is one which ushers in a mystical experience that confirms the meaninglessness of the world?

“…whilst in that state of abstraction rising higher, perceiving there is a place beyond any bodily condition, adding still and persevering further in practising wisdom, rejecting this fourth dhyâna, firmly resolved to persevere in the search, still contriving to put away every desire after form, gradually from every pore of the body there is perceived a feeling of empty release, and in the end this extends to every solid part, so that the whole is perfected in an apprehension of emptiness. In brief, perceiving no limits to this emptiness, there is opened to the view boundless knowledge. Endowed with inward rest and peace, the idea of ‘I’ departs, and the object of ‘I’—clearly discriminating the non-existence of matter, this is the condition of immaterial life.” Buddha

If one wishes to rush to a ‘conclusion’ and attempt to wrap up the infinite within one of the worldly religions, in order to live in the world, in order to ‘make sense’ of such a confrontation, then one is only fleeing from Nihilism and ultimately doing a disservice to the ‘something’ that one meets on the psychedelic journey. This is not about belief or developing a system or trying to box in Nihilism. One must accept the utter mystery behind Nihilism as something too ‘powerful’ to be confined in the finite. There is only the Infinite Conclusion.

One encounters Nothingness in the Transcendent experience of Nihilism.

“Therewith, they learn that It is the Cause of all things and yet Itself is nothing, because It super-essentially transcends them all.” Pseudo-Dionysius

“In statements such as Eckhart’s, God is equated with nothing.” Huxley

Huxley further goes on to confirm the Nihilist’s experience of the Nothing of oneself:

“Cheap,” I commented. “Trivial. Like things in a five-and-ten.” And all this shoddiness existed in a closed, cramped universe. “It’s as though one were below decks in a ship,” I said. “A five-and-ten-cent ship.” And as I looked, it became very clear that this five-and-ten-cent ship was in some way connected with human pretensions, with the portrait of Cézanne, with A.B. among the Dolomites overacting his favorite character in fiction. This suffocating interior of a dime-store ship was my own personal self; these gimcrack mobiles of tin and plastic were my personal contributions to the universe.”

Why is this important? The ‘truth’ of the experience is one that is confirmed by those separated by time, space, culture, and so on. A repeating of the words of Huxley can be found in the mystic St. Molinos: “Knowing that thou art nothing, that thou canst do nothing, and art worth just nothing, thou wilt quietly embrace passive drynesses, thou wilt endure horrible desolations; thou wilt undergo spiritual martyrdoms and inward torments. By means of this Nothing thou must die in thy self, many ways, at all times, and all hours, Keeping thy self in Nothing, thou wilt bar the door against every thing that is not God”. Molinos further states: “But the happy Soul which is gotten to this holy hatred of it self, lives overwhelmed, drowned and swallowed up in the depth of its own Nothing.”

Within mystical experiences human truth, better put, human rationality is no longer a concern. There are ‘things’ that are brought forth that no human language can describe, that no human being can fully comprehend. The experience is one that must be dealt with subjectively.

“In life, man proposes, God disposes.” Huxley

Smith describes his encounter with the Other as such: “The world into which I was ushered was strange, weird, uncanny, significant, and terrifying beyond belief.” Smith, describing his experience himself in a Transcendental manner, also declares: “Revelations can be terrifying.” The mystical experience is not like anything of this world.

Huxley describes a part of his psychedelic experience as follows:

“And then t here is the horror of infinity…I found myself all at once on the brink of panic. This, I suddenly felt, was going too far. Too far, even though the going was into intenser beauty, deeper significance. The fear, as I analyze it in retrospect, was of being overwhelmed, of disintegrating under a pressure of reality greater than a mind, accustomed to living most of the time in a cosy world of symbols, could possibly bear. The literature of religious experience abounds in references to the pains and terrors overwhelming those who have come, too suddenly, face to face with some manifestation of the Mysterium tremendum. In theological language, this fear is due to the incompatibility between man’s egotism and the divine purity, between man’s self-aggravated separateness and the infinity of God.”

“Quite naturally, then, almost no one figures their time to be ill-spent in bickering about some point of scripture or a psycho-philosophical poser rather than in sizing up some superlative individuals who have called into question what we are or what we might be aside from slaves of our egos.” Ligotti

Is there any better explanation for why philosophers and theologians have ‘missed the mark’ in their sand-trap of pursuing ‘rationality’ instead of direct experience? Is there any better reason one could give for the seemingly endless stagnation and frustration that ensues from the ‘intellectualizing’ of these issues? Is there any doubt as to why the dogmas of the naturalist and of the worldly ‘religious’ are trapped in a stalemate with their attempts to ‘convince’ one another with reason and rationality? Reason and rationality have their place, but if there is not an attempt to go beyond, then one necessarily can only obtain a constrained portion of the human condition.

Huxley sums it up with a question:

“How many philosophers, how many theologians, how many professional educators have had the curiosity to open this Door in the Wall? The answer, for all practical purposes, is, None.”

There is no need for a concern over ‘spookiness’ in any ‘supernatural’ or ‘new age’ sense. The particular mystical-type experiences that I have briefly mentioned are not anything special. By ‘special’, I mean that these experiences can be induced into anyone willing to undertake such a task. There is no worry of any ‘new age’ or ‘supernatural’ powers underlying any of the claims made here.

Any person in the proper set (psychological preparation) and setting (proper surroundings and environment), along with a definite intention for the pursuit is welcome to ‘test’ the results of such an experience for themselves. There is no need for years of meditation, chanting, yoga, or any other traditional ‘religious’ interlocutors; although these methods, and others, can be used in correlation with psychedelics which may bring out a fuller and deeper experience.

One is now simply left to interpret said experience. Is it wholly naturalistic? Is there anything veritical about the psychedelic experience? Speaking from personal experience, the experience that one encounters with the use psychedelics is not only not contradictory with the philosophy of Nihilism (as laid out in these pages), it rather confirms it quite strongly.

This does not prove anything. While one is tempted to refer to the Transcendent experience as an objective encounter with the Other, with all its unimaginable, noetic, and paradoxical qualities, there is no explicit contradiction in reducing the experience down to a purely naturalist interpretation.

Regardless of how one perceives the Transcendent form of Nihilism, we eventually will be dropped back into the world, to our normal, mundane state of consciousness, and we will once again feel the vice grip of the Worldly/Temporal Nihilism, and be left with the irresolvable doubt from the Nothing of the world.

St. Theresa laments:

“Oh, what a distress it is for my soul to have to return to hold commerce with this world after having had its conversation in heaven! To have to play a part in the sad farce of this earthly life!”

“This, however, is the sublime melancholy of our lot that every You must become an It in our world. However exclusively present it may have been in the direct relationship- as soon as the relationship has run its course or is permeated by means, the You becomes an object among objects, possibly the noblest one and yet one of them, assigned its measure and boundary.” The actualization of the work involves a loss of actuality. Genuine contemplation never lasts long; the natural being that only now revealed itself to me in the mystery of reciprocity has again become describable, analyzable, classifiable- the point in which manifold systems of laws intersect.” Buber

“How, in other words, can one be a saint and still organize scientific movements of world-historical importance? How does one lean on God and give over everything to Him and still stand on his own feet as a passionate human being? These are not rhetorical questions, they are real ones that go right to the heard of the problem of ‘how to be a man’- a problem that no one can satisfactorily advise anyone else on, as the wise William James knew. The whole thing is loaded with ambiguity impossible to resolve.” Becker

# The Symbolic Resonance of Nothing

-The Dialectical Silence-

“There is a nagging suspicion that the diagnostics are exploiting Heidegger’s exotic language in order to “keep talking,” and thus keep calm and unaffected by the horror of the bottomless abyssus humanae conscientiae with which they are incessantly confronted.” Tønnessen

“Martin Heidegger is what happens when one believes in one’s own emotions, i.e. poetry.” Heisman

“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

The question comes up once more: Is one driven to madness or forced to relinquish their existence? Can one confront the Other in an authentic way that is not motivated by a purely selfish need for comfort or ‘security’ within the nightmare of existence that is revealed through the experience of Nihilism? Can a language of Nihilism, having the duel roles of navigating the Nothing of the world while propagating a loop Transcendental aspect of meaninglessness, as an authentic way to encounter the Other, be developed?

Is there any place for philosophical thinking in this world of contradictions? These questions plague modern philosophy, encompassing more than just the symbolic reasoning behind concepts of God and understandings of Nihilism. The suggestion of a language dedicated to Nihilism, as Transcendent, raises the prospect of a collective acknowledgment of the deeply discomforting idea of a fundamentally meaningless reality – an acknowledgment we have been avoiding.

Can the human mind, in its state of evolutionary distress to find meaning, to survive and adapt, ever truly accept such a vast, terrifying void, laid bare in front of its understanding? Could we actualize an existentialist form of survival, surpassing historical and cultural scaffoldings imposed on the consciousness to cope with the underlying Nothing?

The thought naturally incites resistance. After all, humanity’s journey has always, whether an explicit battle or with a feigning aloofness, been the attempts to eliminate this Nothingness. How does one “eliminate” Nothing? And the more pressing question: \*Should\* one even attempt to alleviate the Nothing?

Nevertheless, this existentially ‘possible’ Being-towards-death remains, from the existential point of view, a fantastical exaction…Does Dasein ever factically throw itself into such a Being-towards-death? Does Dasein demand, even by reason of its own-most Being, an authentic potentiality-for-Being determined by anticipation?” Heidegger

One must first accept that one does not know what they are talking about. This is simply another crewd translation of the simple fact that there is not one person who knows what is ‘going on here’.

Underhill expresses, fully, the self-criticism that this sort of project is bound to: “If the metaphysician be true to his own postulates, he must acknowledge in the end that we are all forced to live, to think, and at last to die, in an unknown and unknowable world: fed arbitrarily and diligently, yet how we know not, by ideas and suggestions whose truth we cannot test but whose pressure we cannot resist.”

Could we circumnavigate all this and express the experience of Nihilism in the simplest of terms as: ‘all worldly endeavors are futile’. It seems that we cannot. Cliches, as such, will never do, since, as Heidegger points out, cliches are nothing but a form of empty ‘idle talk’ riddled with ‘ambiguity’ of a passing off as ‘knowing’. This ‘passing over’ is simply another distraction. There may be a ‘message’ that is missed when we speak of Nihilism in such cursory ways. If we want to develop a language of Nihilism that is not simply Naturalistic, that is beyond the dead ‘solutions’ of the worldly philosophies and religions, and moreover, that is not simply idle-talk that contributes nothing more than to a premature suicide, then we must proceed past such banalities.

A main problem with discussing Nihilism is that there are no words that hold a tight enough grasp on the experience itself as to allow the experience to become transferable. St. Therese of Lisieux explains her experience within a Christian structure: “He allowed my soul to be overwhelmed with darkness, and the thought of Heaven, which had consoled me from my earliest childhood, now became a subject of conflict and torture…I wish I could express what I feel, but it is beyond me. One must have passed through this dark tunnel to understand its blackness.”

Is one who has experienced Nihilism, with its essence of ‘non-transferability’, now left to a Quietist silence? I believe that an honest answer to this question is: yes. Do we stop here? We cannot, because we are still in the theoretical. Most, of the seemingly rare few, who have experienced Nihilism do not have the ‘stamina’ to renounce the world in its entirety. Experiencing Nothing and renouncing everything are not equivalent (as we spoke of in the section on Naturalism). Beyond renunciation, even the Suicide, who claims to feel a ‘brand’ of Nihilism, is seemingly misunderstanding the message. The Nihilist is one who uses suicide, rather than commits it; at least for a particular span of time.

Is there then some type of ‘affirmative’ substance that is found within the experience of Nihilism that allows us to move forward in a task of developing a language that breaks through what could otherwise be perceived as a simple pointing out, or culmination, of the ‘world’s sufferings’?

To quote Cioran once more on the ’ affirmative substance’ of Nothing: “The initial revelation of any monastery: everything is nothing. Thus begin all mysticisms. It is less than one step from nothing to God, for God is the positive expression of nothingness.”

A language of Nihilism reflects the need to confront the Transcendental yearning as a true confrontation, rather than something that one tries to replace with this or that ‘thing’, this or that creed, this or that activity, etc. The need for such a language in demonstrated in the words of Huxley:

“…the ultimate Reality is not clearly and immediately apprehended, except by those who have made themselves loving, pure in heart and poor in spirit. This being so, it is hardly surprising that a theology based upon the experience of nice, ordinary, unregenerate people should carry so little conviction. This kind of empirical theology is on precisely the same footing as an empirical astronomy, based upon the experience of naked-eye observers.”

A ‘new language’ of Nihilism is one that must be worked out in order to provide an adequate account, that allows for the possibility of Transcendence, as revealed through Nihilism, within human experience, without specifically holding to either a purely ‘religious’ or ‘naturalist’ worldview. With great reservation, I suggest the use of the word Nihiltheism as a word to ground this ‘genre’ of human experience. This is a language that is not strictly based upon on myth, tradition, nor empirical facts. This language must also not ever be taken as ‘complete’ (‘complete’ in a similar way in which ‘literal’ would be used with regards to interpreting a mythical language), but rather as a symbolic language which is always self-critical and therefore always open for re-interpretation.

A language, as any other, may be able to be developed in order to ‘navigate’ the ‘complexities’ of Nihilism in both its forms, as the Nothing of the world and its Transcendence. The groundwork for a language of Nihilism, at least up till the present moment, is found in its most ‘complete’ form in Heidegger’s comprehensive language about the human condition described in Being and Time.

Within the ‘already-made’ language of Heidegger we have concepts of anxiety, moments of vision, everydayness, the call of conscience, the situation, authenticity, uncanniness, resoluteness, and so on, already laid out and defined, that capture key insights into the human condition. These insights and concepts allow for an interpretation of the Nihilistic experience on ‘non-naturalistic’ terms while still being grounded within the naturalistic aspect of the human condition.

There is no need to get bogged down with Heidegger’s perspective being essentially ‘atheistic’ or ’ theistic’ in itself, since we are specifically looking to interpret and discover a language in which a Nihilist may speak about the human situation as he experiences it. Heidegger himself attempts to avoid such presumptuous terms as ‘atheistic’ or ‘theistic’ as they are taken to be ultimately restrictive for a full analysis of the human situation. What Heidegger speaks of ‘objectively’ must still be experienced subjectively. Therefore, Heidegger’s analysis may only be seen as an introductory ‘map’ with regards to speaking about the Other. This ‘map’ need not guarantee a ‘direct’ path to the Other. In other words, assuming there can be such a thing as a ‘language of Nihilism’, the possible interpretations may vary immensely. This ‘Other’ is an aspect of the developing language that will have to rest in obscurity, not only in these introductory words, but even within a more developed speech-set.

Without the need, yet, to go into detail concerning all of Heidegger’s terms or concepts, a bare-bones laying out of the basic structure may be put down in order to help envision the coherency of Heidegger’s analysis of human existence as a possible foundation for developing a language of Nihilism. Therefore, a very brief summary of what Heidegger refers to as ‘Being-Towards-Death’ with some of its particularities will be put forth as an example of the foundations of such a language.

‘Being-Towards-Death’, concisely put, consist of anxiety, in a moment of vision, having a call of conscience that seems to come ‘from me and beyond me’ (Buber- “It appears simultaneously as acting on and as acted upon”), that ‘gives something to be understood’ in an ‘indefinite’, incommunicable way, and which causes the world to ‘drop out’ as to the entirety of existence sinks into insignificance.

And yet, one feels a “push” to stay resolute, sitting in this anxiety produced experience, while knowing that death may happen at any moment, which, as a result, allows one to escape the ‘everydayness’ of the world in order to turn inward with attempts to discover one’s True-Self. Without even going into detail, Heidegger’s structure is one which should not be difficult to see how his analysis of the human condition explicitly lends itself to the building of a Nihilistic language.

Is Heidegger’s analysis, which is commonly labeled as ‘atheistic’, really at all different from what the Trappist monk, Thomas Merton, has come to accept? Merton also clearly states the bankruptcy of a constant outward-seeking, hectic search for ‘meaning’ within life. In comparison to Heidegger, he expresses the same idea in this language: “The truly sacred attitude toward life is in no sense an escape from the sense of nothingness that assails us when we are left alone with ourselves.

On the contrary, it penetrates into that darkness and that nothingness, realizing that the mercy of God has transformed our nothingness into His temple and believing that in our darkness His light has hidden itself. Hence the sacred attitude is one which does not recoil from our own inner emptiness, but rather penetrates it with awe and reverence, and with the awareness of mystery. This is a most important discovery in, the interior life.” Is the use of the word ‘God’ enough to somehow make any sort of distinction between Heidegger’s ‘atheism’ (which he explicitly denies) and Merton’s ‘theism’? A Nihilistic language would be one that attempts to reconcile such superficial disparities.

With that said, Heidegger admits that his full conception of ‘Being-Towards-Death’ is one that is ‘fantastical’. That is to say, if we are to develop past a purely Heideggarian analysis of Being, how does one, in fact, proceed in a constant participation with an existence that is drowned in the meaninglessness of the world (this includes one’s self, that paradoxically, though reasonably, due to our nature of doubled-mindedness, is washed over with fear and doubt, paralyzed at the thought of their nothing selves disappearing into infinity {this is just a thought that needs rewritting}) and which faces annihilation at any moment? Is it possible to even proceed with, or in, such a ‘fantastical’ structure?

Further, what is to be meant by a ‘True-Self’ as interpreted on not ‘wholly naturalistic’ terms which avoids, in its analysis of the human condition, from falling back into the language of myth and worldly ‘religion’? On the other hand, is there any kind of ‘positive’ substance that stems from the Nihilistic experience which is not to be interpreted as wholly biological, naturalistic, and worldly, as many interpreters of Heidegger have, so far, done with his language? Heidegger himself dismisses both ‘biological’ explanations and, seemingly traditional conceptions of ‘God’ as too preemptive, as they are hindered by assumptions that do not necessarily leave open the mystery of the ‘Why?’.

“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 any biological ‘explanation’ of this phenomenon. But it is also no less distant from a theological exegesis of conscience or any employment of this phenomenon for proofs of God or for establishing an ‘immediate’ conscience of God.” (pg. 313)

(‘The Call’ as both from oneself and beyond oneself) “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 sexploitations pass over the phenomenal findings too hastily.” (pg. 320)

This new language must not be seen as ‘rescuing’ one from the Nothingness, rather it is a language that attempts to bring one ‘face to face’ with the nightmare of existence. The terror of existence is one that opens up the ‘positive’ content. The unending questioning of ‘why?’ opens up something that is not wholly natural, yet must still be experienced and discussed within the world.

Even the mystical experience, while a blow to Naturalism, does not defeat Naturalism. One of the few accurate statements that Sartre put forth when describing his particular brand of ‘existentialism’ was that whether God exists or not, it’s all still the same, it makes no difference (regardless if he was using this statement as a ‘defense’ of his atheistic existentialism). The ultimately empty structure of Naturalism must be experienced as a ladder into Transcendence, not as an obstacle to be overcome. One must not play with the toys of the world that are crushed into dust with every movement. To keep grabbing a new, always vanishing, this or that \_thing,\_ is but a reflection of the unthinking, that is not grounded in Nihilism.

When one holds to any form of optimism as they speak of the Other, one knows that this person has not been grasped by the Nothing of the world. While we are all damned to some particular idolatry, optimism is one of its lowest forms. The fanaticism of thought that brews in the fear of Nihilism is only a turning away from Nihilism, an illusion of comfort; there is no embracing, there is no participation in the Nothingness. The worldly religions are fundamentally fanatical in nature due to their turning away of Nihilism; a failed attempt to do the impossible: mask up Nihilism.

Spong, in his desire to ‘revive’ the dying language of Christianity, says: “We fear that if theism is dismissed, only a bottomless pit remains.” and “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.”

One last mention on the falsity of ‘optimism’ is deserving, if only because it is the overwhelming strain of thought within the current American culture; this ‘optimism’ shows itself in forms of ‘prosperity churches’ all the way to some type of foundationless ‘humanism’. Quoting St. Seraphim Rose once more will thus prove to be deserving: “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. The true Nihilist places his faith in things that pass away and end in nothing; all “optimism” on this foundation is clearly futile.”

A relevant example of this sort of ‘unthinking’, or lack of search for Transcendence, can be shown within the mindset of a majority of practicing scientists of today. Science, assuming a ‘realist’ perspective, 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 and even ourselves. To comprehend a description of things is not to comprehend why, seemingly mindless particles and molecules are acting in the ways in which they do. Why are there ‘things’, why are these ‘things’ following a particular rational structure, and why is a there a ‘building’ process found within these ‘things’? These philosophical questions are shunned by a majority of mainstream scientific ‘intellectuals’. This sort of ‘unthinking’ is what has produced the ‘optimistic’ scientism of the current times.

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 of the Other. In other words, religions with their theologies contain too many assumptions and ‘answers’ that shun the mystery of existence. Philosophy, on the other hand, 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. These are simple, lower forms of idolatry.