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Dialectic into Dialogos and the Pragmatics of No-thingness in a Time of Crisis

(with acknowledgement to Guy Sengstock)

Abstract:

Nishitani and Neoplatonism both argue that overcoming the nihilism of non-being requires a confrontation with, and cultivation of, the experience of nothingness. This paper argues that the appreciation of nothingness is best realized in the practice of dialectic into dialogos, as adapted from the Socratic tradition. We argue that dialectic equips the self for the confrontation with nihilism, and is best suited to transforming the privative experience of nothingness into a superlative, collective experience of no-thingness. The practice of dialectic into dialogos exapts the nature of the self as a synthesis of being and non-being, and possibility and necessity, in and through its relationship to others, and to its own otherness within self-transcendence. Dialectic into dialogos can thereby become a central philosophical practice for responding to our contemporary meaning crisis by affording a generative process of meaning-making that can lead to personal and cultural transformation and communion within the culture – renewing communitas for new communities.

Keywords:
dialectic, dialogos, nothingness, nihilism, metanoia, parable, koan

If you gaze long enough into an abyss, the abyss will gaze back into you.

Fredrich Nietzsche

The eye with which I see God is the same with which God sees me.

Meister Eckhart

I. Introduction

We have argued extensively, alongside many others, that the West is currently confronting a meaning crisis, a state wherein the affects of absurdity, anxiety, despair and alienation effect a pervasive, if at times unrecognized, form of nihilism.

The existence and symptomology of this crisis has been argued in our other works, namely *Zombies in Western Culture,* which interrogates the condition through one of its modern mythograms, and *Diagnosing the Current Age: A Symptomology of the Meaning Crisis,* which examines the various forms of the condition manifest in individual and communal life. A long form version of this argument has also been presented in the video lecture series, *Awakening from the Meaning Crisis.*

This paper aims to advance this project by providing a sapiential and spiritual resource for confronting and responding to the nihilistic dimensions of this crisis. We attempt to explore the individual and existential experience of nihilism, and to extrapolate from this level of experience to propose a more generalizable, cultural normativity for the transformation of discourse as a means of responding to this meaning crisis. While the scope of our discussion will largely centre on dyadic interlocution, the application of the practice outlined in this paper also extends to forms of distributed cognition. At both individual and cultural scales, the function of what we will call "dialogos" turns the privative experience of nothingness into a superlative experience of no-thingness, affording a communicable form of spirituality that is a lived response to nihilism.

II. Formulating the Problem

One of the preeminent figures of the Kyoto school, Keiji Nishitani, argued that the main cause of nihilism is the inability to distinguish between the nothingness found in thinkers like Nietzsche, and the no-thingness that is experienced as abundance within the Buddhist *shunyata.* Western thought came to very similar conclusions within the Neoplatonic tradition, which also saw the culmination of the practice of dialectic. The topics are conjoined in the following passage, written by the Neoplatonist Porphyry:

> As for non-being, one type we engender when alienated from being, the other we acquire a preconception of when cleaving close to being, for if we should by chance be alienated from being, we do not have a preconception of the non-being that is beyond being, but we engender non-being as a bogus experience, which happens to someone who has departed from his proper state, for each human being, while remaining one and the same, even as it were possible for him, truly and on his own initiative, to be elevated toward the non-being that is beyond being may also be set astray toward that non-being that constitutes the collapse of being.[1]

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1)   Porphyry, *Neoplatonic Philosophy*, 180–81.

Here, Porphyry distinguishes the non-being of *nihil* from the non-being of *theosis*, a distinction that inheres the tenets of Neoplatonism, Christianity, and Zen Buddhism. Yet it is not sufficient for any of these traditions merely to distinguish privative language from the superlative, but to seek an apposite expression for their fittedness. To do this we must, as the Greek expression provides, avoid both Scylla and Charybdis: the errors of logical equivocation (to see them as unrelated) and logical equivalence (to see them as logically identical).

This paper will argue that the psychotechnology[2] of dialectic is a practice of discernment that discloses the affective difference between valences of no-thingness[3] while integrating their aspects. Dialectic cultivates perspectival stereoscopy, a form of contradictory self-identity that functions as an opponent process[4] that resolves into an implicit singleness and depth of being that the Buddhists called *shunyata*, or "no-thingness."

This dialectic resolution is a traditional feature of the Socratic *elenchus* (wherein a proposition may be confirmed for accuracy while marked for insufficiency), and in Christian characterology (where a soul can be feted for virtue while being implicated in the Fall of man). These two instances of dialectic combine to formulate an existential problem: that in being, and being ourselves, we essentially face non-being, and being not ourselves. *Media vita in morte sumus*, as the Gregorian chant cries ("in the midst of life, we are in death"). The aspect of non-being brings us face to face with nihilism, a perennial crisis of meaning that dissolves personhood by ungluing the affective, aspectual and agent-arena relations[5] we maintain as the context of livable reality.[6]

This paper will offer dialectic as a philosophy whose form of life responds to nihilism by restoring the phenomenal-functional *telos* of religious life – a *metanoia*, whereby turning to no-thingness is the realization of being in the non-being of oneself, and the realization of being in the non-being of reality. This function of dialectic does not simply apply to an intrapersonal resolution, but equally to interpersonal life, and develops a conversance between these two dimensions of relation.[7] For Nishitani, confronting no-thingness is the only viable way to face the threat of nihilism, and return to tell the tale.

The source tradition of dialectic is not merely Socratic or Buddhist, but also proto-existential. For Kierkegaard, the question of selfhood was the cynosure of ontotheological orientation. He applied dialectical opponent processing to the self by reconceiving it as a synthesis of spirit, and he developed his exegesis of the *sickness unto death* (despair) under several aspects of dialectic (e.g., as lacking infinitude or finitude). Under this condition, the aspiring movement to be oneself (e.g., by infinitizing oneself) can invert into a movement away from oneself. This inversion is a forsaking denial, dissolution, or "impotent self-consumption,"[8] if it lacks dialectic counter-valence, the tension that resolves the self authentically, and teleologically, in its establishing

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2) The term "psychotechnology" refers to a socially generated standardization of formatting communication and application of information processing that can be readily and deeply internalized by individuals. Psychotechnologies are readily and widely disseminated through a population in order to reliably and systematically enhanced cognitive performance in a domain general manner. Prototypical examples are literacy and numeracy. It is a tool designed to fit and enhance the mind.

3) Throughout this paper, we will use "nothingness" to denote the referent of the privative, nihilistic experience, and "no-thingness" to denote the referent of the superlative experience realized in self-transcendence. In forthcoming excerpts from Ueda, note that he uses the term *nothingness* where we would use the term *no-thingness*.

4) Opponent processing is a dynamic means of controlling a process by binding two functions that work for opposing goals, but are nevertheless causally interdependent. A biological example is the autonomic nervous system, divided into the sympathetic (which is trying to raise the level of arousal) and the parasympathetic nervous system (which is trying to reduce the level of metabolic arousal). Their opponent process continually recalibrates and works to balance the individual's level of arousal.

5) For further discussion and explanation of agent-arena relations, see Vervaeke, Mastropietro and Miscevic, *Zombies in Western Culture*.

6) Ibid.

7) Vervaeke and Mastropietro, "Gnosis in the Second Person."

8) Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, 48.

power. One such aspect of this affliction, which invokes both Porphyry's caution and Nietzsche's abysmal confrontation, is described by what Kierkegaard termed *possibility's despair:*

> Now if possibility outstrips necessity, the self runs away from itself in possibility so that it has no necessity to return to. This then is possibility's despair… Becoming oneself is a movement one makes just where one is. Becoming is a movement *from* some place, but becoming oneself is a movement *at* that place… . In the end it seems as though everything were possible, but that is the very moment that the self is swallowed up by the abyss.[9]

As we will argue, the dialectic of no-thingness exercised in dialogos articulates "that place" for the becoming of the self – the dialectic resolution of its dichotomous aspects. In so doing, it can respond to the disorientation that fells the *metanoetic* project. For Kierkegaard, the condition of despairing over oneself must be understood dialectically, and so must its resolution. Despite traditional charges of radical individualism, there is a distinct dialogic presence in Kierkegaard's teleology of selfhood, a relation to "another" whose ontological grounding resolves the dialectic of an individual's opponent process. For Kierkegaard, of course, this presence has a distinctly Christian character. Stephen Evans notes that while Kierkegaard frequently refers to Socrates as his teacher, he "believes in" Christ, and sees faith in the latter as the formal response to the despair made conscious by Socratic irony.[10] The agapic capacity to love one's neighbour, or undertake any such works of spirit, requires an inward movement to internalize the pattern of Christ as a paradox of actuality. This paradox ameliorates possibility's despair by marriage to necessity. An infinitizing movement away from the earth, where the abyssal imagination runs amok, will simultaneously become the movement to *re-finitize*, and in this bidirectional movement, the self comes to be "grounded transparently in the power that established it."[11] Kierkegaard analogizes this transparency by describing how a body acclimates to a draft by resolving contradictory sensations, or how consonants and vowels, when fitted together properly, disappear as they resolve into discourse. In the same way, the "syntax" of selfhood stereoscopes (see further ahead) when it is spoken to another – a thou – who hears it singularly, whose transcendent measure of possibility potentiates the dialectic of self into becoming itself by *becoming intelligible* to itself. In other words, the self becomes no-thing before a negative presence that recollects its conflicting elements into a higher order unity (a *logos*), and inspires its will to resolve itself, proleptically, to this eternal aspect.[12] Just as the child's necessity is grounded by the sight of her knowing parent, so the self, by relating to "another," can draw the breath of possibility without careening into the infinite nonbeing.

This bidirectional movement, wherein the dichotomous aspects of self (possibility and necessity, infinitude and finitude) become annealed to one another, is also the paradox of faith. Kierkegaard writes: "The despair which is the corridor to faith is also due to the help of the eternal: through the eternal the self has the courage to lose itself in order to win itself."[13] Self becomes conscious of itself as spirit before this aspirational presence; for Kierkegaard, the presence is properly known as God, though we have described it as a *Geist* in our account of dialogos. This transparent grounding, the movement of faith, is taken up by Tillich as a symbolic or sacramental practice for responding to the threats of nihilism. Despite being an inward and subjective experience, it

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9)   Ibid., 66.

10)   Evans, *Kierkegaard and Spirituality,* 44.

11)   Kierkegaard, *Sickness unto Death,* 44.

12)   The notion of being cohered by a transcendent listener reminisces of Augustine's *Confessions*: "May I know you, who know me… May I 'know as I am also known.'"

13)   Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death,* 98.

is nonetheless a dialogic one, and commends Kierkegaard's affinity with Martin Buber. Conferred onto worldly interaction, this faith can become the participatory affordance for a higher form of communion and interpersonal recognition, one that avoids the idolatrous errors that occur when one aspect of the dialectic predominates: in other words, when we "build castles in the air"[14] or invest in earthly immediacies and false dichotomies. These ersatz forms of worldly identity prematurely terminate the spirit, devolve our cultural discourse, and inhibit the stereopsis of perspective between persons in good faith. The faith of becoming oneself in the aspect of no-thingness can help respond to the individual forms of despair that condition the cultural symptoms of the meaning crisis.

In subsequent sections, we will discuss how the confrontation with no-thingness in the pragmatic context of the I-Thou relation may intervene in this condition to re-socialize the confining and expanding factors of being, and being oneself, in the face of perspectival *aporia* and its affective absurdity.[15] Heidegger, who was informed by both Kierkegaard and Eckhart, believed that Nietzsche succumbed to this disorientation by failing to subvert the cultural-cognitive grammar of nihilism, instead merely inverting it, confusing the movement beyond being with the movement of non-being, and so steered himself into the *nihil* that constitutes its collapse. To avoid this existential threat, one must face numinosity without succumbing to the affect of horror. Dialectic combines an *integrative* understanding that can observe the aspectual homology between horror and numinosity, with a *differentiative* understanding that prevents us from essentializing horror as the affective response to numinous experience. In dialogos, the intersubjective exchange of perspectives conditions the emergence of a third presence. In previous work, we have referred to this presence as a Geist, though others have called it a third factor or "we space." This Geist becomes the persona of the numinosity of the encounter. This was among the seminal insights of Martin Buber's I-Thou relation: "When one says you, the I of the word pair I-You is said, too… The basic I-You can only be spoken with one's whole being… Whoever speaks one of the basic words enters into the word and stands in it."[16] Dialogos self-organizes a spiritual pilotry that uses both integration and differentiation to steer the streams of movement between being and non-being. This cognitive process, which we may call dialectical complexification, is an existential defense against perdition.

The social context, if properly curated, can direct the self to no-thingness without losing it to utter negation. Nihilism is simultaneously a cognitive pathology, an inhibitor to existential meaning-making, and a cultural scarcity, affecting the normativity of where meaning can be found. As a psycho-ontological phenomenon, it therefore requires intervention at both poles. Dialectic opens a multi-perspectival field in which participants are reciprocally opened to one another. This affords a capacity of mutual transformation, and new ways of being oneself while being with others. Crucially, this interpsychic dynamic also applies to the tensive relation of intrapsychic life, as in the case of Kierkegaard. It also affords dialectic a capacity for cultural transformation; internalization of this reformulated distributed cognition – ways of relating to one another – becomes the basis for enculturation.

Since the nineteenth century, many moderns have tried to take Nietzsche's place on the rampart and stand before his abyss. Tillich, for instance, famously wrote that the faith which fits courage to despair is the affirmation of being drawn from the midst of non-being: "the vitality that can stand the abyss of meaninglessness is aware of a hidden meaning within the destruction of meaning."[17] Existentially, Frankl also exemplified this insight with a practice of psychological self-transcendence, drawn from the attitude disposed to unavoid-

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14)   Ibid., 100.

15)   Ibid., 60.

16)   Buber, *I and Thou,* 54.

17)   Tillich, *The Courage to Be,* 177.

able suffering. To commutate self-suffering, his logotherapy offered a paradoxical process of "dereflection."[18] Though the meaning of "dereflection" may not be immediately apparent, we might understand this synonymously as a process of de-centring, which denotes a displacement of egocentrism, a dialectical recentring of our attention to an other, whose perspective stereoscopically integrates with one's original identity to create a synthesis of self that is both possible and necessary, in other words, a self that becomes other than it was while remaining itself, and realizing the constitutive necessity of its relationship *to* itself. Dialectically, the aspect shift induced by cultural participation works to potentiate the process of individuation. This synthesis does not occur by the exchange of propositional insight, but by a mimetic assumption of presence that transmogrifies us into perspectival conformity, or *gnosis*, with a second form of selfhood.[19] This conformity re-places us, and being known in excess of our knowing calls our being into a question of non-being that begs accommodation. This inter-perspectival conjunction takes on an ontological dimension, which Eckhart evokes when he equates the episteme of divine sight ("the same eye by which I see God") to a relational form of *theosis*.

There is a theme of transcendent socialization emerging here. Dialogos communes us with no-thingness by creating a process-place of transformation. Ueda writes that the dialectic loss of the self in the interchange with another is the encounter into its own nonsubstantiality,[20] and this encounter portrays an ecstatic process of "drawing with existence an invisible circle of nothingness-nature-communication."[21] The dialectic cultivated within dialogos uses the internalization of otherness in I-Thou relating to effect the transmutation of autobiographical narrative into this ontological retraction. In this stereoscopic mergence of egoic identity with the internalization of an adopted perspective, the prospective view from "you" is fused with the intimate view from "I," like the left and right fields of vision. This mergence affords what we may call ontological depth perception. In other words, this gnosis of otherness redraws the egoic necessity of each self from the open source of their shared possibility of self-transcendence. At the same time the gnosis also sources its possibility from within the consenting necessity of the dialogue. This necessity retrieves the self from its abyssal infinitization by resolving its will to the *realization* of its being in both aspects, the perspectives of "I" and "Thou." One way of understanding the realization of this synthesis is as the dialectic of non-logical identity between self-emanation (the necessary self that is) and self-emergence (the possible self that becomes). With this resolution, the abyssal encounter of oneself need not be set astray by the nihilistic non-being, but by the conveyance of infinitude, in the fellowship of this inter-realization, may come to be "grounded transparently in the power that established it."[22]

Our anamnesis of this non-logical identity, like Kierkegaard's spirit, is reflected in the no-thingness that becomes communicable when this dialectical synthesis of self-emanation and self-emergence becomes socially realized and enacted. This occurs in the disclosure of dialogos, whereby the descriptive and normative expressions of selfhood are resolved into a shared identity; our coming into being (emergence) is the recollection of our having been (emanation) transformed. This resolution educes the aspect shift from a privative self into a self of surpassing receptivity. This aspect shift within the self, so described, re-identifies the self and the world coextensively by subjecting immediate, worldly narratives (i.e., autobiographical agency) to dialogical framing and reflective aspiration. In dialectic, the transcendence of the ego paradoxically becomes part of its egoic narrative. Its organization therefore becomes more proleptically rational and responsive to aporia, and the presence of the

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18) See Costello, *Applied Logotherapy*.

19) See Vervaeke and Mastropietro, "Gnosis in the Second Person." (forthcoming)

20) We might contrast this with Sartre's famous indictment: "hell is other people."

21) Ueda, "'Nothingness' in Meister Eckhart and Zen Buddhism," 163.

22) Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death,* 44.

infinite becomes implicit in the form of its finitude.[23] Drew Hyland calls this *finite transcendence,*[24] the telos of the Socratic-Platonic project. In that way, one might say that dialectic in dialogos is the psychotechnology best suited to splitting the atom of the ego, and turning our narrative into a memory of authentic selfhood.

For Nishitani and Eckhart, the realization of no-thingness grounds the self in its transcendent locus of identity, a grounding that goes before and beyond egoic concerns. This grounding is neither spatial nor temporal, but primitively ontological, and its realization in no-thingness has often been conceived as a kind of return to origin, not in the temporal sense, but in the onto-existential one. By this realization, dialectic effects a double disclosure: the self's paradoxical relation to its own no-thingness reveals the same paradox in its constituting reality. In dialogos, the I-Thou relation can then shift its aspect of perspective between the paradoxical no-thingness of self and the paradoxical no-thingness of being, and thereby transmute the existential vitality of hidden meaning into a faith of ontological unconcealment, *aletheia*, a presence of non-being-beyond-being emergent in our psychosocial qualia. The dialectic between emanating and emerging selves converses the move to non-being into a movement of *metanoia*, a shift away from the absurdity and horror that unfolds from the *nihil* that Porphyry and Nietzsche both described. Eckhart wrote that the return to no-thingness was the rebirth of God in the soul. Contemporarily, we might describe this religious movement in Nishitani's terms, as the *self-realization of reality.*[25]

III. Dialectic as the Response to Nihilism

In dialectic, we are arguing for a theory of a hierarchical, dynamical system of self-corrective communication, and a culturally practicable response to nihilism. By hierarchical, we mean that the system can be implemented in predictive processing models of cognition.[26] By self-correcting, we refer to the capacity of these higher levels to compensate for deficiencies or defects that arise in lower levels of discourse. By cultural, we mean the renegotiation, within distributed cognition, of the normativity that governs discourse. The lowest level is the level of discussion, where the primary function is social grooming. This functioning is the glue that is designed to coordinate cooperation based on a presumption (or sometimes a pretense) of interpersonal agreement. However, when the presumption of agreement comes into question, we move to theoretical debate designed to justify claims based on a presumption (sometimes pretense) of a shared rational normativity. If the debate succeeds, then we have restored agreement, and we can move back down to the level of discussion to live our socially shared lives. However, when the shared normativity comes into question, then we move to the level of dialectic-into-dialogos, which is designed to re-create culture as a meta-meaning system based on a presumption (or sometimes pretense) of shared, transformative con-formity to ourselves, to each other, and to the world. If this movement succeeds, then we recover a shared normativity, and we can return to the level of debate with a common ground and commitment by which the debate can be resolved. If the debate is resolved, we may return to our shared social lives.

This bring us to the problem of nihilism, which infests at the level of dialectic. Nihilism is the attitudinal position that a shared worldview attunement – one that is in con-formity with reality – is not possible. Debate cannot resolve nihilism because it presumes a shared, rational normativity that nihilism rejects and calls into question. The exercise of debate falls at the wrong level of discourse because it cannot appreciate how deeply

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23) For "proleptic rationality," see Callard, *Aspiration.*

24) Hyland, *Finitude and Transcendence in the Platonic Dialogues.*

25) Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness.*

26) See Clark, "Whatever Next?" and Hohwy and Michael, "Why Should any Body have a Self?"

nihilism has called debate's presumed normativity into question. Therefore, nihilism's skepticism is simply irresolvable debate. Discussion is too far removed from the existential locus of the questioning, and can only avoid nihilism in a problematic fashion, with the idle anxious chatter that Heidegger criticized so pointedly. The only real response to nihilism (which Nietzsche sees in part, and Nishitani sees in full) is to re-create culture, to enact the shared transformative con-formity that re-grounds worldview attunement and affords resolvable debate and livable discussion. Nietzsche and Nishitani both understood the religious significance of this project, but disagreed in their appreciation of its religiosity. If the project fails, then there is only absolute skepticism (unresolvable debate) and solipsism (inability for shared lives). The great doubt of which Nishitani speaks is existentially transitive; when confronted with the impossibility and nonviability of absolute skepticism and solipsism, our doubt throws us back into discourse, specifically into the level of discourse that can effect a *metanoia* at the level of the greatest possible questioning, the level of dialectic.

IV. The Existential Modes of Questioning, and Calling into Question

Robert Fuller provides a useful distinction between curiosity and wonder: they share an affective recognition of ignorance.[27] However, curiosity frames that ignorance as a gap of intelligibility to be filled by the acquisition of knowledge. Therefore, curiosity seeks certitude and satisfaction. Wonder, conversely, frames ignorance as an opening to be widened for the passage of perspective unto greater possibility of being. We can therefore understand curiosity as a mode of questioning, and wonder as the mode of calling the self and world into question. To use a framework offered by Erich Fromm,[28] curiosity questions from the *having mode*, while wonder calls into question from the *being mode*. In contrast to both, Porphyry (see above) also describes another affective response to ignorance: a state whereby we are not simply ignorant of our relation to being, but alienated from it, and affectively moving away from it. This affective mis-stepping "engender[s] non-being as a bogus experience, which happens to someone who has departed from his proper state."[29] This is an existential misidentification in process, the affective negligence of ignorance, or the willful ignorance of ignorance, and therefore the opposite of the "learned ignorance" described by Cusa and Augustine that descends from the Socratic tradition of aporia. This form of self-deception is an existential version of what Harry Frankfurt, contemporarily, has termed "bullshit."[30] Bullshit leads discourse toward the nihil, and possibility's despair. It is the subverting of intelligibility in order to belie the act of questioning, and is therefore inimical to both curiosity and to wonder. Bullshit is a void pretending to be a place. It is the collapsing of the intelligibility of being. Bullshit picks up on the salience within curiosity, but it equivocates. In curiosity, we care about ignorance for the sake of what will repair it. In wonder, we care about ignorance for the sake of how it transports us. In bullshit, we stop caring about our ignorance altogether. It veers us from the state of curiosity, but instead of shifting that state into wonder, it degenerates curiosity into the attraction of salience rather than into the exploration of significance.

The "bogus" intelligibility of bullshit, and its attendant dangers, necessitate a deeply complex response. As we explained in the previous section, dialectic is the complexification of intelligibility to afford an opponent process between integration and differentiation. This process affords the emergence of the Greek *anagoge,* the opening of being. Wonder encompasses a comprehensive nihil without collapsing into nihilism; it calls everything into question in order to tutor our sensitivity to the superlative. Dialectic calls everything into the great

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27) Fuller, *Wonder.*

28) For further discussion, see Mastropietro and Vervaeke, "Diagnosing the Current Age: A Symptomology of the Meaning Crisis."

29) Porphyry, *Neoplatonic Philosophy,* 180–81.

30) Frankfurt, *On Bullshit.*

doubt, and aspect-shifts this doubt into a form of great wonder, or *metanoia*. By contrast, bullshit desensitizes us to the wonder of being. The existential function of dialectic moves us from *having questions* to *being in question*, that is to say having a self with questions to being a self in question. No-thingness describes the state of the self-in-question. It is what holds the self without having the self, the no-place home of the self. As Kierkegaard observed, we can only *be* a self by relinquishing our *having* of a self, and the dialectic of no-thingness is the practiced *metanoia* (turning around) of that possibility. Tanabe[31] criticized Nishitani's mentor, Nishida, for underemphasizing the importance of this *metanoetic* turn. It is only dialectic that can afford the ultimate kind of *metanoia*: the swallowing of nihil into the wonder.

V. Views from Nowhere and Above: The Symbolic Shift from Speech into Conveyance

To respond to nihilism, we need a discourse beyond debate. Dissensus cannot integrate perspective while it differentiates its claims. It is ultimately confined within a propositional way of knowing. The appearance of absurdity within a proposition is therefore a semantic epiphenomenon. It cannot be resolved by the proposition itself; this would be rather like the body trying to treat its own ailment at the level of symptomology. For example, take the following phrase inspired by our Gregorian chant: *I am dead right now*. This phrase, on its face, leads us to a performative contradiction; we state this aptly in the third person, but we cannot make it viable in the first person (I cannot say "I am dead" while also being dead). There is no self-contradiction in logical or semantic terms, but there is a clash between first and third person perspectives that is irresolvable unless we interrogate the phrase by the pragmatics of its expression, the expression of living in mortality. In other words, there are faceless determinates behind the face of the expression that can only be accessed when the expression *faces itself.* Absolute skepticism and solipsism are absurd not because of any structural difficulties, but because of the perspectival clash that leads to performative contradictions. In order to question the statement "I am dead right now," we must symbolize the expression to appreciate its contradiction: we must animate the proposition into a face-to-face conversation of its clashing perspectives. This *aporetic* self-encounter of its expressed state turns the statement into a kind of *koan*, a dialogic synthesis of being and non-being. Our participation in and identification with its being-in-question returns our speech to the source of its pragmatic conveyance. This necessitates our return to no-thingness; as we continue to argue, only in dialectic can we overcome the absurdities of perspectival clash and performative contradiction by resolving the inter-presence of being and non-being: the life in death, and the death in life. For Kierkegaard and many others, this resolution is also an existentially Christian project, because it meliorates the dialectic nonduality of finitude and infinitude, and the relation between sin and salvation.

We see another example of this in Nagel's *The View from Nowhere*,[32] which interrogates the common conviction that temporal finitude is cause for ultimate inconsequence. Yet as Nagel argues, there is no reason why my irrelevance in a thousand years' times should be cause for present concern, because if my present is irrelevant to this distant future, the distant future should also be irrelevant to my present. The absurdity is articulated at the propositional level, but its ontological origins lie elsewhere. The propositional framing leads to an impasse because it presupposes a perspectival frame that the statement cannot fill. Philosophically, the only way to deal with this problem is to take the proposition as a conducting rod for a perspectival shift, like taking a noise as a signal to return to its conditioning environment – a shift from the foreground of semantic meaning to the background of its pragmatic conditions. In other words, I may use the faceless future to artic-

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31)   Tanabe, *Philosophy as Metanoetics.*

32)   Nagel, *The View from Nowhere.*

ulate the question of my future being in such a way that it puts my being into question. We have to become the question, to make a symbol from within the phrase, turning it into a Socratic *aporia*, or a provocative Zen *koan*. Returning to the pragmatics symbolizes the proposition from a question *to have* to a question *to be*, and thereby shifts its propositional form to the procedural, perspectival and participatory ways of knowing.[33] In this shift, the phrase is no longer subject to debate, but subject to the dialectic of perspectival pollinations. In this ontological graduation, the phrase reconveys its value to the project of wisdom.

This shift into dialectic is central to overcoming nihilism, whether it manifests in despair, anxiety, absurdity or alienation. A propositional debate cannot remove these affective features because it cannot alter their paradigmatic preconditions. It cannot disrupt the frame that draws focus to the object of its framing. In order to escape absurdity, we must displace the entire world into which the absurdity emerges by referring its contingent form to an undisplaceable ground, in the same way that Heidegger returns to Dasein to transcend the technological enframing of modernity.[34] This is where no-thingness appears into the practice. No-thingness is not displaceable, but infinitely re-placeable. In order to overcome absurdity, we return its propositions to no-thingness, so their expressions reconceive, and their speech retracts into the pragmatics of the perspectives they convey. Only then can they be called into question, and call us back into the question of being.

With this, let us return to the view from nowhere. The exercise of cosmic withdrawal is a source of existential declension, as Nagel observed. The proposition can neither justify nor remedy the feeling of absurdity because it does not prestate at the level of its source. Though possibility is atemporal, it is represented in Nagel's expression by the annihilating prospect of a farther temporality. In order to interrogate the expression, the concept of temporal distance must be realized as a symbolic conveyance for querying the no-thingness of cosmic perspective. This symbolic conveyance is the original speech within the speech – its logos – and it must think itself symbolically to relate itself back into the form of this formally causal, original conveyance. Only then, when the proposal retracts into the space of its own non-being, does its conveyance become an act of being that discloses the condition of being-in-the-world.

The Stoics understood this dialectic function long before Heidegger put being into these terms. Marcus Aurelius cultivated the *view from nowhere* as a *view from above*, with a view to enacting its perspectival power. When he kisses his child and remembers the child's mortality, or when he retreats from the palace to remember his finitude, the point of his spiritual exercise is not to destroy the relevance of the present, but to stereoscope its relevance with the possibility that overwhelms its existential specificity, to presence the non-being of the possible within the present tense of his being. The purpose of this ontological replacement is to use the affective experience of absurdity to aspect-shift perspective to allow a new agentic relation with the world. This affective, aspectual, agent-arena shift is what we invoked earlier in the chapter under the appellation of "*metanoia.*"

This brings us to the pragmatics of no-thingness. Speaking and thinking occur originally in an onto-epistolary form. Heidegger had a similar insight: we always think toward some possibility that draws us, draws back to us, and places us in the tension of Dasein. Dialectic makes us realize the epistolary relationship with being by pronouncing the pragmatic conveyance of our speech so that it can be finessed and transmuted. Even in mundane social interaction, we are always caught in the absurdity that our speech is bound within a perspective of conveyance that cannot be fully spoken. Let us illustrate this with a concrete example: you stop your car and ask someone on the street for directions. The conversation is brief, and simple. You say: "I am out of gas," and she responds by saying: "there is a gas station at the corner." Now let us try to unpack what is actually being conveyed. It is assumed that your act of speaking is a request for her attention, and will

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33)   See also Vervaeke and Mastropietro, "Gnosis in the Second Person."

34)   Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology.*

not unduly trespass on her time. Meanwhile, the phrase "I am out of gas" implies several things at once; by saying "I," you refer to the person making the statement, but "I" also refers to the vehicle you are driving, so there is an implied metonymic relation between you and the car that must be preconsciously accepted for the interaction to become intelligible. By "out of gas," you refer to the fact that you are *low* on gas because you are still capable of driving the car, it is understood that the car, not your body, requires refilling, and it is understood that "gas" refers to gasoline and not a state of matter. When the person responds by saying "there is a gas station at the corner" you might imagine the complex conversational implicature we could continue to unpack in the contexts of "station," "at," and "corner."[35]

The obviousness of the context that backgrounds these utterances is a perspectival feature of their conveyance, and each of these sentences we used to unpack the conveyance carry their own contexts of conveyance that could, in turn, be infinitely unpacked. The conveyance bears the salience and relevance of a certain state of mind within a particular situation. We have a conveyance upward to the *moreness* that can be infinitely conveyed, joined to the indexical uniqueness of this specific encounter and speech-act that cannot be captured by your words (its *suchness*). The conveyance is therefore bidirectional: it emerges from the immanent irreducibility of the speaking context, and emanates from the infinite atmosphere of possible explicative utterances. With this in mind, it is a *wonder* that we manage to be mutually intelligible. Each conveyance can only be accounted in these pragmatics, rather than in the semantics of our speech. This metaphoricity is a perennial necessity for our sociability, which means that every instance of speech carries performative contradictions. Dialectic intervenes at precisely this level of intelligible discourse. It turns these performative contradictions into icons of *aporetic* awareness, and dialogos replaces these awakened pragmatics into the social context so that speaking into the open possibility of "the other" makes known our necessity of perspective as it becomes replaceable with other possible perspectives. In the re-placement, possibility has become more knowable. In dialectic, the necessary and the possible reach for each other, like *The Creation of Adam* depicted in the Sistine Chapel. The pragmatics of no-thingness cultures a co-realization of being and non-being in the form of our self-realization. Nishitani's dialectical realization stands in both meanings: emanated to being by its dawning to awareness, and emergent into being by birth into necessities of place and time.

VI. The Pragmatics of No-thingness

One way to think of dialogos is as the social pedagogy for the pragmatics of no-thingness. The psychotechnological machinery for this is already part of our cognition. Vygotsky's concept of *internalization*[36] is the assumption of alien perspective and forms of life. This internalization does not refer to sympathy of proposition, but to a participation in others' identities as if they were entire cities with customs and idiolects, entire situations of belief through which to act. The other being becomes something to be, like the question of being in a thousand years' time. Except this symbol is not simply another question, but another being whose being is in question, and therefore host to performative contradiction and perspectival transformation. Through conformity to this living question of being, the world opens from beyond the individual, and if the dialectic is cooperative, it expands to include the individual, and his role changes because this second person has become a symbol in whose world he has been recast. Perspectivally, knowing the other person's story is like living through his

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35) See Grice, "Presupposition and Conversational Implicature." Grice defines "implication" as a logical relation that holds between propositions. "Implicature" is used to describe the rational relationship that holds between speech acts and conveyance. For ease of speech, we choose not to press on this point, though dialectic plays with the relationship between implication and implicature.

36) Vygotsky, *Mind in Society*.

parable, and knowing his speech is like standing in his *koan*. This *thouing* is a view to beyond rather than a view from above. Through the other, I become not myself, and the not-myself-ness becomes the possibility that faces my necessity, and the dialectic integrates and differentiates them to facilitate my complexification, a kind of self-transcendence through the presence of our being-there opposite to the second person.

This is the Vygotskian internalization. In dialogos, where the process of sensibility transcendence is reciprocal, and the internalization mutual, the perspectival shift of dialectic is not absurdity-inducing because the second perspective does not supplant the first – like in debate – but reaches toward it, and the world that each person enters already includes them, and rebinds them to some necessity that redeems their displacement from the center of being. Each encompasses and re-places the other into a more complex totality that draws their conveyance into still-deeper distinction. The stereopsis of selfhood creates a relation – we have called it a Geist[37] – that draws an acrostic pattern from the two-person relation and triangulates into new ontological territory, being beyond being, without losing their sense of placement (between possibility and necessity) and veering them to the abyss of non-being. Hence, the dialectical dialogos becomes a psychotechnology for *aletheia*, and its intersubjective transformation is the spatialization of the no-thingness of self. Using perspectival internalization, the dialectic intervenes in the thinking relation between speaking and listening. It finesses the pragmatics of speech by inverting the current of conveyance and cultivating the performative contradictions. In dialogos, this amounts to the following changes in conversational convention:

1) *We begin to speak with our silence*; we bespeak the possibility afforded by the co-internalization of perspectives, which means we think into (recall the epistolary metaphor) the perspectival stereopsis that is still forming and transforming with our participation.
2) *We begin to listen with our speech*; language provides necessity to frame our thinking and constrain its possibility, even as it sources from it. The communing silence is realized against the obsidian of the spoken word, like waves lapping on the rocks. Yet the silence, not the speech, is the no-thing that is lapping.

The inverted conveyance of the speaking-listening relation is the figure of this dialectic movement. It is the foreground-background aspect shift that conduces the *metanoetic* turn to superlative sensitivity. To illustrate this, let us reprise the analogy of water and rock. Imagine staring at a pebble in the stream, and then suddenly shifting your focus to the water rushing around it. When we listen with speech (the rock), our speech begins to question, and when we speak with our silence (the water) we embody the question of being. The structure of dialogos turns our semiotic custom inside out, allowing us to source the necessity of speech from silent possibility, just as the silent possibility regrows from the nothing conveyed inside our speech, and becomes framed by the necessity of our relation. In the aspect shift, this framed silence of possibility emerges as the Geist, which becomes a thou that stands reflected in our perspectival stereoscopy, a situation of being that has emerged in the non-being between each self, and that emanates from each "other."

This *daimonic* mirror is a symbol for Socratic self-knowledge, and it translates hermetically between the ontic and ontological modalities of being. The aspect shift that presents the shape of this Geist is best analogized by the famous *Rubin's Vase* (fig.1)*, a reversable image that, in one aspect, shows two human profiles staring inward, and in the other, a vase shaped from the empty space unfolded between their faces. Hence, the pragmatics of no-thingness, through the relation of speaking and listening, creates a singular empty oneness that knows each individual from the view of no-thingness. This synthesis of spirit becomes like Eckhart's eye, gazing into the abyss to gain a view to the non-being beyond being. When this view is internalized, and the self becomes

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37) Vervaeke and Mastropietro, "Gnosis in the Second Person."

no-thing, its entire being becomes an act of aspiration, and it participates knowingly in the creation of the world. Dialectic is the ultimate symbolon between being and non-being, and dialogos raises it to self-realization. We become the self that is, emerged from our necessity, by becoming the self we are not, emanated from possibility. We place dialectic into dialogos because its social dramaturgy equips us to question the bidirectional pragmatics of conveyance that are already implicit in the presence of our every waking utterance.

VII. *I am Dead Right Now:* As Parable is to Narrative, *Koan* is to Dialogue

The dramaturgy of dialectic-into-dialogos includes a change in orientation of the narrative form. It is a change in the ontological direction of conveyance that maps the inversion of silence and speech, and their possible and necessary ontologies. Narrative features at each level of discourse, in both its contentious and conciliatory forms. In debate, narrative is used to justify propositions within the frame of their perspective. For instance, a phrase like "I am out of gas" comes at the end of a narrative that involves travel, and mileage, and perhaps a procrastinating driver. Yet despite the complex of pragmatic movements we described in the previous section, the conveyance remains perspectivally continuous, and the narrative could ostensibly proceed five minutes later with a triumphant statement such as this: "Then, I stopped at the station, and got a full tank of gas."

For contrast, let us now visit with an earlier example. "I am dead right now" is also a point of narrative culmination. We might imagine that it was uttered by a visiting friend as he sank into a chair, perhaps with a drink in hand. It could easily have been proceeded with a long story about a tireless workday. "Dead" could stand for "tired." By a strict metaphoric reading, the statement is patent, propositional, and perspectivally consistent, much like the statement from the gas-seeking driver. However, if discussions between friends were always so straightforward, dialogos would be a thing of fantasy. Let us therefore to try to broaden the friend's imagination: what if, in this context, "dead" does not merely mean tired? What if his long day's journey was existential rather than practical? What if "dead" *means* dead? His friend would be forgiven his bemusement, but he could not urge his friend to carry on his story, or carry it on himself, unless he ignored this call and contradiction. When the first friend says it to the second, and the second understands it as the conveyance of narrative conflict, there is an implicit "what now?" that comes at the end of its ellipsis. He thinks of death's inexorability, fatality, ubiquitous indexicality, and he thinks in his friend's speech. The narrative of the world has ended. Life has turned against itself. If he inquires thus, he realizes that his friend is not posing a question, but living in one, and if he is to access the scope of the question, he will have to live in it himself. Now, the conversation between two friends is not just biography, or even dispute. Now, their conversation turns into *philia sophia*.

At this point, any modern would grant a few provisions: if the friend is only one glass into his evening, and otherwise of sound mind, the statement cannot be not literal because its reason cannot be logical, nor its proposition possible. After all, *If I am, then death is not. If Death is, then I am not*, as Epicurus famously reasoned. Still, this logic leaves us in question. If the expression is not literal, neither is it merely metaphoric. Unlike an expression of fatigue, this narrative terminus of "I am dead" cannot be read coherently within the perspective of the narrative. Therefore, it requires hermeneutic assistance, a place for the dialectic to face itself unobscured. Dialogos functions like a pond, reflecting an open sky while confining it to a place of necessity so that we can see into it, read into it, and wade in a share of its depth. Indeed, when our narratives clash, we often watch helpless as our sky crashes to earth. In the case of a meta-narrative clash, the fall leaves us truly unsheltered, and attracts our eye to Nietzsche's abyss into which we are forever falling. To leaven its Fall, the broken narrative may steer itself into dialogue by turning its phrase into a form that *deliberately* disrupts the definitions of its perspective. If "I am dead right now" is not merely metaphor, it demands to be housed by a new form of discourse. The state-

ment did not just describe something, but it enacted something, and the dialogue must re-act to integrate the change to rebuild a perspective around the *aporia*, to reach for the more of its own conveyance and keep the sky in view. When the conveyance of perspective ends in a clash of perspective, it means that the narrative has conveyed itself unto a point of transformation, by producing a second face that turns to face the first, just like the Rubin Vase. It questions itself, demands its existence be conversed. By facing itself like so, the whole story has become dialectical. Its formal cause is to complexify. It has assumed the features of parable.

As we noted, to call something a parable is not to suggest that it is merely a metaphor. This equivalence would veer us into the Charybdis problem that we promised to avoid. At the level of semantic meaning, however, one would be forgiven this synonymity. Parable often contains metaphor, and modernity has long since forgotten the invisible axis that lies between literality and falsehood. The equation of parable and metaphor is a category mistake because while both feature dialectical semantics, the parable assumes a different level of pragmatic conveyance; its form is not just representative, but also effective. This is what gives it a distinct ontological status. Parables exapt narrative to generate a face to face perspectival clash that is ultimately non-logical, and disposes a new form of being-in-the-world. Sallie McFague argues that the parable is a "figurative representation of an actual, total meaning, so they do not 'stand for' anything but *are* life."[38] If we follow McFague's proposal, we must conclude that the expression, "I am dead right now" does not mean "I am dead-tired," it means that death is somehow a feature of my present actuality. As Nishitani wrote: "The aspect of life and the aspect of death are equally real, and reality is that which appears now as life and now as death. It is *both* life and death, and at the same time is *neither* life nor death. It is the nonduality of life and death."[39] Nishitani compared this aspect shifting to a double exposure photograph, which we might liken to our Rubin's Vase. The vase is not a literal statement about the relationship about faces and vases, nor is it a metaphorical relation between them. This is how we must understand the dialectic of no-thingness: it is a multi-perspectival movement of aspect shifting that conveys a richness of reality that transcends the literal and the metaphorical. It must be enacted to be understood, and to be properly appreciated.

The example of death is truly fit for purpose here, not simply because it teases the modern imagination, but because it is an apt depiction of how an actuality that seems to negate actuality can become a source of morbidity, absurdity and nihilism. Here, at this juncture, is where the philosopher must be most heedful of Porphyry's instruction. We need a way to obviate the despair that eventuates when we displace ourselves from the center of narrative by opening that narrative to *aporia*, to the possibility of its own non-being. Narrative conveys memory, and identity, and therefore this *aporia* can become an egoic fatality as well as an ontological one. The combination is more than adequate for the narrative nothingness to produce the affective afflictions that Nietzsche described. Still more difficult is that the friend who is "dead right now" cannot account for his pronouncement, or find his way back to its source of actuality. He knows it is not *literally* true, and yet he knows that it is somehow still *actually* true. In this *aporetic* fog, his attitude toward being can follow one of Porphyry's two prognostications: i) it goes the way of the fallen narrative, and sinks his identity, and memory, into the sin of despair, or ii) it becomes Kierkegaard's knight of faith: the Gregorian chant of death conveys in a new direction, not backwards, or forwards, but *upwards*: it aspires up the ontological chain to seek perspective on its own conveyance, which remains mysterious – perhaps unconscious – even to its conveyer.

Parable, then, is both privative (it breaks narrative) and superlative (it allows us to break beyond narrative). If the latter road is taken, the dialectic into dialogos has turned the experience of narrative destruction

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38)   McFague, *Speaking in Parables,* chap. 4. Accessed at: https://www.religion-online.org/book-chapter/chapter-4-the-parable-the-primary-form/.

39)   Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness,* 52.

into an anagogic rebirth of actuality, a self-realization for both the ego and the world. The eye that opens unto Nietzsche's abyss becomes the dialectic eye of Eckhart that is capable of seeing beyond it. To find mystery in our own conveyance is the purpose of the dialectic and its functional inversion of silence and speech. We listen with our speech because it contains a mysterious pragmatic conveyance. We speak with our silence because only the possibility inside silence, its no-thingness, is inexhaustible enough to as to convey the totality of that mystery. When Pontius Pilate asks Jesus "*Quid est veritas*?" his only response to Pilate is to forebear. The transition from narrative to parable is a transition from speech into speech-act. At this point, the narrative conveyance also becomes a dialogic conveyance, and turns back to survey the direction from whence it came, to reimpregnate its perspective and subject the world to the great doubt of its question. Just as it was for Plato, narrative is offered to dialogue for the sake of its self-realization, and dialogue offers itself to narrative for the same reason – so they may be known to one another, and thereby known to themselves. According to Hyland, the interpenetration and inter-affordance of narrative drama and argumentative questioning is at the core of the Platonic dialogue.[40]

Dialectic is a practice that realizes this extraordinary interpenetration and inter-affordance; in this process, the narrative is transmuted into parable, and dialogue is exapted into *koan*. The parable and the *koan* become mutually resonant, and mutually realizing. The truth of parable is the truth of *aletheia*. When it becomes subject to the dialogue's contemplation, the parable becomes *koanic*, and if the two friends follow its conveyance, it bears them jointly through the labor pains of non-being, aided by its Socratic midwifery.[41] The mystery emerges from the speech-act of their conveyance, and emanates toward them, drawn by their anamnesis of a state that is conveying itself into their awareness. They are conveyed and being conveyed by the no-thingness in their thought that cannot be spoken, and retracting back into this no-thingness is not the nihilism of non-being, but rather the abundance of mystery that draws forth and draws from the font their now necessary possibility.

VIII. Dialectic into Dialogos, unto *Metanoia*: The *Real* Self-Realization of Reality

We are accustomed to thinking of dialectic as a clash of propositions. However, it is critical to understand its function at the level of perspective, the frame that orders the presentation of environment and its affordances for action. Without understanding perspective in its full and embodied dimensions – as an entire world with semiotic and existential indexicality – we cannot understand the potency of dialectic intercession. We must imagine two perspectives of a dialectic relationship like the view of two lovers in a quarrel, each with a story of their relationship that appears essential to its fate, each replete with an embodied affect, aspectual salience and agent-arena arrangement. Narrative is highly effective at distinguishing these aspects and features, enacting perspectival contrast to make each complete and livable. Dialogue turns them face to face so each narrative is forced into the *aporia* of seeing its own atemporal finitude, its own non-being reflected in the eyes of the other lover, and her alternate narrative This experience can, and often does, leave its lovers in a crisis of solipsistic absurdity. However, if treated with the bearings of Socratic faith and proleptic rationality, then this *aporia* can become *kairotic*, and opportune. Each lover is made to internalize the other, made to become more of one other, to integrate each other and differentiate from themselves, to complexify, and in the act of losing themselves to the world of the other, to paradoxically become more of themselves as a new world conveys itself through them, and reproduces into their being.

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40)   Hyland, *Finitude and Transcendence in the Platonic Dialogues.*

41)   Ahbel-Rappe, *Socratic Ignorance and Platonic Knowledge in the Dialogues of Plato.*

This inter-perspectival *eros* was dramatized by the Platonic dialogues. This was their *techne* of midwifery. Many of the dialogues are preceded by a narrative of Socrates' eponymous interlocutor, one that extols his sterling reputation. At the outset of the dialogue, the subject of his narrative (e.g., their virtue) becomes the subject of discussion, and turns into the subject of debate. Debate is shifted into dialogos by using *elenchus* to slyly invert the perspective from the claim that carries it into conversation – for instance, by showing effective instances of the virtue that are not congruent with its definition – and waking the discussant to this clash so that he finds himself suspended in its question, suddenly at quits with his knowledge and narrative reputation.

The Socratic *elenchus* is a definitional disruption[42] of the ego and its ontology, and this is what makes the Vygotskian internalization possible. Just like the alienated lovers, the *aporetic* experience can lead into absurdity, and then nihilism, if it is not paired with the proper pedagogy. When he is displaced from his narrative ontology by his clash with the thou's perspective, the interlocutor finds himself in the Rubin's Vase, face to face with his self-displacement. He realizes that the *aporetic* presence between himself and his old perspective, inverted from the presence between his self and his opposite other, now consists in no-thing. His perspective has lost its essentialism. No-thingness has become the space between the aspects, the boundaryless boundary that separates the perspectival worlds. In dialectic, this thou of no-thing is a self-lessness that must become the self, an objectless object withdrawn into subjective life, a thingness that dissolves toward transparency to become a new manner of seeing. This is the transparency-opacity shift[43] of the dialectic – although one imagines that the cast of Plato's dialogues saw the profile of Socrates in this figure-ground reversal, rather than the form of a vase.

When two perspectives are seen at once, as through the Socratic icon, the world multiplies itself like the logos of Heraclitus. Two axes meet to create a third dimension, a new geometry of trans-perspectival depth. This new dimension seems to emerge from within, as one perspective regrows through the other, and it seems to emanate from without, as the first perspective recognizes itself, and reaches to help it grow. Hence, the new self of dialectic seems both poetic and anamnestic; interlocutors are recollective of themselves, and creative of each other, creative of themselves, and recollective of each other. The vase in the center is the cup of no-thing that both faces drink from, and each self becomes both faces. This aspect shift means that the movement away from oneself in the act of perspectival self-negation suddenly becomes a movement toward oneself in an act of participatory self-creation. As Heraclitus observed, *the way up and the way down are one and the same.*[44] These are the two stages of Nishitani's *metanoia*, and they could be aptly described as a loop of realization in its dual meanings: you continually realize that you are being realized, and this co-realization opens your dialogic narrative to a new being of self beyond the non-being of its sudden *aporia*. Ueda describes this process in the following passage:

> Next, on the basis of this incarnational reality that confirms selflessness and sustains it, there appears the selfless self which, by its very selflessness, takes the hyphenated "between" of the I-Thou, as its own existential inner realm of activity… For the self in its selflessness, whatever happens to the other happens to itself. This communion of common life is the second resurrected body of the selfless self. The self, cut open and disclosed through absolute nothingness, unfolds itself as the "between." I am "I and Thou," and "I and Thou" are I. What we have here is the self seen as a double self grounded on selflessness in nothingness. It is a coincidence – a reciprocal coincidence

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42) This thought is provided by Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life.*

43) See Polanyi and Prosch, *Meaning.*

44) Heraclitus, *Fragments,* DK22 B60.

– of absolutely self-sufficiency and absolute dependency, which takes us further than the I-Thou relationship that Buber speaks of.[45]

Dialectic is a practice that enacts and engenders the aspect shift, right at the rudiments of being. Nishitani understood this *metanoesis* as a form of religious conversion, the only way to overcome the non-being of the nihil. He understood the phenomenal-functional purpose of religion as reality's self-realization. The interpersonal dialectic of dialogos enacts the aspect shift from the privation of exposure to a superlative sensitivity. This act conditions a state of onto-existential vulnerability by which thingness and no-thingness become mutually realizable. If we imagine intelligibility (to use Kant's famous metaphor) as a pair of glasses, then this ontological sensitization is the clearing of the glasses to afford the clearing of being. We must relinquish the having of intelligibility – including the having of an intelligible self – in order to effect the modal shift of being-through intelligibility, and to participate in the no-thingness of the world with the no-thingness of our own identity. In this transformation, the subject-object aspects shift to become *transjectively* continuous, to see thing and no-thing, self and other, in a single stereopsis.

This onto-stereoscopy is a symbolic revision of being. The point of the dialectic transparency-opacity shift is not simply to forsake thingness for no-thingness, but to midwife ourselves from their mutual impregnation, to recover our being from non-being. This *telos* guided the Neoplatonic practice of turning theory into *theoria*, like turning narrative into parable, or dialogue into *koan*. D.T. Suzuki compares Eckhart's Christian Neoplatonism to the Buddhist *prajñā,* the scaling up and scaling down of dialectic intelligibility.[46] The proper relationship to emergence and emanation can be here described as reverential receptivity. Eckhart captures this relationship by pairing *gelassenheit* ("letting be") with *durchbruch* ("breaking through"), conspiring from two directions to entreat the disclosure of the logos. The fellowship of dia-logos is what conduces the self-organizing aspect shift, the gathering together, the arrangement of our face to face. The aspect shift of dialectic is a meta-transparency-opacity shift; the self is dialectically negated so that it becomes itself by seeing through itself, like the story negates itself in parable so we can convey the conditions of its actuality, and bring them to realization. In the same way, the dialectic is present in all of philosophy's preconditions; cognition negates itself so we think through it, language negates itself so we speak through it, the finger negates itself so we can index and touch the world. The no-thingness of the self affords this self-negation, so that the self can turn to itself by turning *through* itself, so that it comes to rest transparently in its establishing power, the power of non-being beyond its being.

IX. Conclusion

As Porphyry cautioned, each person's quest "to be elevated toward the non-being that is beyond being may also be set astray toward that non-being that constitutes the collapse of being."[47] This is the quest provided by these times. The task of Socratic self-knowledge lies concealed in the wonder of being. The dialectic in dialogos enunciates an actuality that is neither literal nor metaphoric. It resolves the despair of possibility by resolving us to the emptiness that constitutes its necessity. We crave to matter to that which is beyond the matter of egocentric concern. Dialectic displaces our concern from the egocentric to the onto-centric. If we confine our conveyance to the determinacy of spatial-temporal objects, then true connectedness becomes impossible. Dialectic replaces

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45)   Ueda, "'Nothingness' in Meister Eckhart and Zen Buddhism," 163.

46)   Suzuki, *Mysticism Christian and Buddhist,* 28–29, 35.

47)   Porphyry, *Neoplatonic Philosophy*, 180–81. Also cited above.

us into a harness as we hover over the abyss of infinitude, and it lengthens the span of our gaze until we find ourselves knowingly reflected, reopened, by the eye of its dark expanse. The movement of the self through no-thingness replaces us into the state of *aletheia*; the reading of deeper conveyance unspools ours narrative into trans-narrative form, and transports the self safely through its empty possibility, like the Heraclitan logos that steers all things through all things. In dialectic, the speech-act retracts us into the great question of our being, and equips us to face its correspondent shadow. Only in dialectic into dialogos, therefore, can the transjective life be realized transjectively. Only in this form of dialectic do we find a home in no-thingness that subverts the domicide of nihilism, and find ourselves known by the conveyance of our self-realization.
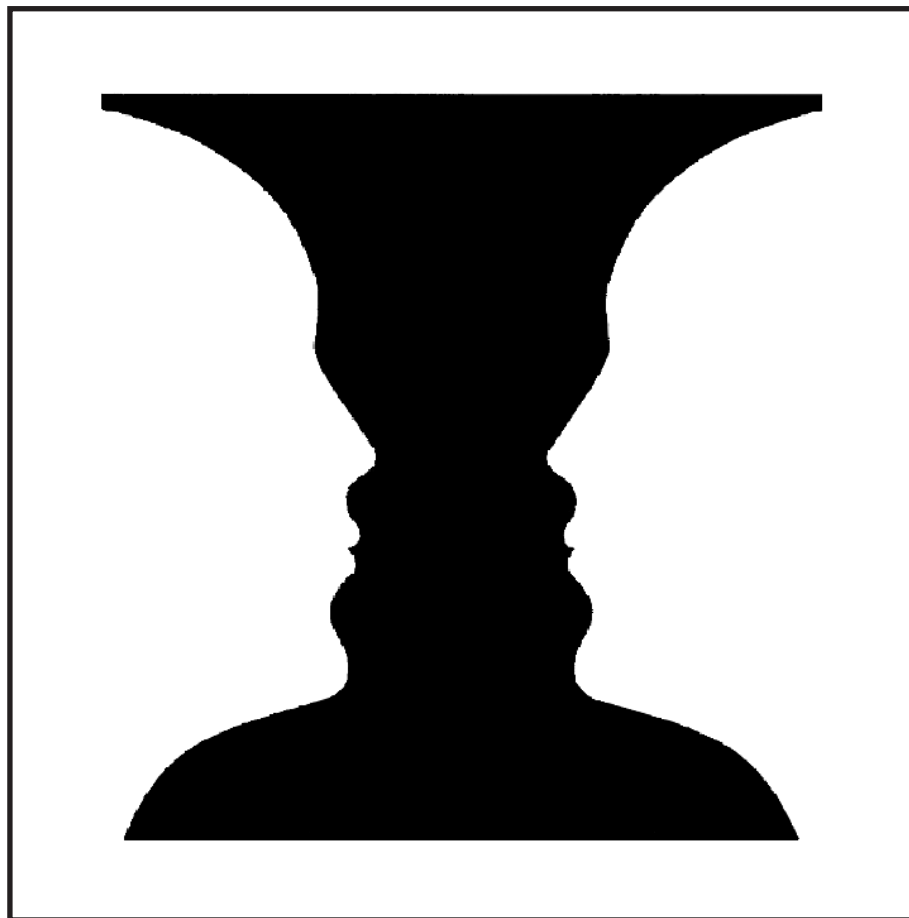

Figure 1: Rubin's Vase

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