Direct experience of existence Maritain and Nishitani on being and absolute nothingness.

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DIRECT EXPERIENCE OF EXISTENCE:
MARITAIN AND NISHITANI
ON BEING AND ABSOLUTE NOTHINGNESS

by
Wayne Harold Harter

A Thesis
submitted to the
Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
through the department of
Religious Studies in Partial Fulfillment
of the requirements for the Degree
of Master of Arts at
the University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada
1988
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to compare the Thomistic concept of being with the Madhyamaka doctrine of absolute nothingness, in order to correct certain misconceptions of the past and provide a foundation for true dialogue between these philosophic traditions. The selected representatives of these traditions are Jacques Maritain (Thomism) and Keiji Nishitani (Madhyamaka). In examining the writings of Nishitani and Maritain it becomes apparent that the success or failure at dialogue is rooted in the ability of the dialogical partners to recognize a critical distinction: the terms being and absolute nothingness do not proceed from the same cognitive level. Treating them as if they were two views in competition for expressing the same level of truth (as both Maritain and Nishitani did) leads to an inability to correctly perceive the essential nature of each term. The result is that the terms then appear as antinomies and dialogue becomes a competition between superior/inferior philosophies.

Respecting the different levels of knowing these terms represent, leads to a dialogue much different in nature: a dialogue between parallel traditions that
converge at points of mutual and vital concern. This study has found four such areas of convergence: (1) a proper starting point for epistemology; (2) intentionality in the act of knowing; (3) levels of knowing proceeding from the same object of cognition; and (4) the transcendence/immanence of the ultimate source of existence.

The treatment of these four themes by Maritain and Nishitani shows fundamental agreement, but it is also recognized by this study that important differences separate these traditions as well. These differences began in historical contingencies surrounding the formation of the respective philosophic traditions and resulted in divergent understandings of the relationship of philosophy to soteriology. This divergence affects the use of philosophic language and must be taken cognizance of in order to arrive at mutual understanding.

In summation, there is both unity and diversity found in a dialogue between these philosophic traditions. While it is not possible to simply compare them, it is possible to recognize a significant and fundamental agreement between them on matters of central concern.
To Deborah,  
with whom all else comes merely as added joy;

To Joseph Leddy,  
who provided me inspiration to study and a 
model of integrity;

To Holy Mother Church,  
who has given sustenance throughout the ages.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Every worthy endeavour requires us to seek out and depend upon the charity of others. Because of this happy circumstance, I am indebted to certain generous people that aided me in the completion of this study and whom I now wish gratefully to acknowledge.

Dr. Roy C. Amore kindly consented to be the director for this study in philosophical dialogue between Jacques Maritain and Keiji Nishitani. He provided initial encouragement for its prospects and suggested ways in which the treatment of the subject could incorporate a Buddhist as well as a Christian perspective. I am still not as comfortable within Buddhist thought and terminology as I am in my own Christian tradition, but to the degree that this study has successfully addressed the Buddhist reader, I am indebted to the influence of Dr. Amore.

The external reader for this thesis paper was Dr. Ralph C. Nelson. At first, I sought out Dr. Nelson because of his expertise in the thought of Maritain. Upon seeing the proposal for the thesis topic, however, Dr. Nelson was candid in expressing certain reservations concerning the concept of the study. It was this
skepticism and his character as an exacting scholar that forced me to examine with great care the arguments I wished to defend. Now that the study is completed, I am convinced that I chose wisely in seeking his aid. Dr. Nelson's final approval of this study is for me a source of personal pride and encouragement for further research.

It is to the internal reader, Dr. Barry L. Whitney, that I wish to offer a special acknowledgement of debt and gratitude. Dr. Whitney spent numerous hours working with the progressive drafts of this study. He provided valuable criticisms of its content and style, and it was his efforts that ultimately brought coherence and readability to this work. In many other ways his kindness went far beyond the duties of a thesis committeeperson. Although those additional helps need not be mentioned here, I hope that he realizes my deep appreciation for those many acts of selflessness. His intellectual honesty and his offer of friendship turned my two years of study at the University of Windsor into a period that I shall always look back upon with warm regard.

Then, of course, I am also very grateful for the material support that made this study possible. The generosity of the University of Windsor and the Province of Ontario provided scholarship money, without which my
studies would not have been completed. My mother and father-in-law, as well, supported many of the needs of my family—that were outside of the means of a student. But, especially it is my wife Deborah who deserves recognition and my gratitude for her support. She willingly sacrificed many comforts and continues to do so now as I prepare for doctoral studies. For this I always shall be thankful.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank also those who made my studies at the University of Windsor particularly enjoyable. I would like to thank Dr. Dietmar Lage for his friendship and his interest in matters of philosophy and theology. He reinforced my belief that the work of Universities is sometimes a noble endeavour. I am grateful to Ethel M. Smith, as well, for the many times she aided me in the bewildering details of academic existence. And finally, I thank Christine A. Charlebois. For all those times she came to my rescue in matters for which I am no match, I offer now my sincere appreciation.
And finally, what is the ultimate mystery, beyond human explanation, which embraces our entire existence, from which we take our origin and towards which we tend?

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I

The Call to East/West Dialogue

The quotation above is taken from the Vatican II document, *Nostra Aetate*. Written with faith in the common root of all humanity and in recognition of the ever-increasing interdependence of the world community, *Nostra Aetate* seeks to bring the wisdom of Christianity to the question of non-Christian religions. Yet it is not only the fact of religious plurality that has brought the Council to reflect upon the mystery of Providence in other faiths, but, more importantly, its recognition that truth and holiness are found in the teachings of Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. The

document, while holding to the uniqueness of Christ in
salvation history, calls upon Christians to
"acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and
moral truths found among non-Christians."

This present study is offered in the spirit of
Nostra Aetate by a Christian author who holds the
Buddhist tradition in high esteem. Specifically, it is
an attempt to approach the question of "what is the
ultimate mystery which embraces our entire existence" by
looking to the wisdom of both modern Thomism and
Mahāyāna Buddhism. Jacques Maritain (1882-1973) will be
selected as the representative for the philosophy of St.
Thomas and Keiji Nishitani (1900- ) will speak on
behalf of the tradition of the Great Vehicle.

It may be hard to imagine, initially, two
traditions that appear more unlikely as candidates for
dialogue than Scholastic Thomism and Mahāyāna Buddhism.
Yet it is the contention of this study that, while there
are basic differences between these two traditions that
must be recognized in any attempt at comparison, still,
there are important parallels as well. These points of
agreement in areas of fundamental concern provide the
basis for fruitful dialogue. Those familiar with the
writings of either or both philosophers will already be
aware that neither Maritain nor Nishitani themselves
expressed confidence in finding comparability between their traditions.

Certainly, Maritain's evaluation of Buddhism was extremely negative. He considered it to be "the corruption and dissolution of the Brahman philosophy" and an "intellectual plague to humanity." Later he came to modify somewhat that assessment by claiming that "Indian metaphysics [Brahmanist or Buddhist] is rich with invaluable insights and experiences," but still he went on to say that "it is seriously mistaken, insofar as it teaches that the supreme Truth is sheer undifferentiation, and the Supreme Reality so transcendent that it cannot be known in any expressible manner." Therefore, Maritain remained of the opinion that Buddhist philosophy is either antithetical to or insufficient in comparison to Christian thought. Yet, whether he actually demonstrated an adequate understanding of Buddhist thought is a consideration we must address in this study.

As for Nishitani, the apparent unlikelihood of this dialogue arises from a different consideration. Whereas Maritain approached the relationship of East to West

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primarily in terms of the history of philosophy, even then dealing with Buddhism only briefly (considering it merely as a type of metaphysical error). Nishitani has devoted much of his life to the problem of East/West dialogue. He spent many years studying Western philosophy, including three in Germany with Heidegger. His writings exhibit a profound grasp of the inherent contradictions of post-Cartesian philosophy and the subsequent developments in modern idealism and nihilism. But even though he acknowledges an affinity for some Christian thinkers such as Eckhart and Kierkegaard and even St. Francis of Assisi, nowhere in his writings does he explicitly engage either Roman Catholic theology or its dominant philosophical tradition, Thomism. He does refer occasionally to "medieval philosophy," but he characterizes it as a naive realism and thus, he is either unaware or mistaken as to the actual nature of Thomism, medieval or modern. In either case, Nishitani himself does not provide us with the foundations for a Mahāyāna/Thomist dialogue.

We cannot look, then, to either Maritain or Nishitani for the initial groundwork of a dialogical encounter. Yet, it is the intention of this study to

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4 Keiji Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, translated with an Introduction by Jan Van Bragt, Foreword by Winston L. King (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983). See references to traditional Western philosophy on pp. 120, 134, 142.
show that since Maritain misunderstood the nature of Buddhist thought and since Nishitani’s criticisms of Western ontology simply do not apply to Maritain’s metaphysic, genuine dialogue is still possible. Genuine inter-faith dialogue is understood by this study as being, in the words of Willard G. Oxtoby, a "concern for the understanding of the partner’s identity in itself and for its own sake," while seeking to relate this understanding to "our own terminology because that is all we have." It is, in other words, the search to "preserve diversity within unity." By remaining in fidelity to the central concerns of each system, we can reach genuine dialogue, in spite of the past state of affairs.  


6 Hans Waldenfels has suggested some possibilities for such dialogue in Absolute Nothingness: Foundations for a Buddhist – Christian Dialogue, translated by J. W. Heisig (New York: Paulist Press, 1980). See, especially, chapter 8, "Mystical Experience and Philosophical Reflection", pp. 133-137, where Waldenfels specifically points to the difference between the languages of cataphatic and apophatic theologies. It is in this discussion that he points to the epistemology of Maritain as an aid for attempts at Christian – Buddhist dialogue.

This present study is indebted to Waldenfel’s suggestions, in that they lent support during the early and sometimes difficult period of research when it was not always apparent that dialogue between Maritain and Nishitani would, indeed, prove fruitful.
The chapters following this Introduction are divided into separate discussions on Maritain, Nishitani, and the foundations for dialogue between their thought. Chapter 2 examines the metaphysical thought of Jacques Maritain. In that chapter we will follow his purely rational analysis of being to its culmination in the intellectual certainty of the existence of Subsistent Being itself. The purpose of that survey is to reveal the nature and intention of his philosophic language of being and to thereby show the possibilities and limitations of cataphatic wisdom.7

Chapter 3 belongs to the exploration of Nishitani's "standpoint of śūnyatā."8 There we will also discover rational analysis, but this time it will proceed along different lines because it develops from different intentions. The intention of Nishitani's exposition differs from that of Maritain's because it does not wish to remain within the bounds of purely rational knowledge, but seeks to point to the trans-rational wisdom of Ṣādhu toṣa experience.9

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7 The term, cataphatic wisdom, refers to conceptual knowledge and will be discussed more fully below.

8 Śūnyatā is the sanskrit term for "absolute nothingness." The meaning and etymology of this term is found in the discussion on Nishitani, chapter 3.

9 Ṣādhu toṣa knowledge is the knowledge attained in mystical vision. The suitability as well as some problems in applying this term to the thought of Nishitani are discussed below.
The philosophy of being and the standpoint of sūnyatā: both philosophers themselves believe that they exist as antinomies. Yet, this study will argue that this is not their true relationship. Once we come to appreciate the dynamic (or "heart") of these terms, we will see that, although they resist any simple comparison, the philosophy of being and the doctrine of sūnyatā both express some parallel views about the nature of existence and about the potential of human knowledge for its attainment of such.

By exploring the distinctions between levels of knowledge (a distinction common to both traditions) and then approaching the concepts of Being and Absolute Nothingness with respect for those distinctions, a new basis for philosophical dialogue between Mahāyāna philosophy and Thomistic metaphysics appears. Such is the work of Chapter 4: to respect the essence of both ways of knowing while bringing them beyond their current dialogical impasse.

Before this exploration can proceed, however, there are two considerations that must be given attention in this introductory chapter. First, we must recognize that the relationship of philosophical speculation to soteriology as it exists in each tradition is not identical, and that this has great bearing upon the search for successful dialogue. By failing to recognize
the real divergence of these traditions in their use of reason to illuminate the trans-rational, or by overestimating that divergence, it will be impossible to appreciate fully what is meant by the terms Being and Absolute Nothingness. In fact, the proper appreciation of both traditions in this matter is the very foundation for establishing true dialogue. Even though this relationship of faith to reason will remain a constant and central theme throughout this study, it will be helpful to introduce the issue here, in a preliminary manner.

Secondly, we must seek to understand the nature of both cataphatic and apophatic wisdom. In light of the divergent traditions concerning the relationship of reason to soteriology, this is a consideration that holds great potential for establishing true dialogue between Mahāyāna and Thomist thought. Without this distinction we would be faced with the futile task of attempting to reconcile statements that seem to arise from opposing doctrinal standpoints, but which are, in reality, reflections of different levels of truth. We will see that statements concerning ultimate reality take on different forms, according to which level they reflect. After having come to grips with these two considerations of historical divergence and use of
language, we will be better prepared to enter into a dialogical encounter.

II

Philosophy and salvation

The relationship of faith to reason has a long and complicated history in the West. From the time of the Church Fathers, philosophy was brought to bear upon the deposit of faith in order to better illuminate that revelation and define orthodoxy against the heretical movements. In order to protect certain truths (e.g., the nature of Christ, or the ontological relation within the Trinity), various Councils and theologians utilized the precision of Greek philosophy to provide an adequate conceptual grasp of what was by nature unattainable by the natural intellect alone. Greek philosophy was a powerful tool in the hands of the Christian theologians and it even came to be seen by the early church as evidence of divine preparation of the pagan world for the eventual coming of the Gospel. There was, however, also the recognition by the Apostolic Fathers, such as Clement of Alexandria (ca. A.D. 150 – ca. 215), that because it was a purely natural wisdom, it was limited by distortions and falsifications.10 Revelation came

from the Jews and philosophy from the Greeks. That fact was never overlooked by the Church, especially at the height of medieval scholasticism.

The great "medieval synthesis," exemplified by the thought of St. Thomas, sought to harmonize the natural and supernatural wisdoms of Greek and Jewish/Christian teachings. Thomas referred to Aristotle as "The Philosopher." He understood that such a title belonged pre-eminently to this towering genius born into a world ignorant of the gospel of Christ. Yet, because of that ignorance, Thomas also understood that Aristotle’s knowledge of God was limited to what is attainable through the natural intellect (what is now known as natural theology) and was, therefore, extremely limited in comparison to the superior knowledge of God proceeding from the revelation of faith (today termed revealed theology). Between these two types of knowledge there is as wide a difference as that between one genus and another.\(^1\) The impact of Aristotelian thought upon Christian philosophy in the West was truly revolutionary, but if we peer into the Divine Comedy, which reflects Thomist cosmology,\(^2\) we find that Thomism


\(^2\) For the relationship of Dante to St. Thomas, see Pope Benedict XV, *Dante Encyclical*, reprinted in *Dante Theologians: The Divine Comedy*, translation and
does not confuse the eminence of the "The Philosopher" with the glory of the redeemed who, even in purgatory, are at least confident of the beatific vision.

In the history of Buddhism we find a different situation. There is no equivalent in the Buddhist lexicon for the Western notion of "philosophy," a wisdom distinct from salvation.\(^\text{13}\) In Buddhism all worthwhile knowledge is knowledge of the Dharma and is, therefore, inseparable from soteriology. To spend time speculating on the nature of things would be seen as an absurd waste of time (if such speculation did not of itself advance one along the Path). It would be the equivalent of a man who, being mortally wounded by an arrow, refused to have the arrow removed until he was satisfied in the knowledge of where the arrow had come from.\(^\text{14}\) Rational

commentary by Rev. Patrick Cummins, O. S. B. (St Louis: B. Herder Book Company, 1953), pp. 4-12. There has been some debate as to whether Dante was a Thomist, considering that he defended Siger of Brabant, who taught that the soul was not immortal. Dante placed Siger (in Paradiso X) in heaven at the left hand of St. Thomas. The problem this raises, interesting as it is, does not, however, affect the illustration being made here, namely, the Thomistic understanding of the relationship of philosophy to faith.


\(^\text{14}\) "I will not have this arrow drawn out until I know the one who pierced me, whether he is a nobleman or a brahman, a merchant or a laborer... What is his name, and to which clan does he belong? I will not have this arrow drawn out until I know the type of bow with which I was pierced, whether it is
wisdom did not come from an external tradition as it had in the West. It grew up within Buddhism as the intellectual aspect of the desire for release from suffering. Even today, a century after the Western concept of the University has come to be the standard for Japanese education, Keiji Nishitani teaches both philosophy at Kyoto University and religion at the Jodo Shinshu Buddhist Otani University -- and the content of both courses is likely to be identical.\(^{15}\)

If we fail to see that historical developments have brought about a fundamentally different understanding of the relationship of rational wisdom to religion for Christians and Buddhists, then we undoubtedly shall fail to achieve genuine dialogue. The Western notion of philosophy as a distinct discipline from theology places metaphysical discourse in a different context than it is given in Buddhism. Being, as a metaphysical concept reached by the power of the natural intellect alone, cannot be directly compared to Absolute Nothingness, a term originating from the dialectic of enlightenment.

To treat them as the same level of statement leads to

> a spring-bow or a cross-bow, 


\(^{15}\) Winston L. King, Foreword to *Religion and Nothingness*, p. ix.
profound misunderstanding, as we shall see, in both Maritain's own view of Buddhism and Nishitani's criticism of the Western philosophy of being.

In an attempt to avoid such misunderstanding, some current researchers of Christian/Buddhist dialogue have begun to stress the dissimilarity between the two traditions. But here also a new error is being inserted. The following quotation taken from Jan Van Bragt's Introduction to *Religion and Nothingness* exemplifies the fallacy of overemphasizing the dissimilarity of Christian and Buddhist philosophic discourse:

> Even after the advent of Christianity, Western philosophy held fast to its Greek roots and did not make a fundamental shift in orientation to serve as an explanation of the Christian religious experience. The same could be said of either the Judaic or the Islamic religious experience vis-à-vis Western philosophy. As a result, we find religion and philosophy coexisting in conditions laden with tensions. The individual tends to assume one world view, for example, in moments of spiritual reading and another in moments of rational analysis. It is different in Buddhist philosophy, where the unity of the religious and the speculative has never been severed.  

Now, there may be varieties of Christian and Buddhist thought that would justify this assessment by Van Bragt, but surely, if we look more closely at the two traditions we are concerned with here, we can see

that Thomism and Mahāyāna Buddhism are not described by this passage.¹⁷

It has already been conceded that the tradition followed by Maritain has insisted upon the distinction between the realms of philosophy and theology. According to Maritain, the nature of philosophy, as a power of operation, is determined by the object which is

¹⁷ St. Thomas denies that the truth of philosophy originates from a source that is different or conflicts with the truth of sacred doctrine:

"According to His [Jesus'] own statement, divine Wisdom testifies that He has assumed flesh and come into the world to make the truth known: 'for this was I born, and for this came I into the world; that I should give testimony to the truth' (John 18:37). The Philosopher himself establishes that first philosophy is the science of truth, not of any truth, but of that truth which is the origin of all truth, namely, which belongs to the first principle whereby all things are. The truth belonging to such a principle is, clearly, the source of all truth; for things have the same disposition in truth as in being" (SCG, I, c. 1, #2).

On the other hand, Nāgārjuna refutes the notion that truth has the same form, irrespective of the level of inquiry from which it is pursued:

"The teaching by the Buddhas of the dharma has recourse to two truths: the world-ensconced truth and the truth which is the highest sense. Those who do not know the distribution of the two kinds of truth do not know the profound 'point' in the teaching of the Buddha."

Yet, Nāgārjuna goes on to say:

"The highest sense (of the truth) is not taught apart from practical behavior, and without having understood the highest sense one cannot understand nirvāṇa (Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikās, c. 24, 8-10)."

Thus, he does re-establish the unity of all truth, practical and transcendental, under the highest truth, which is sūnyatā.
its proper end. This end, or goal, of philosophical activity is "wholly rational ... [derived] intrinsically from reason and rational criticism alone: ... based entirely on experimental or intellectual evidence and on logical proof." When the term philosophy is preceded by the adjective "Christian," moreover, its nature is not thereby changed for Maritain. As Maritain understands philosophy, it is essentially the same in nature whether it is pagan, Christian or Buddhist.

Yet Maritain does not mean that Christian philosophy is merely philosophy performed by a Christian. It is not analogous to Christian geology or Buddhist mathematics. In an epistemic hierarchy that will become more clear as this study progresses, Maritain understands that the philosophy of Aristotle was not simply taken up by St. Thomas, but radically transformed through the guidance it received from the superior light of the Judeo-Christian revelation. It is true that, in abstraction, philosophy remains untouched by revelation in terms of its essential nature or activity (which is to attain a wholly natural and rational form of knowledge), but the actual state of


philosophy at the hands of a Christian is fully transformed by the encounter.\textsuperscript{20} Revelation has come to inform philosophy of a whole deposit of knowledge it is incapable of achieving unaided.\textsuperscript{21} Gilson elucidates the subtlety of this distinction:

the "revealable" extends even beyond the limits of the actually revealed; it includes the whole body of human knowledge inasmuch as it can be considered by the theologian in light of revelation and used by him in view of its end, which is the salvation of man in general. This leaves intact, within theology, the formal distinction between natural knowledge and supernatural knowledge, but it includes them both under a still wider formal reason since "revealables" comprise the whole body of natural cognitions considered as being at the disposal of the theologian in view of his own theological end which is the salvation of man.\textsuperscript{22}

While Christian philosophy remains philosophy in its nature of being a science of natural knowledge, the Christian philosopher brings a new clarity and purpose to philosophizing that is the result of the illuminating power of revelation.


\textsuperscript{21} It is not possible here to give the fullness of Maritain's thought concerning the nature - state distinction in Christian philosophy. The reader will find the distillation of his position in \textit{An Essay on Christian Philosophy}.

To hold that Christian revelation is knowledge radiating from a light inaccessible to the purely rational intellect does not lead, then, as Van Bragt believes, to a sort of schizophrenic in the life of the Christian philosopher, forcing the Christian "to assume one world view . . . in moments of spiritual reading and another in moments of rational analysis." However, it does force the Christian philosopher to face the existence of levels of knowledge, to face the limits inherent to the nature of ratiocination (the act or process of reasoning). When the intellect becomes aware of its own limits, moreover, through the discovery of a knowledge that clearly sees what reason had only dimly been aware or totally ignorant of, then the state of the intellect has itself become new.

If we wish to understand the relationship of reason to revelation in the term Christian philosophy as it is intended by Maritain, then he bids us to understand that it is philosophy that has found "its ontological pivotal center" outside and above the entire philosophical order "in that fact, unique and beyond compare, which is the Incarnation." Philosophy, the activity by which the intellect attains a wholly natural wisdom, is perfected by a higher wisdom which, by virtue of its brilliance, clarity, height and depth, informs

philosophy of its limitations and thus provides an orientation, a standpoint for philosophy that reveals to natural wisdom its proper sphere in the salvation of the entire person.

The understanding of philosophy in Mahāyāna Buddhism is, in many ways, parallel to this Christian distinction between levels of knowledge; it is not as divergent as Van Bragt supposes. If we look at the writings of Nāgārjuna, the father of Mahāyāna Philosophy, we find a very clear distinction between the level of rational analysis and the standpoint of Absolute Nothingness, the standpoint that is the "light" under which his discourse develops. It is correct that everything Nāgārjuna says philosophically "has to do with the clearing of the way for enlightenment," but this is precisely true because Nāgārjuna simultaneously distinguished ratiocination from the standpoint of enlightenment while asserting that rationality is perfected by this higher wisdom.

Had Nāgārjuna not insisted upon the transcendental nature of the term Absolute Nothingness, then that term would be subject to rational critique. In that case, his opponents would have been correct in refuting Nāgārjuna's dialectic because, from within the limits of

24 King, Foreword to Religioin and Nothingness, p. xxvii.
discursive reasoning, the doctrine of Absolute
Nothingness is indefensible. Yet we should not then
jump to the hasty conclusion that Nāgārjuna is anti-
rational, opposed to purely metaphysical speculation.
His aim was to expose a decadent scholasticism that had
based its metaphysic upon the hopelessly irrational
doctrine of the self-nature (svabhāva) of the dhammas.

25 Nāgārjuna’s opponents claimed:
“As there must be a denial of something
that exists, as (in the statement): ‘There is
not a pot in the house,’ that denial of yours
which is seen must be a denial of self-
existence that exists. Or if that self-
existence does not exist, what do you deny by
that statement? Certainly the denial of what
does not exist is proved without a word!
There is no proof of a "point" possible for
you if it has no grounds”
(Vigrhaḥyāvarṭanī, I,11-12,17. quoted from
Frederick Streng, Emptiness: A Study in
Religious Meaning, Nashville: Abingdon Press,
Nāgārjuna denied, however, that Absolute
Nothingness is a position that is capable of being
grasped by the purely rational intellect:
“If I would make any proposition
whatever, then by that I would have a logical
error; but I do not make a proposition:
therefore I am not in error” (ibid,II,29).

26 The dhammas are the basic and ultimate
phenomena of all reality. The scholasticism which
Nāgārjuna struggled against had listed approximately 200
of these elements into five basic groupings (skandhas).
The various schools often argued amongst themselves as
to the exact number and grouping of the dhammas. Their
respective cosmologies were extensive constructions
drawn from the myriad possible combinations inherent to
these dhammas in the make-up of the universe.
Svabhāva (own nature) is the concept of causality
that explains the dynamic for these ever shifting
combinations of dhammas. An element with svabhāva acts
spontaneously, according to its own nature. There is no
His method of refutation was to carry its logic to its inevitable and absurd conclusions. He used logic to show that without the illuminating realization of emptiness, logic would go astray from the teachings of the Buddha and become blinded by ignorance.

Nāgārjuna was very aware of the nature and limits of philosophical dialogue. While he did not confuse the way of the intellect with the way of Emptiness, neither did he abandon the way of reason in the quest for certitude. He does insist that without the standpoint of Śūnyatā, reason is blind.

III
Two Kinds of Wisdom

Understanding, then, that both Mahāyāna Buddhism and Thomist philosophy distinguish between the realms of revealed knowledge and rational analysis, we must now seek to establish the exact relationship that these traditions place between these two ways of knowing. The purely rational mode of knowledge proceeds by way of clear concepts and is known as cataphatic wisdom by need to look behind it for further causal explanation. It is its own reason for existence, or, in Thomistic terminology, there is no distinction between the essence of the dharmas and their existence.

Nāgārjuna denied the svabhāva of the dharmas since this doctrine of the schools led to hopeless contradictions in logic and undermined the Buddha's teaching of dependent origination.

See A. K. Warder's discussion of this in Indian Buddhism, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1970), pp. 41; 303-308; and 377-387.
Maritain and the discursive intellect by Nishitani. Revealed knowledge (or what is, perhaps, better described as experiential knowledge, or mystical vision) forsakes the realm of concepts, which are always once-removed from direct experience, for the wordless, imageless knowledge (a sort of knowledge of non-knowing), known by Maritain as apophatic wisdom and by Nishitani as attaining the mind of the Tathāgata.²⁷

If we consider the nature of metaphysics, which is the highest realm of cataphatic knowledge, we can recognize, along with Maritain, its majesty as the supreme science of natural wisdom, but also its abject poverty in the ability to deliver its own proper object up to experiential knowledge. Metaphysics brings the intellect to a certain knowledge of the existence of a primal source of all being and thereby "awakens a desire for supreme union, for spiritual possession completed in the order of reality itself and not only in the

²⁷. "The mind of the Tathāgata" is an alternate term for "the mind of the Buddha" (Yoshinori, Heart of Buddhism, p. 162). It is, in the words of Nishitani, "the non-discerning mind that is the absolute negation of the discernment of consciousness or intellect" (Religion and Nothingness, p. 181).
concept." But, as Maritain also reminds us, "It cannot satisfy that desire."

The highest path of the natural intellect, arrives at the recognition of "something unborn as well as imperishable" at the centre of existence, but it dead ends at this certainty, unable to proceed further. There is no manner in which the intellect, while moving within the limits that are natural to it (or, in Buddhist terms, while remaining the discursive intellect that it is) can experience or even comprehend the pure act of existence. Our rational intellect is grounded in the distinctions proper to essences. It cannot grasp pure Being or Absolute Emptiness because these terms apply to their object in an uncircumscribed manner. Accordingly, as both Maritain and Nishitani recognized, the height of our natural knowledge of this First Act of existence is to know it as unknown.

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29 Maritain, Degrees of Knowledge, p. 7.

30 The agreement between Maritain and Nishitani that the center of existence is "pure act" is discussed in chapter 4, pp. 162-163.

31 As Maritain said, "at the term of our knowledge we know God as unknown" (Degrees of Knowledge, p. 236); and as Nishitani also states, "it is what we might call a knowing of non-knowing, a sort of docta ignorantia" (Religion and Nothingness, p. 139).
Unlike metaphysical wisdom, mystical vision does know this transcendental source of all existence in a manner that involves experiential knowledge, thereby satisfying the deep longing of the soul for union. This knowledge, rather than resting in concepts that are only analogically applicable to the source of existence, turns away from the form of what it knows to the more that transcendental categories of thought signify. In other words, by forsaking all distinctions and clear conceptions, the intellect empties itself of the attachment to concepts, rests no longer in created form, but in what is ontologically prior to such form.

Before we can proceed with the discussion of mystical vision, however, we must first deal with a very difficult problem. The problem is the lack of consensus among those pursuing Christian/Buddhist dialogue as to whether "mysticism" is an adequate term for describing the Zen experience. As Waldenfels has observed, the attempt to compare Zen experience with Christian mysticism has a history of divided opinions. Some noted Buddhologists, such as D. T. Suzuki, while they originally favored such comparisons, later came to

32 Metaphysical wisdom does attain a certain knowledge of God, but not experientially. It attains the knowledge of God through his effects. When an effect is known as such, the demonstration of its cause thereby exists (St Ia. 2, 2).

33 Waldenfels, Absolute Nothingness, pp. 124-126.
regret such approaches. Suzuki’s eventual position was that “Zen has nothing ‘mystical’ about it or in it. It is most plain, clear as the daylight, all out in the open with nothing hidden, dark, obscure, secret or mystifying in it.”

Yet, much of the controversy over whether the Zen experience is mystical or not arises from the fact that the term “mysticism” has been used to denote such a wide variety of phenomena (both cognitive and otherwise), that it is difficult to find two sources that use it with the same intention. As we can see from Suzuki’s disclaimer, mysticism is sometimes portrayed even as obscure knowledge, opposed to common knowledge by the quality of hiddenness, analogous to the claim made by the gnostics for their doctrines in opposition to the universal or “catholic” wisdom of the early Christian church. This sort of characterization of mysticism is not Maritain’s understanding of what is denoted by the term apophatic experience, and since we are concerned here only with establishing dialogue between Nishitani


and Maritain, we can leave aside the wider debate and focus upon Maritain's use of that term.  

This does not mean that Maritain's own understanding of mysticism provides us an easy path to dialogue; quite the opposite. The difficulty we must now face is that Maritain understands mysticism, properly so-called, in a very narrow sense. It is, for him (and for traditional Catholic theology) a supernaturally inspired knowledge and a knowledge by connaturality.  

These two conditions for mystical knowing are made possible, not simply by the act of making the intellect void of concepts, but primarily by "sanctifying grace and the indwelling of God in the soul in the state of grace." Without the presence of these ontological prerequisites and the added special act of infused wisdom accepted by way of the theological virtue of charity, Maritain would not recognize the Zen

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36 For a detailed exposition on Maritain's understanding of mystical knowledge, see Degrees of Knowledge, pp. 247-290.

37 Maritain, Degrees of Knowledge, p. 259-263. God dwells within the soul through sanctifying grace. As Maritain says: "He is really present within us as a Gift, a Friend, an eternal life companion" (p. 260). We have become, then, "co-natured" with God because God has united himself to us. "Knowledge of God by connaturality" refers to the attainment of an intimate knowledge of what has become incarnate within us (just as our knowledge of ethics becomes perfected through our becoming ethical). This attainment of the knowledge of God by connaturality is made possible through the virtue of charity, our love for God.
experience as a form of knowledge rightly called mystical.

Now, even though these prerequisites are understood in Christianity to follow from theological faith, Maritain did not thereby rule out the possibility of true mysticism in non-Christian people.\(^\text{38}\) His ecclesiology, however, did not allow him to accept the non-Christian formulations of such experiences as being more than accidents that obscure the purity of the mystical experience.

Maritain admits that it is difficult to distinguish what he would consider as genuine cases of mystical experience from the apochryphal. He does suggest that

\(^{38}\) Maritain, *Degrees of Knowledge*, pp. 272-277.

"One thing is sure: if cases of authentic mystical experience are met with in these circles [Moslem, Hindu, Buddhist, and other schools of mystics], such cases arise from divine grace and from infused contemplation more or less modified in their typical forms by special conditions of development and apart from the influx of sacramental graces and the visible rays of revealed truth. Everything leads us to think that such cases are encountered since we know that unbaptized persons, even though they are not stamped with the seal of unity so as to participate through the virtue of the Church (which is redemption continued), can nevertheless (inasmuch as they receive without knowing it the supernatural life of the self-same divine blood which circulates within the Church and of the same spirit which rests upon it) belong invisibly to Christ's Church. Thus they can have sanctifying grace and, as a result, theological faith and the infused gifts" (pp. 272-273).
A critical study of the expressions and testimonies, an examination of their analogies and relations with the testimonies of the saints can be of help. And any love that dispossesses man of himself does not lack indications, fleeting though they be, which point to a genuine mystical experience when that love penetrates the whole being with the desire to be dissolved and to be with God: a desire with a two-fold aspect, each of which is probative only in conjunction with the other.\textsuperscript{39}

While the demands of this study do not permit a wide ranging comparison between Buddhist testimonies of the Zen experience and those of Christian mystics, we can use the above criteria set forth by Maritain to establish our argument for the appropriateness of using the term, \textit{mystical} (at least as Maritain understands it), to describe Nishitani’s standpoint of \textit{śūnyatā}.

First, it can be said that Nishitani’s descriptions of this experience do not signify any of the various natural analogies to true mysticism identified by Maritain.\textsuperscript{40} These natural analogies are concerned primarily with the realms of moral action, beauty, the love of creatures, or the self. It will become apparent as this study turns to examine the writings of Nishitani that his noetic starting point does not begin or end in created being. It seeks to attain the uncreated, immortal and immutable source in which all created being

\textsuperscript{39} Maritain, \textit{Degrees of Knowledge}, p. 275.

\textsuperscript{40} For Maritain’s discussion of this, see \textit{Degrees of Knowledge}, pp. 280-282.
are subsumed. It testifies, moreover, to the two-fold aspect of true mysticism identified by Maritain: a desire to escape the orientation of self and to be united with the ultimate Reality. It is, therefore, taken by this study (without passing judgement on the essential or accidental role played by Buddhism in this matter) that when Nishitani speaks of a radical shift in noetic standpoint, from a conceptual grasp of the ground of all existence to "our true mind . . . stripped of its hindrances [and] laid bare as an ecstatic openness [that] passes out of the world,"\(^{41}\) he is speaking of mystical vision in the sense intended by Maritain.

Unlike the wisdom of metaphysics, which depends upon transcendental concepts, in order to attain only the intuition of subsistent being, apophatic knowledge gives up the clarity of concepts so that it might experience without separation the object of its deepest desire. It is a knowledge to be sure, even a higher, more certain knowledge, but the term knowing is applied to this apophatic experience in a manner that is analogous to the knowing of natural wisdom. It is, rather, as Maritain has said, "a suffering of divine things, an experience which leads the soul through a series of states and transformations until within the very depths of itself it feels the touch of divinity and

experiences the life of God.\textsuperscript{42} Or, in the words of Nishitani, it is for the supreme reality "to transfer essentially, just as it is and in its suchness, into the man who understands it; and for the man who understands it to be transferred into that reality."\textsuperscript{43}

This manner of knowing that proceeds not by the senses or reason, but through an affective connaturalit, Maritain understood as the highest form of knowing, short of the beatific vision.\textsuperscript{44} It is also this form of knowing that Nishitani took as knowledge \textit{par excellence}. That is the reason why Nishitani has spent so much effort refuting the noetic starting point of the subjective self in the attempt to know the Real. Such a beginning point is already grounded in the clinging to a limitation upon existence and cannot truly advance upward into a pure knowing devoid of essential determinations.

If the intellect is to know the supreme Reality that transcends every possible limitation, it too must become "de-limited." It must give up any essential standpoint, because such a standpoint is already removed from the transcendence of all standpoints. In essence, the self must become nothing in-itself before it can

\textsuperscript{42} Maritain, \textit{Degrees of Knowledge}, p. 247.

\textsuperscript{43} Nishitani, \textit{Religion and Nothingness}, p. 178.

\textsuperscript{44} Maritain, \textit{Degrees of Knowledge}, pp. 236-237.
possibly come to know the uncircumscribed All. The attainment of apophatic knowing is only possible when the self gives up its own subjective standpoint for the wholly indeterminate act of pure existence.

If we compare the two following statements made by Maritain and Nishitani, we can see their essential agreement as to the practical demand for self-denial as the necessary epistemological prerequisite for apophatic experience. In the words of Maritain:

Since all human means whatever they may be, are disproportionate with respect to possessing God in his own life, the best thing the creature can do is cast himself off, rid himself of self, renounce his own proper operations and make a void within himself.\(^{45}\)

And in the words of Nishitani:

On the field of sūnyatā, the center is everywhere. Each and every thing in its nonobjective and "middle" selfness is an absolute center. To that extent, it is impossible for the self on the field of sūnyatā to be self-centered like the "self" seen as the ego or subject. Rather, the absolute negation of that very self-centeredness enables the field of sūnyatā to open up in the first place.\(^{46}\)

The importance of this discussion on the distinction between the natural mode of knowing proper to cataphatic knowledge and the higher mode of apophatic wisdom, which is not natural to the self (for, indeed, the self must be cast away as its prerequisite), may not


be immediately apparent to our search for dialogue. Yet, actually it is the recognition of these two distinct modes of religious knowledge and how they proceed from different references to the Real that enables us at all to undertake dialogue between Christian and Buddhist philosophy.

Statements concerning the ultimate reality can either possess a primarily ontological value and belong to the manner of conceptualizing proper to cataphatic knowledge, or they might possess primarily a practical value because they flow out of the dynamic of apophatic wisdom. It is possible to speak of this first act of existence as being because of the transcendental nature of being as an object of thought. It is also possible to speak of it as an absolute nothingness because in the experiential, higher knowledge of mystical vision, concepts no longer provide the formal means of knowing.

For this reason, a certain measure of artificiality is imposed upon the task of presenting converging themes between the thought of Maritain and Nishitani. Whereas Maritain remains strictly within the rigors of metaphysical speculation,\(^47\) it is often necessary to

\(^{47}\) This is somewhat of a simplification concerning Maritain’s thought because he certainly felt free to draw upon the insights of mystical theology to better describe what his metaphysics only groped towards. His purely natural speculations are never far from the expectation and excitement of knowing that what is signified by Subsistent Being itself is also Subsistent
read metaphysics (properly so-called) into statements made by Nishitani. The way of metaphysics cannot be compared by a simple equation or lack of equation to the standpoint of śūnyatā, which arises out of the dialectic of enlightenment. As Maritain has said, concerning dialogue between cataphatic and apophatic traditions, our intellect must be willing to go "from one conceptual vocabulary to another, as it goes from Latin to Chinese or to Arabic." ⁴⁸

We must remember that the standpoint of śūnyatā is the standpoint of apophatic experience. This does not imply that conceptions that flow out of this experience are unrelated to the wholly cataphatic knowledge of metaphysical wisdom. In fact, as Maritain has rightly said, if apophatic theology did not contain inherently a cataphatic theology, it would end up as a pure agnosticism. ⁴⁹

That is the reason why, even if the dialogue is forced at times to move between metaphysical doctrines that are explicit in the case of Maritain and simply implied in the case of Nishitani, still it represents true dialogue and not a confusion of levels of statements. Unless we wish to deny the unity of all

Love in the triune person of God.

⁴⁸ Maritain, Degrees of Knowledge, p. 327.
⁴⁹ Maritain, Degrees of Knowledge, p. 239.
knowledge (regardless of whether knowledge proceeds from the realm of the physical sciences, from philosophy, or from revelation) we must recognize that each formal means of knowing reflects in some manner the truths that are proper to the other realms. In the case here at hand, comparing statements made by Nishitani with those made by Maritain, we are, of course, also aided by those times when Nishitani does not speak primarily from the standpoint of apophatic wisdom. Particularly when he engages what he perceives as the insufficiencies of the philosophical doctrines of the West, he deals with them on rational grounds.

To see that Nishitani's statements often originate in a relationship to the Real that is essentially different than Maritain's will clarify a great deal of possible confusion. For instance, Maritain speaks of the self in terms of substance; Nishitani speaks of the self as a non-substantial substantiality, or a self as non-self. Maritain centres his reflections in the concept of being; Nishitani insists upon recognizing the equal presence of non-being as well.

These are not mutually exclusive positions (despite even the personal opinions of these philosophers themselves). They proceed from different references and with different intentions. Maritain's statements are purely ontological and serve the purpose of disclosing
to the intellect the deeper structures of being. Because he remains strictly within the distinction between natural and supernatural (mystical) realms, his terms are aimed primarily at reflection and only accidentally at the practical. The conceptions of Nishitani, however, are heavily laden with the call to transcend the normal mode of knowing in preference for the trans-conceptual. His writings, as one might well expect from a tradition that does not rigidly separate questions of epistemology from those of soteriology, are consistently aimed at the next step beyond purely rational discourse, where reason is perfected under the light of the void. The intention of his statements, even those that take the way of rational argument, is primarily practical, designed to bring the intellect before the apophatic experience itself. Unlike cataphatic wisdom that aims at understanding, apophatic aims primarily at union.

IV
Conclusion

Our attempt to establish true dialogue between the thought of Keiji Nishitani and Jacques Maritain must be continually cognizant of the two considerations raised in this introductory chapter. The first concern is the different historical circumstances that led to a unique understanding of the relationship of reason to faith in
these two traditions. The second is the recognition of two different types of knowing, cataphatic and apophatic, and how they differ and how they exist in complementarity.

By keeping these distinctions in mind, we shall avoid many pitfalls of the past and present attempts at dialogue between the Christian philosophy of being and the Buddhist standpoint of śūnyatā. Past attempts, of which Maritain's writings are a good example, often failed to see that although metaphysics in the West is tempered by the concept of a philosophic wisdom distinct from the realm of soteriology, such a distinction is not completely translatable to Buddhist thought. It is not possible simply to compare philosophic statements about being with statements arising from the dialectic of enlightenment, as if they existed on the same level of truth. The more contemporary error of overemphasizing this divergence between the two traditions can also be avoided by realizing that both traditions recognize that there is a relationship between purely rational and mystical knowledge.

While it may be true that Maritain's writings are more characteristic of purely rational wisdom and Nishitani's more often reflect a preference for the logic of apophatic experience, there is, nevertheless, a way of reconciling the two. While the details of this
reconciliation must be worked out in the text of this study, we can look to the following quotation, taken from Cardinal Journet's *The Dark Knowledge of God*, for an excellent summary of the reconciliation we are seeking. The words themselves may be directed at the Christian tradition, but the balance they achieve extends to the relationship between the writings of Maritain and Nishitani:

Touching the mystery of the infinite simplicity of the divine reality, (the intellect) vehemently presses towards that more which revealed concepts cannot make manifest, and by which those concepts, so to speak, know themselves to be surpassed: 'Thou doest well, then, O soul, in seeking Him always in His secret place; for thou greatly magnifiest God, and drawest near unto Him, esteeming Him as far beyond all thou canst reach. Rest thou, therefore, neither wholly nor in part, on what thy faculties can embrace; never seek to satisfy thyself with what thou comprehendest in God, but rather with what thou comprehendest not; and do not rest on the love of that which thou canst understand and feel, but rather on that which is beyond thy understanding and feeling: this is to seek Him by faith . . . . Faith which at the outset necessarily employs concepts, is thus later driven to transcend them: following the path which concepts have opened to it, faith is impelled not, indeed, to go beyond the mystery of reality they express, but beyond the imperfect and fragmentary way in which they express it, and to culminate in an assent *conditioned*, to be sure, by the presence of concepts, but one which ceases to employ concepts as formal means of knowledge, because faith is in itself transconceptual,
without mode, obscure, rich in all that has been antecedently specified by concepts.\textsuperscript{50}

An intelligible mystery is not a contradiction in terms. On the contrary, it is the most exact description of reality.  
-- Jacques Maritain

CHAPTER 2

JACQUES MARITAIN

AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF BEING

In this chapter, we will seek to understand the nature of Maritain's Thomistic metaphysics of being. Particularly, we will attempt to understand what his metaphysics seeks to establish, its self-conscious limitations, and its relationship to revealed wisdom. Actually, these three considerations are not independent of each other, but are different facets of the single truth upholding the thesis of this study: ultimate reality is exposed in different manners, according to the level from which it is viewed. Each level of inquiry has access to truth in a way that is proper to its methodology. We can certainly speak of "higher" and "lower" truths, of the relationship of mystical to

natural vision. It is the confusing of these levels of cognition that often leads to needless controversy. In the case of dialogue between positions originating in different levels, the failure to distinguish them (as such) leads to the inability to discern consonance from disparity.

This chapter is not, however, directly concerned with the task of establishing dialogue. Its concern is limited to the three considerations listed above. Because they are not independent problems, however, they will not be presented as such; any one of them may emerge as the focus of a particular discussion. What is most important for this chapter is to understand their inter-relatedness within Maritain's metaphysic, so that we can then lay the groundwork for going outside this system in the attempt to reconcile it with Nishitani's thought, a thought that often proceeds from a different cognitive level and with different intentions.

We can begin the consideration of these themes by looking to the nature of Maritain's appreciation for the founder of his philosophic tradition: St. Thomas Aquinas.

I

Maritain and Thomism

"I am not a neo-Thomist," writes Jacques Maritain: "All in all, I would rather be a paleo-Thomist than a
neo-Thomist. I am, or at least I hope I am, a Thomist." 2

What is Thomism for Maritain? How is it that he considers the thought of a 13th century Catholic theologian and philosopher to be essentially immutable?

In words leveled against the critics of the timelessness of Thomism, Maritain replies:

What I assert ... is that truth does not pass, does not flow away with history; that the spirit does not disintegrate, that there are stabilities not of inertia but of spirituality and life; intemporal values; eternal acquisitions: that time is in the eternal like a gold piece in the clutch of the hand; and that the mind is above time. 3

Maritain's answer is that Thomas Aquinas fulfilled a unique role in human history. He sees Thomas' glory, his highest accomplishment, his god-given destiny as the salvation of the mind, whole and entire into the holy light of Christ. 4 What he means by this is that Thomas Aquinas successfully established the proper relationship between natural wisdom and the revealed wisdom of the gospel of Jesus Christ.


4 Maritain, St. Thomas, pp. 23; 99-100.
The historical synthesis we now call Thomism is seen by Maritain as a unity composed of two distinct, but not unrelated, uncreated streams of wisdom. Through Aristotle Thomas inherited the wisdom of natural reason. For Thomas (and Maritain) Aristotelian thought is not simply a philosophy, but Philosophy itself; and Aristotle is "The Philosopher." The wisdom of the philosophia perennis is formally the wisdom of Aristotle, but materially it is the natural uncreated wisdom open to human intellect. The other stream to which Thomas fully unites this natural wisdom is the wisdom of Holy Scripture and the testimony of the saints. It is Maritain's opinion that, "In Thomism, the proper understanding of how Divine truth, both as the wisdom of philosophers and as the wisdom of the saints, exists for the salvation of the entire person."

Although he also writes extensively on the originality of St. Thomas (for instance, concerning his elevation of Aristotelian doctrine), we should understand that, for Maritain, Thomas is not primarily an innovator of Christian philosophy. He is a discoverer of Truth, the same truth that is the basis for wisdom accessible to natural reason as is for wisdom

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5 Maritain, St. Thomas. p. 97.
6 Maritain, St. Thomas. p. 40.
7 Maritain, St. Thomas. p. 108.
that must come as grace if it is to come at all because it is disproportionate to the power of human comprehension. When Maritain speaks of Thomism he is referring, in one sense, to an organic body of thought that received its formal structure at the hand of a medieval theologian, but what he is intending us to see is a Thomism that is "peculiar to nobody, strictly impersonal, absolutely universal . . . [and in which] the whole of reality is to be found in it unimpaired."\(^8\) For Maritain, Thomism is not merely a phenomenon in the history of Western thought, it is Wisdom's own vision of the eternal nature of existence.

At this point we need to stop and focus our attention upon a distinction being made. Maritain understands that St. Thomas united the wisdom of natural reason to the wisdom of Christian revelation, and that these two wisdoms are not eternally separate truths, but are united in being, subsumed into uncreated Wisdom.\(^9\) We might ask, then, how it is that uncreated Wisdom becomes expressed in two distinct realms of knowing.

Maritain goes to great lengths to distinguish what

\(^8\) Maritain, St. Thomas, p. 41.

\(^9\) Maritain's recognition of the ontological unity of natural and supernatural wisdom reflects the appraisal given by St. Thomas (SCG, I, c.1, #2). For the relevant passage of this text by St. Thomas, see chapter 1, footnote 17 in this study.
sort of knowledge is proper to each realm\textsuperscript{10} and considers the confusion of these levels as a source of great error. Yet it is also being claimed by him that all truth is united ontologically in the simplicity of uncreated Wisdom. Where does Maritain locate the basis for this distinction between the realms of knowing? Their unity is to be found in the simplicity of God, but their distinction, he argues, is related to the question of human nature.

"Man is flesh and spirit," writes Maritain, "not held together by a thread, but substantially united."\textsuperscript{11} This definition given by Maritain has been expressed through the ages by the concept, "rational animal," yet the content of that all-too-familiar term is exceedingly rich in Thomist thought. It points to the intellective nature of the human person, but also to its limitations. It does not designate a nature that is a pure intelligence (as are the angelic beings) but, rather, an intellect that, due to weakness, is substantially united to a material body. We, as humans, are not intelligences, but intellects immersed in materiality. We are spiritual beings because the nature of intellect is transcendental to matter, but, writes

\textsuperscript{10} Maritain's comprehensive treatise on epistemology, \textit{The Degrees of Knowledge}, is entirely devoted to this problem.

\textsuperscript{11} Maritain, \textit{Degrees of Knowledge}, p. 15.
Maritain, as "St. Thomas never tires of repeating, the human intellect is at the lowest level in the scale of spirits."\textsuperscript{12}

Maritain reflects upon the weakness of the human intellect in its implications for knowledge:

[The human intelligence] is to be placed on the lowest level in the scale of intellectuality, and its intensive power (vis intellectiva) is naturally so weak that it needs, in order to enjoy a sufficiently distinct and illuminated knowing, that \textit{multiplicity} of concepts and of representative particles with which abstraction alone, working from the sensible, can supply it. The human intelligence needs ideas incomparably more divided and particularized than those required by the least of the angels; this is true to such an extent that if the knowledge of which it is capable when it is separated from the body were merely the intuitive knowledge of the existence of the soul, which is natural to the state of separation, that knowledge would be too indeterminate to inform suitably the human intellect concerning the world and God.\textsuperscript{13}

The human intellect, in its weakness, is forced to resort to the multiplicity arising from matter.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{12} Maritain, \textit{Degrees of Knowledge}, p. 84.


\textsuperscript{14} In the metaphysics of St. Thomas, the essence (or "whatness") of a being belongs to it as a substance (\textit{suppositum}). Essence is nothing of itself, it is merely a limitation upon the primary act of existing, and a substance is, therefore, a created individual being whose essence is the measure to which it receives being. In the immaterial realm of the angels, each being is differentiated by a formal distinction. This means that each angel is a single species, just as the term \textit{human} points to a single species of being.
Without the various representations of animals, for example, our intellect is too weak to grasp the richness of what is contained by the essence "animal."

For this reason, Maritain speaks of the human intellect as being naturally disposed toward, or co-natured to, material objects.\textsuperscript{15} Although the human intellect transcends matter in its attainment of essences, it only does so \textit{via} the direct perception of material being. Our knowledge is always gained through the opaque medium of matter-encased being. Unlike purely spiritual beings (i.e. angelic beings) who know objects with a vision that penetrates straight to the intelligible essences, our knowledge is, by nature, derived from (but not limited to) sensible impression.\textsuperscript{16}

All that can be known by the rational intellect \textit{via} this knowledge of material being can be described as \textit{natural knowledge}, since it is proportionate to our own nature. It is, on the one hand, a very limited

Descending into the material realm, however, the substantial union of essential form with matter leads to another composition in created beings. The single essence, \textit{human}, individuated in the first place because the act of creating is itself individual, becomes differentiated in multiplicity through matter, subject to the laws of nature. God creates individual beings, e.g. individual humans, which are essentially identical but differentiated because of their material corporeality. Armand A. Maurer, \textit{Medieval Philosophy} (New York: Random House, 1964), pp. 175-179.

\textsuperscript{15} Maritain, \textit{Degrees of Knowledge}, p. 203.

\textsuperscript{16} Maritain, \textit{Degrees of Knowledge}, p. 203.
knowledge: it only attains its object in a mediated manner and not experientially, through signs (the intelligible species that give rise to mental concepts) that are not the things in-themselves but are the "vicars of objects" (through which, nevertheless, the existence of the things themselves are attained). Natural knowledge does not penetrate straightforward to the essences of things. Yet, this knowledge is capable of attaining (once again, through the medium of created being) the knowledge of the existence of the supreme Object of thought. As we shall soon see, this natural knowledge reaches up (through a knowledge by analogy) to the rarified heights of metaphysics, where the existence of uncaused Being, Being as pure act, becomes an intellectual certainty.

Maritain insists, however, that we distinguish the knowledge by analogy of pure Being from the "face to face" vision of the uncaused Cause of existence. Such vision is disproportionate to our intellectual nature and is thus properly called *supernatural*, or infused, wisdom. This is the wisdom of revelation contained in the testimony of the saints. It is not discursive. It does not proceed to its object by means of concepts. It is imageless, wordless, and not attainable through the natural mode of knowing. To know that there must be that "which all men call God" is a certainty of the
natural intellect. To see the essence of God can only be "natural" to an intellect proportioned to that essence: God himself.

Thus, the unity of the two great streams of acquired and infused wisdom leads to the recognition of a hierarchy of knowing. Mere knowledge (sense knowledge) lies beneath wisdom (knowledge which attains the stabilities of created existence), metaphysical wisdom beneath theological wisdom (wisdom informed by the light of grace), and theological wisdom is itself inferior to the wisdom of the saints (the face to face vision of God).

In this chapter we shall be pursuing the Thomist concept of Being as pure act. The bare outline, sketched above, of how that metaphysical wisdom exists within a hierarchy of knowledge will become a later concern.

II

Anti-Thomist notions of being

As Maritain has said, every great philosophical doctrine has a central intuition at its core. If we find that intuition at the heart of the doctrine, we shall be able to comprehend the doctrine as a whole. It

17 St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I. Q. 2, Art. 3.
18 Maritain, St. Thomas, p. 43.
19 Maritain, Truth and Human Fellowship, 12-18.
will become for us an organic body rising up from a central vision around which it revolves. But if we miss the central intuition, we will mutilate the doctrine; we may perhaps get all the parts in order, as when the archaeologist correctly assembles scattered bits of broken pottery. But, nonetheless, we shall grasp nothing more than a corpse. To confuse the heart of great doctrines with their systematic form is to confuse a corpse for a living being.

Now it may seem odd that this chapter, which is devoted to illuminating the heart of Maritain's intuition of Being, immediately will turn to the consideration of some false understandings of Thomistic Being. It is not often we are presented the understanding of something via an understanding of what it is not. Yet, this approach will begin to make sense as we actually discuss the intuition of Being as pure act, for that term signifies a reality we come to know only indirectly, through knowledge by analogy. We cannot know it in the same manner that applies to things proportioned to our intellect. And there is another important reason, as well, for this preparatory consideration of anti-Thomist conceptions of being. It will also help to identify the misunderstandings that caused Nishitani's own failure to adequately address the Thomist metaphysics. For these reasons let us turn,
then, to cast aside any false starts or attempts to resuscitate corpses, in order to avoid tearing the heart out of Maritain's concept of Being.20

We can begin with Maritain's statement that, "it is a fundamental doctrine of scholastic philosophy that the formal object of the intellect is being."21 "Therefore, whatever it knows and every time it knows it attains being."22

For Maritain, metaphysical wisdom is no exception to this doctrine. Like every other sort of human knowledge, it begins in the intelligible forms, or essences, of existing things. He argues, however, that it would be a mistake to imagine that metaphysics is concerned primarily with essences.23 Although being is always encountered in some particular form and these myriad forms, indeed, are not something outside of being or added onto being, yet, in themselves, they are but limitations or determinations of being. But considered as such, these diverse forms are the proper object of the empirical sciences and not of metaphysics. Maritain admits that the various sciences (in the contemporary

20 The following discussion is drawn from Maritain's study of "counterfeit metaphysical coin" in, Preface to Metaphysics, pp. 17-42.

21 Maritain, Preface to Metaphysics, p. 17.

22 Maritain, Preface to Metaphysics, p. 25.

usage of that term do study being, but he also contends that it is always "being of a particular kind." 24 Chemistry is the study of being, but being only as it exists within the relationships of chemical reactions. Biology is the study of being, but being only as it relates to living organisms; and so forth. All empirical sciences study being, but being under some essential determination. Metaphysics is the science (science in the traditional sense of a discipline leading to certain knowledge) that also has being as its proper object, but being abstracted from any particular determination, that is, being as being.

The knowledge of being as being already exists in that body of knowledge referred to as common sense. 25 Maritain labels this common sense apprehension as "vague being," for although it is a genuine intuition of the object of metaphysical science, it escapes clear perception because the common intellect is not disciplined in the rigors of scientific reasoning. If common sense understanding attempts to formulate this concept at all, it is usually imagined in the sense of the widest possible category, or the widest generalization, of all existing things. It is the end product of

the mere disengagement of a universal from the many particulars it subsumes, the simple operation by which, before enquiring whether in what I call man there exists an original focus of intelligibility and what that focus is, I derive from Peter and Paul the object of thought "Man", then from Man in turn the object of thought "Animal", thus passing successively to increasingly general universals. 26

Conventional wisdom does recognize something common to all existing things, something that somehow is both the beginning and the extent of all existence. There is, in common sense, an inchoate knowledge of the unity of being. Its presence can be detected in the fact that we can communicate to each other about the "universe" and that term is significant to even those who are unable to explicitly express what sort of unity that term implies. The knowledge is there but common sense does not know the implications of that unity with the clarity and precision of scientific knowledge. "Otherwise," says Maritain, "every man would be a metaphysician, and the metaphysical habitus would not be, as it is, a sublime and exceedingly rare mental endowment." 27

Notice that up to this point we have referred to being both as that which the intellect encounters in every act of knowing and also as a concept that exists

26 Maritain, Preface to Metaphysics, p. 31.
in the mind with greater or lesser clarity. We must distinguish carefully between being as existential encounter and being as the concept which is subsequently produced in the mind. The nature of a concept is that it is a product of intellection and, as such, does not exist outside of the mind. Any concept, no matter how faithful to actual existence, is in the mind in a manner that is proper to the mind's own existence and, thus, exists in the mind in a manner that is different from its existence in the object perceived.

The concept of being is not the object of metaphysical wisdom. It may be the product, that which is the residual gain for the intellect after the encounter with existential being. But considered as a concept, argues Maritain, it is the concern of the science of logic and is to be understood as "being divested of reality."28 He follows this statement with the contention that the metaphysician is not unconcerned with the concept of being, but only that the reality of what the metaphysician calls being is not discovered through the reflexive gaze of the mind in its turning inward to the life of mental constructs. To examine the concept of being is to examine how it exists "in the

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order of thought proceeding towards truth, and in the vital relationships of concepts between themselves."^{28}

On the other hand, the *intuition of existential being* is not attained through a reflexive act of the mind. If the intellect is to know existential being at all, it must first be capable of going beyond itself through an encounter we shall be considering presently. The result of that encounter is that the concept of being comes to exist within the mind, but, argues Maritain, "there could be no more serious error than to suppose that the being of metaphysics is this being envisaged under the aspect of conceptual being, the being which belongs to the distinctive subject matter of logic and is apprehended by the objective light distinctive of logic."^{30}

Maritain also identifies another potential source for misunderstanding the Thomistic doctrine of Being, this time leading to what he terms *pseudo-being*.^{31} We need not look too closely at his discussion, for it involves the same errors already examined, except that now they have become the basis for philosophic doctrines. For example, the "Platonic or Scotist" error was in making essences the proper realm of metaphysics.

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^{28} Maritain, *Preface to Metaphysics*, p. 34.


The error typified by Hegel is the confusing of being with the logical notion of the widest genus of existing things (just as common sense is likely to confuse being with a category that embraces all existing things). There are also the variations on the philosophy of idealism which begins the assumption that the mind imposes categories (e.g. being) onto the sensory encounter of existence, thus rendering being a category of the mind rather than an existential encounter.

Since the very logic of these various philosophies denies either the ontological unity between the intellect and the object attained in the act of knowing, or reduces existence to the question of essences, or simply robs being of any existential value, Maritain denies that understandings of being arising from these philosophies can be more than "pseudo-being."

As was stated, this preparatory digression into some anti-Thomist conceptions of being was given, not only as an aid in eventually working towards Maritain's understanding of the true intuition of being, but also to provide a basis for identifying Nishitani's own failure to adequately address the Thomistic doctrine of being.

Nishitani believes that the weakness of the Western concept of being is that it refers to the intellectual
grasp of what traditional (e.g., Thomist) metaphysics refers to as a substance:

Throughout the history of Western thought, from the days of ancient Greece right up to the present, being or existence has, by and large, been thought of in terms of either the category of "substance" or that of "the subject." Whether animate or inanimate, man or even God, insofar as an entity is considered to exist in itself, to be on its own ground, it has been conceived of as a substance. 32

His assessment is in error, however, in its failure to distinguish the different manner in which the term substance is applied to God and to created beings. 33 Only by first coming to terms with the distinction between the ability of a being to exist in itself and the causation of that existence is it possible to apply the term substance to both God and created being.

As Maritain defines the term: "Substance is a thing or nature whose property is to exist by itself, or in virtue of itself (per se) and not in another thing." 34 This "existing by itself" does not imply that the thing is self-caused, but only that it does not exist in some other subject. The substance, this man, Peter, for instance, is a single act of existence that is not

32 Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, p. 110.


34 Maritain, Introduction to Philosophy, p. 163.
essentially in some other being, such as "humanity." In that sense only does substance denote the being of something in itself. By not recognizing that the notion of substance points primarily to the fact that existence is individual and does not imply that it is its own sufficient cause, Nishitani ends up confusing the Western doctrine of being with the Buddhist doctrine of svabhāva.\textsuperscript{35} We shall see the evidence of this confusion in the following quotation, but first we need to recognize some further points related to the doctrine of substance.

Unlike essence, substance is not directly conceivable. A substance is individual existence, differentiated through matter, and opaque to the intellect. We are able to know of the existence of substance, but only through the intelligible aspect it presents to our mind. This intelligible form (the intelligible species) provides us with the knowledge of substance and is the essence of the thing perceived, grasped through the act of simple apprehension.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{35} For a discussion on svabhāva, see Chapter 1, footnote 23 of this study.

\textsuperscript{36} A simple apprehension is "the act by which the intelligence grasps or perceives something without affirming or denying anything about it. We make an act of simple apprehension when we think, for example, 'man,' 'rational animal,' 'white,' 'intelligent,' etc." Maritain, An Introduction to Logic, translated by I. C. (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1937), p.12.
Nishitani does recognize the doctrine that substance is known only through the intellectual grasp of essence (eidetic form) and uses it to provide the basis for two fundamental criticisms of the doctrine of being.

His first criticism is that the essence of a thing only gives the mind access to the aspects of existents that remain constant, in spite of the equally constant nihility towards which all things tend. Drawing upon the Christian doctrine of creatio ex nihilo, Nishitani asserts that the Western grasp of being leaves out an equally fundamental facet of individual existence:

Christianity speaks of a creatio ex nihilo: God created everything from a point at which there was nothing at all. And since all things have this nihilum at the ground of their being, they are absolutely distinct from their Creator... Insofar as God is the one and only absolute being, all other things consist fundamentally of nothingness.37

From Nishitani's point of view, if what a thing is can be understood from the concept of substance, and substance is what is known through the grasp of eidetic form, then we have not yet come to an explanation of the constant nihility that is also manifested by all things. We can express what things are through the notion of substance, but we do not, thereby, also explain why they are not subsisting in themselves.

37 Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, p. 37.
This is, of course, the confusion spoken of above. The fact that all material things are subject to dissolution does not undermine the doctrine of substance. While the being of a substantial nature exists in itself as an individual, it does not necessarily follow that its existence is immanent to its nature. Its individual existence can be contingent upon another (act of existing). We can distinguish between what a thing is in itself and that it is. What a thing is is expressed by the term, essence, and, as has already been examined, Maritain denies that the being of metaphysics is concerned primarily with the grasp of essences. The being of metaphysics is properly concerned with being as act, abstracted from any particular determination. Metaphysics does not stop at the attainment of being as essence, but pushes further (via the intuition of being as such) to Being as the pure Act of existing, in which all essences are subsumed.

Nishitani’s second major criticism of traditional Western metaphysics is a development from the implications of the first. If the being of a thing, he says, is to be understood in terms of a substance existing in itself, then we have not provided an ontological basis for the fact of the world. Although we have accounted for the independence of substantial
natures (the diversity of things in the world), we have simultaneously failed to establish the manner in which these individuals form a system, a unity that is the world. We have not, come, Nishitani argues, to the point where the world "worlds."  

He claims that only a lack of self existence (that which will be discussed in the third chapter of this study as the emptiness of self existence), or non-substantial natures, can account for a world:

To summarize, a system of being becomes genuinely possible, not on a field where the system of being is seen only as a system of being, but on a field of emptiness where being is seen as being-sive (with)-nothingness, nothingness-sive-being, where the reality of beings at the same time bears the stamp of illusion.  

Yet, this second criticism also misses the Thomistic concept of being, not only because it is still confusing substance with svabhāva, but more importantly, because the aspect of being we have yet to discuss (the act of existence separable from individual natures) is the transcendental basis for the unity of all existents.

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38 Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, pp. 141-147. Nishitani's phrase, "where the world 'worlds'," is intended to emphasize that 1) there must be an ontological basis for the world, and 2) that basis cannot exist somewhere other than the ontological basis for the things of the world. There is no world existing separate from the things that comprise it.

39 Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, p. 147.
In contradistinction to all the "counterfeits" of metaphysical being, and the criticisms raised by Nishitani, we now turn to the central intuition upon which Maritain's metaphysic is constructed.

III
The Intuition of Being

Maritain states that, "[m]etaphysical wisdom is at the purest degree of abstraction because it is farthest removed from the senses; it opens out onto the immaterial, onto a world of realities which exist or can exist separately from matter."\(^4\) It reaches out to the ultimate object attainable by the natural intellect, Subsistent Being itself. For Maritain, "It is true knowledge, certain and absolute, the highest pleasure of reason and worth being a man for..."\(^5\) Yet, in spite of all his praise for the worth of metaphysics, Maritain also recognizes that it is a mere human science, with all the frailties that implies. Because our human intellect is necessarily grounded in the world of matter, even this crown of the intellect begins in the restrictions of sense knowledge. It does rise above the sensible to a transcendental realm, but it too must start in the very ordinary, most common cognitive act: the awareness of existing things.

\(^4\) Maritain, Degrees of Knowledge, p. 5.

\(^5\) Maritain, Degrees of Knowledge, p. 6.
What separates metaphysicians from the rest of humanity is not the realm where their science begins, but that in which it ends. Metaphysical science begins with being, "that which exists or is able to exist, that which exercises or is able to exercise existence." But whereas common sense and the empirical sciences remain locked within the intelligible structures of material being, metaphysics ascends, via the intuition of Being, to being as pure act transcendental to created form, to Subsistent Being itself.

In a certain sense, it is not possible to explain this realm of the metaphysician. As Maritain says, "... the metaphysical habitus is requisite, if we are to have the intuition of being as such... Yet it is this intuition that effects, causes, the metaphysical habitus."43

We are caught here in a sort of double bind. The metaphysician is only born at the moment she or he perceives the intuition of being as such. Without this intuition a person is incapable of becoming a metaphysician. We can speak here of the metaphysical realm as Maritain understands it, but there will always be the danger, unless we also possess the requisite intellectual habitus, of remaining caught within the

42 Maritain, *Existence and the Existent*, p. 34.
words themselves or reading into the words one of the forms of "pseudo-being." Although, as with any other discipline, metaphysics can be studied, the study of metaphysics does not make the metaphysician. He or she comes to be only with the momentary opening up of the most common of experiences, the experience of an existing thing. With this awakening to the reality of existence, the subject is overwhelmed by what is forever incapable of being captured in words. The person, says Maritain, is then filled with emotion; sometimes rapturously joyful, sometimes sickening or maddening.\(^{44}\)

But whatever the emotional response, the intellect has now been changed permanently through the acquisition of the metaphysical habitus which from now on lends the subject to a joyful bewilderment over the rich fecundity of being.\(^{45}\) Enough, however, with this digression. We have no choice but to content ourselves with the limitations of conceptual communication as we explore the trans-conceptual realm of Maritain's metaphysic.

He gives us the following account as an apt description of the subjective experience of the intuition of being:

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One morning when I was still a child, I was standing on the threshold of the house and looking to my left in the direction of the woodpile when suddenly there came to me from heaven like a lightening flash the thought: *I am a self*, a thought which has never since left me. I perceived myself for the first time and for good.46

By expanding these words, we can trace out the intellectual implications which metaphysical analysis uses in its reach from the material to the immaterial and most-sublime realm. All the abstract terminology subsequently employed to penetrate being has its existential roots in such an experience.

The above account itself concerns the direct experience of the subject's own existence. It could have been otherwise: it does not matter whether we directly encounter the existence of our self or some other thing. The encounter with the reality of the existence of any single thing is equal in metaphysical content. To *really see*, not simply assent intellectually, that *I exist*, or that *this tree exists*, is the direct perception from which the intuition of being opens out onto Subsistent Being itself.

Let us examine this ascent from the standpoint of the terminology of metaphysics.

The simple apprehension47 of the thing experienced,

46 From the autobiography of Jean-Paul Richter, in Maritain, *Preface to Metaphysics*, p. 47.

47 See footnote 36.
argues Maritain, is joined inexorably to a judgement that affirms or denies the existence of that thing. The direct experience of an existing thing, accordingly, is always divided into two noetic aspects. The first is the "whatness" of the thing, its essence, or form. It is the self recognized, the tree seen, the object of simple apprehension. The second aspect is attained for the intellect through the act of judgement and is expressed in a form of the verb to be. It completes the object, perfects it, places it within actual existence. The judgement that I am, or the tree is, is the grasp by the intellect of the second noetic aspect, existence, which is distinguishable from the simple apprehension of an essence. There is nothing in the intelligible structure of my self or the nature of a tree that necessitates the fact of existence. It is not possible to move intellectually from the nature of a thing to an assurance that it is.

For instance, a farmer tells of a horse he has just purchased. It is a marvelous animal. It never desires to rest or eat or drink when it is time to work. It is never obstinate and the best part is that it came at the extremely low purchase price of only a few shillings. Unfortunately, it is also dead.

48 A judgement is "that act of the mind by which it unites by affirming or separates by denying" (Maritain, Introduction to Logic, p. 82).
Existence is a perfection; in fact, Maritain says, it is the first and transcendental perfection of substantial natures. Although we never encounter existence outside of some essence existing, it is also true that we never encounter an existing nature that is identical with its own existence. Being is the concept we apply to all things in existence. As we noted above, furthermore, it is being that Thomism recognizes as the proper object of the intellect: all of our thoughts are resolved in being. Yet, the direct perception of being reveals to us that all existents are composites of "what" they are and "that" they are.

This apprehension of all being under the dual aspects of essence and existence is extremely fertile and compelling for the intuition of Subsistent Being itself. Subsistent Being itself (discussed below) is the common ground of all that is. The point missed here by Nishitani is that when the philosophy of being speaks of grasping the nature of the objects of existence as "being," it also is speaking of the basis for their commonality (that which makes them a world of things, rather than a chaotic assortment of unrelated subjects) through the single concept we apply to all of them: being, that which exists or is able to exist, that which exercises or is able to exercise existence. Existence,

as act, is seen to be ontologically prior (by nature) to the particular thing existing. Existence is that which ties the multitude into a world. It is simultaneously the perfection of this particular nature I now apprehend as well as every other existent and the unity in which they co-exist. All aspects of this interpenetration are signified by the single term, \textit{being}.

We should understand that Maritain recognizes that it is not by virtue of something shared essentially among all things that a world is possible. The essences of things are that which \textit{distinguishes} each from another. Therefore, it is not through the grasp of essences that we are able to ascend to the first Act from which all existence follows. It is only through the intelligibility of that which is truly common to all being, namely, existence.

This necessarily brings us to the consideration of being as a transcendental. Some concepts, says Maritain, are univocal in nature.\textsuperscript{50} They do refer to a universal which embraces a diversity of individual entities, but such concepts are the product of mental abstraction from individuality and are not realized in the things they signify in a variable manner. They designate a "community of essence;" so that what we understand through the concept \textit{humanity} is that which is

\textsuperscript{50} Maritain, \textit{Degrees of Knowledge}, pp. 212-213.
common to all human beings, but that which is not found in Paul in a different manner from Peter.

This type of universality is not the manner in which we grasp the transcendental. Rather than univocal, Maritain asserts that transcendental are polyvalent, or "superuniversal." They are concepts which designate a plurality of objects, but the existence they refer to is not shared among the objects (referred to henceforth as analogates because the transcendental refers essentially to itself and only to these objects by way of analogy) by a unity of essence, but by a unity of proportionality. The transcendental being applies to every individual existent by what Maritain describes as an "analogy of proper proportionality:"

\[ \text{the being, man, stands to its man-
existence as the being, stone, to its stone-
existence, and as the being, angel, to its
angel-existence.} \]

Not only does being refer to human in the exact proportion as it refers to stone or angel, but this analogy of proper proportionality extends to each

51 Truth, good, unity are examples of the transcendental. Being is the first transcendental, or transcendental par excellence, under which all the others are subsumed. See, Maritain, *Preface to Metaphysics*, pp. 66-67; *Degrees of Knowledge*, pp. 210-211.


53 Maritain, *Degrees of Knowledge*, p. 214.
individual within these genera as well. Both Peter and Paul are human. Both Peter and Paul are being. Yet both are grasped as human through a mental process that abstracts every aspect of existence which stands Peter and Paul in individuality, while both are being in a manner that embraces every reality of commonality and every fiber of individuality. Peter is being and Paul is being in the same proportionality as a stone is being and a star is being. The analogates of being subsist within transcendental being in a manner that, in one sense, is defined by their individual existence (an existence, we should note, that is opaque to the intellect when it grasps the object through its essence) but, in another sense, through a commonality that allows this concept being to be applied equally to all. The direct perception of being, therefore, is simultaneously the perception of individual existence and universal existence. It is, argues Maritain, a unity that is "implicitly and actually multiple." 54

Failing to grasp being as a transcendental, and confusing the metaphysics of being with a science of essences led Nishitani to his conclusion that it is impossible in a system of being to move from the perception of individuals to the grasp of the unity of

54 Maritain, Degrees of Knowledge, p. 213.
the world. What he failed to see is that since being is "that which exists or can exist," it refers to itself, being qua being, essentially, and only to individual existents by analogy. The same is true for all the transcendental.

Good, for example, refers essentially only to itself as Subsistent Good. It can refer to created things, but only through analogy and only to the degree that they participate in Subsistent Good. Although we say that "Mary is good" or "philosophy is good," and understand that goodness is here actually referring to their specific nature; those statements could not be understood unless we also (and first) grasped the nature of Good, independent of individual analogates, subsisting in itself. The same is true with being.

Now, since there is only nothingness outside of being, Maritain asserts that all determinations of being must arise from within the fecundity of being. Even the distinction between what a being is (its essence) and that it is (its existence) must be a distinction wholly from within being itself. This is a very

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55 See pp. 52-53 of this study.

56 This use of the term nothingness as the antithesis of being must be distinguished from its use in our later discussion of the Buddhist concept of Absolute Nothingness. See chapter 3.

57 Maritain, Degrees of Knowledge, p. 211.
important realization for our discussion, because through this distinction of essence and existence we find that all being participates in a sort of conspiracy; a subtle motion that gently coerces the intellect away from created individual existents to Subsistent Being itself.

Let us return again to the direct experience of existence. The apprehension I exist or the tree is being, already presented to the intellect under a dual aspect. The "I" or "tree" is the acquisition of a simple apprehension. It is, explains Maritain, simply the species impressa as it has attained an existence in the intellect, an eidetic image or mental word.\(^5\) The second aspect of these perceptions is the affirmation of their actual existence, and as we have already discussed, the reason for this existence cannot be found through any analysis of the essence, no matter whether it reaches down into atomic structures or back through time in the chains of causality, etc.

Now, Maritain asks us to see that, since even this duality of being arises only within being itself, my being, apprehended directly through the experience that I exist, necessarily points to being outside of my self. My being as essence is simply a possible determination

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\(^5\) Maritain, Degrees of Knowledge, pp. 115-116. See also his discussion on the eidetic visualization of Being as such in, Preface to Metaphysics, pp. 58-61.
upon the ontologically prior act of existence. My being is being-with-nothingness, being which in itself is rescued from nothingness only by an act of existence originating outside of the essential nature of my self.

This prior act of existence could not be simply the aggregate of being we know as the world, for the world is not itself a reality independent of the things it contains. There must be, then, some other being: being in which existence is consubstantial with essence, being whose essence is pure existence, being-without-nothingness, Subsistent Being itself which is the cause of all existence. "And this being," says St. Thomas, "we call God." 60

The heart of Maritain's metaphysic is this intuition of Being and all it implies for metaphysical doctrine. It is an intuition born through a purely natural movement of the intellect, realizable in any direct experience of existence. Through this intuition the intellect attains its highest potential. It is natural theology, says Maritain: a "beautiful paradox" whereby "a science of things divine [is] achieved by human means, an enjoyment of liberty, proper to spirits, gained by a nature which is 'a slave in so many ways'."

59 Maritain, Approaches to God, pp. 3-5.
60 St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I, Q.2, Art. 3.
It is a wisdom even "the gods envy us" and indeed worth being a human for.\textsuperscript{61}

He reminds us, nevertheless, that for all its majesty, metaphysics suffers from an inherent weakness. For all its riches, it is truly poor. It knows God as first Cause, but only through a knowledge by analogy. It is certain of God’s existence. But like the soul who has the certain knowledge of Love’s existence, yet has never loved or been loved, this certain knowledge of God’s existence only sharpens the natural desire to see face to face God’s form. Metaphysics approaches God and stops short at the threshold of vision. It is one thing to know that God is first Cause, Subsistent Good, Truth, Beauty and Love. It is quite another to come face to face with such an object:

That, then, is the poverty of metaphysics (and yet its majesty, too). It awakens a desire for supreme union, for spiritual possession completed in the order of reality itself and not only in the concept. It cannot satisfy that desire.\textsuperscript{62}

If this desire is to be fulfilled, then it can only be by a movement that descends upon the intellect, experienced as grace.

If there is a single theme that we need to come to terms with in regard to Maritain’s metaphysic of being,

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{61}] Maritain, \textit{Degrees of Knowledge}, p. 5.
\item[\textsuperscript{62}] Maritain, \textit{Degrees of Knowledge}, p. 7.
\end{itemize}
it is this: the certain knowledge of Subsistent Being itself is attainable by the purely natural intellect—but once attained, it inflames a natural desire to press beyond the natural realm of the discursive intellect. It sharpens the desire for the more of supernatural vision, in which Subsistent Being itself is seen without the mediation of concepts, "face to face."

Since Dante was the poet of Thomism, we would do well to hear from him just how far the grace of faith and the wisdom of the saints is to be exalted above the majesty of metaphysics. While Graeco-Roman civilization, including its philosophy, was seen by early Christians as the field prepared by God for "that Roman Sower who is Christ," in Dante's great vision of divine providence, the spirit of Thomism placed unredeemed natural wisdom in the lost realm of Limbo.

We should see in these verses, not that Thomistic thought despairs of a synthesis between Greek metaphysics and Christian revelation, as was suggested by Winston King, but rather, that natural wisdom is finally frustrated in its attempt to attain the only object which is capable of fulfilling its natural

\[\text{footnote 12 in this chapter, concerning the "Thomism" of Dante.}\]

\[\text{footnote 64 See discussion on "Philosophy and Salvation", pp. 9-20.}\]
desire: the object which is given to the intellect only through the virtue of faith.

Then he to me: "I hear thee not demanding who be these spirits here whom thou perceivest? I will thou know, with here thy feet still standing.

These did not sin, o'er whom in soul thou grieve: but though with merit, still died unbaptised, outside the faith which thou believest.

They lived before thy Christ as God was prized: hence unto God not worthy nursed devotion: among them I, as thou art well advised.

For these defects, not other guilty motion, only so far afflicted and offended, that without hope, desire our one emotion."

Me, when he thus his explanation ended, great sadness seized, because men high in glory I saw, who in that Limbo were suspended. 65

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65 "These" are the great heroes of pagan civilization, among whom Dante recognizes the pre-eminence of Aristotle.

Each and everything, no matter how well acquainted the self may be with it, remains at bottom, in its essential mode of being, an unknown.\(^1\) -- Keiji Nishitani

CHAPTER 3

KEIJI NISHITANI

AND THE STANDPOINT OF ŚŪNYĀTA

As a preliminary to this chapter on the thought of Keiji Nishitani, it would be helpful to reflect upon the nature of \textit{metaphysics}, as that term was employed in the discussion on Maritain. In the context of that chapter, metaphysics was understood in the traditional Western sense, as a science that begins and ends within the realm of the natural intellect. It was self-consciously distinguished from the realm of supernatural, or infused wisdom.

In this chapter, much of the same terminology of metaphysics will reappear, but there is a fundamental difference in its usage. Keiji Nishitani does not begin or end his speculations in the realm of discursive

\(^1\) Nishitani, \textit{Religion and Nothingness}, p. 111.
thought. This assertion is not meant to imply that his arguments do not appeal to the authority of reason, for it is recognized that he often engages the thought of Western metaphysics from a purely rational level. But there is a subtle distinction we must make between the form his discourse takes and the source of it.

Nishitani's thought begins and ends in the noetic standpoint of śūnyatā. This standpoint cannot be reached by the rational intellect. It is what Maritain terms, apophatic experience. While there is a connection between the rational and mystical realms, apophatic knowledge is of a different species than metaphysical. Nishitani uses metaphysical discourse. He uses it, however, in a manner that does not seek to remain within its bounds. He employs the insights of metaphysics in an attempt to move the intellect towards the realization of śūnyatā.

Imagine, for a moment, that levels of knowing exist in a physical hierarchy. It is, then, as if beginning in the higher knowledge of mystical vision, Nishitani "reaches down" into the realm of metaphysics, rearranges what he can of that world, in order to bring it into consonance with the higher realm of śūnyatā, only so as to persuade those intellects trapped, in the world of discursive thought to abandon that realm and cross over, "upwards" into the standpoint of śūnyatā. He uses
metaphysical discourse in an attempt to go beyond metaphysics, as is so characteristic of the tradition descending from Nāgārjuna.

This disparity between Nishitani and Maritain in the use of rational discourse is the justification behind an initial survey of their thought in separate chapters, before passing on to a direct dialogue. We are not dealing with expositions that proceed along the same logic. There is, nonetheless, even within this fundamental disparity, a point of convergence between Maritain and Nishitani that may be appropriate to point out at this stage. There is a distinct parallel between Maritain's perception of the relationship of his metaphysic to revealed wisdom and Nishitani's use of metaphysical language. The following section explores this theme of philosophy's relationship to religion in Buddhism.
Buddhist Philosophy and Religion

As we saw in the previous chapter, in order to grasp the nature of Maritain's understanding of Christian philosophy, he directed us to centre our reflection around the ontological pivotal point of the Incarnation. It is there, in an essentially religious vision of the nature of existence -- in the light of a supernatural mystery inaccessible to the power of the purely natural intellect -- that the key to understanding the full spirit of Maritain's Thomist metaphysics lies. In order to assimilate fully the purely natural wisdom of the metaphysics of Being, Maritain insists that we must first experience the reality of God become human. His purely philosophical inquiry finds fulfillment in the religious worldview of Christian revelation.

In a similar vein, Keiji Nishitani is a philosopher engaged in dialogue with the secular philosophies of the.

2 Nishitani sees the historical emergence of philosophy as a demythification of religion. Both are grounded in the existential encounter of being-in-the-world and must be approached only through the grasp of what is at the heart of mythico-religious intuition. Nishitani rejects any approach to philosophy that would strip it of its existential orientation, and sees such approaches as a modern negation of life, arising from the spirit of "scientism" (Religion and Nothingness, p. 173).

3 See page 17.
West. He counters these philosophical systems without resorting to arguments from the authority of religion. As a body of wisdom, however, his thought will also remain outside of our grasp unless we first attain some appreciation for the Buddhist experience out of which he speaks.

Nishitani's philosophy belongs to the Mahāyāna philosophic tradition, which is "intrinsically religious," centreing its speculations around the Buddha's teachings on the Four Noble Truths. As a philosophic wisdom, Mahāyāna received its self-conscious awareness of the limits of ratiocination through Nāgārjuna's analysis of śūnyatā. His explorations then provided the philosophic justification for the subsequent emergence of the Zen preference for existential encounter over theoretical reflection. Yet, whether we speak of Nāgārjuna, Zen Buddhism, or the writings of Nishitani, we must recognize that the spirit they attempt to illuminate is what the Buddha conveyed through the Noble Truths.

The Four Noble Truths are the essence of Dhāraṇa.  

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4 This phrase is borrowed from a similar observation made by Jan Van Bragt in his Introduction to Religion and Nothingness, p. xxvi.

5 The term, Dhāraṇa has various meanings. Yoshinori Takeuchi offers the following: "The ultimate constituent of existence; the law that governs all things; the essence or nature of a thing, and hence by association the things themselves;
Dharma is the heart of all Buddhist doctrine and is expressed through four themes: suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the eight-fold Path of Enlightenment. The first Truth expounded by the Buddha, according to the Majjhima Nikāya, places the relationship between these four themes as follows:

What then is the Holy Truth of Ill? Birth is ill, decay is ill, sickness is ill, death is ill. To be conjoined with what one dislikes means suffering. To be disjoined from what one likes means suffering. Not to get what one wants, also means suffering. In short, all grasping at (any of) the five skandhas (involves) suffering.8

We should pay particular attention to the last sentence quoted here. The five skandhas, or "attachment groups," are matter (rūpa), sensation (vedanā), perception (saṃjñā), forces (saṃskāras) and consciousness (vijñāna).7 In traditional Buddhist cosmology, these five attachment groups combine in various proportions and, thereby, constitute all the phenomena of the universe. What is particularly relevant to the understanding of Buddhist philosophy is the ultimate truth taught by the Buddha" (Heart of Buddhism, p. 159).

The capitalization of the term, in our context, refers most closely to the last usage given by Takeuchi. As ultimate truth, however, it also includes the other definitions as well.

8 Taken from Conze, Buddhism, its Essence and Development, p. 43.

7 Warder, Indian Buddhism, p. 86.
that the first Truth perceives acts of consciousness and the grasping at perceptions as also being sources of suffering.

The reason for this is that desire, which is the root cause of all suffering, is dependent upon certain factors that are mutually supportive. At the base of the chain of dependent origination (pratītyasamutpāda) lies an interdependence between consciousness (vijñāna) and sentient body (nāmarūpa); sentient body being the Buddhist term to denote mind and corporeality, or form (nāma) and matter (rūpa).

The fact that consciousness is grounded in the distinction between form and matter and that this distinction between form and matter is itself an expression of consciousness is the base condition whereupon all grasping and desire is made possible. The Buddha likens this interdependent relationship to "two sheaves of reeds leaning one against the other." If either sentient body or consciousness were withdrawn, the other would collapse and with it would fall the entire mass of ill. The basis for craving and desire lies in the consciousness of the distinction of things.

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8 Warder, Indian Buddhism, p. 108.

9 For a full discussion of this point see Takeuchi, Heart of Buddhism, pp. 82-104.

10 Samyutta Nikāya, from Takeuchi, Heart of Buddhism, pp. 88-89.
what is often referred to by Buddhists as discursive reasoning.

It is inevitable that discursive reasoning leads to suffering because the whole of samsaric existence is fated to a continual passing away. To perceive some thing (as a distinct entity separated from the existence in which it is grounded) is to perceive what can never be had.” As the Buddha remarked to his companions while gazing upon a fire on a distant mountain:

Do you think it is only the mountain that is burning? It is not only the mountain that burns, but your eyes that see it as well. Everything is burning. As much that which is seen as that which sees - all burning together. As much that which is heard as that which hears - all burning. . . .

According to the Buddha, when one directly perceives this impermanent nature of all samsaric existence, and confronts the ignorance of grasping for finite things, then one no longer desires what can only lead to suffering and death. The hopeless cycle of desire and suffering, built upon the consciousness of the discursive intellect, is finally broken. The Path of Enlightenment is, therefore, none other than the realization (in both cognition and act) of existence as

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11 Dhammapada, v. 146, taken from Takeuchi, Heart of Buddhism, p. 110.

12 Kātyāyanaśīla. Sūtra, translation and discussion of this sutra in Warder, Indian Buddhism, pp. 128-130.
it is found prior to the distinctions, arising from the
discursive intellect, between form and matter, mind and
corporeality.

The term that points to this original existence is
**absolute nothingness** (śūnyatā) and was clearly placed at
the centre of Mahāyāna philosophy through the writings
of Nāgārjuna. It is a sanskrit term that was derived
from the root svī, meaning "to swell," and further
denoting the idea of "hollowness." It refers to
"[s]omething which looks 'swollen' from the outside
[but] is 'hollow' inside." In other words, what
through the discursive intellect appears as a
substantial nature, a thing-in-itself, is actually empty
of self-nature, with only the appearance of
substantiality. The doctrine of śūnyatā states that the
original form of existence of every individual thing is
a pervasive emptiness at the heart.

Nāgārjuna demonstrated this truth through a
**reductio ad absurdum** of the metaphysical position that
ascribed self-nature (svabhāva) to the elements and
things of existence. As an example of his analysis of
existence, we can follow his treatment of the
relationship of fire to kindling.14

13 Waldenfels, *Absolute Nothingness*, p. 19; see
also Conze, *Buddhism, Its Essence and Development*, p. 130.

In the *Fundamentals of the Middle Way*,¹⁵ Nāgārjuna begins with the position that fire and kindling are distinct things; each with its own nature, independent of the other. The question then becomes: how is it that fire, which is something *other* than kindling, does not exist in its own self (independently of kindling)? Why is fire found only where there is kindling present and becomes extinguished as the kindling is exhausted? On the other hand, if it is supposed that fire is not distinct from kindling, then how is it explained away that it is kindling which is *being burned*?¹⁶ To say that something is burning implies that the thing burning is distinct from the burning itself. But this is an impossibility. If an ontological distinction could

¹⁵ The *Mūlamadhyamakārikās*; for a translation of this treatise, see Appendix A in Streng, *Emptiness*, pp. 183-220.

¹⁶ The objection that fire is the result of the composite of sufficient heat *plus* kindling does not avoid Nāgārjuna's point. If fire is something other than heat and kindling, then their combination still will not produce fire. If fire is not something other than heat and kindling, then their combining will not produce something new. Further, if fire is the result of an aggregate of conditions, then the very moment that these conditions attained the correct proximity would have to also be the very same moment and location of combustion. In that case, there can be no distinction made between the aggregate causes of fire and fire itself.

"Certainly a oneness of cause and product is not possible at all. Nor is a difference of cause and product possible at all" (*Mūlamadhyamakārikās*, 20:19).
exist, then fire could exist through its own nature and would thus be independent of any consideration of kindling. Yet it is also not possible to deny the real distinction between fire and kindling. The only way out of this hopeless conundrum is to realize that neither fire nor kindling, nor any other existing thing that is subject to the fate of origination and dissolution, has its own nature in-itself. All things have the appearance of svabhāva, but all things are empty of self-nature.

If we use this analysis of fire and kindling by Nāgārjuna to interpret the words of the Buddha concerning the burning mountainside, we find that Madhyamaka¹７, as a philosophic tradition, is, in actuality, a deepening of the existential awareness expressed in the statement “everything is burning.”

That statement, “everything is burning,” came from the context of a discourse on the suffering inherent to clinging to what by nature is transient. Madhyamaka deepens this awareness by drawing attention to the further realization that there is no absolute distinction possible between the mountain that burns, the eyes that burn, and the burning itself. There is no absolute ontological distinction between the self which

¹７ Madhyamaka is a philosophic tradition of Mahāyāna Buddhism, dating back to Nāgārjuna (second century A.D.).
is passing away in the great conflagration of existence and the fire in which the self burns. Self-consciousness, where the "self" is seen as something other than the fire that consumes finite existence, is illusion. All points of reference for the discriminating intellect are equally empty of a place to stand on. All points of reference, if held onto, are loci of suffering.

This exploration of emptiness, beginning with the existential encounter of the transient nature of all things is the heart of later developments in Mahāyāna Buddhism, especially in Ch'an, or Zen Buddhism. We have not the space requisite to give an overview of the character of Zen Buddhism, yet it will suffice here to recognize that the often absurd (at least to Western perceptions) statements of Zen masters are grounded in the above realization of the emptiness of all standpoints, including, and especially, intellectual standpoints arising from self-consciousness.

This brief attempt to provide a background of the philosophic tradition that has come to be known as Madhyamaka has great bearing upon our inquiry into the

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18 The reader is directed to Heinrich Dumoulin, A History of Zen Buddhism, translated from the German by Paul Peachy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963) and the original writings of the Zen masters, as can be found in collections such as The Blue Cliff Record, translated by Thomas and J. C. Cleary (Boulder & London: Shambhala, 1977).
philosophy of Nishitani. It is the Mahāyāna doctrine of emptiness with its interpenetration of religious themes of salvation and philosophical insight, culminating in the radical expressions of the Zen masters, that Nishitani has found to be the heart of his own philosophy. In an essay entitled, "My Philosophical Starting Point," Nishitani writes:

Before I began my philosophical training as a disciple of Nishida, I was most attracted by Nietzsche and Dostoevski, Emerson and Carlyle, and by the Bible and St. Francis of Assisi. Among things Japanese, I liked best Natsume Soseki and books like the Buddhist talks by Hakuin and Takuan. Throughout all these multiple interests one fundamental concern was constantly at work, I think... In the center of that whirlwind lurked doubt about the very existence of the self, something like the Buddhist "Great Doubt" or daigi. Thus I soon started paying attention to Zen. 18

II
From Being to Nihility

The path to understanding the nature of Reality, according to Nishitani, lies in the direct perception of the nature of the myriad things of existence. 20

18 Taken from Waldenfels, Absolute Nothingness, p. 50.

20 "... when man casts off his small self and piously enters Reality, Great Wisdom (prajñā) opens up as the native place of all these things, as the place where they emerge and realize themselves as they are—the place of reality itself. This opening up is, directly, none other than man realizing Reality in its suchness." Nishitani, "On The I-Thou Relationship In Zen Buddhism," The Eastern Buddhist, New Series II/2.
existential encounter with things-as-they-are, the field of possibility from which they emerge is disclosed. This field is what the Zen masters refer to as the original countenance, or dharma nature. It is what Nishitani refers to with the term Existenz, and it advances forward to inform the self of the nature of reality when the self abandons the discursive intellect. Not by the power of the intellect to know the essential divisions within created reality, but by the ability of the intellect to attain the message being "preached" by all things is the Great Wisdom effected.

Utilizing the Japanese term koto, meaning "matter and word," Nishitani urges that we look to and seek to realize the kokoro ("mind" or "meaning" or "the heart of the matter", as in the title of Natsume Soseki's famous novel) of the koto of things. Things speak, or preach, about the matter of their being. It is from things that we learn the sermon on dharma. In the words of the Japanese poet Basho:

From the pine tree
learn (the koto) of the pine tree.
And from the bamboo

1969, p. 85).

21 Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, pp. 193-201.

22 As Dogen taught: "To practice and confirm all things conveying one's self to them, is illusion; for all things to advance forward and practice and confirm the self, is enlightenment" (Shobogenzo, taken from Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, p. 107).
(the *koto*) of the bamboo.\textsuperscript{23}

This *koto* being preached by all things, says Nishitani, is that they are not abiding in themselves, but are continuously burning in impermanence. They are existing in a middle ground between the polarities of being and non-being, between life and death, form and dissolution. At the heart of all those familiar things and persons which make up the everyday world in which we fashion our lives there is an unfathomable strangeness that eludes our grasping intellect. We think that we know what they are; we believe that we have grasped their essential form. But that form is itself being dissolved away constantly into a bottomless nihility.\textsuperscript{24}

At one pole of the existence of things we encounter being, and being is the basis for those positive aspects of existence expressed by terms such as *life*, *personality*, *spirit*, *identity*, *order*, and so forth. Nishitani claims that it is this positive side of existence that, when viewed in abstraction from the negative aspects of dissolution, has often been the basis for understanding Reality. The concept of God, he believes, often is understood only through this grasp of

\[23\] Quoted from Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, p. 195.

\[24\] This nihilum is bottomless both because nothing escapes it and because it is, therefore, impossible to see its limits. It brings the limits to all things; its own depths are not sounded by what it consumes.
essence, which is then simply magnified to the unlimited proportions of the Infinite. Yet, being, or form, is only an aspect of existence:

... 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 it is neither life nor death. It is what we have to call the non-duality of life and death... the crosscut of reality which discloses the aspect of death has heretofore been called the material, and that which discloses the aspect of life, the vital. Soul, personality, spirit, and the like have been viewed exclusively through this latter aspect of life; so has God. 25

When things advance themselves to the self and speak of their own existence they do not proclaim only their being, but their abiding in non-being as well. The analogy given by Nishitani of this middle ground of existence is the sort of effect achieved when photographic plates are placed one upon the other, resulting in a single portrait of a double-layered reality:

For in truth, reality itself is two-layered. A hundred years hence, not one of the people now walking the Ginza 26 will be alive, neither the young nor the old, the men nor the women. As the old saying goes, "With a single thought, ten thousand years. And with ten thousand years, a single thought." In a flash of lightening before the mind's eye, what is to be actual a hundred years hence is already an actuality today. We can look at the living

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25 Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, p. 52; see also, "Science and Zen," p. 84.

26 The Ginza is a famous shopping center in Tokyo.
as they walk full of health down the Ginza and see, in double exposure, a picture of the dead.  

It is not only mortal beings that present this ambiguity to our gaze, but every object in existence as well. When we look upon anything we do not simply see being, but non-being as well.

This double-faceted presentation of things to the self is not the product of some process of imagination or fantasy. It is not a conclusion of reason through generalizing from past experience to "the nature of things." It is, in fact, the actuality of things-as-they-are. The death that shows its face upon those who stroll the Ginza is a reality of those persons as equally as is the countenance of life. It is not death seen only as the ending of the temporal succession commonly referred to as life; it is a present reality. As Nishitani says in the passage above, "What is actual a hundred years hence is already an actuality today."

Philosophically, we can understand this truth by reflecting upon the impossibility of making an absolute distinction between what a person "is" and the death that threatens that person's being. If an individual could exist independently of the death to which she or he tends, then there would never be the attainment of that individual's death, for what is "other" remains

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other to the end. While it is certain that the individual does not exist in identity with death, certainly it is also obvious that a mortal individual cannot be existing independently from death. After all, there is no death outside of things that die. The nihility opening up at the ground of every existing thing (what might also be termed the radical contingency of all existence) is as much present to the gaze of the self as it looks out upon reality as is the abiding character of being.

These two aspects — life and death, being and nihility — are the polarities between which every existing thing emerges. We must, however, adequately grasp the "betweenness" of this emergence, for it is not to be conceived of as some sort of "mixture" of being and non-being. Nishitani insists that he does not mean that being and non-being mingle together in each thing as if they were quantitative elements; and certainly not that death comes about when life wears down to its end, or that nihility appears when being disappears. I mean instead that while life remains life to the very end, and death remains death, they both become manifest in any given thing, and therefore that the aspect of life and the aspect of death in a given thing can be superimposed in such a way that both become simultaneously visible.

28 This analysis is intended to reflect Nāgārjuna's discussion of "going to" in the Mūlamadhyamakakārikās, chapter 2.

29 Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, p. 93.
In an attempt to move us beyond the cognitive standpoint of being, Nishitani speaks of a nihility at the ground of all existence. He points to the fact that, while being is the basis for those abiding characteristics that distinguish one thing from another, it is nihility that can be said truly to be shared essentially among all natures. Our experience of familiar persons and objects is forged out of an all-pervading abyss. It is, says Nishitani, "an absolute abyss, compared to which even a stranger along the roadside is the most intimate of friends. Essentially speaking, then, all men [and in a wider sense, all things] be they the most intimate of friends or the most distant of acquaintances, are exactly to the same degree 'unknown'." One begins to approach the original countenance of all things when one perceives that at the ground of existence is a bottomless nihility out of which all being emerges and toward which it ceaselessly tends.

This is only a beginning, however, at understanding Reality. If taken as a position, it will miss the mark as surely as does a naive metaphysics that attributes

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30 In line with the philosophic tradition descending from Nāgārjuna, Nishitani identifies the term, being, solely with that aspect of being that was identified in the previous chapter as being-as-essence.

self-nature to individual being. Rather, we should view Nishitani's consideration of being-toward-nihility as only a corrective for the ignorance caused by the desire of the self to grab onto and possess "things." It is a philosophical exercise analogous to the meditation performed by Buddhist monks upon corpses in various states of decomposition. What Nishitani attempts to direct us to with his discussion on the nature of things in light of the existential encounter with nihility is the realization that to perceive objects solely from the perspective of being is to perceive only half of their nature as it is. He is saying that when we perceive these same objects from the standpoint of their nihility, their being takes on the appearance of illusion. The enduring form of being is present to the self only in abstraction from the actual existence that manifests it.

We must be careful here. In speaking of a cognitive movement from being to nihility, we are very likely to misunderstand the Buddhist standpoint of the middle ground, which is so characteristic of Mahāyāna philosophy. Maritain himself failed to deal genuinely with Buddhism precisely because he imagined that Buddhist metaphysics located Reality on the side of non-

32 Here again it is most important to keep in mind that Nishitani's use of the term being is restricted to what Maritain refers to with the term being-as-essence.
being rather than being. Comparing the Buddhist doctrine of the emptiness of all things to the philosophy of flux advocated by Heraclitus, Maritain charges that Buddhism is guilty of

Substituting for that which is that which passes away, refusing to say that anything does or does not exist, and admitting only a succession of impermanent forms without fixed foundation or absolute principle -- in other words subordinating being to what is known as becoming or fieri.  

For Maritain, the teaching of the Buddha, that "Every thing is empty, everything unsubstantial," laid the foundation for substituting the doctrine of substantial being (in Brahmanical thought) for a metaphysics based upon the sole reality of a sort of stream of phenomena or radical flux, regarded as the final basis of existence.

Nishitani himself mentions a certain affinity between Buddhist thought and the Greek philosopher Heraclitus (Religion and Nothingness, pp. 215, 258, 263-264), but his remarks are based upon his understanding of the Western debate on the primacy of being-vs-becoming and are thus relative to his grasp of the fullness of the doctrine of being. The contention of this study, that Nishitani has mistakenly interpreted the doctrine of being (see discussion of this in chapter 2, under the heading of "Philosophy of Being"), would thus first need to be addressed before the significance of both philosopher's belief in the comparability of the philosophies of Heraclitus and Buddhism could be assessed.

Maritain, Introduction to Philosophy, p. 11.

Maritain, Introduction to Philosophy, p. 12; and footnote 2.
It was this mistaken perception of Buddhist metaphysics that led Maritain to conclude further that the doctrine of nirvāṇa was born from the perception of being as an illusion and that salvation thus consisted of an attainment of a "species of mystical nothingness."

In other words, whereas beatitude in the West consists in the vision of the fullness of being and existence, Maritain believed that Buddhism admonishes the wise man to seek the indeterminate over form and existence. This is what he imagined the state of emptiness to be.

Even in later years when his attitude towards Buddhism appears to have softened (at least in tone), Maritain remained of the opinion that Buddhist metaphysics promoted the sheer undifferentiation of Truth and a corresponding disregard for the intellect in "formless religiosity."

To avoid such misinterpretations, we need now to follow Nishitani's movement from nihility to sūnyatā, for whereas the aspects of being and becoming often have provided the basis for division in Western philosophy,

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38 This same argument of being-vsvs-becoming is presently forming much of the contention and misunderstanding between process philosophers and Thomist metaphysicians.
Nishitani intends to strike the middle ground, between being and becoming: where there is no opposition between form and dissolution. To believe mistakenly that his teaching on śūnyatā is a preference for nihility over existence is to set one's self up to miss entirely the characteristic avowal of Mahāyāna Buddhism: samsāra is nirvāṇa, nirvāṇa is samsāra.

III
From Nihility to Śūnyatā

Throughout Nishitani's writings he expresses a central concern which has become for him the problem facing contemporary humanity. This problem is the spread of nihilism, which Nishitani perceives as the root cause of a profound crisis that is especially acute in the West, and increasingly so in the East as the East attempts to incorporate the technology and cultural influences of western nations. Nishitani sees the impact of nihilism and the related scientific worldview, with its inherent tendency to reduce the world to considerations of mechanical, impersonal, and material force, as threatening to destroy the wisdom of traditional religion and throw modern civilization back upon itself in the despair of meaningless existence. 39

39 See Nishitani, "My Philosophical Starting Point", pp. 229-230; reprinted in Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, p. xxxvi. A related discussion of this theme is also the underlying concern of his article "Science and Zen".
It is true that he accepts nihility as a genuine existential encounter that destroys the possibility of erecting a philosophy based solely upon considerations of being. But he also rejects nihilism. He sees nihilism as an incomplete grasp of existence that is not sufficiently critical of its own position. Although nihilism proclaims the dissolution of being through the awareness of abiding in a pervasive nothingness, this position fails to recognize that it is itself dependent upon a covert acceptance of the validity of being. Nihilism uses the standpoint of subjective being, then, to deny the reality of objective being and, thereby, forces the confrontation between the self and the abyss over which it is suspended.

To understand how Nishitani perceives nihility as concealed at the ground of all existence and yet how he does not (despite Maritain's belief concerning Buddhist thought) substitute non-being for being, we must look to his criticism of the half-way-nature of nihilism, particularly in light of the Zen teaching of the self-presentation of the Great Doubt.

The Great Doubt is often first encountered when an individual, through the experience of the death of a loved one or some other such event, comes face to face with the realization of the finite character of all being. They are thus thrown up against a great
uncertainty. Substantial being appears under the form of illusion. The self itself is threatened, cast into doubt, because it too shares in the fate of all being. As long as it was able to remain within the realm of the discursive intellect, as long as the self could take refuge in the abiding characteristics of essential being, it was insulated against the reality of its own existence. Yet, reality under the aspect of nihility advances toward the self and the self is nullified:

On the field of consciousness this nihility is covered over and cannot make itself really present. When it does make itself present, however, everything that was taken for external and internal reality at the field of consciousness becomes unreal in its very reality: it is nullified but not annihilated. Self-being and the being of all things combine to make one question; all being becomes a single great question mark.\(^4^0\)

The self is not, then, something other than this nihility it confronts. The self has become informed of a reality even more elemental than the division between subject and object, internal and external. In actuality, in the encounter with nihility, the self becomes aware of its own nature at a level that is more basic than what can be grasped through self-consciousness. "It is not a question," says Nishitani, "of observing nihility objectively or entertaining some representation of it. It is, rather, as if the self

\(^{40}\) Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, p. 17.
were itself to become that nihility, and in so doing become aware of itself from the limits of self-existence."\footnote{41}

It is in this realization of a field more elemental than subjectivity that Nishitani departs from the thought of certain Western philosophers such as Heidegger\footnote{42} and, especially, Sartre.\footnote{43} When they speak of self-existence as "held suspended in nothingness" (Heidegger) or declare that human existence has its foundation in nothingness (Sartre), they betray that their positions are still bound to a subjectivity that is based upon being and which confronts some thing called "nothingness" without its own being dissolved. Beginning with the concept of self -- a concept carrying with it the connotations of being, existence, identity, etc. -- these philosophers then speak of nothingness as if it were some "other" that rises up to oppose the abiding character of being.

Such a view of nothingness leaves the self intact. It is, in Buddhist terminology, \textit{relative nothingness}, for it is seen only in relation to (or through the

\footnote{41} Nishitani, \textit{Religion and Nothingness}, p. 16.

\footnote{42} For Nishitani's views on how Buddhist thought differs from that of Heidegger, see Nishitani, \textit{Religion and Nothingness}, pp. 33-96. See also Waldenfels's discussion on the relationship of Nishitani to Heidegger in Waldenfels, \textit{Absolute Nothingness}, pp. 69-92.

\footnote{43} Nishitani, \textit{Religion and Nothingness}, pp. 30-35.
mediation of) the notion of the self. It is nothingness as it exists for the self:

One is holed up inside the cave of the self-conscious ego that has nothingness at its ground. And as long as this nothingness is still set up as something called nothingness-at-the-bottom-of-the-self, it remains what Buddhism repudiates as "the emptiness perversely clung to". ... Nothingness may seem here to be a negation of being, but as long as it makes itself present— as an object of consciousness in representative form—in other words, as long as the self is still attached to it—it remains a kind of being, a kind of object.44

It is this opposition of the self to nothingness, seen as the "other" in which the self moves, which places the individual at odds with existence and in dread of the dissolution of being. The nihilistic standpoint, in its option for nihility-over being, is as incomplete as the standpoint of being itself.

Nihilism depends upon the existence of some subjective place to stand for the ego to look out upon the field of nihility. But the Great Doubt of Zen teaching swallows up even that last vestige of being known as the "self." Self itself is nullified there.45 It is no longer possible for a self-conscious awareness of nihility. In order for that to happen nihility would still have to be far enough behind or beneath being to

44 Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, p. 33.

45 This is known in Buddhism as anātman, the doctrine of no-self.
allow ego and nihilility, as kinds of being, to exist in relation to each other. Yet, the nothingness that advances itself as the Great Doubt is absolute. Not even the standpoint of subjectivity remains. There is literally no place to stand in absolute nothingness and, even further, no self standing (anātma).

The emptiness proclaimed as the dharma of all things is not being and it is not nihilility. The Buddhist doctrine of absolute nothingness, śūnyatā, points to neither being nor non-being, only to things in their suchness (tathatā):

The emptiness of śūnyatā is not an emptiness represented as some "thing" outside of being and other than being. It is not simply an "empty nothing," but rather an absolute emptiness, emptied even of these representations of emptiness. And for that reason, it is at bottom one with being, even as being is at bottom one with emptiness. At the elemental source where being appears as one with emptiness, at the home-ground of being, emptiness appears as one with being . . . . For the field of emptiness stands opened at the very point that things emerge into being.46

Nishitani, then, brings us away from being, which is continuously swallowed up in its abyssal ground, to a rejection of relative nothingness, and from there to the consideration of a middle ground called absolute emptiness, where being and nihilility are no longer in opposition, but exist as aspects of a more fundamental source.

46 Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, p. 123.
To refer to this more original source, Nishitani employs the Latin conjunctive *sive* between polar opposites. Absolute emptiness is the field of being—sive—nothingness, nothingness—sive—being. It is where being and nothingness exist in reciprocity, where the face of being exists simultaneously and precisely in the same location as the face of becoming, like photographic plates placed one on top of the other and resulting in a single image. It is the place where things actually exist in their *suchness*. It is where each and every thing, no matter how familiar or inconsequential, presents a sermon on the most sublime of mysteries.

Now we are ready to grasp the avowal by Mahāyāna that *samsāra* is *nirvāṇa*—or, using the logic of *sive*—that all things emerge from the field of *nirvāṇa—sive—samsāra, samsāra—sive—nirvāṇa*. In doing so we can see the invalidity of the claim by Maritain that the

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47 *Sive*, "or conj. (si/ve). (I) or if; (2) in a disjunctive sense, whether . . . or (D. P. Simpson, *Cassell's Latin Dictionary*, New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1959). The appropriateness of Nishitani's use of the Latin term "sive" is not obvious from the definitions provided here, but the fact that sive is used as a conjunctive to unite two terms or as a disjunctive to separate them, fits well with Nishitani's intention to both affirm and deny the ability of the intellect to grasp the nature of reality through concepts which are polar opposites. As Van Bragt points out in his Glossary to *Religion and Nothingness*, "Nishitani frequently repeats the terms connected with *sive* in reverse order to stress their reciprocity . . . (p. 303)." The corresponding Japanese term for this conjunctive is *soku* (य).
doctrine of nirvāṇa can be understood as a "species of mystical nothingness" in which being and existence are dissolved in a state of total indetermination.

IV
Śūnyatā

The search for Reality is the search for the One at the centre of the many. This is not to say that the quest for Reality is a denial of uniqueness or multiplicity, but it is the recognition that because all things are part of a world and not simply immersed in chaos, there must be a "point," then, where the uniqueness of each thing is surrendered to a more elemental and unifying source. Nishitani argues that, ontologically, this point, or source, is located simultaneously where things emerge as they are (or, as the being that they are) and where the world "worlds." 48

We have already followed Nishitani to the locus of this source. It is found in a location that is unattainable by the discriminating intellect in its grasp of opposing polarities such as subject and object, or being and nihility. It can be termed an absolute

48 Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, p. 159. This simultaneity, or identity, of location between the source of being of things-as-they-are and the reality of the nexus we call the "world" exists because, ontologically, there is no world apart from the beings that comprise it. The ordered existence to which things respond is not something other than that from which they receive being. A fuller discussion of this point is found in Chapter 4, pp. 150-153.
nothingness that escapes nihilism, or an absolute transcendence that escapes even the last vestiges of being. In either case it is to be found at the heart of things, in the centre, designated by the disjunctive sive in being-sive-nothingness, nothingness-sive-being. Because it is a centre more elemental than any grasp of polarities could attain, moreover, Nishitani says that the discriminating intellect must be left behind in a profound "cognitive leap" to this field where being remains precisely being and nihility remains nihility to the end.48

It is from this centre of existence that the intellect then encounters the real possibility for all the subsequent distinctions and divisions that are built up from within. In other words, through this cognitive leap, the intellect now stands on neither being nor nothingness, but arrives at the source where being and nothingness, the self and others, the multitude and the world, are no longer at odds. One arrives at the centre where every existing thing is and where the world worlds.

This centre of every existing thing can also be understood as the One giving rise to all things. But this One is not to be conceived as some "thing" that is the source from which the myriad phenomena arise. Once

48 Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, pp. 97; 130.
again, this sort of conception (which we also encountered in our exploration of nihilism) is based upon the covert acceptance of the standpoint of being over nothingness. This would then cast us into the impossible position of trying to establish a relationship between the being of this One Thing and the being of all others (being understood here as essence, that which distinguishes one thing from another).

Being, says Nishitani, is the cognitive grasp of merely the circumference of an existing thing. It is the grasp of this as opposed to that and cannot thereby be the basis for establishing the existence of a One upon whom the many depend. The grasp of being, he contends, cannot lead the intellect to the perception of the basis for a world.

Matters are quite different when we accept the field of śūnyatā as the starting point of existence. Located at the ground of things in their mode of existing between being and nihility, it is not reducible to either form or dissolution. It is a centre that all share. It is shared, therefore, in a manner that is both particular and universal. Yes, it can be spoken of as "the centre" of existence, but we err if we imagine it as a centre of some vague sort of being that is either the indeterminate "stuff" of created beings or,

50 Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, pp. 141-147.
simply, the sum total of the collection of things called the "world:"

Since there is no circumference on the field of sūnyatā, "All are One" cannot be symbolized by a circle (or sphere). Even though we say that the mode of being of things in their selfness appears in the return from the circumference (namely, from the fields of sensation and reason) to the center (the homeground of things themselves), this center is no longer the center of a circle; it is no longer a center with a circumference. It is, as it were, a circumference-less center, a center that is only center and nothing else, a center on the field of nothingness. That is to say, on the field of sūnyatā, the center is everywhere.\[51\]

This centre, the field of sūnyatā, is not located somewhere other than where the being of any one thing is encountered, nor is it completely identified with any locus of particularized being, for it is also found at the centre of all other beings. And it is even found at the centre of that aspect of existence we refer to as dissolution. If we refer to this centre, then, as the "original self which transcends particular self," we come to the understanding of what Nishitani means by saying that "each thing is itself in not being itself, and is not itself in being itself."\[52\] Each thing, in

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\[51\] Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, p. 146.

\[52\] Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, p. 149. The center is the "original self" because it is antecedent to the self conceived of from the standpoint of being. Also, the self as being does not realize the totality of its own existence; as we have already seen it essentially leaves out the constant tending toward nothingness that is also an aspect of the self. Therefore,
its true (original) selfness, lies on the field of 
śūnyatā, which is also the true selfness of all others. 
This transcendental field is, accordingly, the original 
selfness of all things, and also not the self of 
particular being. All things thus exist in what 
Nishitani refers to as a circuminsessional relationship, 
because all things in their original selfness exist at 
the point where being is manifested from within the 
nexus of infinite becoming, where there is no thing in 
particular, and yet everything altogether; on the field 
of "possibility."\(^5^3\)

Reflecting upon this "mode of being of things as 
they are in themselves in emptiness," Nishitani says 
that they "preach" a matter that is dual-natured. 
First, they preach about themselves; they proclaim their 
suchness as an abiding in emptiness. Since the nature 
of their abiding points not to their selves, however, 
but to the absolute emptiness from which all things 
issue, they then are also preaching simultaneously about 
that which makes them to be what they are: \(^5^4\)

in moving from the self (as being) to the original self 
(which is not the "self"). A thing is actually encountered in its true reality.

\(^5^3\) Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, pp. 147-150.

\(^5^4\) Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, pp. 192-193. The point that needs to be recognized here is that the "suchness" of things does not point primarily to their own concrete natural forms, but to a field that is even more substantial than their non-substantial being.
That things are means, aboriginally, that they express themselves; and that in expressing themselves they give expression, at the same time, to what it is that makes them be, pointing it out and bearing witness to it (in the twofold sense of clarifying and confirming). This is what it is for things to be in a dharma-like mode. The one aspect we referred to as things preaching the dharma, the other as their obeying its imperatives.\footnote{Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, p. 195.}

These imperatives, known as "the dharma of things," issue forth as "King Samadhi, the voiceless speech of 'one who is master wherever he is'."\footnote{Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, p. 194.}

The question now becomes whether Nishitani can speak of this "one who is master wherever he is" apart from anything else.

The reality of the self of any thing is found, not in the essential form of that nature, but in the field from which all things arise. In the words of Nishitani, "This Sole Self-exposed One, then, is there where every phenomenon is even more itself than it is in itself" ("Science and Zen", p. 96.). We shall later turn to consider that statement in light of what Maritain has said concerning the nature of being as the primary transcendental.

Nishitani defines the preaching of dharma as the "rational order of existence [which] can be referred to as word or speech [logos]. Just as the promulgations of juridical law and order are a kind of voiceless speech that shows the people 'the track their social lives should run on, so the rational order is in the grip of the King Samadhi, the voiceless speech of one who 'is master wherever he is'. The 'rational order is, as it were, his preaching of the dharma [ibid]."

Nishitani's portrayal of dharma as the logos which directs the emergence of all being is unmistakably reminiscent of the concept of natural law as it is expressed in Thomist cosmology. This similarity suggests that the source of Thomist natural law and that of the dharma of things are themselves one and the same. That consideration is taken up in the following chapter.
from any consideration of the world which reveals "him."

It would seem that Nishitani does indeed speak of this one in-itself, even in a manner that the most devout of theists would be comfortable with in discussing the matter of God:

... there is a "master" ... who without preaching himself makes things preach the dharma. He makes things reveal their own dharma while at the same time he lets them reveal themselves; he makes the dharma preach itself as well as things. After all, the dharma is nothing other than this master's preaching of non-preaching.57

This master, the Sole Self-exposed One, can be spoken of, then, as transcendental to the world. It is possible to speak of "him" as prior to the world as such. In fact, as we have seen, the nature of the world leads us away from itself and to the consideration of the primacy of this transcendental source.

In considering the nature of time as a temporal sequence, for example, we are forced to admit to the existence of a source of time that is itself transtemporal.58 This is because it is impossible to conceive of past, present, and future, without simultaneously conceiving of their mutual fulfillment in

57 Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, p. 194.

a transtemporal source. If the past, present, and future are completely "other" to each other (ontologically), then it is obvious that beginning with the past, the other two will never be obtained. On the other hand, if the present and future are in the past (as their sufficient cause), then the very process of time is inexplicable. As Nishitani clearly asserts, the source of time "remains out of reach, no matter how far back or how far forward we go. It involves something of another dimension, as different as a solid body is from a flat plane, something like a true infinity that can never be attained no matter how much something finite is enlarged." At the heart of time is something that contains time but is not time and exceeds time as much as three dimensions exceeds two.

59 As Nagarjuna stated:
   "If 'the present' and 'future' exist presupposing the 'past',
   'The present' and 'future' will exist in the 'past'.
   If 'the present' and 'future' did not exist there (in the 'past'),
   How could 'the present' and 'future' exist presupposing the 'past'?
   Without presupposing 'the past' the two things ('the present' and 'future') could not be proved to exist.
   Therefore neither present nor future time exist.
   In this way the remaining two (times) can be inverted" (Mālamadhyamakakārikās, 19:1-4a).

60 Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, p. 224.
The same example can be extended to the concept of being. Since our being wells up into existence as a continual passing away -- or, as the emergence of time, which is the same matter -- it overflows being frozen into a permanently immobile form. The perception of reality which begins with the self (as ego, which is grounded in the mutual dependency between consciousness and matter and form [nāmarūpa], as was taught by the Buddha) can only approximate the true nature of this existence in its grasping and letting go, its trading off, of successive forms of being (a process that is pointed to in the expression "stream of consciousness"). The self-conscious intellect perceives that "first there was this and then there was that and then . . . ." But the radical refusal of being to achieve any sort of consummation in static form betrays the inadequacy of this perception. The suchness of things testifies not to being as form, nor even to nihility, but directly to "an endless world nexus . . . previous to any and all conceivable pasts [and] . . . after . . . even the most remote of possible futures." It testifies to a source whose nature is infinity, a transcendent nature of pure being. When expressed in the emergence of form, this transcendental source can be so only through a continual passing away in impermanence. This pure being upholds

61 Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, p. 245.
but overflows every form of being and, therefore, every form of being is also the manifestation of a continual burning in impermanence.

What is important to see here is that such a realization looks neither to the form of being nor the dissolution of being, but to the field where both are one. The reality of any being as becoming (being-sive-nothingness, nothingness-sive-being) is here on this field. Thus, when we are on this field we are nearer, infinitely nearer to the reality of our existence than when we perceive our existence from the standpoint of the self (as ego), with all its attachments to static form:

In its ultimate home-ground, the self-being of man is not human. Human Dasein may be said to emerge as the "con-formation" of the form of the human and the "trans-form" of being into a single whole. At the ground of our being human lies a level of pure being beyond any determination to the human. 62

Nishitani asserts that the dharma preached by all things involves a message concerning "Something 'immortal' or rather, in Buddhistic terminology, something which is 'unborn as well as imperishable'--something which lies beyond the duality of life and death, which is increate and immortal -- [and which] stands there self-exposed." 63 In effect, he is saying

62 Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, p. 248.
that it is through things that we are called to make the
"passage from the world of sansāra to the far side of
the yonder shore," where "[e]verything that subsists has
its subsistence from the first only through having been
taken into this 'unborn as well as imperishable
[One]."64

This passage to the yonder shore differentiates the
standpoint of śūnyatā from that of nihilism. If clung
to, the abyss at the bottom of existence can only
imprison the self in nihilistic despair. But from the
standpoint of śūnyatā, the abyss at the bottom of the
self is a springboard, it is a directive to transcend
the world of sansāra for the true infinity, called
nirvāṇa. Says Nishitani, the movement from nihility to
śūnyatā "is an essential conversion from 'death' in its
basic sense to 'life' in its basic sense, from true
'finitude' to true 'infinity'."65 Nihilism is as far
from śūnyatā as death is from life.

To stop at this point, however, would be to give a
misleading picture of the thought of Nishitani. His
reflections on the "Sole Self-exposed One," transcendent
to the world, imperishable, and uncreated, also stress
the equally important realization of the radical
immanence of this transcendent reality.

64 Nishitani, 'Science and Zen,' p. 93.
65 Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, p. 177.
To cross over to the yonder shore of nirvāṇa is no different than abiding on the absolute near shore of samsāra. There is, in reality, no change of location from samsāra to nirvāṇa. Nishitāni points to this truth through the words of Dogen: "Just understand that birth-and-death itself is nirvāṇa . . . . Only then will you be free of birth-and-death." If one is to "look for nirvāṇa," that standpoint of absolute nothingness which frees the self from the endless cycle of birth and death in samsaric existence, then one does not look beyond or behind birth-and-death to find some other "reality lurking there. The field of liberation is nearer to us than we are to ourselves:

For us, this field of emptiness is something we are aware of as an absolute near side. It opens up more to the near side than we, in our ordinary consciousness, take our own self to be. It opens up, so to speak, still closer to us than what we ordinarily think of as ourselves. In other words, by turning from what we ordinarily call "self" to the field of suñyāta, we become truly ourselves.

The movement, then, is not one of location, but of perception. When the intellect is freed from the standpoint of self (as ego) and becomes centred in the suchness of samsaric existence, it finds that the fullness of its own reality lies not in its personal

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66 Taken from the Shōbōgenzō Shōji, quoted in Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, p. 178.

67 Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, p. 151.
selfness, but in an original self that defines the meaning of and gives rise to the whole of existence. It is absolutely close to us, for there is not a single thread of our being or our dissolution that does not first begin with it as the primary reality. This position of antecedence, however, should not be understood in anything resembling a temporal progression (although there is no reason not to speak of the pre-existence of this original source in relation to the existence of the world), but as an ontological priority. It is not the sort of antecedence that obtains in the giving of existence from parents to child. Rather—and ultimately even this analogy breaks down because it is not based upon an ontological priority— it can be likened to the relationship of a single note to the entire piece of music in which it is immersed. Only in the grasping of the music itself can the intellect then grasp the full reality of that particular note. The full reality of the note subsists in the music to which it belongs.

True abiding in nirvāṇa is, then, a non-abiding. A true encounter with the Sole Self-exposed One is, in fact, none other than the true encounter with the suchness of the world. Drawing upon the metaphor of the famous Oxherding Pictures of the Zen master Kakuan Shien, we can say that the Buddhist path to heaven leads
straight to the marketplace. As Waldenfels has recognized:

The way comes to its end not in a worldlessness but in a new tie to the world, not in a timeless eternity but in an open historicity, not in the privation of ego and self but in selflessness and in helpful communication. The enlightenment of the way of Zen, too, ends in the way of the Bodhisattva.68

It is this emphasis upon the radical immanence of the source of existence that often poses a stumbling block to a proper understanding of Buddhism for theists of the Christian tradition. It has often led them to mistakenly view Buddhism as a sort of pantheism. Or in the opposite case, as with Maritain, when the path of enlightenment is not seen in its return to the world, Buddhism is perceived as a desire for unknowing over knowing, nothingness over form. A more correct view will be explored in greater depth in the following chapter.

The fact that philosophical discussions seem to consist of deaf men's quarrels is not reassuring for civilization.  

-- Jacques Maritain

CHAPTER 4

FOUNDATIONS FOR DIALOGUE

We turn now to the process of establishing true dialogue between the thought of Jacques Maritain and Keiji Nishitani. Initially, such a task seemed unlikely. Whenever Nishitani engaged in a critique of the traditional Western metaphysics of being, he found it to be inadequate, capable only of bringing the intellect to the consideration of one aspect of existence, incapable of disclosing the absolute nature of Reality. Moreover, in those few and isolated occasions when Maritain turned to consider the nature of Buddhist thought, he found it to be seriously in error, antithetical to Christian revelation, and directly in opposition to a metaphysic of being.

These negative opinions expressed by Maritain and Nishitani were dealt with in the previous two chapters, where we sought to expose the fallacies upon which they

1 Maritain, Truth and Human Fellowship, p. 12.

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were based. Having identified these mistaken assumptions, we were able to remove certain obstacles to dialogue. But that accomplishment was only a beginning. What is now required is the identification of themes of convergence between these two philosophers, all the while maintaining a respectful awareness that discovering convergence does not absolve us from also coming to grips with the real divergence inherent in their two views of the Real. True dialogue is always hopeful of discovering a sharing of truth, but it is also respectful of genuine divergence and careful to protect what is unique.

In this chapter it will be shown that dialogue can be built around the common understanding by Nishitani and Maritain of levels of cognition and how these levels attain degrees of the Real. We will begin this exploration with the question of epistemology. It is the contention of this study that the epistemologies of both men are parallel and best described as critical realism. Following a short digression, we will then examine how both philosophers understand the relationship of their epistemology to the science of metaphysics. It is within that discussion that we will begin to see the divergence between Maritain and Nishitani, and how the term metaphysics is applied to the thought of Nishitani in an equivocal manner.
Especially when we consider the relationship of metaphysical knowledge to the direct knowledge of ultimate reality, the uniqueness of each "system" will become apparent.

I

Critical Realism

Maritain states that metaphysical wisdom is a knowledge discovered through a turning away from sense knowledge to the realm of intelligibility. Nishitani agrees that sense knowledge (and also reason, he adds) is only capable of attaining the "circumference" of things and does not penetrate to their heart, or existence-as-they-are. In that case, the question both men must consider, is how our knowledge of things, which begins in sense knowledge, leads to the attainment of things-as-they-are; how our objective grasp of things is truly the attainment of transobjective subjects. This consideration is why much of Maritain's and Nishitani's writings are concerned not simply with the nature of ultimate reality, but equally with the question of proper epistemology.

Neither philosopher would accept the notion of philosophical dialogue if that dialogue were not first and foremost cognizant of the relationship of the

2 Maritain, Degrees of Knowledge, p. 2.
3 Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, p. 141.
intellect to truth. Doctrinal positions that sound very similar may have very different meanings when they emerge from different noetic standpoints. As Étienne Gilson rightly has said: "... instead of being a condition for ontology, epistemology grows in and with it, being at once explanatory and explained, as what supports and is supported by it, just as the parts of a true philosophy lend mutual support to one another."\(^5\)

The epistemology of both Maritain and Nishitani can be described as a critical realism. Maritain has already accepted this label for his own philosophy and has provided a detailed explanation of the exact meaning of that term.\(^6\) In order to show that Maritain's

\(^4\) For instance, Nishitani says that when Sartre speaks of existence as a form of exstasis his "words make him sound like a Zen master," but his epistemic starting point is the self perceived as ego and is therefore incapable of attaining the nature of ecstatic existence as it is expressed in the Zen Buddhist doctrine of absolute nothingness (Religion and Nothingness, pp. 33-35).

Maritain argues that, "... it is fitting to place critique at the start of metaphysics as a kind of apologetic introduction (as a matter of fact, critique, ontology and natural theology grow together), it is so because they are even more closely bound together than the moral virtues, inasmuch as they integrate a single specific habit" (Degrees of Knowledge, p. 80).


\(^6\) Maritain, Degrees of Knowledge, pp. 71-135. I am indebted to Dr. Ralph Nelson for bringing it to my attention that Étienne Gilson was critical of Maritain's use of the term critical realism to describe Thomist epistemology. See Étienne Gilson, Realisme Thomiste et
understanding of critical realism is also applicable to the philosophy of Nishitani, we must first inquire into the nature of realism in general (as distinct from idealism) and then further separate the concept of critical realism from that of naive realism.

As an epistemological doctrine, realism is the belief that the act of knowing is the ability of the intellect to attain the being, or reality, of things external to it. In other words, the intellect knows because it is in potency to the act of existing things. Although the agent intellect actively does abstract the

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7 The split between realism and idealism is based upon an act of faith (or lack of faith) in the ability of the mind to attain external reality.

In view of the possible objection that Nishitani would reject any epistemic standpoint that was grounded in the split between "internal" and "external" realities because these terms arise only from a knowledge mediated by the self-conscious ego, it is necessary to point out that this division between "internal" and "external" is purely metaphorical and designed to simply underline the fact that the manner in which things exist "in consciousness" is different than the manner of their existing in-themselves (Maritain, Degrees of Knowledge, pp. 84-86); a proposition that Nishitani certainly supports (Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, p. 141).

8 One of the essential divisions in Aristotelian metaphysics is the division of being into potency and act. In the present context, it refers to the intellect attaining knowledge because it is ontologically capable of rising up (the movement from potency to act is an attainment of perfection) to the attainment of the existence of the being it knows. In a very real sense, in the act of knowing the intellect becomes what it knows through "intentional being." A discussion of this can be found below in subsection II, "Intentionality."
intelligible forms from sense impression, there is, nevertheless, a certain passivity on the part of the intellect; there is a primacy (of nature) of things over the mind. Truth, in its most basic character, is not to be understood as the end result of a series of syllogisms. While it is correct that truth is a quality that is attributed to thought, truth resides first in the object of thought. It is the actual existence of objects outside the mind that determines the truth or falsity of the mind's judgments. Truth is, in the words of St. Thomas, "adaequatio rei et intellectus," adequation or conformity between the intellect and thing.

Even metaphysical truth, which of all human wisdom is the furthest removed from the senses, originates in the direct perception of things. Maritain asserts that,

... he [the Thomist metaphysician] should be plunged into existence, steeped ever more deeply in it by a sensuous and aesthetic perception as acute as possible, and by experiencing the suffering and struggles of real life, so that aloft in the third heaven of natural understanding he may feed upon the intelligible substance of things.9

Does this description of the (Thomist) metaphysician by Maritain apply equally to the thought of Nishitani?

Certainly we can recognize in Nishitani the same orientation toward the direct perception of things as

that which forms the speculations of Maritain. Consistently imbedded in his arguments against various philosophical doctrines, Nishitani uses the possibility of an adequation of the intellect to things as the means for discerning truth. He urges us to seek the koto of things, to seek wisdom from things, such as bamboo or pine in their proclamation of the dharma. He implicitly rejects the methodology of idealism in its preference for "clear and irrefutable ideas" and squarely places his noetic 'starting point in the process of the intellect becoming informed by things external to it. He chooses the words of the famous Zen Master Dogen to describe his own gnoseological doctrine. They reveal, what has been termed above realism:

To practice and confirm all things by conveying one's self to them, is illusion: for all things (dharmas) to advance forward and practice and confirm the self, is enlightenment. ¹⁰

Now, if this position does, indeed, correspond to what Maritain advocates with the concept of realism, then we must seek to understand how it came about that Nishitani rejected realism as an adequate epistemology.

The problem with realism, according to Nishitani, is that when it speaks of things "outside of consciousness" which the intellect attains, it is inescapably limited to the perception of things from the

¹⁰ Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, p. 107.
The intellect cannot, therefore, be truly said to have attained the suchness of things as they exist for themselves. Even the very notion of an object independent of the perceiving subject is itself based upon the orientation to self-consciousness and thus cannot be said truly to attain the thing as a trans-objective reality. Since realism states that our intellect attains the things which exist independently of our conceptions of them, it has not yet explained how our conceptions represent the attainment of what is by nature prior to any division into subject/object duality:

In general, no matter how much we think of an objectivity within things and events lying beyond our consciousness and its representations, so long as they are envisaged as things and events in the ordinary sense of those words -- that is, so long as they are looked upon objectively as objects -- their objective reality has yet to elude the contradiction of being represented as something lying beyond representation.\(^\text{12}\)

Nishitani's criticism of realism is that for all its insistence on attaining being or reality outside of intellect, it, in fact, ignores the truth of the matter, which is that even its conceptions of objectivity are what Buddhism repudiates as "to practice and confirm all things by conveying one's self to them." What Nishitani


\(^{12}\) Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, p. 120.
desires is that we "see" things as they are in themselves, prior to the sort of division introduced by subjectivity.\textsuperscript{13}

Is this at odds with Maritain's use of the term realism? In order to see that it is not we must consider the full designation Maritain applies to Thomist epistemology, which is not simply realism, but critical realism. Critical realism acknowledges a difference between the existence of a thing in-itself (in its own act of existing) and its existence as an object for the mind. Yet, as a realist epistemology, it also preserves the real unity of our knowledge with actual existence.

\textsuperscript{13} We can see, then, how far Nishitani is separated from the sort of epistemology that arose in the West after Kant. In his own words, Nishitani asserts, that

"On the field of śūnyatā, the Dasein of things is not 'phenomenal' in the Kantian sense, namely the mode of being of things insofar as they appear to us. It is the mode of being of things as they are in themselves, in which things are on their own home-ground. But neither is it the Ding-an-sich that Kant spoke of, namely, that mode of being of things sharply distinguished from phenomena and unknowable by us. It is the original mode of the being of things as they are in themselves and as they in fact actually exist. There is no distinction here between the phenomenon and the thing-in-itself. The original thing is the thing that appears to us as what it is, without front side or back" \textit{(Religion and Nothingness, p. 138).}
To begin with, Maritain agrees that the distinction between the existence exercised by things in-themselves and their existence in the mind is one of "capital importance in the theory of knowledge . . . the notion of knowledge as a copy or transfer is utterly inadequate, not only on the side of the disparity between the conditions of the mind and those of the thing, but also on the side of the unity between the thing and mind." 14

"There are," Maritain asserts, "two different esse's, two levels of existence, for things: the proper existence they possess in order to maintain themselves outside nothingness, and the existence that supervenes upon them in their apprehension by the soul in order that they may be known." 15 The thing itself is a trans-objective reality, what Maritain calls the "transobjective subject." The human intellect does not immediately obtain the essence or nature of this trans-objective reality. Such intelligence is proper only to those intellects which know without the mediation of material sense-perception. Only the angelic beings and God see things with a perception that immediately

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14 Maritain, Degrees of Knowledge, p. 87. We will turn shortly to the question of the unity between thing and mind, but first let it be seen clearly that the realism of Thomist epistemology is in no manner a naive realism.

15 Maritain, Degrees of Knowledge, p. 86.
penetrates to the essence of things. What the human intellect must content itself with is "not a 'central' knowledge but a 'radial' knowledge that goes from the outside in, that attains the centre only by starting from the circumference." The human intellect never attains things in their pure subjectivity, it knows them only as objects. Maritain is aware, therefore, that "[t]here is a gulf between the conditions or mode of thought and the conditions or mode of the thing." An object of thought is only an abstraction from existence as it is exercised by things in-themselves. Objects, as such, are not the intellect's attainment of an actual existence, but only of a possible existence.

This position of Maritain's, regarding the difference in existence between a thing in-itself and its existence in the intellect, echoes Nishitani's own appraisal:

... the mode of being of things that appear to us as objects on the fields of sensation and reason is the Form of things visible from their circumference, while the things

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16 And Descartes also, says Maritain, who "believed he received [such knowledge] from the clear and distinct ideas of thought and extension" (Degrees of Knowledge, p. 203).

17 Maritain, Degrees of Knowledge, p. 203.

18 Maritain, Degrees of Knowledge, p. 94.

19 Maritain, Degrees of Knowledge, p. 86.

20 Maritain, Degrees of Knowledge, p. 91.
themselves constitute the mode of being in which they are rather, as it were, at their own center. This latter, non-objective mode of being was also termed the "middle" mode of being of things. 21

The question for a dialogical encounter between the epistemic standpoints of Maritain and Nishitani becomes, however, the problem of how the intellect is understood to be able to move beyond the perception of things as objects, which is essentially grounded in the subject/object split introduced by the self-conscious ego, to the more original awareness of a thing in-itself.

Both philosophers point to the knowledge of things in-themselves as the portal to metaphysical wisdom. This assertion is as fundamental to Maritain's expositions on St. Thomas' proofs for the existence of God as it is for Nishitani's reflections upon the Buddhist Sermon on Inanimate Things. 22 Yet, both philosophers also agree that our grasp of the existence of things-as-objects is not strictly identifiable with the existence of these same things in-themselves.

How then does the intellect attain the trans-objective reality of things? How does it attain the middle mode of the being of things? Nishitani sees the

21 Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, p. 141.

22 Maritain, Approaches to God, pp. 15-19; Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, pp. 193-201.
relationship of object to thing as follows: The centre of trans-objective things is an absolute emptiness not a relative emptiness, which would be a simple void, the antithesis of being and form, but a trans-finite source that overflows any reduction to form. The centre of things is an absolute "non-form," from within which objective form emerges without becoming fixed as a concrete static entity. Seen from the unlimited possible number of "external" subjective reference points, this centre of non-form gives the appearance of an equal number of objective manifestations. It is an exstasis that erupts into form but is never, thereby, exhausted. And so, the objective form of things is not something other than what they are in-themselves, but, rather, what they are from the position of their disclosure to us: 23

On the field of śūnyatā ... things ... appear from the home-ground (elemental source) of their existence, from the selfness lying at their home-ground. This means that the sensible and rational forms of a thing recuperate original meaning as apparitions of the non-objective mode of being of the thing in itself, as the positions of that thing. This is what was referred to earlier as the process of "belfication." 24

This explains how, for Nishitani, our intellectual grasp of things is both the source of illusion and

23 Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, pp. 141-147.

24 Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, p. 146.
enlightenment. The paradox of our grasp of things is that they exist as non-form precisely at the locus where they exist as form. The centre of things is not to be identified with the objective form we encounter, but neither is that form something other than this non-objectifiable centre. *The expression of the absolute nothingness at the centre of all things is the objective form presented to our intellect.*

This paradox in the objective presentation of a thing, involving two levels of existence, reflects Maritain's position also. Maritain asserts, that although "existence is not a sensible object per se," and, thus, that there is a gulf between the existence of a thing in its apprehension by the mind and its existence as a being held outside of nothingness, nevertheless, in the intellective grasp of an object, the attainment of the thing-in-itself is effected as well. It is true that the thing grasped as object is only the apprehension of possible existence. Yet, having admitted as much, Maritain argues that the proper function of judgement would be incomprehensible if the

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23 It is true that Maritain would not use the terms "illusion and enlightenment" to describe these two levels of knowing. But we should keep in mind that Nishitani uses those terms as a reflection of the "logic" of apophatic experience. His essential concern is not reflection, but soteriology.
mind did not pass from the level of simple object to the level of thing or subject possessing existence. 28

To understand his reasoning, we can recall our earlier discussion on his analysis of the act of knowing, where he stated that knowing is divisible into two operations. The first is simple apprehension, "the act by which the intelligence grasps or perceives something without affirming or denying anything about it," the act whereby the mind attains the possible existence of an external object via the intelligible species. 27 The second is judgement, "that act of the mind by which it unites by affirming or separates by denying," the movement whereby the essence attained in simple apprehension is then grounded in an existential orientation. 26 A complete thought, then, composed of the simple apprehension of essence (e.g. "man," "white") and the judgement expressed in some form of predicate ("is," "is not"), attains not only possible existence, objective existence abstracted from the thing itself and found only in the mind, but actual existence as well, the thing in-itself, independent of the mind:

Intellectual simple apprehension, in perceiving what I call "triangular" or "conic," "musician" or "philosopher" perceives

26 Maritain, Degrees of Knowledge, p. 96-97.
27 Maritain, Introduction to Logic, p. 12.
28 Maritain, Introduction to Logic, p. 82.
something (possible) which is made its object under the formal aspect in question. On the other hand, and above all, intellectual knowledge is completed in the judgement. And what is judgement if not an act by which the mind asserts that a predicate and subject, which differ in notion or in their intramental existence, are identical in the thing, or outside the mind? ... Thus the function of judgement consists in making the mind pass from the level of simple essence or simple object signified to the mind, to the level of thing or subject possessing existence (actually or possibly), a thing of which the object of thought (predicate) and the subject of thought (subject) are intelligible aspects.\(^{29}\)

For Maritain, then, the intellect does not attain the existence of things (what he calls their existence as "transobjective subject") in the apprehension of the intelligible species, but through, or by means of those species. He claims, that these "presentative forms are not the object we know, but pure means of our knowing. ... What is known though these immaterial species, they [the scholastics] called objectum quod, the object which is known."\(^{30}\)

The judgement whereby the intellect asserts, for example, that "This is a man" or "This colour is white," indicates that the mind has actually attained the existence of the thing independent of its own conceptions (for the subject is distinct from the predicate in the very act of intellection), but also,

\(^{29}\) Maritain, Degrees of Knowledge, p. 97.

\(^{30}\) Maritain, Degrees of Knowledge, pp. 120-121.
that the intellect does not attain this extramental existence except through the mediation of concepts.

That Maritain asserts that transobjective subjects are actually attained by the intellect through the mediation of the presentative forms and that Nishitani asserts that the forms of things are the positions of a non-objective centre that expresses itself by this constant eruption into form (and that, therefore, form is essentially and primarily non-form), I believe can be considered as possessing the same intentional content and constituting a compatible epistemological approach to metaphysics; a philosophy built upon critical realism.\footnote{To remove any possible objection that Maritain is here saying that we know presentative forms primarily and somehow thereby attain a secondary knowledge of things in-themselves, refer to his discussion of this in Degrees of Knowledge, pp. 116–121, where he explicitly contends that our knowledge of presentative forms in-themselves is a reflexive knowledge. In the primary act of knowing these forms (intelligible species) are "formal signs" which disappear "in the face of the object, for (their) very essence is to bear the mind to something other than itself."}

II

Intentionality

We need to turn away, for a moment, from the main line of the discussion at hand, in order to reflect upon a consideration that will have great importance as the discussion develops. The consideration I have in mind is the ontological value of knowledge, or what can also
be termed the "union of the knower and the known in the act of knowing."

We have already recognized that in realism the intellect is understood to attain the actual existence of things in the act of knowing. Yet, we qualified that understanding, through the concept of critical realism, by admitting that the existence attained by the intellect, is not strictly identifiable with the existence exercised by the thing itself in its act of being maintained outside of non-being. To explain how it could be that the being of an external thing is in the mind in a manner that is different from its being in-itself, Maritain employs the Thomist concept of intentional being, while Nishitani speaks of a "realization" (in the sense of appropriation) in light of the Buddhist doctrine of non-ego or anātman.\(^{32}\)

The main point that I wish to bring out in this discussion is that, for both Maritain and Nishitani, the act of knowing involves two levels of existence, not only for the thing known, but also for the subject who

\(^{32}\) Anātman is usually translated as "non-self," but Nishitani prefers to render this sanskrit term as "non-ego," particularly because he sees it as the antithesis of the Cartesian starting point for metaphysical speculation. See the Glossary in Religion and Nothingness, p. 300 and the relevant discussion, ibid., pp. 13-15.
In the act of knowing, the subject attains an existence that is precisely other than its own natural existence (as a being maintained outside of nothingness), thus knowing involves an ontological value and we must expect a change in the condition of the knowing intellect that is proportionate, or conformed, to the essence of the object known. We can anticipate the later importance this doctrine will hold when we turn to the consideration of that which is the supreme knowledge in both Maritain's and Nishitani's philosophies: a reality that is infinitely disproportionate to the nature of finite intelligence. Such considerations must wait; for now, let it suffice, for us to establish that Maritain and Nishitani do

33 As Martin Buber described this truth:

"Basic words do not state something that might exist outside them; by being spoken they establish a mode of existence.

Basic words are spoken with one's being.
When one says You, the I of the word pair I-You is said, too.
When one says It, the I of the word pair I-It is said, too.

"Being I and saying I are the same.
Saying I and saying one of the two basic words are the same.
Whoever speaks one of the basic words enters into the word and stands in it."

indeed have parallel understandings of this ontological/epistemological relationship.

Distinguishing between the natural existence of a being (*esse naturae*) and the existence attained in the act of knowing (*esse intentionale*, or intentional being), Maritain says that intentional being...

... is an existence that does not seal up the thing within the bounds of its nature, but sets it free from them. In virtue of that existence, the thing exists in the soul with an existence other than its own existence, and the soul is or becomes the thing with an existence other than its own existence. As Cajetan tells us, *intentional being* is there as a remedy for the imperfection essential to every created, knowing subject, to wit, the imperfection of possessing a limited natural being and of not being, of itself, everything else.\(^{34}\)

The act of knowing, argues Maritain, is not to be confused with the production either of an image in sensitive knowledge or of a concept in intellective knowledge. These are but the "conditions and means and expressions" of the act of knowing. Formally considered, "[t]o know is to advance oneself to an act of existing of supereminent perfection."\(^{35}\) Knowing, he says, considered purely in itself, is the act whereby "the soul receives or submits only in order to exercise its own vital activity -- only in order to bring itself

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34 Maritain, *Degrees of Knowledge*, p. 114.
35 Maritain, *Degrees of Knowledge*, p. 113.
Maritain does not speak of the act of knowing as something the intellect does (for this would raise the question of what the intellect is, independent of the act of knowing); he says that knowing should not be considered a "passion" or an "action." Rather, "knowing is a properly immanent action, belonging to the category 'quality'." 37

Nishitani agrees with this assessment. Knowing considered as act, claims Nishitani, is the "absolutely straightforward or protensive" orientation towards objects. He goes on to say that this "absolutely protensive position referred to is the point at which the self is truly the self in itself, and where the being of the self essentially posits itself." 38 In other words, since the self is free of self-nature (or what could be also described as being a nature that is free of self-confinement), it is able to posit itself through its basic orientation to what is "other." There is an ontological unity between it as knower and what it knows. The intellect is essentially empty of selfness; it is not oriented to its self, but to what is other.

36 Maritain, Degrees of Knowledge, p. 117.
37 Maritain, Degrees of Knowledge, p. 113.
38 Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, pp. 154-155.
This lack of self-nature, moreover, is both what it is and what it does. The act of knowing, argues Nishitani, cannot be separated from the agent that knows. Properly understood, knowing is not the action of the knower, but rather, *is the act constituting the knower as such*. The act of knowing, accordingly, is truly a "realization" in a dual sense. In the first place it is an apprehension of an object originally existing externally to the self. But on the other hand, it is also the manifestation of the self itself because knowing is not something the self does, it is what the self is:

The self is the self as something that knows the self; but in the self in itself, as it is on the home-ground of the self, there is an essential *not-knowing* that is one with the *knowing* of the self. Were the self in itself something that knew the self in itself, the self would be completely unable to attain the knowledge of knowing anything at all (just as if the field of emptiness were a sort of being and we would be left with only one Spinozistic "substance," while the world and all things would melt away). In this case no knowing in the sense of knowing oneself through intellectual intuition or through consciousness or cognitive knowledge, and no *self*, in the sense of a "subject" that comes to know itself in such ways, could come about. The result would be that not even the knowing whereby the self knows other things (as subject knowing its objects) could come about.\(^39\)

We can see, then, that for both philosophers the act of knowing is that whereby the intellect as such has existence. While it does not become what it knows with

the same existence that is natural to it as a being held outside of nothingness (what Nishitani describes as its "subjectivity that persists in being a non-objective existence and refuses to be an object" and what Maritain denotes with the term esse naturae), still there is an ontological unity perceived by these philosophers between the knower and the known in the act of knowing.

The reason this common understanding is so important to dialogue between the two schools represented here is that it places doctrinal positions within an existential orientation. The fact that these two men realize that knowing is, first and foremost, the attainment of existence, means that we should understand that the conceptual framework of their "systems" is but the "means and expressions" of a way to existence. The true importance of what they say is not so much in the limitations inherent to the conceptions employed, but in what is being pointed to with those conceptions. Of course, this does not mean that the concepts used are unimportant, for in their attempt to direct the intellect toward the realization (in the dual sense of manifestation-sive-apprehension) of a transcendental reality, they can certainly be judged on their effectiveness to do so.
III
Dianoetic and Amanoetic Intellecction

Any metaphysic built upon a critical realism is faced with the problem of explaining how the attainment of things in themselves is also, at least potentially, the attainment of the knowledge of ultimate Reality.

We are speaking here of two different levels of knowing arising out of the same cognitive source. We must determine how it is that, in the words of Maritain, "there can be two complementary knowledges of one and the same reality . . . how [it is that] metaphysical knowledge can and should rise above the Philosophy of Nature."40 Or, as expressed by Nishitani, how it is that the field of sūnyatā "is none other than the place where all natural phenomena emerge presenting themselves as they actually are."41

For the most part, we have been speaking hereto of the ability of the intellect to attain the actual existence of things in themselves (although not directly, but through its grasp of the intelligible structure of transobjective subjects). This sort of knowledge is referred to by Maritain as dianoetic

intellection. At times, however, we have also taken cognizance of the claim by both philosophers that the knowledge of things does not disclose only their own existence as autonomous beings, but also it attains (at least potentially) the knowledge of a "field of possibility," a ground of existence, that is ontologically superior to and, therefore, even "more real" than these myriad things in existence.

How is it that the objects of cognition attained by the intellect in the act of knowing are also the gateway to a transcendental field which is the ground of all existence?

Nishitani comments as follows:

Even the very tiniest thing, to the extent that it "is," displays in its act of being the whole web of circuminsessional interpenetration that links all things together. In its being, we might say, the world "worlds."  

Maritain agrees with Nishitani that it is in our attainment of the knowledge of existence, of even the...

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42 Although our interest here is only the distinction between the object of dianoetic intellection and that of knowledge by analogy (ananoetic intellection), Maritain provides a discussion on a third level of knowing, perinoetic intellection, which does not bear upon essences or transcendental objects of thought, but on natures which are inferior to our power of intellection; are so immersed in materiality that they are opaque to our vision. See his discussion of the three levels of knowing in Degrees of Knowledge, pp. 202-244.

43 Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, p. 150.
most common, most insignificant of things, that the most sublime of mysteries is to be found:

Metaphysics, the supreme human science, possesses a character in common with the Gospels. What is most precious and most divine is hidden under what seems most commonplace. . . . For the little word "is," the commonest of all words, used every moment everywhere, offers though concealed and well concealed, the mystery of being as such.  

Both philosophers agree, then, that it is the existence of things (expressed by the predicate is) which presents to the intellect two possible levels of knowing. Dianoetic intellection (or discursive reasoning), while it does attain a real knowledge of things, does not find anything particularly profound in the observation that

Every morning the sun ascends in the east, every night the moon descends in the west. Clouds retreat, the mountain bones are bared, rain passes, the surrounding hills are low.  

But this is only because the discursive intellect ends with the grasp of things as discrete essences; it does not pass on to attain the full reality expressed by their being. As we have noted, for Nishitani, the discursive intellect remains bound to the standpoint of its own subjectivity as ego and, therefore, sees such events as only isolated phenomena, having "meaning" only

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44 Maritain, Preface to Metaphysics, p. 89.

45 Eihei koroku, Book I, translation taken from Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, p. 188.
in their relationship to its own conditions. Maritain likewise has asserted that the simple grasp of essence only discloses the "what" of existence; it is impotent to disclose the "why."

Yet, there is another way of seeing these same events. This vision does not stop short at the essence of things but penetrates to the source from which they are constituted. As Maritain puts it,

... there is a third area of intelligibility which makes us pass beyond the sensible without giving up the order to existence, and so it introduces us into the more real than the sensible real, or into what exceeds the very reality of the latter. This is the area of the trans-sensible or of metaphysics, which follows immediately the area of the sensible real.46

This vision does not abstract from existence, rather it penetrates the same object that is attained in dianoetic intellection, but in a manner that allows the thing to advance forward with its own message of a trans-sensible field. This transcendental realm can never be known in the manner that is proper to the discursive intellect. It cannot be penetrated by dianoetic intellection. The mind can attain a knowledge of it (and this is by no means common), but only through a knowledge by analogy, what Maritain refers to as amanoetic intellection.47

47 Maritain, Degrees of Knowledge, pp. 218-226.
Let us see how each of these two philosophers understands this process of knowing by analogy and how, even though their use of terminology is different, their mutual agreement on certain points provides a strong basis for dialogue.

To begin with, even though both men use different terminology to express this point, we can recognize that they both rely upon the real distinction between essence and existence, while also admitting that existence is never, can be never, disengaged entirely from the notion of essence.

In the case of Maritain, he understands that to be able to affirm that "I exist" and "that tree exists" and "those stars exist," it must be possible for the intellect to attain simultaneously not only the essence of the thing perceived but also a realm of intelligibility, distinct from that essence, designated by the common attribute of being in existence.\footnote{Maritain, \textit{Existence and the Existent}, pp. 22-35.} Existence, that which has been ascribed equally to each individual essence, has been so in a manner that is equal by proportion to all, but which is not derived from their essential determinations. Existence does not posit or abstract from a community of essence; quite the opposite. Existence is what holds these diverse natures together \textit{in spite} of essential differences. If not,
then to say that "I exist" and "that tree exists" and "those stars exist" would not inherently contain the notion of a world. Existence would then be attributed without proper proportionality and the collection of things in existence could only be a hopeless jumble, a chaotic conflict. In fact, the term in existence then would signify nothing. The recognition that what exists is separable from the fact that it exists (or, that what exists, exists), contains the recognition that existence is distinct from essence and precedes it, not necessarily by time, but certainly by nature.

On the other hand, Maritain does not make existence itself an object of direct perception:

...this concept of existence, of to exist (esse) is not and cannot be cut off from the absolutely primary concept of being (ens, that—which is, that—which exists, that whose act is to exist)... The concept of existence cannot be visualized completely apart, detached, isolated, separated from that of being; and it is in that concept of being and with that concept of being that it is at first conceived.48

Although the intellect attains the knowledge of existence as pure act, separate from the essences that have their subsistence from it, it only does so through (by means of) the being of objects of everyday cognition. This point will have relevance for our later

inquiry into the possible charge that Buddhist thought is implicitly pantheistic.

We can see that Nishitani also relies (implicitly) upon the distinction of essence and existence within being. The first aspect we are considering, that what things are is distinct from the act by which they are, is expressed in the following passage taken from Nishitani's discussion of the significance of the existential encounter with nihility. The point he is attempting to make is that the ground of existence for things, exposed by their coming to be and passing away, is transcendental to their individual essences. In other words, since essences have their being from an elemental field that is both the source of their individuality and transcendental to that individuality, then their essence is subsumed within the first Act of existing:

..."directly beneath the Dasein of man, the real Form of his existence rises to self-awareness at one with the real Form of all other things in the world. There the essence of human being-in-the-world is revealed as a being-in-the-world in this sort of all-encompassing infinity (infinite finitude) and thence in its own selfness as well.

For this reason, at the outer limits of human existence, the essence of human existence is no longer merely "human." It belongs to the class of all sentient beings in the sense that it embraces every other form of existence. Freed of the determinations of the human, it is, as it were, a naked being in the world as itself. It is a sheer being-in-the-world in its straightforward sense,
existentially more essential than being in the
world as man.50

In this manner having established the distinction
between being as existence and being as essence,
Nishitani, like Maritain, then goes on to deny that the
act of existence can be made the object of a perfect
abstraction. We do not perceive, cannot perceive,
existence per se. We come to know it, certainly, but
only because it is manifest in the encounter with things
as they are. We do not turn away from the world, away
from essential form in order to arrive at the knowledge
of the first act of existence. We can only grasp
existence stripped of essential determinations when we
grasp things in their true "suchness," their "original
face:"

This sheer being-in-the-world, rid of all
determinations does not of itself represent a
transcendancy from the world. Nor is it a
departure from the "three worlds." On the
contrary, it reveals the ultimate form of
being in the world and the essential form of
the existence of all things that have their
being in the world. The essential form is, as
noted above, interminable finitude, birth-and-
death as "transmigration." It signals an
advance to the final frontier on the field of
sheer being-in-the-world at which man
surpasses the determinations of the human. It
is man's collision with the essential barrier
of his own Dasein. This is the so-called
brink of despair, and yet also the ultimate
form of man's being in the world.51

50 Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, p. 175.

51 Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, p. 176.
We can see in the above quotation that Nishitani uses the terms *essence* and *form* in a much different manner than does Maritain. Whereas for Maritain, essence denotes what a thing is, as distinct from the fact that it is, Nishitani uses the term *essential form*, to designate the ontologically prior Act of existing in which particular being is subsumed. The reason this divergence in terminology occurs is that Nishitani’s statements are attempting to reflect the “more real” reality of this original field. As in the consciousness of mystical experience, where the entire reality of the world is seen as an expression of the presence of the Supreme Reality, so also Nishitani’s use of the term *essential* here is an acknowledgement that the truth of being is not to be found in particular created being, but in the indeterminate source of all being. Because existence is not immanent to the essence of things, the tiny word *is*, when applied to an essential nature, points away from the individual being of that thing to a transcendental field that is the reality of that thing even more so than it is in itself. The full reality of created existence becomes disclosed only when the intellect attains the knowledge of that primary act of existence in which essence is subsumed.

This truth is the understanding that is implicit to Nishitani’s repeated assertions that the “self is non-
self." The "suchness" or self of a thing does not reside in its self but in a field transcendental to it and which is, therefore, not the self (as essence):

In bearing witness to this solitary one laid bare, each and every phenomena is by far more itself than it is on its own homeground. We can say that in the beginning where the world worlds, the world is more truly itself than it is in the world itself. That "all dharmas advance forward and practice and confirm the self" means that all dharmas return to the point where they are far more able to be "truth" than when they are in and by themselves, to the absolute truth, to what is unveiled in its full grandeur, solitary amidst the myriad of things.52

Using the same terms that Maritain uses for purely metaphysical analysis to elucidate the logic of apophatic wisdom, Nishitani treads a ground that is confusing to Westerners who incorporate a clear distinction between cataphatic and apophatic levels of discourse into their own conceptions. This is also why it is possible to object to the use of the term metaphysics for describing Nishitani's philosophy of absolute nothingness. Certainly, in comparison to the distinctly Western thought of Maritain, that term can be applied only in an equivocal manner. While admitting as much, however, we should recognize also that Nishitani's statements do contain virtually a metaphysic, properly so-called. It should be apparent that the intent of his statements, quoted above, is to assert that being-

52 Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, p. 199.
in-the-world as human is secondary (by nature) to a sheer being-as-existence, that the ontological ground of being human is pure existence as it is shared among all things of the world. This assertion belongs to the science of metaphysics.

That assertion, moreover, is precisely what Maritain intended to convey with his discussion on being as a transcendental.* Unlike Nishitani, who restricts being (at least when he is speaking of the Western doctrine of being) to the notion of essence, Maritain understands that the apprehension of being (the first and fundamental object attained by the intellect in the act of knowing; "that which has existence or can have existence") is simultaneously the basis for two complementary knowledges. One path attains the intelligibility of the thing existing in itself and is called dianoetic intellection. The other penetrates the fact that this thing is in existence and thereby arrives (at least implicitly as in the case of common sense) through a knowledge by analogy of existence as pure act, stripped of any particular determinations. The encounter with being is a direct encounter with something that is simultaneously one and many. "From the first instant in which it is grasped by the mind in a subject, it bears within itself the possibility of being realized according to its proper significance.
(formaliter, the scholastics would say) in subjects which by their essence differ totally and absolutely from that one." Maritain, Degrees of Knowledge, p. 214.

Individual things and the unity of the world, therefore, for Maritain, do not exist as thesis and antithesis — just the opposite. He recognizes that the same concept (being) by which the mind grasps individual existence is that by which it grasps the unity of the world.

A similar understanding is expressed by Nishitani when he says that the absolute autonomy of a subject is inconceivable outside of its absolute relativity to all others. He states, that "[t]he absolute uniqueness of a thing means ... that it is situated in the absolute center of all other things." Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, p. 147.

He means by this statement that because no other being can be substituted for the uniqueness of any other existent, there is, in a certain sense, an affirmation of the unique being of this thing by all others. All things are subordinate to it at the same time that it is subordinate to all others. The fact that "this thing here is what it is" may, at first, appear to be a meaningless tautology, but, in fact, it points to the irreducible mystery of
existence. When a thing remains what it is, it is also supporting the being of all others by not exceeding its own boundaries. By remaining "this" it is simultaneously constituting the possibility of "that" in the very act by which it posits its own being.

Nishitani can say thereby that the nature of individual existence is not simply being as essence, but non-being (here referring to its subordination to all others) as well. He refers to this absolute autonomy/absolute subordination of all things as their circuminsessional relationship. The being of every thing is on the homeground of the being of all others.

If that were not the case,

there would in truth be no way for us to explain the fact that all things "are" in the "world". Only on the field of śūnyatā, where the being is seen as being-sive-nothingness, nothingness-sive-being, is it possible for each to be itself with every other, and so, too, for each not to be itself with every other.

\[55\] Maritain points to the same truth when he says that the principle of identity "is no tautology, it implies an entire metaphysic" (Preface to Metaphysics, p. 93).

\[56\] We must not construe this non-being as equal to a simple negation or void (which signifies nothing at all), but as pointing to the same truth that Maritain intends when he says that, "From the moment that there are diverse things, no one thing suffices unto itself to exist; otherwise it would be the all; it is necessary, therefore, that it depend on another without which it would not be, and in which it finds its own sufficiency" (Degrees of Knowledge, p. 223).

\[57\] Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, p. 150.
The field of śūnyatā is the "field of force" whereby this circuminsessional relationship becomes possible, where each and every thing is and where they are also part of a world. This force which "makes the world and lets it be a world," is the primary ground, the ultimate Real of existence -- that which gives existence to all things and is more real, more fundamental by a priority of nature than that which we grasp as essence through dianoetic intellection.\footnote{Nishitani, \textit{Religion and Nothingness}, p. 150.}

What we need to see here is that, although these philosophers are not using the same terminology, they are both speaking of a knowledge of existence through its expression in existents. That is, the highest knowledge attainable by the natural intellect is attained when objects of ordinary cognition are not viewed in themselves, but as analogates of the act of existing stripped of any particular determinations. They are pointing to a knowledge that is rooted in sensible things, but a knowledge which attains that which is transcendental to such things and in which such things are entirely subsumed. This type of knowledge is what Maritain intends to signify by the term \textit{dianoetic intellection}.

Just as the intuition of being reveals an object of thought that is "essentially superuniversal or
analogous," applying to all things by an "analogy of proper proportionality\(^{59}\) (thus revealing being-in-itself, Subsistent Being itself, independent of any particular determination), so also the absolute autonomy/absolute submission of all things, subject to the law of dependent origination, points to "a field" where the being of any one thing is transcended and subsumed in the One at the centre.

\[ \text{IV} \]

\textit{Subsistent Being Itself/Śūnyatā}

Can we conclude, then, that the common epistemology of Maritain and Nishitani brings us to the same object? Are "Subsistent Being itself" and "the field of śūnyatā" two terms for the same transcendent Reality, despite the personal opinions of Maritain and Nishitani?

It appears that the answer to that question must be yes and no. On the one hand, it is not possible to simply equate those two terms unless we ignore the distinction between the levels of knowing upon which both are justified. For reasons already discussed,\(^{59}\)

\(^{59}\) This term, "analogy of proper proportionality," means that although the essence of the being, man, is not independent of his existence, and likewise with the essence of the being, stone; nevertheless, the term \textit{being} is applied to these essential natures in a manner that is equal or properly proportionate (a man is not more or less \textit{being} a stone); but in a strictly analogous manner, \textit{being}, man, is essentially different from the \textit{being}, stone, in every thing that makes it to be \textit{what} it is (there is no communality of essence).
nearly, the different circumstances giving rise to the relationship of revealed wisdom to philosophic wisdom in the traditions of Mahāyāna and Thomism, we can reject any uncritical equations between these terms. These terms are not convertibles, nor are they opposed to each other.

On the other hand, we can admit that these terms do point to the same reality, albeit from different perspectives. In order to further demonstrate this, a possible point of confusion remains to be clarified. This potential for confusion lies in the manner in which these philosophers seem to differ in their speaking of this Reality in-itself, independent of its manifestation in things. It is the ever-present problem in the Christian encounter with Buddhism that, from the perspective of the absolute distinction between the world and God (who is Subsistent Being itself, revealed in the perfection of person), Buddhism appears to be pantheistic.60 If we take Nishitani's doctrinal statements on their own terms, however, I think such an accusation cannot be demonstrated and that there is no

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60 Maritain's understanding of pantheism is that, "[f]or a system to be pantheistic, it need not explicitly identify God and creatures (very few pantheists fulfill this condition). It is sufficient that its teachings are logically irreconcilable with an absolute distinction between God and creatures" (Introduction to Philosophy, p. 8).
reason not to assume that these systems point to the same encounter with the Real.

We can avoid such a misunderstanding by inquiring into how each of these philosophers understand the reciprocal nature of the absolute transcendence/absolute immanence of the source of existence to the world. We can begin by recognizing that both Maritain and Nishitani saw the absolute transcendence of the ground of existence and its absolute immanence to the world as two sides of the same coin. Because the nature of things in existence is not sufficient, as such, to account for either themselves or their inclusion in a world, it was seen that their nature was thus a "pointing toward" another realm of existence. The nature of things points away from every aspect of particularized being to that which transcends those limitations. On the other hand, since these things have their being entirely from this transcendental source, we can also say that to encounter the reality of their existence is to encounter the manifestation of this original source. The source of the world is to be found exactly in the same location where things emerge and pass away, but in a manner that testifies to its being untouched by such existence. At the heart of mutable existence lies an abiding immutability.
The instances where Nishitani and Maritain refer to
this transcendental source, independent from the things
that manifest it, could be multiplied many times over
the number cited thus far. But there is a fundamental
difference between them in the manner in which they
speak of this source. Whereas Maritain is quite
comfortable to speak of this source in-itself, separate
from even the concept of a created world (suggested by
his term *Subsistent Being itself*), Nishitani
consistently seeks to include the world in his
conceptions of this source.

It is true that Nishitani does speak of a "force"
that makes the world to be what it is:

Now the circuminsessional system itself,
whereby each thing in its being enters into
the home-ground of every other thing, is not
itself and yet precisely as such (namely as
located on the field of sūnyatā) never ceases
to be itself, is nothing other than the force
that links all things together into one. It
is the very force that makes the world and
lets it be a world.  

But at the same time, Nishitani does not intend for us
to conceive of this force as "somewhere other" than the
world. The field of absolute nothingness, he says, is
not a "world apart." It is "at one with the world of

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primary fact. \textsuperscript{62} It is "a force which, since ancient times, has gone by the name of 'nature'." \textsuperscript{63}

Certainly, Maritain does not intend the term \textit{Subsistent Being itself} to be consubstantial with what, "since ancient times, has gone by the name of nature." Yet, that equation by Nishitani is not intended to establish the sort of relationship between the world and its source of existence that Maritain terms "pantheism" either. It is simply a corrective for the sort of understanding of transcendence that would look for it outside of an existential encounter with the world, thereby effectively denying that the world is entirely subsumed within this source.

We still might ask, though, whether Buddhist thought, as presented by Nishitani, is not at least implicitly pantheistic. Since pantheism is the (at least implicit) denial of the absolute distinction between God and creatures, it would seem that a metaphysic that equates the force that makes the world to be with the fact of the world itself certainly is not comparable to the term \textit{Subsistent Being itself}, the grasp by the natural intellect of the transcendent God. But before succumbing to such an interpretation, there

\textsuperscript{62} Nishitani, \textit{Religion and Nothingness}, p. 127.

\textsuperscript{63} Nishitani, \textit{Religion and Nothingness}, p. 149.
is another possible and more reasonable solution for reconciling these two systems.

To begin with, we must recognize that Thomism itself affirms the immanence of God as First Cause to the secondary causation of the creature. Maritain agreed that the act by which the creature moves (or moves itself) is not immanent to that creature, but to God alone as First Act.64 As Maritain says: "Do we not know, against the Occasionalists, that the transcendent First Cause is more really and more perfectly cause because it itself confers on the created things, which are nothing over against, the power themselves also to cause?"65

Therefore, if our sight was attuned to the real reality of every fibril of being, we would see God in the bare facts of the world. This is the same meaning we can perceive in the assertion by Nishitani:

For us, this field of emptiness is something we are aware of as an absolute near side. It opens up more to the near side than we, in our ordinary consciousness, take our own self to be. It opens up, so to speak, still closer to us than what we ordinarily think of ourselves. In other words, by turning from what we ordinarily call "self" to the field of sūnyatā, we become truly ourselves.66

64 Maritain, Approaches to God, p. 23.


66 Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, p. 151.
The insistence by Nishitani that the field of sūnyatā is not to be considered a "world apart" from the world of primary fact is not a refusal, on the level of everyday distinctions, to distinguish between the realm of samsāric existence and the "yonder shore" of nirvāṇa. It is a refusal from the higher perspectives of either metaphysical intuition or mystical vision to exclude the world from the realm of nirvāṇa. This can be seen as analogous to the Christian perspective that acknowledges that one's eternal relationship to the transcendent God is forged in terms of one's relationship to the misery and suffering of the world. The significance of Nishitani's refusal to consider the field of sūnyatā as somewhere "other" than the world is rooted in the soteriological realization that it is craving and desire (or sin) that places barriers between existence on earth and the existence of the Buddha. Nirvāṇa becomes truly possible only when one does not cling to it as nirvāṇa, because to cling to it as "other" means that one has surreptitiously protected the ontological independence of their self-conscious ego from the demands of the absolute immanence of the field of sūnyatā.

Actually, Nishitani is not opposed to the understanding of this field of sūnyatā as an "absolute transcendence of being." What he is opposed to is

67 Matthew 25:31-46.
understanding this being solely from the standpoint of
essence, which would only serve to "distance" the
transcendent Other from the world of fact, leaving the
world separate from the realm of śūnyatā and the self as
ego intact:

. . . emptiness can well be described as "outside" of and absolutely "other" then the
standpoint shackled to being, provided we
avoid the misconception that emptiness is some
"thing" distinct from being and subsisting
"outside" of it.68

These two aspects, the absolute transcendance and
the absolute immanence of the source of existence, bring
the intellect before a reality that is incomprehensible
to it. It is the One at the centre of the many. It is
the source of the uniqueness of being in the many. It
contains within its own act of existence every
particular determination of being expressed in the
infinite multitude; and yet, in itself, it is unbounded
by any and every limitation of being.

As Nishitani has said, the elemental source of our
being human "is a being that has rid itself of all form
. . . At the ground of our being human lies a level
of pure being beyond any determination to the human."69
As Maritain also argues:

. . . it is not the act of existing of a thing
which has' existence, but the very act of

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68 Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, p. 97.
69 Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, p. 248.
existing itself, subsisting through itself. Thus we are necessarily led to the principle which no concept can circumscribe—Being in pure act, from which comes every being; Thought in pure act from which comes every thought; Self in pure act from which comes every self.\textsuperscript{70}

The direct perception of existence brings Maritain and Nishitani along different roads over the same terrain to the same altar for the intellect. Incapable of grasping adequately the nature of the source of its own being, the intellect approaches it in darkness, realizing only that its own being is utterly contingent upon it, that its own being is revealed as a being-with-nothingness. From an infinite distance the intellect knows that, in the words of Nishitani:

Something "immortal" or rather, in Buddhistic terminology, something which is "unborn as well as imperishable"—something which lies beyond the duality of life and death, which is increate and immortal—stands there self-exposed. Everything that subsists has its subsistence from the first only through having been taken into this "unborn as well as imperishable," only through having been delivered thereto, preserved there, and saved from dissolution into nothing.\textsuperscript{71}

\textsuperscript{70} Maritain, \textit{Approaches to God}, pp. 64-65.

\textsuperscript{71} Nishitani, "Science and Zen," p. 93.
The truths of faith, since they are revealed by God, are in themselves absolute and perfect. However, they are always imperfectly grasped by believers, . . . ¹

— *Humanae Personae Dignitatem*

**CHAPTER 5**

**CONCLUSION**

**I**

**Summary**

Jacques Maritain and Keiji Nishitani both rejected the philosophical tradition represented by the other. This study began with the recognition of their mutual criticisms. But in examining their thought, it was shown that their criticisms were based partly upon mistaken perceptions and partly upon a lack of appreciation for the subtleties of the other tradition. The possibility for true dialogical encounter between the thought of these two philosophers, accordingly, was not seen as being seriously impeded by those personal opinions expressed.

In order to lay the foundation for dialogue, this study isolated four themes that are of vital concern to both traditions and which are expressed in a comparable manner. These four areas of convergence are: 1) the proper epistemological starting point, 2) intentionality in the act of knowing, 3) levels of knowing proceeding from the same object of cognition, and 4) the transcendence/immanence of the ultimate source of existence. Having done this, it is now possible to see that these two traditions are parallel in their analysis of knowledge and existence, although they are divergent in their manner of using philosophical language. This divergence is rooted in the contingencies of history and resulted in the use of philosophy by Maritain purely for reflection as opposed to Nishitani's tendency to subordinate the language of philosophy to the practical demands of Zen experience. This divergence, although real, is not as divisive as some recent studies have suggested.

Reviewing the aforementioned themes of convergence, we find a basis for true and fruitful dialogue between Mahāyāna philosophy and Thomist metaphysics. Regarding the problem of proper epistemological starting point, it is evident that both traditions begin with a fundamental decision to accept the validity of realism, albeit a realism tempered by an awareness of levels of existence
giving rise to a formal distinction between things in-themselves and things as objects for the mind (critical realism). Both Maritain and Nishitani accept the notion that the existence of a thing in-itself (as a transobjective subject) is not strictly identifiable with the existence of that same subject as it is presented as intelligible form. Both deny, however, that these two levels of existence represent a radical distinction between thing and object. Neither Maritain nor Nishitani accept the validity of the idealist critique. Their mutual conviction is that the act whereby the intelligibility of a thing is apprehended by the intellect is also the act of attaining actual existence through eidetic form. The thing as object is not something other than the thing in-itself, it belongs to it as its own expression.

The second point of agreement in epistemology is their shared recognition of the importance of intentionality in the knowing subject. Not only is it recognized by both philosophers that the act of knowing involves two levels of existence for the thing known, but two levels of existence for the knowing subject as well. They recognize that there is a certain passivity on the part of the knower, resulting in the knower becoming what he knows, precisely as other. For Nishitani and Maritain knowing is not, therefore, so
much what the intellect does, as it is that by which the intellect has existence. Knowing is grounded in existence, both in terms of its real relationship to external things and also because there is an ontological gain in the act of knowing. This mutual understanding is extremely important when dialogue concerns the possibility of knowing ultimate reality.

The third area of convergence between the thought of these two philosophers is the recognition that things in existence present two realms of intelligibility to the intellect. These two realms, forming the basis for dianoetic and anaonoetic intellection, are grounded in the distinction between essence and existence. Both men agree that the grasp of what a thing is is only a partial attainment of its reality. There is another aspect, signified by some form of the verb is, which proceeds from another realm of intelligibility and completes the knowledge of being. This aspect, furthermore, is recognized by Maritain and Nishitani as the act of existence giving rise simultaneously to the being of individual subjects and the unity of the world. Although existence per se is never conceived of independently from the notion of essence, and is only known by analogy, it is claimed by both philosophers that the act of things existing points beyond their being to a more fundamental source.
This source is called "Subsistent Being itself" by Maritain and the "field of śūnyatā" by Nishitani. The fourth point of agreement between these two philosophers is their characterization of the relationship of this primal source to the world. They both understand that this source is simultaneously transcendent and immanent to the world. It is immanent because every fibril of being rests upon it as first Cause. For that very reason, however, it is also transcendental to the world; it precedes the world by a primacy of nature. Whereas all things of the world have existence, this transcendental source is existence, the act of existing in-itself, pure being, immutable and without limitation. It is the centre of all existence continually giving birth to the things of the world, but is never, thereby, reduced to form itself. Maritain and Nishitani argue that we can never fully conceive the reality of this One at the centre, yet we approach an understanding of it when we do not conceive of its transcendence and immanence as antimonies, but affirm the resolution of those aspects in the pure act of existence.

II
Implications

This study has provided the basis for understanding the comparability between the Thomistic concept of Subsistent Being itself and the Mahāyāna doctrine of
śūnyatā. These terms emerge out of traditions that converge at key points, but all the while remain distinctive in their manner of conceptualizing.

In the last area of convergence identified above, it was noted that neither philosopher imagined that the intellect was capable of fully conceiving what was signified by the transcendence/immanence of the primal source of all being. Both men recognize that the highest limits of discursive reasoning leads to the awareness that the supreme Object of thought is known more perfectly when it is known as unknown. This means that both philosophic traditions call for a profound cognitive leap into the realm of mystical experience in order to experience directly what is grasped imperfectly through the mediation of concepts. We can see, then, that the investigation of dialogue between philosophical traditions urges us by its own dynamic to a dialogue rooted in theology.

While this study makes no pretensions of establishing the groundwork for that higher dialogue, it seems possible to hold expectations for success in theological dialogue, based upon the findings of this study. Since all truth (philosophical, theological or otherwise) has its origin in Divine Truth (according to Maritain) or Dharma (according to Nishitani), the presupposition of the unity of all knowledge leads to
positive expectations. Having found agreement between philosophical wisdom in these two divergent traditions we can assume, at least tentatively, that there is agreement between the theological traditions that complement them.

This assumption is complicated by the fact that it is not immediately evident as to how certain theological doctrines making absolute claims can be reconciled without effectively emptying them of content. But there always is potential for dialogue between diverse religious traditions when we take seriously the distinction between the content of dogma and its expression. We can imagine, then, some sort of principle that relates one religion to another without demanding that either one necessarily give up its absolute status. Dialogue between them becomes, not so much the process whereby one tradition is influenced (or converted) by the other, but rather the means whereby Reality is revealed in its manifold expressions.

In this spirit, this comparative study of Nishitani and Maritain, although written from a Christian perspective, hopefully will be of use to Buddhists in their path toward understanding Reality. This comparison, moreover, responds also to the injunction of *Nostra Aetate* to "acknowledge, preserve and encourage" the truths of other religions and also to proclaim
"Christ who is the way, the truth and the life (Jn. 1:6) . . . , in whom God reconciled all things to himself (2 Cor. 5:18-19), [and] men find the fulness of their religious life."
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