

Philosophy and Religion

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Thinking about god, we disobey god
Fernando Pessoa

The theme that gathers us today — philosophy and religion — already says a lot and yet too little. It says a lot because, pronouncing the connective «and», it affirms that something joins and disjoins philosophy and religion, evoking a long tradition of discussions about this theme.¹ But it says little because it says nothing about what makes us think *today* about the relationship between philosophy and religion.

Instead of trying to trace a history of ideas and positions about this relationship, I would like to propose a reflective *disposition*, that should be called a disposition of the fugue, in the very musical sense of «searching» and «escaping», *ricercare e fuga*. Religion and philosophy will be here treated as theme and counter-theme, as subject and counter-subject in a fugue.²

In the last years, it has been common to talk about the return of the religious and the turn to

religion.³ To return is only possible when something or someone has once left a place. To return means also that time has passed and that what returns cannot be the same. In every discourse about the returns and the turns is implicit an interpretation of time and history. To talk about a return of the religious or about a turn to religion implies assuming a construction of the history of philosophy and of the history of religions guided by a philosophy of religion. But talking like this we take the risk of neglecting the question about the position assumed by philosophy. In other words: we assume implicitly that philosophy is the correct place to talk and think religion and the religious. But which is this philosophical position and how can we legitimate its correctness? Is our question here only the one of thinking religion or is it even the one of how religion can think philosophy, that is, thinking as such? Is philosophy, that is, a certain way of thinking developed by Western culture under the sign of metaphysics, the only way to think?

The discourse about the return and turn of and to religion is anchored in the modern world. The modern world can be defined as the world in which philosophy loses its place to science. According to the modern primacy of science, religion is to philosophy what philosophy is to science. This mean (proportion) operates out from an idea of time and from an ideal of knowledge. According to this mean (proportion), time is said to be progression and progress

¹ The theme «Philosophy and Religion» is dictionaryed. See William L. Reese, *Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion*. Humanity Press, Atlantic Highlands N.J. 1996. See also the account of the great number of theses on this subject made by Irene Butt and Monika Eichler in *Bibliographie Philosophie und Religion*. Saur Verlag, München 1992.

² The technical terms used to describe the structure of a fugue are subject and counter-subject and not theme and counter-theme. Because this lecture will discuss the concept of subject in modernity I preferred to use «theme» and «counter-theme» in order to make my discussion more easily understood.

³ See Gianni Vattimo, «La trace de la trace», in *La Religion*. Edition du Seuil, Paris, 1996, and Hent de Vries, *Philosophy and the Turn to Religion*. John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 1999.

— in such a way that it assumes that at the beginning was religion, then philosophy and at last, that is, now, there is science; and knowledge is said to be the power of objectifying everything in a cognition. The modern world is such that not only religion but also philosophy in a sense is shown as figures of a past. That is why we have become such antiquarians when doing philosophy today. It means that, in the age of modern science, not only religion but also philosophy is out of place and in the need of justifications. If we can only talk about returns and turns when something is out of place, then philosophy, put out from its place by science, can also be discussed in terms of turns and returns. To talk about a return of and to religion could then also imply to talk about a return of and to philosophy. To a world unidimensionalized by the technical ideal of a scientific knowledge, what Heidegger conceptualized as *Gestell*, both religion and philosophy and the relation between both become suspicious. Philosophy and religion are always under suspicion because it seems that they still insist on the meaning of searching for a meaning for human life.

The modern world has left behind every explanation of the world that presupposes a divine and transcendental cause, that is, a cause that should be found outside the world. If the question about the ultimate meaning of human life and about the reality of things can only be answered in terms of a transcendent principle, modern world has showed that there is no meaning in asking about ultimate meanings. The technical-scientific rationality that structures the modern world lives out from a central paradox. Defined as a world that gravitates around the autonomy and supremacy of human reason, the modern world is, at the same time, the world that became indifferent to the fact of the human. The world that only considers things out from the point of view of the human is, at the same time, the world that lost from its view the human in its concrete existentiality.

According to a modern conception, the human is self-consciousness, the untiring transformations of things into facts for a system of consciousness, a system constituted by reason, intuition and feeling. But in its existential fact, the human is, however, the impossibility of

transforming itself into a fact for the system of consciousness. This paradox has been exposed with deep intensity and under multiple angles by, for instance, Schelling, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Dostoevski, Freud, Marx and Heidegger, that is, at the turn to the century of the two world wars. This paradox can be described as the paradox of the construction of subjectivity. The last short story written by Kafka has the title «The Construction», «*Der Bau*». Here we can find a penetrating because crystalline image of this paradox. In its paradoxical construction, the individual ego of consciousness appears in the untiring work of digging a fortress under the ground, completely isolated from every outside where the ego could be completely closed inside itself. The paradox here described is that the individual ego of modern consciousness does not accept the world as it is at the same time that it cannot leave this world. The result of this paradox is that the individual ego of modern consciousness means a world that builds a world by means of excluding the world as world.

In the paradox of the construction of a world that can neither be accepted nor left behind, Kafka shows that the powerful impotence of consciousness in the matter of making itself objective for itself appears when consciousness exposes the impotent power of its omni-objectivation. The paradox in this construction says that the limit of modern rationality is to be found right in the very rationalization of all limits and differences. Taking as a starting point the paradox of the construction of subjectivity, I would like to assume here not really a position but rather a disposition that is quite distinct from the major part of the discourses about the return and turn of and to religion.

Vattimo proposes the theme of a return of the religious out from the presupposition that the religious returns when the big systems disestablish and the metaphysics of grounds disappears. He means that from the point of view of common consciousness, religion returns because people still cannot deal with the lack of systems and fundamentals; from the point of view of the enlightened consciousness, the return of the religious confirms the impossibility of great systems and the disappearing of a rhetoric of foundations (and grounds). As far as I can see, this

assumption has two big problems. On the one hand, the problem of admitting a distinction between a common consciousness and a more enlightened or proper consciousness. The problem lies in the fact that it assumes that understanding is a progression from not-knowing to knowing; on the other hand, it seems to be a mistake to identify our hermeneutical situation as the one in which systems are dissolved and foundations disappear. I think that this so called return of and to religion shows on the contrary the fundamentalism of several post-metaphysics of the non-foundation and that quite far from dissolving the idea of systems we assist a continuous generation of mini-systems, in an unfinished process. Perhaps the image of a return and turn of and to religion is only an illusion. My disposition is that religion can neither return nor turn because it has no place to stay and therefore to leave. My disposition is the one that, in the lack of place for religion that characterizes the modern world, we can find the placeless place of religion. Reminding some verses of the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa, I would say that in the same way that «the mystery of things is that things have no mystery», also the place of religion is not to have a place. This disposition can even be expressed by means of affirmation. In the same way that the mystery of things is in everything, also religion is everywhere.

How should religion be nowhere as well as everywhere? How do we meet this thing called religion? Different theories and philosophies of religion define religion as the relationship between the human and the absolutely transcendent. What is presupposed is the relationship between two entities — the human and the divine. This presupposition implies therefore a metaphysics of essences and a theism of the divine. In most theories and philosophies of religion, these implications are not sufficiently discussed. The discussion privilege the problems about the modalities of this relationship out from the standpoint of these admitted opposed essences. Much has been said about the abandonment of the individual will to the will of god, about the vision of god, about the mystical union with god, about the intellectual intuition of the infinite in the finite, and so on. Those various positions develop the idea that religion is the relation

(*re-ligare*) between two orders — an order of the universe independent of man and an order of man that is dependent on the universe. Religion is presupposed in connection with an idea of order. To love god means thereby to love the world order created by god. God is mixed with a natural rational order of the universe. That is why when science is able to explain with such clarity the order of the universe a god is no longer necessary. But the question we have to ask is if god, if that which we maybe should name the sacred, is the same as a natural rational order of the universe. The question is if religion really has to do with a cosmological idea of the world and with an idea of order.⁴

But there is still a question beyond this historiographical strategy of approaching religion.

⁴ According with history of religions and specifically the history of Western religions, the identification of an idea of religion with an idea of order is generally asserted as a character of the Indo-European peoples and of their celestial religions. The best examples for it seem to be Greece and India (Upanishads). In the Greek horizon, Pythagoras and Plato seem to represent its most fully expression. But, at least in relation to Greece, this identification is more problematic than evident, above all when we remember that the Greek language had no word for what we call religion. Derrida remarked accurately that when we say religion we talk Latin and not Greek. The word religion can be said to be one of the questions that separate in an irreconcilable way, the Greek and the Latin worlds. Cicero defined the word *religio* opposing it to *superstitio*, seeding the religious semantics in the lexical key of separation, difference, distinction, election and even elegance. The absence of a Greek term for expressing the religious experience points out that the experience of the sacred is not defined essentially with the idea of order. The Greek language has the words *eusebeia* and *threskeia*, which lead us to the gesture of devotion, of wonder and veneration. They are words that grow in the soil of the care, they take care of the deaths, they take care of the mystery, and they take care of the unknown. These words do not send us directly to the difference or separation between two distinct orders. Plato affirms that the animal differs from man because it does not adore god, because it is not a *theosebés* (Protagoras, 322a 3-6, Laws, X, 902b5). And even the figure of the demiurge in the *Timaeus*, so present in the Western imaginary as the image of god as a god of the order, speaks rather of the beauty of the world than of

It is the question of how do we meet today this phenomenon called religion.

Today, in a world where the dominant orders have no need of the religious order, how do we meet religion? We meet religion today as *impurity*, to recall a crystalline expression of Paul Valéry. Religion meets us as a mix and combination of elements. It is «a mixture of history, of legends, of logic, of police, of poetry, of justice, of feeling, of the social and the personal».⁵ This impurity and mixture makes possible that religion reaches the most different people in the most different ways. Religion reaches us as orthodoxy of positions, as cultural and civilisatory history, as tension between the personal and the collective, as myth and symbol, as a past without future and a future that is already past, as control

the order of the world. Plato's demiurge does not create but realizes the most beautiful world as possible. When Plato defines the demiurge as the one who orders in a world the original disorder or chaos, he insists that he realizes the possible beauty. The demiurge order is in fact a taking care of chaos, preserving and obeying the *khôra*. This means that order comes from the beauty of the possible and not the other way around. That is why Plato defines the world as the life of totality and the totality of live (*talla zoa*). This means that both the aspect of life and the aspect of death are equally real. As the demiurge of the world, god is what appears both as life and as death. Plato's cosmological order emerges from *eusébeia*, from the devotive care of the world's beauty. That is why it is not very adequate to talk of a religion of Plato. (About the religion of Plato see P. E. More. *The Religion of Plato*. Princeton. 1928. Victor Goldschmidt, *La religion de Platon*. Paris, 1949. James K. Feibleman, *Religious Platonism: The Influence of Religion on Plato and the Influence of Plato on Religion*. London. 1959). Discussing the immediate identification between the phenomenon of religion and the idea of order and considering for instance the Greek testimony of other semantic keys, it is not very difficult to accept that the word religion brings an idea of religion that does not correspond to the religious experience.

⁵ Paul Valéry, *Oeuvres*. Vol 1. Bibliothèque de La Pléiade. Paris, 1980, p. 413. «ce qui me frappe le plus dans la religion c'est l'impureté. Mélange et plus que mélange d'histoire, des légendes, de logique, de police, de poésie, et de justice, et de sentiment, de social et de personnel ...»

and domination, as fanaticism and passivity, as conservatism and hope. Simone Weil, though not using the word impurity, understood the impurity of religion as «social imitation of faith» and affirmed, «in the present circumstances, to abandon the social imitation of faith is perhaps for faith a question of life and death».⁶ In these words, Simone Weil indicates the disposition which today seems to me necessary in order to face the relation between philosophy and religion. It is the disposition to understand that to abandon religion is a decisive question for faith, for the religious experience itself and not for the anti-religious or a-religious positions.

To abandon religion is to be considered a religious task, and not a laic one. It is a sacred task and not a profane one. In this passage of Simone Weil we meet the spirit of the Christian mystics, the spirit of a negative theology. My issue to discuss the theme philosophy and religion is to consider the necessity of thinking in the placeless place of the in-between philosophy and religion, in this uncomfortable place of the connective «and» where we are neither in philosophy nor in religion, being both and at the same time in philosophy and in religion. This uncomfortable placeless place of the in-between characterizes the positionless disposition of the negative theology in the mystical tradition. Even if the distinction between theology and mystics is not a religious distinction but a quite modern and philosophical, it can be said that from the point of view of contemporary philosophy, mystics has been talking in-between philosophy and theology, having been condemned by both sides. I propose the disposition of being for a while in this condemned place without place.

Out from this disposition, the task of thematizing philosophy and religion can be defined as the religious task of abandoning god, religion and hope. For the spirit of Christian mystics «thinking about god we disobey god»,⁷ to search god means to loose him and to loose means to find him, recalling a recurrent formulation in the

⁶ Simone Weil, *Attente de Dieu*. Edition du Vieux Colombier, Paris, 1957, p.152. «Dans les circonstances présentes, repousser l'imitation sociale est peut-être pour la foi une question de vie et de mort».

⁷ Fernando Pessoa, *O guardador de rebanhos*, VI.

Gospels of Luke, Matthews and John that became a central motivation for the late Schelling.⁸ In her spiritual auto-biography, Simone Weil also says that «dans toute ma vie je n'ai jamais, à aucun moment, cherché Dieu». Meister Eckhart prays to god to help him «to escape from god» because god, that is, the personal character of godhead (of the sacred) is nothing else than a social imitation of faith. The theme of «god is dead», which was pronounced by Hegel and deepened intensively by Nietzsche, insists again and again on the central theme of the Christian mystics: religious experience is the experience of such an intensive and radical abandonment that it includes even the abandonment of god itself.

The distinct mark of Eckhart's mystics is the distinction between god and godhead. The decisive difference between Nietzsche's «Gott ist tot» and Eckhart's distinction between god and godhead is that, for the mystics, it is not sufficient to bring transcendence into the realm of immanence. Abandon every hope, as Dante wrote at the door of the hell, does not mean for the mystics to revindicate an immanent god. The distinction made by Eckhart between god and godhead consists in abandoning the distinction between immanence and transcendence. If it can be argued that the mystical position is hyper-essentialist because it affirms god as what *is* beyond being, it is important to admit that this «is» ruins the metaphysics of essences. Meister Eckhart's sermon *Quasi stella matutina in medio nebulae* gives us an important testimony on this point. To abandon religion, god and hope means finally the religious task of abandoning the transcendence of immanence as well as the immanence of transcendence.

The difference between god and godhead can even be exposed as the difference between religion and religiosity (the sacred) and the difference between hope and the non-duality of life and death. In this sense, to abandon god, religion and hope is not the same as leaving the church, changing the cult and religion, or expulsing reli-

gion from this human world. To abandon god, religion and hope is a religious task not because so many atrocities have been committed in the name and sake of god, in the name and sake of religion and hope. Atrocities continue to be committed in the name of non-religion, non-god and non-hope. The sacred task of this tripple abandonment consists in discovering that the impurity of religion is at the same time the force of religiosity, the force of the sacred. Impurity has an extraordinary force because it shows that at the very place in which we suppose that religion should be pure, religiosity looses its place. In other words: *if religion cannot correspond to the experience of religiosity it is because religiosity is the very experience that no religion can correspond completely to religiosity*. Here we even meet a paradox: at the same time that religion is not religiosity, religiosity can be within religion.

The difference between religion and religiosity here discussed intends to signal that the religious experience is not an answer but an affirmation that can only be pronounced when the human becomes a *real* question to herself. That is why the abandonment of religion is the most religious task. That is why religion cannot be thought outside the religious.⁹ The abandonment of religion does not happen when the presence of the evil inflicts doubt about the power of god. Thus to credit to god the power of deciding the good and the evil means to accept as divine law a metaphysical, that is, philosophical (and not sacred) distinction between good and evil. To blame god or to look for god in order to cure and solve difficulties and sufferings of a life means to keep the philosophical issue of an individual-subjective order of consciousness. It means to stay prisoner of the paradox of the construction of subjectivity, described by Kafka, where religiosity can only meet us in the impurity of religion. Religious experience means, however, the discovery of the nothingness of the self. This is the heart of negative theology that guides the Christian mystical tradition. To abandon god, religion and hope defines the religious experience as the abandonment of subjectivity,

⁸ Lk. 17:33: «*hos ean zetese ten psychen autou peripoiésasthai apolései auten, hos d' an apolései auten, dsoogonesei auten*». Similar formulations in Lk. 9:24f., Mt. 10:39 and Jh. 12:25.

⁹ Eugenio Trias, «Penser la religion», in *La religion*, op.cit., p. 109.

not only of the individual human ego, but even of god. The abandonment of the subjectivity of god and of the individual can be called the beginning of the nothingness of the self.

The religious theme of the nothingness of the self touches the fundamental theme of modernity, the construction and deconstruction of subjectivity. Around the question of overcoming the point of view of the construction of subjectivity, philosophy and religion, strictly separated from each other by the presuppositions of modern scientific rationality, discover each other, however, in a modern «sacred community», to recall an expression of Schelling.¹⁰ The several attempts to appropriate the East by means of an occidentalization and to reappropriate the Western by means of an orientalization give, in their sane impurity, a testimony that this strange sacred community between philosophy and religion takes place precisely at the place in which they seem separated. Here what unites is precisely what separates and vice-versa. The sanity of this mixture or impurity is that it makes evident that overcoming the point of view of the subject does not mean interior conversion or illumination in the sense of an ego dissolved into an alienated totality. A certain rhetoric of selflessness can still mean selfishness. The paradox of the construction of subjectivity cannot be solved by means of changing the bad consciousness of self-consciousness to the better consciousness of an intuition, of an unconsciousness or subconsciousness. In our present situation, the better is not to talk in terms of conversion or illumination. Perhaps it is better to talk, following the inspiration of a nietzschean Eckhart, in terms of the increasing of the desert of the self. To abandon the subjectivity of god and of the individual ego means not only to break through the point of view of the duality of subject and object, *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, inside and outside, transcendence and immanence, but even to break forth into what Eckhart called the desert of godhead. The desert of godhead was also called by the Japanese philosopher Keiji Nishitani the self-awareness of reality.¹¹ The expression self-

awareness of reality says that our ability to perceive reality is the very way in which reality realizes itself in us and that it is only in our perception of reality that we can perceive that reality realizes itself in us. Nishitani's expression was also inspired by Meister Eckhart when Eckhart affirms for instance the following: «When I break through and stand emptied [ledig stehen] of my own will, of the will of God, of all the works of God, and of God himself, I am beyond all creatures, and I am neither God nor creature but am what I was and what I should remain now and forever more». ¹² To break through the perspective of creatures, in Eckhart's terminology, is to break through what we would call the dichotomy of subject and object, that is, the perspective of things, the perspective of self in such a way that in this very break through it is possible to break forth into the self-awareness of reality. It means therefore that there is here no question of breaking through from something in order to come or reach another better state, a state of non-ego, or non-self. Reality becomes real in the «self» when the «self» realizes reality as being realizing by the self. In other words: reality becomes real in us even in the very dichotomy of subject and object, that is, appearing for us as unreal. But this can only receive transparency when the dichotomy of subject and object can be realized as a dichotomy. Realizing the dichotomy of this dichotomy it becomes possible to see that the mistake, the doubt, lies in the fact that we perceive too much of reality, that we know too much. This breaking (through) forth into the self-awareness of reality has nothing to do with a displacement from a place to another place, from a stage to another, because in this breaking forth we break out the duality of an inside and an outside, of immanence and transcendence. Trends of mysticism, today very disseminated, that shall not be confounded with the so called mystical tradition, never break through the perspective of the self when it seeks for ecological places to make experiments of a more

¹⁰ F. W. J. von Schelling, «Philosophie und Religion», (1804), in *Ausgewählte Schriften*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 1985.

¹¹ Keiji Nishitani, «What is religion?», in *Religion and Nothingness*. University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London 1983, p. 5.

¹² Meister Eckhart. *Deutsche Predigten und Traktate*, Diogenes Verlag, Zürich 1990.

pure reality. To break through the perspective of the construction of subjectivity means on the contrary to make existence real. It means to realize that reality already exists in us because it realizes us without «us». Existence becomes real when it «falls into reality» to translate literally a commonplace expression in my Portuguese mother tongue.¹³ We are never within reality, but sometimes we can fall into it. In other words: only very rarely we become what we perceive. Only very rarely we make the experience of the necessity of actualizing existence in one practice and to realize experience. Existence does not become real because those rare moments become constants but because sometimes we perceive that only rarely existence becomes real.

To make existence become real, to make real what can be called the work of experience means to realize that reality becomes real in us when we realize reality as that which exists without us within us.¹⁴ This realization is what I call the beginning of the nothingness of the self. It means further to discover that everything that gives meaning to our lives has no meaning. This disposition is not the same as the sceptical position that denies reality to reality, only admitting

¹³ Husserl's phenomenology insisted on the fact that the naive attitude towards the world is a sedimented theoretical view. Heidegger deepened this issue of Husserl's, discussing the interconnection between *Vorhandenheit* and *Zuhandenheit*. The non-quotidian scientific knowledge and the non-scientific quotidian knowledge share the same point of view, the point of view of the paradox of the construction of subjectivity. From this point of view, we perceive things, the world, the others as a reality existing without us at the same time as we perceive reality as what exists within us, such as our idea of reality. Here we meet again the same kafkaesque paradox of the construction of the subject: we perceive reality as existing without us out from the reality existing with-in us but at this point we do not perceive the reality of our perception. The eyes cannot look at the eyes. In some Portuguese verses of Fernando Pessoa, this sounds as following: «The only mystery of the universe is the most and not the less./ We perceive too much the things — this is the mistake, this is the doubt./ What exists transcends for me what I admit that exists./ Reality is only real and not rationalized.

¹⁴ See Keiji Nishitani, *op. cit.*

in the concepts of reality the reality of the concept. Neither does it have anything to do with the absurd position that transforms meaninglessness in the meaning of the absurd. Neither does it say that the ego no longer has a transcendent ground and foundation that is absolutely immanent.

To discover that what gives meaning to our lives has no meaning points to a viewing in double perspective, a viewing in the way of a fugue. From the point of view of our lives, what gives meaning to our lives is full of meaning but, at the same time, viewed from the point of view of our deaths, it has no meaning. The religious dimension of human being is usually described as the instant in which a human being discovers himself as nothingness faced with the totality of what he is not. The multiple dimensions of the word nothingness are related to what we call death. In one of the most impressive paintings of Goya, the skull writes above the tomb: nothingness. The nothingness of death has been culturally connected to the totality of god. Human beings want to be immortal because they know about being mortal. But on the other way around, the everythingness of god is for human being nothing, because, being mortal, human being cannot realize this everythingness that he attributes to god. The frontier between attributing everything to god and considering god as nothing is as thin as the frontier between day and night. Christianity introduced in Western culture a god that is at once everything and nothing. The philosophical-theological understanding of the Christian premise of a *creatio ex nihilo* affirms god as the cause of everything. The religious experience that god creates everything from nothing says that only in nothingness can god be found. This nothingness from which it is not possible to escape but in which it is impossible to remain, is the nothingness of god.

The difficulties we feel in following the religious experience of nothingness lies in our difficulty of distinguishing god from godhead, religion from religiosity, hope from the non-duality of life and death. Only in identifying them we can be theists, pantheists or atheists. The nothingness of god says further that when god does not mean anything to human life, when human life has no need of god, can human being realize

the godhead of god. We have always heard that god does not need humans and that only humans need gods. The late Heidegger talks about a coming god, saying that only a god could save us. Those statements have often been misinterpreted. Because for Heidegger if the modern world is the world that no longer needs god, it is in this world that it is possible to realize that god is nothing that can be the object for a need. I read Heidegger in the sense that the nothingness of god tells us about a beginning, the beginning of the nothingness of the self. It may be that Plato meant something like that, when he said that every beginning is a god.

The beginning of the nothingness of the self has nothing to do with a new religion, with a new theology or a new god, neither with a romantic mythological religion. It is on the contrary a kind of vision in which is fully viewed «the uncertain world of birth and death,»¹⁵ as Nagarjuna is supposed to have affirmed. To see fully means to actualize in a practice and to realize in an experience the uncertain world of birth and death. In this sense, we could even say that the beginning of the nothingness of the self is the non-duality of life and death. The non-duality of life and death is still not the same as the indifference towards life and indifference towards death. When Gadamer reminded that only human beings bury their dead, i.e., that only humans plant death, he points out that only human beings cannot be indifferent to death. The different contemporary existentialisms have insisted on the point that this impossibility of being indifferent towards death constitute and edify human loneliness. But at the same time that human life cannot be indifferent to death, human life can be indifferent to the life of life. Human being is indifferent to the life of life when it lives indifferently with regard to the non-duality of life and death. This indifference expresses itself in the perception of life as

something contrary and opposed to death. In this perception, human life only admits the reality of life, assuming death as that which is opposed to the reality of life. In this sense, death is perceived as non-reality, as irreality, as nothing. It belongs to a linguistic common place in most languages to say: dying we become nothing. It says that dying we cease to be things; we cease to be something becoming nothing. But death is real, as real as life, because both life and death are not things but realization. The non-duality of life and death is further not the same as acceptance and resignation towards the fact of death but the understanding that reality appears as life as well as death. The modern world can even be characterized as the world of the indifference towards the fact that human life cannot be indifferent to life and to death. This indifference becomes transparent in the way modernity faces the non-duality of life and death as exclusion, difference, and opposition. Death is not the other of life, nor is life the other of death. I think that another Christian author, Nicolaus Cusanus, saw with precision that death is rather the non-other of life as well as life is the non-other of death. Saying non-other, *non aliud*,¹⁶ he points out that the question is not that of becoming indifferent to the difference between life and death in order to overcome the indifference towards the fact that human life cannot be indifferent to life and death. The non-other, the non-duality of life and death says, on the contrary, that the difference between life and death is not a difference of opposition but the difference of a realization. Schelling defined it with the following words: go through everything, being in such way nothing, that it even could be another.¹⁷ Only in this way begins the nothingness of the self.

The disposition of fugue treated here the relation between philosophy and religion as the disjunctive conjunction and the conjunctive disjunction of a theme and a counter-theme, of a

¹⁵ According to a passage in «Guidelines for studying the way by Gakudo Yojin-shu», in Dogen, *Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of a Zen Master*, Kazuaki Tanashi (ed.). San Francisco, 1985, p. 31: «Ancestor Nagarjuna said: <The mind that fully sees into the uncertain world of birth and death is called the thought of enlightenment>».

¹⁶ Nicolaus Cusanus, *Non aliud*. Edition Cerf, Paris 1998.

¹⁷ F. W. J. von Schelling, *Initia Philosophiae Universae*. Erlanger Vorlesung WS 1820/21. Bouvier Verlag, Bonn 1969, p.18 «Durch alles durchgehen und nichts seyn, nämlich nichts so seyn, dass es nicht auch anderes seyn könnte — dies ist die Forderung».

subject and a counter-subject. The art of the fugue, the supreme art of Bach, is the art of keeping itself in the tension of a beginning in which the theme is not the counter-theme but neither the non-counter-theme. The theme is the non-other of the counter-theme. Proper to a fugue is the impossibility of hunting one's own shadow or of existing without shadows. Listening to a fugue, when we search the theme (the subject) we have already lost it, but loosing the theme (the subject) we have already found it. Only escaping can we be where we are. That is why the only possibility of listening to a fugue is to become one in the uncertain world of birth and death, it is to listen with full attention where we are. The historical opposition between philosophy and religion can be heard as a fugue (escaping) from reality but it can even be heard as the reality of the fugue. Those rhetorical figures of inversions may sound now as a relativism, but they intend to make transparent that the very presuppositions for the opposition between philosophy and religion are already the conditions for another relation between them. There is no place outside for a more pure beginning. There is no sense in trying to escape from escaping. The very presuppositions of modern philosophy of a dichotomy between subject and object, between life and death is the sacred place in which we can assume the sacred task of dis-

tinguishing god from godhead, religion from religiosity, hope from the non-duality of life and death. Because the theme (the subject) of the one is the counter-theme (counter-subject) of the other, we can further ask the question of how to think religion out from the perspective of how religion can make philosophy face thinking. When the abandonment of god, religion and hope becomes a religious task and not only a philosophical one, it is possible that we discover the philosophical task of abandoning philosophy and thereby to experience the difference between philosophy and thinking. Because, as Schelling said once, the liberty of philosophy only takes place when someone «has come to his own deepest abyss, has been aware of the profundity of life, has once abandoned everything and has been abandoned by everything and everyone, when one falls and face infinity in total solitude: this is a big step, that Plato once compared to death».¹⁸

In this abandonment we have to abandon perhaps even those very abandonments. Here begins nothingness, or perhaps, the fugue of the music of a beginning.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

