

Research Article

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Nietzsche, Nishitani, and Laruelle on Faith and Immanence

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Abstract: This article explores the use of the concept of “faith” in three non-Christian philosophers. The study begins with Nietzsche, who, while deeply critical of Christian belief throughout his work, offers a positive reformulation of the term in a few key texts. From here, the discussion proceeds to two authors who are deeply influenced by Nietzsche, François Laruelle, and Nishitani Keiji. Laruelle’s recent turn to non-theology sees him engaging directly with Christian theological material and presenting a distinction between a positive form of “faith” in contrast from standard religious “belief,” a distinction I suggest bears close resemblance to Nietzsche’s approach, especially in relation to the Apostle Paul. Finally, Nishitani offers his own account of faith, one inspired primarily by the Buddhist notion of faith, but also referencing Christian theology and specifically the practice of Paul, while also connecting with Nietzsche. The connecting theme for all three thinkers is rooted in Zarathustra’s encouragement to be “faithful to the earth,” a non-transcendent, immanent formulation of faith. Faith, in Nishitani and Laruelle especially, is non-doctrinal, non-dogmatic, and non-intellectual; it is, instead, practical, an immanent existence, a way of life resulting in a different form of connection with the world around us.

Keywords: Nietzsche, Laruelle, Nishitani, faith, immanence, non-theology, non-philosophy, Kyoto school

1 Nietzsche, Nishitani, and Laruelle on Faith and Immanence

Bruce Ellis Benson’s *Pious Nietzsche: Decadence and Dionysian Faith* argues for a “Dionysian Pietism” as the centrepiece of Nietzsche’s thought, a religious approach formed in opposition to Christian piety, yet still embodying much of its framework. This is an approach presented, as well, in the edited volume *Nietzsche and the Divine* and in Giles Fraser’s *Redeeming Nietzsche: On the Piety of Unbelief*.¹ Whether or not one agrees with Benson’s overall depiction of Nietzsche, one of the key features of Benson’s argument is Nietzsche’s use of the concept of “faith,” a term which is, of course, of great significance to Christianity.² This term likewise makes a prominent appearance in the recent “theological” turn of François Laruelle, whose non-theology makes much of a distinction between faith and belief, and this in an essentially Nietzschean manner. A question emerges: why? What do these non-Christian (perhaps anti-Christian in the case of Nietzsche) thinkers see as worth redeeming about the concept of “faith”? To these two figures, and by way of helping to explore this question, I add a third, namely Keiji Nishitani, a Japanese philosopher deeply influenced by Zen, Nietzsche, and Christianity. That these three non-Christian philosophers all rework the concept of faith is significant in

1 Benson, *Pious Nietzsche*; Lippit and Urpeth, *Nietzsche and the Divine*; Fraser, *Redeeming Nietzsche*.

2 Benson, *Pious Nietzsche*, 16, 196.

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itself; but the specific form in which they develop their notions of faith, especially their shared emphasis on an immanent, worldly orientation, merits additional investigation.

In moving to the details of each argument, it must be acknowledged that Nietzsche nowhere formally establishes a concept of “faith” in the positive sense, providing only intermittent examples; this distinguishes him from the other two authors here discussed, both of whom develop it as a formal concept. Nonetheless, Nietzsche’s religious “turn” is essential to understanding the conclusions of Laruelle and Nishitani; in particular, Nietzsche’s criticism of Paul is foundational to what comes next. In *The Anti-Christ* and elsewhere, Nietzsche articulates a thorough critique of Paul’s efforts, one which is focused fundamentally on what Nietzsche understands to be Paul’s denial of life. As will be discussed below, Nietzsche understands Paul to be the “inventor” of Christianity, in the sense that he understands Paul’s primary impact to be the creation of a conceptual world which is divorced from life, the actual world, reality, and truth. Paul is thus, according to Nietzsche, a nihilist, in the sense that he does not work from the realities of *this* life, does not focus on *this* world, but rather posits a new heavens and a new earth, promising immortality and eternity in a different place. Nietzsche argues that this renders our lives meaningless, and thus holds Paul’s thought, and Christianity with it, to be an embodiment of nihilism.

To avoid this criticism offered by Nietzsche, then, we must avoid the error which he finds in Paul’s thinking. This is where faith comes in; in a very few instances, Nietzsche speaks of a “Dionysian faith,” presenting it as a repudiation of the world-denial of Christianity, and thus a repudiation of Paul’s nihilistic activities. In this sense, the “good” form of faith in Nietzsche is about avoiding Pauline errors – no doctrine which denies the world and life itself, no repudiation of the world as it is, and no restriction on the processes of life. Laruelle’s notion of faith is dependent on Nietzsche’s reading of Paul, as I have argued elsewhere.³ Laruelle thus employs a key distinction between “faith” and “belief,” where doctrinal or conceptual approaches, such as those employed by Paul, are “belief,” and the non-conceptual, non-doctrinal approach which affirms life as it is, is “faith.” The resulting vision of a practical, non-dogmatic faith bears great similarities with the Zen format as developed by Nishitani, but there are two key differences. First, Nishitani’s philosophy, though heavily inspired by Nietzsche, primarily draws on discussions of faith as found in Zen Buddhism; and second, Nishitani offers a different reading of Paul, one where he does not disagree with Nietzsche’s argument about the essential need for the affirmation of life, but rather argues that Paul’s thought is in no way world-denying when properly understood and should not be approached as merely doctrinal or conceptual. Instead, the Apostle Paul is the model of a properly realized life-affirming faith, all the while remaining true to Nietzsche’s disdain for world denial.

This life-affirmation provides the rationale for a return to the concept of faith – faith identifies a more holistic sense of devotion than that found in especially Enlightenment thought. Each of these thinkers pushes towards the intensity of commitment and devotion in opposition to rational or objective distance. This is a movement which sees something particularly positive about the religious devotion of faith, something which is otherwise lost in most forms of philosophy – the use of the concept of faith thus allows for the movement outside of the cerebral or intellectual space that is the standard domain of philosophy. At the same time, however, these thinkers provide a critique of theological approaches to faith which have themselves become too cerebral, a common refrain found not only among non-theologians (see Heidegger’s critique of ontotheology, which actually follows Luther), but also from theologians (see Kierkegaard’s critique of overly rational formulations of religion, or Schleiermacher’s formulation of religion as intuition and feeling, rather than something cognitive). Theology under the influence of the enlightenment offered a notion of faith which is perhaps best described as a solely intellectual process, a matter of rational assent to a series of propositions. The non-doctrinal faith in these thinkers cuts in both directions, then, in that it challenges certain theological and philosophical approaches to religion. Finally, it bears explicit mention that these thinkers are not excluding “beliefs” as a whole, as if a person could function without belief of any sort. The complaint, instead is particularly directed towards metaphysical forms of belief – static doctrines about the overarching nature of

³ Kruger, “Nietzsche, Nishitani, and Laruelle on the Apostle Paul,” 1–13.

reality presented as true or certain and to be adhered to as if they were themselves reality. Beliefs may have a valid function – Nishitani is explicit about this – but they are not the concern in these formulations of faith.

The article will proceed as follows: it begins with a discussion of Nietzsche's approach to religion and faith. The goal of this discussion is not to be comprehensive in terms of Nietzsche's approach to religion, as there is extensive scholarship and debate on this topic. Instead, the goal of this section is to introduce the key themes which resonate in the work of Nishitani and Laruelle, who are both influenced by Nietzsche. Though research is available for Nietzsche on his conception of faith, it is not a well-examined concept for Laruelle or Nishitani; the recent nature of Laruelle's exploration of non-theology is perhaps an explanation of the absence of any meaningful exploration, thus far, of this topic. With *Religion and Nothingness* having been available in translation since 1982, the same cannot be said. Still, outside of a brief treatment by Bret W. Davis addressed below, there is no sustained discussion of the concept in his work. In proceeding to Laruelle's work, I will introduce four key themes which emerge from his recent work, *Clandestine Theology*. The conversation will then shift to Nishitani, focusing on his work *Religion and Nothingness*, along with two additional minor works.

As will be discussed below, faith for each figure is a posture or mode of existence, rather than a doctrinal adherence or wilful believing. For each, the proper mode of faith is not an intellectual endeavour; it is a question of grace (variously understood, but generally a combination of inner/outer power, rather than self-willed choice) and thus cannot be a question of willpower. Each figure will use the resources of religion to guide the person to the position of faith; but in the position of true faith, the beliefs of that religion are not held as beliefs or propositions to be assented to. Instead, the position of faith is indicative of the orientation to immanence, a posture which is able to receive the things of the world as they are for the first time. The greatest disagreements perhaps lie here, in that Nishitani's immanence is a nondual absolute, where God as absolute transcendence is absolutely immanent; but the practical expression of the orientation is much the same – there is no transcendent thing one could turn to, and this location of transcendence within immanence leaves one with an entirely immanent perspective.

2 Nietzsche's "Faith"

In discussing this concept in Nietzsche's work, a clear distinction must be drawn: there are numerous places where Nietzsche is exceedingly critical of the concept of faith, and there are places where he offers a positive reformulation of the term – I will focus only on this positive reformulation offered in certain later works in this article. Benson's work provides us with an essential starting point, and he describes Nietzsche's thought as offering a "Dionysian pietism," a form of faith centred upon a Dionysian framing of existence. This approach is non-transcendent, focused only on this world, and devoted to affirming the world as it is. Benson writes:

For Nietzsche, Pietism is not so much a mode of belief but a way of being that fully embraces life, vicissitudes and all. To reach that place of complete acceptance, Nietzsche practices both a "yes-saying" and "no-saying" *askēsis* designed, on the one hand, to affirm life and, on the other hand, to overcome everything within him that fails to affirm life.⁴

Nietzsche's philosophy requires that the person turn their entire concern to the present existence, to an encounter with the world as it is, and to the removal of systems of thought and mental and physical obscurations which present this direct encounter. This "yes" to life is not about the affirmation of something hidden or outside of the world as it is, but rather about affirming the world directly, a requirement that is non-conceptual and perhaps better understood as embodied.

This leads to the conclusion that Nietzsche is a thinker of "immanence," a term which he does not employ to describe his thought, and is instead better associated with Gilles Deleuze and, perhaps, Laruelle. Andrea Urs Sommer cautions of uncritically describing Nietzsche as a thinker of immanence, given that his writings show a significant degree of hesitation regarding the term. The problem with immanence is that one can err in

⁴ Benson, *Pious Nietzsche*, 5.

significant ways if one thinks that turning to “immanence” solves all of our philosophical problems – for Nietzsche, it is equally plausible that a person may reject transcendence, but then proceed with a metaphysical reading of the immanent world and discover “immanent” laws that govern, with the result that the rejection of transcendence has achieved nothing.⁵ Likewise, Nietzsche’s thought is “attempting to conceptualize plural unity,”⁶ and it is a concern that a simple dichotomy such as immanence/transcendence always leads to dualistic thinking. Nietzsche’s alternative term, Sommer suggests, is “life;” nonetheless, given what Nietzsche says about life and the need for the affirmation of the world as it is, Sommer concludes that, “Nietzsche as the defender of an immanence thus understood also has a certain plausibility. He is, after all, the unceasing critic of shifting the weight of being to another place and time.”⁷ In Nishitani and Laruelle, this is a key theme, and each of their work will attempt to abide by the injunction to keep the focus on this world and avoid any indication of another.

For Nietzsche, there is no one more guilty of shifting attention to another place and time than the Apostle Paul, and thus, a central component of Nietzsche’s articulation of this yes-saying is the rejection of Pauline Christianity. The problem of Paul’s work thus stems, interestingly, not from his method, but from his orientation. Paul is criticized by Nietzsche as an inventor and a liar, but it is possible to find Nietzsche undertaking similar efforts in his work – Zarathustra being an example. Therefore, the problem is not that Paul has made up a story, but rather that the story is one that takes us away from life and the world as it is. As Nietzsche writes of Paul’s Christian storytelling, “When the centre of gravity of life is placed, not in life itself, but in ‘the beyond’ – in nothingness – then one has taken away its centre of gravity altogether.”⁸ While Nietzsche has some kind things to say about Jesus, Paul deviates entirely from Jesus’ world-affirming message and instead creates a transcendent, world-denying lie structure which becomes Christianity.⁹ Pietism, as Benson suggests, is limited in its assertions precisely because of Nietzsche’s objections to the faith strategy of Paul – thus when Nietzsche uses the term faith, it is clear that he has something different in mind than what he sees as the most egregious aspect of Paul’s efforts. Nietzsche is not creating a belief system, but nonetheless keeping “faith.”

The distinction between Nietzsche and Paul is further seen in the goal of their thought; Paul’s movement to another world is a manifestation of the pursuit of power, in Nietzsche’s telling. In *The Anti-Christ*, Nietzsche recounts his effort in *The Genealogy of Morals*, where he explains “noble morality and a resentment morality,” where:

The Judaeo-Christian moral system belongs to the second division, and in every detail. In order to be able to say Nay to everything representing an ascending evolution of life—that is, to well-being, to power, to beauty, to self-approval—the instincts of resentment, here become downright genius, had to invent an other world in which the acceptance of life appeared as the most evil and abominable thing imaginable.¹⁰

The goal of this nay-saying is the reinforcement of the “priestly class,” the establishing of power through the emptying of life, and thus the emptying of well-being, power, beauty, and self-approval. This is Paul’s specific purpose: “What he wanted was power; in Paul, the priest once more reached out for power – he had use only for such concepts, teachings, and symbols as served the purpose of tyrannizing over the masses and organizing mobs.”¹¹ As David Simonin writes, the power Paul achieves is not necessarily true power, though there are elements of this, but rather the “feeling of power,”¹² and thus a furthering of illusion or distance from the

⁵ Sommer, “Nietzsche,” 616–30, 618.

⁶ Ibid., 620.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, #43, 121.

⁹ It is important to note that Nietzsche’s criticism of Paul is distinct from his criticism of later Christianity, especially Hegel; Paul is not guilty of the over-intellectualization that is found in this later period, as Paul’s thought remains intellectually simple and anti-philosophical in Nietzsche’s mind.

¹⁰ Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, #24, 80–1.

¹¹ Ibid., #42, 121.

¹² For a discussion of power, see Simonin’s, “Le sentiment de puissance,” 107–27. Simonin writes (with my translation): “The hypothesis defended here is that religion arises from the need that men have to experience a feeling of power, which may well be

world. As Nietzsche continues, “Men of this sort have a vital interest in making mankind sick, and in confusing the values of ‘good’ and ‘bad’, ‘true’ and ‘false’ in a manner that is not only dangerous to life, but also slanders it.”¹³ It is here that Nietzsche’s devotion to life comes forward – life should not be slandered or misrepresented, nor should the world. Paul’s thought structure fails to be faithful to reality; as Daniel Havemann writes, Paul as a “priest” takes on a specific role in Nietzsche’s articulation, as one of those “who have the power to impose their interpretation of reality as the universal.”¹⁴

Even granted Nietzsche’s hesitations regarding doctrine, Benson still concludes that Nietzsche’s faith is dogmatic¹⁵ because of its adherence to certain convictions, e.g., the world *is* tragic, the will to power, or the concept of an *Übermensch*; Sommer will argue, contrarily, that these are not doctrines, but “intellectual experiments,”¹⁶ and should not be treated as functioning in a way equivalent to a Christian doctrine. Whichever way one chooses to interpret the nature of Nietzsche’s core concepts, they are not the central concern of his understanding of faith. Instead, it is the “yes” to life which recurs throughout Nietzsche’s thought. Benson explains further: “That one is able to accept all that happens is *only possible* on the basis of this Dionysian faith. Such a faith is characterized by a ‘glad and trusting fatalism.’ It is a complete trust in life, in which all of life is sacred.”¹⁷ Faith, in this sense, is *amor fati*, the love of the world as it happens and the desire for the Eternal Recurrence of the Same. Faith as *amor fati*, and thus as love, is rooted in the will to power, love being a form of the will to power, as Frank Chouraqui has noted.¹⁸ Lissa McCullough’s earlier treatment of the notion of faith reaches much the same conclusion:

Here we have the central doctrine of Nietzsche’s faith, the doctrine of eternal Yes, and in light of this anti-nihilistic credo, Nietzsche’s scathing denouncement of the world-fleeing, body-despising, hyper-spiritualizing, self-deceiving systems of the occidental past are seen to be neither cynical nor bitter in spirit. A mere no-saying to the Christian past would misunderstand the requirements of the process of becoming, which mandates comprehension and assimilation with the intent to overcome.¹⁹

Situating the notion of faith in relation to *amor fati*, the “yes” to life, thus demonstrates the significance of the concept in Nietzsche’s thought. One must affirm life by loving life as it has been given – by loving one’s fate, and loving that it will always recur. Dionysian faith is thus articulated in direct response to Nietzsche’s understanding of a Christian faith in an *other* world, a separate world, a form of world denial rooted in all forms of metaphysical thinking.

The faithful one – the one who is able to affirm life completely – is described in a few different locations across Nietzsche’s works. In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche comments on the perspective of Goethe, writing that “he said Yes to everything [...]” and envisioned a human “who would be strong, highly educated, skilful in all bodily matters, self-controlled, reverent toward himself, and who might dare to afford the whole range and wealth of being natural, being strong enough for such freedom.”²⁰ Nietzsche takes this person to be the “free spirit” he regularly praises:

Such a spirit who has become free stands amid the cosmos with a joyous and trusting fatalism, in the faith [*Glauben*] that only the particular is loathsome, and that all is redeemed and affirmed in the whole—he does not negate any more. Such a faith [*Glaube*], however, is the highest of all possible faiths [*Glauben*]: I have baptized it with the name of Dionysus.²¹

inadequate and illusory when it is actually tested: that is to say, having faith can well provide a feeling of power, but not necessarily [actual] power.” 109.

¹³ Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, #24, 81.

¹⁴ Havemann, “Evangelische Polemik,” 175–86. “Als ‘Priester’ versteht er in einem sehr allgemeinen Sinne Menschen, die die Macht haben, ihre Deutung der Wirklichkeit als eine allgemeine durchzusetzen.” 177. (My translation)

¹⁵ Benson, *Pious Nietzsche*, 196.

¹⁶ Sommer, “Nietzsche,” 622.

¹⁷ Benson, *Pious Nietzsche*, 194.

¹⁸ Chouraqui, “Nietzsche’s Science of Love,” 267–90, 286.

¹⁹ McCullough, “Nietzsche’s Faith,” 66.

²⁰ Nietzsche, “Twilight of the Idols,” *Twilight*, #49, 554.

²¹ Nietzsche, *Twilight*, #49, 554.

The key element of this faith: the person no longer negates other possible existences, but simply affirms their own; they “stand free,” and embrace the fate of themselves and the whole. If there is a particular content, a particular doctrine here, it is not entirely clear – perhaps the Eternal Recurrence, but this is not what Nietzsche chooses to suggest here. Instead, it is a joyful, free, and trusting existence directed towards all of existence, without any particularity of dogma – it is a practical mode of living supported by certain intellectual convictions.

The most extensive development of Nietzsche’s understanding of a Dionysian faith is found in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, and it is here that we see the overlap and distinction from the work of the Apostle Paul. The text is, of course, formulated as its own version of a “religious” journey, revealing the spiritual progress of Zarathustra to Übermensch and beyond, and in this quest, traditional religious categories and stages are referenced, altered, and updated to suit Nietzsche’s philosophical project. One of the key features of this re-employment is Zarathustra’s “devotion” to the earth, to the world, and to life. Zarathustra encourages his disciples to, “Remain faithful [*treu*] to the earth, my brothers, with the power of your virtue.”²² He calls his disciples, further, to a virtue which will “lead back to the earth...back to the body, back to life, that it may give the earth a meaning, a human meaning.”²³ This meaning is, crucially, served by their “gift-giving love and knowledge,” a formulation of love with kenotic elements, as Ruin has suggested.²⁴ More will be said about this return to the world and the transvaluation which results in a moment; but the substantive rewriting Nietzsche accomplishes in this text warrants further emphasis. As McCullough suggests, Nietzsche engages not only the Christian concept of faith, but also love, gift, incarnation, resurrection, and life:

All along, as it happens, Nietzsche’s faith has been a thinly disguised celebration of incarnation and resurrection unto Life! - but a celebration of incarnation in this world, and of Life that utters an eternal Yes to this world - while entangled and enmeshed in all its senseless becoming, tragedy, horror, pain, ills, and inevitable death - thereby transvaluing this world as the actually-achieved highest possible ideal (WP 1019).²⁵

The resulting use of many of these Christian categories is, for Nietzsche at least, impossibly far from the Christian approach. Nonetheless, there is use to be found here – the concepts can help us come to the world as it is and affirm it. Though only briefly covered here, Nietzsche employs traditional religious tropes for distinctive ends, most prominently here in the category of “faith,” but also the above list of love, gift, and the religious quest itself as accomplished by Zarathustra. Nietzsche’s use of traditional religious categories (while rewriting the content of each concept) is not, then, incidental to his thought, but a component of his philosophical methodology.

Nietzsche’s understanding of faith is focused on the person who not only affirms existence as it is, but truly loves it. Not only does this person truly love the world, but moves past the subject/object distinction, and recognizes themselves ecstatically as the whole: “The Dionysiac moment, to be sure, involves a kind of ecstatic destruction of individuation, an insight into the whole by being the whole[...].”²⁶ There is a perspective of direct immanence in the sense in which Laruelle will develop this term, and thus a sharp contrast from transcendence, a living indwelling in non-particularity – while again acknowledging that Nietzsche is not employing this terminological dichotomy himself. The faithful person is oriented to life as life and embodies this life within themselves. Continuing from the quote above, this orientation to life requires an “ecstatic destruction of individuation,” and thus, it is important to note that this process is not achieved as an intellectual process of assent, nor by a simple mechanism of individual choice – Nietzsche’s thought overcomes the dichotomy of subject/object, and as Frank Chouraqui has written, “As early as [*Untimely Meditations*] III, Nietzsche wrote of love that it deprives us of our identity because it connects the inside and the outside and overcomes the separation which defines us.”²⁷ That is, the affirmation of the world – the faithfulness to the

²² Nietzsche, “Thus Spoke Zarathustra.” “On the Gift-giving virtue,” #2, 188.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ruin, “Saying Amen to the Light of Dawn,” 99–116, 109–10.

²⁵ McCullough, “Nietzsche’s Faith,” 68.

²⁶ Burnham and Jesinghausen, *Nietzsche’s Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 125.

²⁷ Chouraqui, “Nietzsche’s Science of Love,” 287.

earth – is found in the affirmation of the self where the boundary between self/world has come down. Thus, the affirmation of the world as it is comes with falling in love with the world – *amor fati*. Love, as has been described elsewhere, is not a matter of simple choice; one cannot choose to love the world as it is, but rather can come to see it that way. Jeremy Fortier writes:

When Nietzsche refers to love/nature, then, he has in mind a power capable of shaping human desires and ends, but which does not serve them. The world has necessities, but it does not have purposes, aims, or intentions (see GS 109). And it is in this sense that love/nature can be a fatum, or fatality—it is something that happens to us, for good or for ill, rather than something we can control or make demands of.²⁸

It is in this sense that Nietzsche's thought includes an element of "grace," broadly construed; love happens to us, and it changes us as we move beyond the boundaries of subject and object and move past false notions of the autonomous subject. A similar description is found in both Laruelle and Nishitani – there is no God who is changing us, but neither is it merely ourselves. Instead, in the un-bounded self that emerges beyond false conceptualizations of self and world, a new self is formed with the connection of inside and outside.

And thus only those who are faithful to reality can come to reality as it is, and in fact, become reality themselves. There are endless caveats to what Nietzsche means by "reality," as there will be for Nishitani and Laruelle. Nonetheless, it is only those who affirm the world as it is, who love it and their fate (*amor fati*), who utter the "yes" to life, who encounter reality. In this instance, given Nietzsche's rather indirect notion of truth, we should not think of this as the achievement of some sort of objective truth – a caution which is true for Laruelle and Nishitani, as well. Instead, only the person who is faithful to the world possesses the requisite "strength"²⁹ to affirm the tragedy, horror, pain, death, etc., which characterizes life, and thus, as Nietzsche writes, the faithful person "conceives reality as it is, being strong enough to do so; this type is not estranged or removed from reality but is reality itself and exemplifies all that is terrible and questionable in it – *only in that way can man attain greatness*."³⁰ In possessing the strength to affirm all that is as it is, the faithful one surpasses all other forms of philosophical or religious thinking – they come to embody reality itself in themselves, as a living example of life itself.

By way of concluding this introductory section on Nietzsche, it bears repeating that Nietzsche's conception of faith is rather thin. He does not develop this idea in the formal manner that Laruelle and Nishitani will, and the above clustering of passages is just that, a bringing together of a few diverse threads of his thought. Still, it is clear that key elements of Nietzsche's approach have found their way into the thought of both Nishitani and Laruelle. The most prominent of these is the perspective that we hesitate to call "immanent." Faith and devotion to the world is, for Nietzsche, not developed as propositional or assent-based (in contrast to his development of Paul's creation of Christian belief), but rather as an orientation by the person to this world and their "yes" to it. In this way, the extent to which it may be considered a doctrinal faith is debatable, even as Benson concludes this point, and it must be conceded that his formulation is not entirely devoid of intellectual content; then again, his formulation of faith is predicated on the self-giving, ever overcoming nature of the will to power. In this way, it is not a static thing. We remain faithful to the earth, not as it is as a concept, but as the earth is in whatever way that it is. It is an active posture of devotion, not a series of transcendent categories used to interpret, understand, and discredit, this being the methodology of Paul in both Nietzsche and Laruelle's interpretations. As will soon be discussed, Nietzsche's approach to turn to religious language as a means of bringing others to this devotion is shared by Laruelle and Nishitani, who likewise embrace "faith" as a category to describe the outcome of their thought. It is only through this turn to faith that the engagement with and embrace of reality as real is possible.

²⁸ Fortier, *The Challenge of Nietzsche*, 76.

²⁹ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo in The Genealogy of Morals*. "Why I am a destiny," 5, 331.

³⁰ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, "Why I am a destiny," 5, 331.

2.1 Faith in Laruelle

Laruelle's recent work has increasingly turned to the resource of Christian thought and scripture. His earlier work promoted the notion of "non-philosophy," which has more recently softened into "non-standard philosophy," an approach which "refuses all positing or consistency for itself."³¹ Through non-standard philosophy, Laruelle critiques most all previous forms of philosophy as hinging upon an unacknowledged decision which invariably leads to a false framing of reality according to systematic forms of thinking. Laruelle's work attempts to avoid this problem, not by proposing his own system alongside the others, but by promoting an approach which avoids the positing of philosophical forms of thinking and turns to immanence. Nonetheless, it is important to note the major influence of Nietzsche and others on his thought – many of his key ideas hinge on innovations in the work of Nietzsche, Deleuze, Marx, and others. Among these influences is Laruelle's recent decision to explore a non-theology, following a trend of scholars who employ an emptied form of Christianity as a resource. This has culminated in *Clandestine Theology*, the primary goal of which is an explication of the nature of a certain form of faith. This, as mentioned above, is not a traditional vision of faith – though it certainly holds resonances with a great number of thinkers from both Jewish and Christian thought, from Buber to Eckhart – and it is articulated as a fully integrated piece of Laruelle's overall non-standard philosophical project. Faith is, further, core to the encounter with the Real, a necessary feature as well in the coming to immanence of "Man."

2.1.1 Faith as Immanent Posture

The beginning of Laruelle's explanation of faith is found in the connection with the core theme of immanence, a theme developed throughout his earlier works, especially in relation to and in distinction from Deleuze's articulation of the same. Laruelle writes that he considers faith "to be precisely the intimacy or immanence of the 'consubstantiality' of Man."³² Andrew Sackin-Poll adds this in his introduction to the translation:

The maxim for Laruelle's clandestine theology is no longer '*crede ut intellegas*' (St. Augustine), but could, instead, be 'have faith in order to invent.' From the perspective of this theology, faith is not, first of all, ordered by transcendent beliefs and dogmas but is an immanent experience or lived faith.³³

As Sackin-Poll suggests, to be defined as immanent provides several implications. First, faith as immanent means it is distinguished, of course, from transcendence. Second, it is, as will be discussed in the next section, distinguished from any beliefs or concepts – it is not propositional or confessional. This leaves us with a non-expressible or content-less faith; for those familiar with the history of thought, examples of content-less faith are possible, requiring Laruelle to further distinguish such forms:

Faith is not here a subjective and pietist experience, that is, individual and un-sayable; it is not an interiority opposed to the transcendence of religion. Faith is certainly not a 'faith in man' like Christian humanism, but faith 'in-Man'—that is, faith as a human posture, other than via predicates. Man is not the subject of faith, but rather the real content of it.³⁴

Laruelle here provides the key term for his articulation of faith: posture. Faith is not something held or possessed by a person; it is essentially something embodied, or lived – it is the person who is able to be as a person, uncluttered by a conceptual prison. Sackin-Poll draws the potential connection between Pierre Hadot, and his idea of philosophy as a way of life, as a means of articulating what Laruelle has in mind.³⁵ While there are major differences between Laruelle's project and the classical philosophers who are the focus

³¹ Laruelle, "A Summary of Non-Philosophy," 138–48, 4.1.3, 143.

³² Laruelle, *Clandestine Theology*, 7.

³³ *Ibid.*, xxii.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 23–4.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, xlv.

of Hadot's work, the idea is perhaps apt, as it points to the overriding significance of the practical, of the "Lived." Faith is not an intellectual achievement, nor, as in the above quote, a matter of "interiority." It is a comprehensive practice, a way of existing.

Faith, therefore, is Laruelle's approach for describing the person who achieves the immanence he champions, manifesting this as a posture. This necessitates, of course, defining immanence in the Laruellean way, even as the use of the language of faith and religion will require additional explanation to justify its inclusion. As indicated above, Laruelle's immanence is a distinctive understanding of the notion popularized by Deleuze, and Marjorie Gracieuse provides an explanation as to the key difference between these two formulations. She writes that Deleuze's employment of the term as a label for a certain "vital force" preserves a philosophical systematizing of reality, and thus a conceptual imposition, an approach that Laruelle hopes to avoid. In turn, Laruelle presents immanence as identical to human existence, as Gracieuse writes:

Whereas Deleuze presents immanence as a vital force or matter-energy that is not reducible to the finitude of a human materiality but is said of being itself as 'non-organic life', Laruelle refuses to apprehend immanence as an ontological infinite or vitalist absolute. Rather, the non-philosopher speaks of a finite immanence, which merges with humans as generic humanity and with the solitude of each human being, as immediately given and non-exchangeable individuality. What non-philosophy calls 'the One-in-One', 'the Real' or '*radical* immanence' does not refer to life as an ontological principle, but simply designates the living identity of Man-in-person, both singular and generic, whose flesh and blood are unthinkable through the speculative and logical categories of philosophical thinking.³⁶

Deleuze's notion of immanence is, thus, still philosophical; and it relies, in particular, on a notion of difference, granting at the same time an elite status to certain persons – philosophers. Laruelle's immanence is difficult to articulate for this reason, as it is not reducible to a principle or "transcendental." The "One" for Laruelle is not reducible to a term such as "non-organic life" as in Deleuze; rather, the "One-in-One" is the singular and generic human. It is all humans in their specificity, in their distinctive "flesh and blood" existence which is not possible to express, without distortion, in philosophical (or theological) approaches. The goal of this concept of immanence is an approach which will offer a suitable acknowledgement of the "ordinary man," as Gracieuse explains:

This is the reason why Deleuzian immanence is just a partial and relative immanence for Laruelle, whose full experimentation remains reserved for the 'initiated' (i.e. the clan of philosophers). Once again, the ordinary man finds himself marginalized and expelled by philosophy's self-enjoyment and self-sufficiency. The philosophical indifference to the real is reinforced, and becomes even more apparent when it comes to analyzing the political consequences of Deleuze's philosophy.³⁷

There is a particular sensibility and concern in Laruelle's critique of philosophy for any hierarchy or ranking – it is decidedly anti-Nietzschean on this point. Even in a category as seemingly basic or fundamental to all as "non-organic life," Laruelle reads an ontological philosophical principle which inhibits, restricts, and distracts from ordinary man, preventing the disclosure of the Real.

It is for this reason that Laruelle speaks extensively of a certain vision – a "vision-in-One" – connected with his One and Real. Gracieuse explains:

If the undividable body is indeed for Laruelle the Real in person, it is not simply a 'body without organs', but a non-objectivising vision, a worldless identity within which Laruelle's thought dwells and from which it refuses to get out. This is why non-philosophy is above all a 'vision-in-One' that apprehends the humanity of Man as an open, unfolded intimacy, as a secret that is so immediately obvious that it can but only escape the abstract mediations of philosophical logic.³⁸

To be the "man (of) faith" is to be the one who escapes these "abstract mediations" and lives in immanence.

³⁶ Gracieuse, "Laruelle Facing Deleuze," 43.

³⁷ Ibid., 47.

³⁸ Ibid., 51.

2.1.2 Faith as Distinct from Belief

To be free from abstract mediations indicates that this faith (*foi*) is, of course, distinct from belief (*croyance*), with belief understood as propositions which are adhered to as in a confession of faith. This leads to a differentiation between three senses of faith, each of which appears throughout Laruelle's work. First, there are two negative senses of faith: philosophical faith and religious faith. Philosophical faith is Laruelle's suggestion that all philosophy (as opposed to non-philosophy) is a form of faith because of the transcendental or metaphysical assertions necessarily found within.³⁹ Religious faith unsurprisingly follows the same pattern as philosophical faith, in that it is adherence to transcendental or metaphysical propositions as assertions. The third and sole positive form of faith is that which is introduced in Laruelle's later turn to Christian thought, namely the faith of non-philosophy or non-theology. This is a different thing entirely, as Laruelle explains, to the forms of faith involving transcendental assertions:

Faith is rather a real or radical absence of belief, as we have said, thus also a 'non-belief' rather than an absolute rejection of any phenomena of belief....Faith 'does-not-believe' in belief rather than faith; it believes in the non-existence of belief.⁴⁰

Sackin-Poll adds this point: "In the context of theology, the faithful posture shifts the centre of gravity away from the sufficiency and totality of a dogma towards the faithful human. Faith concerns immanence, not transcendent beliefs or authoritarian uses of dogma."⁴¹ Though Laruelle is most directly addressing religion in *Clandestine Theology*, his arguments extend equally from theology to philosophy; in this sense, it is not surprising that this content-less faith excludes both theism and atheism, secular philosophy and religious theology. The faith he is speaking of excludes *all* of this content. Laruelle explains:

The express or stated proofs for the existence of god are useless insofar as a redoubling of bad conscience or *resentiment*. They are, in any case, phenomena resulting from duplicity and belief, not the work of faith. No more than religions or theology, the existence of God does not need to be proven; there is a god, like there is religion, although neither is *real*. Even skepticism and atheism, under their philosophical form, often form an integral part of the inner life of religion. But they cannot determine faith as a Lived material and a formal *a priori*.⁴²

Faith as "Lived material" offers yet another term for this immanence Laruelle is describing. The faith here described removes concern for the reality of God from one's life – the Man (of) faith will approach God in the way Laruelle describes in the axiomatic use of religion, without concern for the Real existence thereof, but with attention to how the concept God helps Man live in the faith he speaks of.

This criticism of faith includes what Laruelle identifies as previous attempts to avoid the problems of metaphysics through negative theology or "void" thinking, a step which will be particularly relevant in comparison with Nishitani. He explains:

Faith marks an adhesion neither to God and His intentions of love—this would be an 'evident (or positive) belief'—nor to itself in a pure intention towards something, without an intended object (i.e. an empty intentionality), turning forever in the wind, as if the intentional relation were fulfilled by a rigorous empty-or void-relation, like contemporary philosophers, fearful of such positivity, often maintain.⁴³

Laruelle hopes to avoid the pitfalls he suggests exist with each position: the conventional positive approach of adhering to God and pursuing love, and the negative approach of an Eckhartian faith without content or even a Derridean approach through *differance*. As developed here and elsewhere, Laruelle suggests that even these "non-metaphysical" approaches through nothing, nothingness, or void all are either left "turning forever in the

³⁹ *Dictionary of non-philosophy*, entries "Auto-position;" "(Non-philosophical) chora;" "Metascience;" "Mixture;" "Thought-world;" "Universality (Uni-versality and Generality)." Laruelle, *Dictionary of Non-Philosophy*.

⁴⁰ Laruelle, *Clandestine Theology*, 20.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, xxvii.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 18.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 21.

wind” or recreating implicitly a metaphysical perspective. The positive form of faith here articulated, however, is neither ineffective nor authoritarian:

On the contrary, faith is a Truth-without-truth, which makes possible an effect of truth that is inseparable from it—even if faith itself remains foreclosed to atheism, skepticism, and furthermore, to ‘truths’ and religious beliefs. This is condition for faith to work with such beliefs. The operation of faith is an immanent work.⁴⁴

This faith, therefore, will have certain effectual results. These will be discussed particularly in relation to Paul and Christ, but it is possible, I would suggest, to simply explore Laruelle’s treatment of ethics (or non-ethics) to see what the manifestation of this faith is – the influence of Marx is generally apparent in those instances.

2.1.3 The Axiomatic Use of Religion

This brings us to the axiomatic use of religion. Given that Laruelle’s faith is without philosophical or theological content, adhering to nothing, it is perhaps surprising to see Christian theology and scripture so well represented. The use of religion in this instance is, in many ways, merely pragmatic, as Sackin-Poll writes: “The words of Jesus provide, for Laruelle, formal models of understanding and interpreting the posture of faith.”⁴⁵ That is, the use of scripture, and particularly the theology/philosophy of Jesus, is to help us arrive at the posture of faith and to better explain what this is. The religious articulations are of little concern, therefore, in themselves, as the goal is never a correct articulation but a certain form of living. At the same time, the denial of religion, or arguments regarding the non-existence of God, are equally unimportant and questioned in this method.

This leads to the distinction between the results of engagement with the material of religion. Conventional religious faith (belief) and Laruelle’s faith start from a similar place, within an immanent faith. They develop in different directions, however, where the non-philosopher’s faith resists development into religion:

Within a faith that has been converted or transformed into a religion, the risen Christ is understood in terms of an anticipated object. From this understanding follows an eventual appropriation of the risen Christ by a dialectic. When faith refuses such a conversion into religion, however, and, instead, uni-verses, then this gives rise to the non-religious. The non-religious accompanies, like an effect, the Man (of) faith, who grants this much like a grace that he has not received. The subject, moreover, can receive the call of the religious as a solicitation or an occasional cause, inviting him or her to the living memory and actions of Christ.⁴⁶

Faith, as the posture of immanence, is a starting point, and it is possible for this core faith to be taken in one of two directions. In the first direction, faith becomes belief and becomes a religion with its dogmatic arguments and understandings. In a faith of this sort, like Christianity for example, a doctrine like the “risen Christ” becomes a specific, future event, a specific conception of an event, a conception which is eventually subsumed into a philosophical/theological dialectic. In this movement, from event to remote conception of an object of faith, the person moves away from immanence, and faith loses its praxis and thus becomes belief.

Faith, however, can avoid this development and tend towards the “non-religious,” which, despite lacking the authoritative directives of religion, still holds a crucial effect for the Man (of) faith, working as a “grace.” By not becoming an object of faith, a controlled and conceptualized intellectual event, it is possible to communicate the practice of immanence, rather than communicating through an intellectual discourse devoid of praxis. Laruelle explains this impact:

Two affirmations must be held together in a unilateral manner: *faith is without object but nevertheless brings about the non-religious on the occasion of religion*. ... Far from withdrawing or abstracting itself from the world, faith abstracts itself in such a radical manner that it thus transforms religion and emancipates the human subject.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Ibid., 18.

⁴⁵ Ibid., xxx.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 45.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 46.

Religion leads to the non-religious through faith, even as faith is without content; the result of this faith is the “emancipation” of the human subject. The religious thus has its uses. Even if the religion is in no way in itself to be affirmed, whether doctrinally or structurally, there is still an effect which comes out of an engagement with religion. As Laruelle explains, this is what differentiates his thought from a mere repudiation of all religion or philosophy:

This is why our enterprise ends not with the experience of a pure and simple negation of Christianity, that is to say, of belief, but with an objective uncertainty of faith that we oppose to belief, our material, an experience oscillating between the demand for fidelity and the indeterminacy of faith at least as cognizance of messianity or of grace.⁴⁸

If Laruelle’s approach were to make these sorts of systematic denials or approvals, then it would, of course, be a system of decision like all those other philosophies and theologies he is critiquing. It still may be. But on this point, the approach is not to assert a truth but to come to immanence using the resources of the system, in this case, Christianity.

The movement described here requires a shift to the axiomatic use of religion, and thus a shift in our approach to the scriptures. This is seen in the juxtaposition between seeing the words of the text as “axioms that decide Christ” instead of quasi-theorems which possess an “empirical validity that orders or regulates human life from the heavens.”⁴⁹ The risk is that the stance of faith makes the shift into religion described above, as Laruelle suggests, “faith interpreting faith or auto-justifying itself.” Instead, Laruelle describes the alternative:

What matters here is a progress towards uni-version, that is, an operation tracing or establishing the sayings of Jesus as simple axioms and formulae, possessing an *a priori* concrete content understood to be ‘material,’ but human or immanent. They are thus able to engender the Word called, in this case, Christo-fiction, which undoes the philosophical presuppositions of Christocentrism or Christology, underpinning multiple doctrinal variants.⁵⁰

The sayings of Jesus are able, therefore, to aid in the “undoing” of philosophy and theology, especially that of the Christian variety. The religion provides the undoing of itself, by undoing its own beliefs. This enables the arrival of the person at immanence by following the sayings of Jesus as axiomatic instructions rather than heavenly revelations, the latter being freighted with systematic connotations which eliminate the possibility of immanence. This is, as Laruelle suggests, the proper work of faith:

Even the Man (of) faith is not the proprietor of himself and, above all, not ‘his’ faith. The work of faith takes shape in the struggle against the Principle of Sufficient Catholicism, namely the Roman Church, and, in general, against every other minor form and variation: confessions structured in accordance with hierarchical institutions, through consecration or privilege, ministry or the Good....The only tradition *in real time* is the clonage by faith of a faithful subject and the primacy of the Risen over the Resurrection. This is the real content of the apostolic tradition insofar as it does not find itself confused with or distorted by history.⁵¹

The tradition which is to be transmitted is thus this “undoing,” the coming to faith through clonage of one “faithful subject” to another. There is, therefore, no transmission of content or belief, but rather a transmission of a posture, aided by the axiomatic use of the religion.

2.1.4 Faith and the Possibility of the Real

One of the core features of Laruelle’s work is the defining of the relationship between thought/articulation and reality. For Laruelle, as Sackin-Poll writes, “There is no adequate relation between language and the Real.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 95.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 58.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., 93–4.

A symbol or name cannot exhaust the content of its referent.”⁵² The problem of philosophy and theology is that an adhesion between thought and reality is presumed not only possible but a feature of that philosophy or theology. Non-standard philosophy, on the other hand, denies any sort of sufficiency to these modes of thought. And yet, non-standard philosophy does not leave us in a position of perfect nihility, instead announcing an emancipation: “We are definitively free from the chains of language, which have been the instrument of our alienation, and not only in a philosophical manner.”⁵³ The position of faith “bars the auto-sufficiency”⁵⁴ of discourse; that is, it prevents the systemization which chains humans in language.

In this understanding, as Laruelle puts it, “Faith is the Real.”⁵⁵ The posture of faith is the human freed from philosophical and theological theorizing restraining what they are individually and restraining as well the things of the world; the real of Man is not expressed in language but as living. Discourse is not dismissed, as Laruelle notes – there is even a place for the continued presence of metaphysics. But this metaphysics is subject to Man, rather than the inverse which is found throughout the world of philosophy and theology. This inversion is theo-fiction, and as Laruelle writes: “On the contrary, we practice a theo-fiction”⁵⁶ – *practice* theo-fiction, rather than believing or assenting to it. Language can be used by the Man (of) faith, but the purpose is different, as Sackin-Poll notes of this distinction:

This limits the way language can be employed by the faithful, not in a skeptical manner, as something that cannot ever serve to signify—like a negative theology or *apophysis*—but precisely as an experimental application of terms in order to measure their effects.⁵⁷

The engagement with the Real by the Man (of) faith, therefore, allows not for a direct representation or retelling of the Real, but for an experimental evaluation – does this language lead to freedom from the chains of language? Language itself thus does not ever gain a reified status, but does gain an effectual status, based on its practical use.

2.2 Nishitani

While Laruelle defines faith as an “immanent posture,” Nishitani’s immanence is something which emerges from both his Buddhist and Nietzschean influences. For this reason, developing the way in which faith is an immanent posture requires a further excursus into his thought than in the case of Laruelle. But, in a related way to Laruelle’s “real,” religion for Nishitani is about the “real self-awareness of reality,”⁵⁸ a position which is made possible for the person in faith – even as there are extensive qualifications on what this “real” means. This faith, like Laruelle’s, is not dogmatic or doctrinal, but refers to the achievement of a standpoint – the term posture is at least resonant. Key to this understanding is that Nishitani will use, in a way again resembling the practice of Laruelle, various philosophical and religious arguments as pragmatic tools for communicating the core of his thought, with the ultimate intention not of creating a system of thought but an embodied practice. This core is grounded upon “Absolute Nothingness,” one of the central themes of the Kyoto School.

⁵² Ibid., xxxix.

⁵³ Ibid., 123.

⁵⁴ Ibid., xxviii.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 48.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 123.

⁵⁷ Ibid., xxxix.

⁵⁸ Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 5.

2.2.1 Faith as an Immanent Posture

In one of many resonances with (and distinctions within detail from) Laruelle, this “Absolute Nothingness” or emptiness (*śūnyatā*) is “One” or “One and All.”⁵⁹ For Nishitani, however, this absolute is not a transcendental claim, or at least does not function as an abstraction removed from or hidden behind what is immanent. Instead, this is understood in the field of emptiness, with the logic of the nondual, absolute nothingness, and the things of the world are both one and independent of each other. Nishitani explains:

This is the “One and All,” not as is contemplated on the field of reason, but as it is comprehended on the field of *śūnyatā*. This is, as noted earlier, not simply “being,” but being at one with emptiness; and, consequently, it is not an absolute unity abstracted from all multiplicity and differentiation in the world, but an absolute unity on the field where multiplicity and differentiation are absolutely radicalized. It means that an All that is nothingness-sive-being, being sive-nothingness is One; it means that on the field of *śūnyatā* all centers, each of which is absolutely independent, are essentially one.⁶⁰

The person who moves from the field of reason to the field of *śūnyatā* and embraces the world in this non-dual, non-subject/object manner is the one, in the language of traditional Buddhism, who has become enlightened. Nishitani is not recommending enlightenment in an uncritical sense, of course; but the philosophical perspective he recommends is emerging directly from the arguments of that tradition. And to understand existence properly is to be able to see it as nothingness-sive-being, recognizing as well that there is no “I” doing this seeing even as a self emerges.

Nishitani, as mentioned above, will employ religious traditions as a way of expressing his understanding, including Christian language. On the matter of immanence, he writes of the doctrine of the omnipresence of God, and a few of its implications. First:

The Christian must be able to pick up a single pebble or blade of grass and see the same consuming fire of God and the same pillar of fire, hear the same thunderous roar, and feel the same “fear and trembling” that Moses experienced.⁶¹

God as omnipresent means, of course, that there is no distinction between things or places in terms of their presence of God. The Christian who holds this perspective and actually lives in light of this understanding would be a person who truly understands that this seemingly omnipresent, and thus, transcendent God is, in reality, perfectly immanent:

But to say that God is omnipresent implies the possibility of meeting God everywhere in the world. This is not pantheism in the usual sense of the word, since it does not mean that the world is God or that God is the immanent life of the world itself. It means that an absolutely transcendent god is absolutely immanent.⁶²

As Nishitani clarifies, this does not mean that individual things are erased and reduced to being merely “God” or “Absolute Nothingness.” They are “absolutely independent” in the field of *śūnyatā* as they are One. This understanding of immanence empties transcendence – there is no *thing* which is transcendent and can be pointed to, only what is immanent. This is where Nietzsche’s thought particularly reveals its influence on Nishitani. Citing a key passage from Nietzsche’s *Twilight of the Idols*, the final chapter of *Religion and Nothingness* returns several times to this principle: “*Es gibt Nichts ausser dem Ganzen.*” “There is nothing outside of the whole.” For Nishitani, this passage from Nietzsche establishes a turn away from the western conceptualization of history and time towards the “moment,” “*der Augenblick*” for Nietzsche, and “the home-ground of the present” for Nishitani.⁶³ Sarah Flavel has traced the connections and distinctions between Nietzsche and Nishitani on the matter of time and is present in a pair of articles. She indicates the connection

⁵⁹ Ibid., 164.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., 39.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid., 230.

between Zarathustra's "gateway" and Zen formulations of interdependence,⁶⁴ and later connects Nishitani's practice of Death's-Head contemplation with Nietzsche's "affirmation of the whole."⁶⁵ For Nishitani, then, the affirmation of the world requires the turn to the present in a manner which follows Nietzsche's affirmation of the moment by Zarathustra.

Though many are likely to be suspicious of this invocation of God or the notion of an absolute which seemingly hides behind the scenes, Nishitani is quite clear about where our focus is to lie. If we, for example, begin to think of God or Absolute Nothingness as something which can be thought about, then we are not on the field of *sūnyatā* – we are failing to perceive things correctly. He offers this clarification particularly in the context of twentieth-century treatments of nothing and nothingness, including Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Sartre, suggesting that each retains a degree of objectification of nothingness:

And as long 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 denial of self-attachment, but in fact that attachment is rather exponentialized and concealed. 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.⁶⁶

The God who is omnipresent in all things can never be thought of as something outside of those things – there is no transcendent to be thought. God is always immanent, and this absolute transcendence is, at the same time, absolute immanence, never reducible to one thing or the other.

This leads to the discussion of faith; faith appears in Nishitani's thought in multiple senses and contexts, both in its connection with Christianity and in Buddhism, and in both positive and pejorative senses. The distinctively positive sense is taken specifically from the Buddhist tradition, which speaks of faith in certain, carefully qualified, terms. Bret Davis's article on faith in the larger Buddhist tradition highlights the existence of two notions in the *Zengakudaijiten* (*Large Dictionary of Zen Studies*), where there is "one at the beginning of the path, as 'the necessary state of mind for entering the gate of the Buddha Way,' and one at the end of the path, as 'the ultimate state of mind attesting to the truth (*shoshin* Japanese characters).'"⁶⁷ Nishitani follows this track in his discussion of Buddhism, focusing on Nāgārjuna's *Awakening of Faith*, and affirms the significance of the concept at both of the stages described above. He writes:

Yet even Nāgārjuna himself, who more than anyone else exhausted the intellectual path, remarked that you can enter the vast sea of Buddhist law by faith. To state that the narrowest faith is the only entrance to the vast sea of the Buddhist law means that in any event we must proceed step by step toward the place where we come to meet the "enlightened"—this place being faith in the "Buddha" who is the source of all "laws." In Buddhism this movement is called the arousal of a single thought, the awakening of faith, or the awakening of the aspiration to enlightenment. Faith in its religious sense—movement into "vast faith"—means, to use Buddhist terms, that the self has awakened to enlightenment (correct perception) for the first time, or that this aspiration to enlightenment has occurred from within itself in a self-aware and experiential manner as "one single thought."⁶⁸

The beginning of faith which is described here is identified as something very small: the belief that Buddhist teaching has the potential to lead somewhere beneficial for the person. What comes next, which Nishitani identifies as "the movement into 'vast faith,'" is enlightenment, or at least the aspiration thereto; as he indicates that Nāgārjuna is emblematic of this movement, it requires that one has "exhausted the intellectual path." This "vast faith" is no longer faith in the sense of belief in a teaching or doctrine. It is, instead, manifested as a way of life, something realized without assertion.

Nishitani makes another distinction between forms of faith in his *Religion and Nothingness*, again drawing from the Buddhist tradition. This time, the two forms of faith are identified as, first, the faith of the Buddha

⁶⁴ Flavel, "Nishitani's Nietzsche," 11–24, 20.

⁶⁵ Flavel, "Affirming Fate and Incorporating Death," 1248–72, 1259.

⁶⁶ Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 33.

⁶⁷ Davis, "Faith and/or/as Enlightenment," 40, with reference to *Zengakudaijiten Hensansho* 1985, 603.

⁶⁸ Nishitani, "Emptiness and Sameness," 209.

towards sentient beings, and second, the faith of the human. Nishitani then connects this understanding with Christian terminology, as well:

We find the concept of faith as a reality in this sense both in Christianity and in Buddhism. In Christianity, faith is considered to be a grace flowing from divine love. Buddhism distinguishes between “two types of profound faith.” Faith is seen in its primordial sense as the turning of the “Power of the Original Vow” (that is, the saving will) of the *Tathāgata* (Buddha) in the direction of all sentient beings. This is known as the *dharma faith*. When this, in turn, meets with the real awareness of sin by man, it becomes *human faith*. In Christianity, faith in Christ means both man’s witness to and appropriation of God’s redeeming love, and also God’s actualization of and witness to his own divine love in man.⁶⁹

Once more, this faith is developed in the direction of practice, and away from doctrine – at least, we should say, this is the way that Nishitani develops this idea. In particular, focusing on the Christian portion of this articulation, faith involves the “appropriation” of God as love, and God’s “actualization” in humans; that is, faith is not the confession of a doctrine, but is more significantly the realization of such a love in one’s life as one gives oneself in love, a living witness.

This prioritization of faith in the lived sense can be especially seen in Nishitani’s treatment of the apostle Paul in his essay, “Ontology and Utterance.” Nishitani argues that Paul’s speaking of the message of Christianity is for no other reason than to bring new life into the lives of the Christians who follow him, such that they could say, with him, “it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal. 2:20). Thus, for Nishitani, Paul’s transmission of faith is not the transmission of intellectual content, but rather the transmission of life. He writes, “This reciprocal giving-receiving is spoken of as the giving up in death and giving over (*paradidomai*, *trado*) of oneself, of one’s being and living, to another. From this *traditio* of life-death and death-life originates the tradition of Christian ‘life’ and ‘faith.’”⁷⁰ This collapsing of the distinction between life and faith is crucial to understanding how Christianity functions, at least according to Paul’s approach. Paul teaches, but the goal is not the transmission of a doctrine, rather the handing on of the life/death of Jesus such that the person comes to new life. That this is something separate from doctrine is confirmed by the nature of the new life, as Nishitani explains: “But at the bottom of the transference of his life, that is, ‘faith,’ exists something untransferable, which is the mystical union originating Christ.”⁷¹ What is transferred is not a body of knowledge, but the single person’s union with Christ. Nishitani clarifies his understanding of mystical union in this piece, which is beyond our purview; but nonetheless, it is crucial to point to the union as the key concern, not the idea of a specific intellectual content. The Christian religion is Paul’s union with Christ, who lives in him, and the handing on of tradition is, therefore, the realization of the possibility of the next Christian’s enactment of the same union with Christ.

Faith for Nishitani’s Christian, therefore, is directed towards the realization of the immanence of God in all things, the realization of the divine love for oneself and as oneself; in this sense, faith is life, the true life of God manifest in the person’s own life. For the Buddhist, faith is the realization of the immanence of *emptiness* in all things, world and self, inclusive, at the same time as this emptiness is not a *thing* hidden within, but is the thing itself. This is suggested in part by Nishitani’s citation of Nietzsche’s claim that there is nothing outside of the whole,⁷² which follows Nietzsche’s critique of a transcendent God as a form of world denial. Emptiness does not point to something beyond all things, nor does it resolve the existence of all things into an explanatory unity.

2.2.2 Faith as Distinct from Belief

As just indicated, Nishitani’s articulation of faith relies on a similar distinction from belief as we witnessed in Laruelle and Nietzsche. This distinction is not made as concretely as we see in Laruelle, though it is clearly

⁶⁹ Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 26.

⁷⁰ Nishitani, “Ontology and Utterance,” 29–43, 41.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁷² Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 229–33.

found in his work, as Davis concludes: “Faith, for Nishitani, is not a matter of belief in the supernatural or a transcendent afterlife, but rather a matter of returning to a life of naturalness in egoless community with all beings.”⁷³ The primary location for this discussion is found in Nishitani’s “Emptiness and Sameness,” as well as *Religion and Nothingness*. In the former, Nishitani provides something of an overview of the history of belief, writing of the movement of the understanding of the religious viewpoint over time. As he writes, the starting point is with irrational beliefs:

In earlier ages known as primitive societies, the standpoint of archaic religious “beliefs” supported the entire surface of human life. Various kinds of “belief”—what the later science of religion distinguished from true religions as “magic”—flourished in different forms, producing magicians who recited spells and performed incantations.⁷⁴

It is crucial here to note that Nishitani is not being dismissive of these notions of religion; instead, he seems to lament the movement to distinguish religion from magic which occurs in modern Christianity and affirm that Buddhism has not drawn such a strict line. The reason he is positive, in a qualified sense, is that the core of all beliefs is a requirement of the occurrence of something illogical or absurd and to accept these experiences requires an “opening.” This opening is necessary to come to the place which is no longer restricted by reasoning, language, or thinking:

On the other hand, the “opening” of the world, as I will be mentioning later, is also the place where religious reality (in the different forms of mythology, revelation, mysticism, enlightenment, and so forth) “is given” as well as experienced. To this extent, it “goes beyond” the intellectual power of reason and comes after all logics.⁷⁵

It is in this open space that religious faith in its ideal sense occurs, where the “intellectual” is exhausted and faith becomes life. In this sense, preliminary beliefs or magical understandings of the world are not negative, but merely introductory. The opening of the mind is necessary for the opening of the heart, and it is this opening which Nishitani identifies with the “awakening” of Nagarjuna, and thus: “As I mentioned earlier, this is nothing but ‘faith’ in its religious sense. The opening of the religious world is a turning toward the original place where the opening of the ‘world’ is an absolute opening, and it is the opening of man’s heart.”⁷⁶ From this place, Buddhism in particular, but also at least certain tracks within Christianity, develops the methods of self-awareness, which makes possible the “real self-awareness of reality.”⁷⁷

For this reason, metaphysical beliefs, propositions, confessions, and so on are not understood to be a part of the fully formed faith as Nishitani develops it. This distinction is seen in the critique he offers of subject/object, ego, and the active self, on which conventional notions of faith generally rely. He explains:

The acceptance of divine love is called faith. Although this faith remains throughout a faith of the self, it is fundamentally different from the ordinary sense of faith which posits the self as its agent. In ordinary usage, faith is an *act* performed by the self, immanent in the self, and arising from *within* the self as an intentionality toward some object. It is the same even when we speak of believing in oneself. In all its forms belief does not depart from the field of consciousness and self-consciousness.⁷⁸

Any form of belief, therefore – any propositional content *held* by a subject in the direction of a proposed object – is excluded from faith. This would be to remain in the field of consciousness, whereas Nishitani is pushing the movement towards the field of *śūnyatā*. On the field of *śūnyatā*, there is no subject or object, and thus, there is no acting subject, no “I” to say “I believe.” Instead, faith happens at the intersection of the self (differently understood) and Absolute Nothingness, articulated variously as God or Tathāgata.

Faith, as understood in the context of the new understanding of religion suggested by Nishitani (through his predecessor Nishida Kitaro), emerges from the field of *śūnyatā*...

⁷³ Davis, “Faith and/or as Enlightenment,” 42.

⁷⁴ Nishitani, “Emptiness and Sameness,” 207.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 204.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 210.

⁷⁷ Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 5.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 26.

In religion, however, faith comes about only on a horizon where this field has overstepped and the framework of the “ego” has been broken through. Sin comes to be realized within the self as a reality emerging from the one ground of being of the self itself and of all men, or of all sentient beings (*sattva*). So, too, must the faith that signifies salvation as a conversion from that sin be a Great Reality.⁷⁹

Religion in this sense is not about a body of doctrine; instead, it is about the “everyday mind,” a certain form of existence. Nishida’s articulation is consonant with Nishitani’s, emphasizing the immanence of the eternal (Absolute Nothingness, Nirvana, and God). He writes:

The religious form of life is that dimension of experience in which human existence itself comes into focus. It does not have a fixed content. It is the standpoint of all standpoints. Every claim of privileged content for it becomes mere superstition. Hence, religious creeds must always be taken as only symbolic. Religious creeds are only the immediate expressions of our historical life. With that qualification, religious symbols have their significance. But the goal of true religion should lie in grasping eternal life in its own immediacy in our lives.⁸⁰

Nishida, then, and Nishitani following him, employ the symbols of religion as a means of bringing people into the “dimension of human existence itself.” Buddhist teaching and doctrine are useful insofar as they help to bring about the standpoint of all standpoints, without any fixed content.

This articulation of religion, it is important to note, is not an empty “void” relationship. It does not reduce the self and existence to a nothingness which does nothing; instead, it is this standpoint of absolute nothingness which makes it possible for the self to actually be a self. The ego self is shown to be a falsehood, an illusion, but the symbolic doctrine of religion teaches both the absolute nothingness of all things and the particularization of the self as a single self, in its unicity. Nishitani explains:

In general, then, this sort of faith indicates the point at which the self truly becomes the self itself. The elemental realization of evil and sin, the field of nothingness opened up in that realization, and the acceptance in belief of the working of salvation all signify, each in its own way, the point at which the self becomes itself as something absolutely unique, the most “private” point in the self, the standpoint of the “solitary man” as Kierkegaard has it. Not only can no one else take the place of the self; but even the “self” of ordinary parlance, that is the self as “ego,” is equally incapable of replacing the true self.⁸¹

In this realization of self as a non-ego self, the human itself is revealed. This is a reception of the “real self-awareness of reality,”⁸² which is, again, how Nishitani introduces religion. As he explains further:

The moment one pure act of faith springs up, this faith is constituted as a state of non-regression through which the believer enters a state of “right confirmation.” This is so because this faith is not merely a conscious act of the self, but an actualization within the self of the reality we have been speaking of.⁸³

This actualization is not the development of a new reality, but simply the realization of the already-existing reality now freed of illusion.

2.2.3 The Axiomatic Use of Religion

The previous section introduced the distinction between faith and belief and touched on the nature of religion for Nishitani. This sense of religion functions once more in a way with resonances to Laruelle; doctrines are used without any adherence to the doctrine for the sake of coming to the immanence of the self and the world itself. Nishitani is careful in his criticism of “popular” religion and does not dismiss it, though he hardly recommends adherence. Instead, he sees in the religious or the magical (or the artistic, it should be

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Kitaro, *Last Writings*, 115.

⁸¹ Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 27.

⁸² Ibid., 5.

⁸³ Ibid., 28.

mentioned), the possibility of the opening of the heart to a space outside of the constraints of knowledge, reasoning, or language. In this section, I will focus on another element introduced in Laruelle's axiomatic sense of religion, which is the emphasis on creativity, a theme also present within Nishitani's work. The human self which is realized in faith is not a self according to a set notion of "human" or "man," but is the individual self in its specificity. Religious doctrines which describe, therefore, the ideal person offer a movement which is necessarily criticized by Nishitani, as they make the movement from faith to dogma. On the contrary, Nishitani describes the creative process of new birth:

Faith as a *realization* of the love of God (actualization-sive-appropriation) necessarily evolves in the "love of neighbor." When St. Paul uses the word *theopneustos*, (Gk. Characters) "inspired by God" (2 Tim 3:16), he does not mean that we have the Holy Spirit breathed *into us*, but rather that our very being becomes "God-breathed" through the breath (spiration) of God himself. This is the *reality* of faith and rebirth in faith. The ancients expressed a similar idea in the saying "The channel forms as the water flows." That is, water does not flow into a ready-made waterway called "man" but flows freely in its own way, and so makes its own waterway called "the new man." The reality of this rebirth, of this new creation is the absolute affirmation born out of absolute negation.⁸⁴

The person is formed by the flow of the water (God, symbolically) and is outside of the control of either the person or the religion as a whole. Attempts to contain or restrain this flow are, in fact, contrary to faith, relying as they would on the ego. This leads to Nishitani's critique of intolerance, targeting particularly the Christianity of European history, and mostly excluding Buddhism from such behaviour. The reason for this intolerance emerges from an incorrect notion of faith, one which views faith in the negative sense as an act of the ego self, along with the notion of the personal God. He writes:

Intolerance here is essentially bound up with the fact that faith comes into being here on a *personal* standpoint: the standpoint of a personal relationship with a personal God. This is so because, in the last analysis, in religion the personal contains some sort of self-centeredness. Consequently, the faith of Christianity could not help setting off antagonisms from time to time between this self-centeredness and the other element of *agape*, namely, the love of neighbor.⁸⁵

This negative sense of faith/religion is bound up in the notion of the personal: I have a relationship with God, a relationship of subject and object; because I have this relationship with a certain object/notion, challenges to my understanding of that object are challenges to the relationship I am in. When a certain understanding of the personal God is under threat, therefore, all those who believe themselves to be in a personal relationship with that understanding feel themselves to be equally threatened. Contrast this with the notion of faith as "divine love" in Nishitani's understanding: this faith does not rely on doctrine, dogma, or certainty – it does not even rely on a notion of love, but rather a manifestation in practice. As in the passage cited at the start of this section, grace forms the "new man" in whatever way it wishes, and the person who is receptive of this grace through faith does not accomplish this change through an action of their ego-self – the way in which they are formed is not up to them, if they have the faith Nishitani describes.

Nishitani's article "Ontology and Utterance" addresses this tension directly; the concern here is with the challenge of understanding what Paul is saying in certain instances which seem to violate or otherwise challenge ontological philosophical and theological norms. He suggests that there is a "nonontological" core of religion which forms the foundation of faith. This nonontological core can manifest in certain utterances – religious sayings, in particular – which attempt to express the practice of faith. But instead of continuing in their existence as the non-doctrinal, non-dogmatic faith, there is a "bias inherent in such utterances to become dogmatic."⁸⁶ In this instance, Nishitani is most interested in Paul's "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." (Gal. 2:20) The philosophical and theological interpretations of this passage are various, but any interpretation distracts from the core purpose of the statement, which is not intended to be a doctrinal. The

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 208.

⁸⁶ Nishitani, "Ontology and Utterance," 30.

purpose is, instead, the handing on of the tradition of the apostles, which is, once more, not a body of doctrine, but a transference of “life-death and death-life.” Nishitani explains:

Tradition is not a mere empty repetition. The tradition of life in Zen is compared to the pouring of water from a brimming bowl into another without spilling a single drop. This is made possible only by the radical transference of life-death and death-life taking place between man and man. The sheer difficulty of this task brings about formalization. Treachery creeps into the relation which ought to be the giving/receiving of the eternal life between man and man. The *traditio* of life can, at any time, turn into a falseness. But a true tradition is always creative...But at the bottom of the transference of his [Christ's] life, that is, “faith,” exists something untransferable, which is the mystical union originating in Christ.⁸⁷

There is always a risk in this transference. Laruelle, I would suggest, will argue that Paul only teaches belief – faith in its negative sense – and does not have anything equivalent to this core transference of the self/Christ's life as a non-doctrinal effort to be found. This will, again, be discussed shortly; more pertinent to this section is once more the vision of religion and doctrine suggested. The entire purpose of religion in the sense that Nishitani employs it is the transference of a non-doctrinal form of life in immanence coinciding with the “Real self-awareness of reality.”⁸⁸ The development of this process into a formal religion or a body of doctrine is acceptable only insofar as the language is conducive to leading people on the path to faith; but in itself, the doctrine is not privileged, nor should it be static. Instead, as appears here once more, “true tradition is always creative.”

2.2.4 Faith and the Possibility of the Real

Finally, we come to the encounter with things as they are made possible by this faith. Nishitani's philosophy is founded upon the notion of the standpoint or field of *śūnyatā*, contrasted from the standpoint or field of consciousness. To come to the standpoint of *śūnyatā* means a different sort of encounter with the things of the world is made possible. Nishitani describes this altered standpoint on multiple levels.

First, the self. Although Buddhist thought is often characterized as a form of self-denial, or lacking a theory of the self (*anatman*), Nishitani will argue that there is a self which is found in the field of *śūnyatā*, and this is the true self. He writes, “Faith, in contrast, marks the point at which the self is really and truly a *solitary* self, and really and truly becomes the self itself. At the same time, however, this faith is not simply a thing of the self, but takes on the shape of a reality.”⁸⁹ Faith, again, and the self itself, are not concepts, but realities – they are manifest in life as an existence. This existence emerges out of the recognition that the self of the ego, the self of concepts and understandings, is a false self; this self is negated. At the same time as this self is negated, the real “solitary” self is affirmed, as it actually is in its singular nature: “This reality comes about at once as the absolute negation and the absolute affirmation of the solitary self.”⁹⁰

This self which emerges occurs as part of the process described as “conversion” in religious texts. It is this conversion which makes the encounter possible with things as they are. Nishitani explains:

We noted that even though all these things belong to us as our very own, they are real primarily in themselves, and only *really* become our own when we ourselves become their realization. In other words, only when they make themselves present to us in their suchness are we able to be aware of the self in them.⁹¹

The negation of the self and the negation of all things (absolute negation) work with the affirmation of self and all things (absolute affirmation). In this unresolved relationship, things present themselves as they are, with Nishitani explaining this as the result of “non-attachment.” He writes:

⁸⁷ Ibid., 41–2.

⁸⁸ Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 5.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 27.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid., 29.

All attachment is negated: both the subject and the way in which “things” appear as objects of attachment are emptied. Everything is now truly empty, and this means that all things are themselves present here and now, just as they are, in their original reality. They present themselves in their suchness, their *tathāta*. This is non-attachment.⁹²

Much as in the case of Laruelle, this revelation of things as they are does not establish a simple return to philosophy as it was accomplished before. But there is a giving of things as they are which is part of the new form of lived existence made possible in this conversion.

This “giving” is the poetic form of existence – the poet is the one who is open to reality and thus receives from the world in a way different than others. In Nishitani’s article on the poet Basho, he references Kierkegaard’s three forms of existence, the poetic, the ethical, and the religious, and then argues that for a Japanese poet like Basho, there is no distinction between the poetic and the religious.⁹³ The coincidence of religion and poetry is likewise developed in “Emptiness and Sameness,” where Nishitani writes:

This poetic approach implies a course of inquiry that never departs from experience but penetrates the source of experience. Such a course shares the same standpoint with religion. While digging into the ground of knowledge, religion also includes a tendency to overcome the standpoint of “knowledge.”⁹⁴

Experience is the key term here; Nishitani’s engagement with the term is grounded upon the development of the notion in Nishida’s thought, though deviating in key ways. The poetic/religious approach leads the person directly to “experience,” which is outside of the standpoint of “knowledge” – the experience is not the achievement of objective knowledge in any sense, and in fact relies on the overcoming of the perspective which would seek to analyse the world as a subject analyses an object. Instead, in this direct experience, the “real self-awareness of reality”⁹⁵ becomes possible. Nishitani explains:

But when the limits of “art” appear in such a way, the opening far in the distance of such limits is, to say it simply, the horizon of “religion.” The appearance of reality as simply “reality,” beyond language and all its logos and reason, is the end of the way known as art and the beginning of the new way of religion.⁹⁶

Religion begins with this experience of the real – the way of faith is the coming to immanence. Nishitani further clarifies that “the experienced reality of actuality is originally always “something directly given.” Yet it is not given to our “consciousness” as a “representation.” Reality “is given” experientially to ourselves as one body and mind.”⁹⁷ Through this religion, then, reality is non-representationally embodied – it becomes what one is, and thus one becomes, or *is*, reality itself.

3 Conclusion

What is faith? For the thinkers discussed here, in its ideal form, faith is the unmediated affirmation of the world, and the person of faith is the one who lives as part of this reality emancipated from the strictures of systematic thought. It is fully practical; non-doctrinal, non-dogmatic, non-articulable. This purity is complicated in Nietzsche, perhaps, whose reflection on this affirmation indicates conclusions which may be considered doctrinal. Nonetheless, there is a consistency of orientation to the world, not as a concept, and not as one observes it, but as an embrace of the world and ourselves as we are here. This faith is, interestingly enough, always given; Zarathustra gives to his disciples, and Laruelle and Nishitani each describe their own

⁹² Ibid., 34.

⁹³ Nishitani, “Ku,” 285.

⁹⁴ Nishitani, “Emptiness and Sameness,” 186.

⁹⁵ Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 5.

⁹⁶ Nishitani, “Emptiness and Sameness,” 196.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 192.

versions of tradition, a handing on which hands on nothing, and yet is a transferring which makes it possible for the person to come to faith, and with it, the affirmation of the world.

The four themes which govern this article are found in each thinker, although there are differences between each of them. These differences, however, are subtle and technical. The goal of the first aspect of faith presented in the article is the un-glossed engagement with reality, and the sense in which Nietzsche's anti-transcendent approach relates to Laruelle's immanence relates to Nishitani's claim that an "absolutely transcendent god is absolutely immanent,"⁹⁸ would require much additional wrangling to tease out a difference which could only be significant to these authors if it held practical implication, given that they are all pursuing a practical approach to existence. The specifics of immanence are different, but the key element is a this-worldly orientation to all things, and it is this postural change which constitutes the first element for each thinker.

The second distinction, the difference between faith and belief, likewise presents us with minor differences, but also key resonances. Nishitani's approach is perhaps the most kind to conventional religious doctrines, seeing within them the possibility of a positive functional use; nonetheless, the positive function is still that these teachings might help bring the person to nothingness, and thus to a position where these articulations are set aside. In this sense, the ending point is quite similar to Laruelle, even if Laruelle is more dismissive of "belief" from an earlier point in his thought. Nietzsche and Laruelle draw a polar diagram in this instance: belief goes in one direction, away from immanence, whereas faith heads in the opposite direction, towards immanence. Nishitani, by contrast, draws a linear diagram, where the teachings of "belief" tend, imperfectly, in the correct direction of nothingness, to be set aside in due time.

Despite this opposition, however, there is still a use for conventional religious categories – all of the thinkers use categories which they may not "believe" in, but still recognize as having a use for the articulation of the procedures of coming to faithfulness, which is the third category. Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* employs this strategy from start to finish – Zarathustra being a reference to the founder of Zoroastrianism, now repurposed and rewritten to serve Nietzsche's purpose of faith. He also, of course, uses more conventional religious categories and narratives, ideas like "faith" or Zarathustra's journey itself. And yet, Nietzsche's axiomatic use is more distant than Laruelle's, with Laruelle not bothering to develop an entirely new cosmology, but playing much more contentedly within the confines of the Christian Bible. Laruelle will "interpret" scriptures and deviate significantly from a Christian reading – again, see his reading of Paul as representative of "belief," and thus a perspective opposed to the true faith of Christian non-theology. Nishitani, on the other hand, works largely at the fringes of Christian interpretation, finding resources in authors like Meister Eckhart and Nicholas Cusanus to support his Zen-directed interpretation of Christianity.

Finally, reality – the real, the real self-awareness of reality, reality itself – it is only the person of faith who is truly engaged with reality. For Nishitani and Laruelle, this person does not receive new knowledge, but rather maintains a direct connection with the world, one which is unlike any other mediated system. This is the embodiment of reality as it is, a concept which is again found in Nietzsche, though perhaps with different resonances and manifestations. Nietzsche's "free spirit" not only "conceives" reality as it is, but "is" reality. This connection with the world is "enlightenment" in Nishitani's sense and is the "The Real" for Laruelle.

The key difference between the three thinkers, that of doctrine, is, intriguingly, a likely result of their shared lineage; that is, Nishitani and Laruelle are generally more careful to avoid the doctrinal or dogmatic in their work, yet they do so because of what Nietzsche has presented, even if he himself was not nearly as concerned with avoiding intellectual content in some ways. Zarathustra's faithfulness to the earth is, to my mind, the most significant reason for the emphasis on immanence in both Laruelle and Nishitani – not because either based their notions of faith on this specific feature of Nietzsche's thought nor am I suggesting that this excludes any other influence. Instead, it is Nietzsche's constant "yes" to life in all its forms that runs through his writings which has implanted itself in Laruelle and Nishitani. This centrepiece of Nietzsche's work is now built upon in two startlingly different formats, yet retaining its original kernel of devotion to this life.

⁹⁸ Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 39.

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