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EVIL, SIN, FALSITY AND THE DYNAMICS OF FAITH

Masao Abe

I

The apparently similar concepts of evil, sin, and falsity, when considered from our subjective standpoint, are somehow mutually distinct and yet at the same time somehow related. This essay examines these concepts in relation to the dynamics of the awakening of faith.

What is called evil opposes the rules of morality dictated by reason, even if it knows well what they are. The awareness of such an opposition exists because there is evil *as* evil. In contrast to this kind of evil, there is also what is called the awareness of the root evil. The awareness of the root evil means the awareness of a high degree of evil. This is the kind of evil that exists when the standpoint of reason itself, which activates a persistent obedience to the rules of morality that should be able to overcome the kind of evil discussed in the previous sense (i.e. evil as evil), realizes clearly the anti-moral quality of the self. This quality involves an unconscious attachment to the self itself in that, by emphasizing the rules of morality and actually adhering to these rules, it comes to be attached to the rules. The thoroughness of the principle of good that the standpoint of morality necessarily requires—in other words, the absolutization of the autonomy of reason—is aware of the self-contradictory nature within the standpoint of morality, which is that the self cannot avoid or evade the so-called Pharisaical hypocrisy (of attachment to the rules).

Therefore, in its awareness of the root evil, the morality of the self is made to become aware of its own limits and encounters nothingness when realizing these limits. At the extreme point of this tendency, the awareness of evil necessarily becomes one with the awareness of nothingness. Therefore, in spite of the excellent insight into the awareness of evil in Kant's philosophy, we must say that the awareness of evil that is not yet connected with the awareness of nothingness is a level of understanding that is not yet thoroughgoing.

In the midst of bottomless nothingness that fully encounters the consequences of the thoroughgoingness of the standpoint of such a morality, when seeing the light of God transcending in the direction of the self or when hearing Buddha's voice the self enters anew, through the

awareness of nothingness, into a relation with God. When illuminated by this light of God, “the absolute autonomy of human reason” is already being realized, again, not simply as evil, but as sin, that is, as an opposition to the will of God that is hardly to be forgiven. In other words, the way of being of the self that has been realized as a self-opposition to immanent human reason is here realized again as the opposition to the will of the transcendent God. Therefore, this means that the “fundamental subject” is an axis that mediates the awareness of sin and transforms itself from the human being to God. In entrusting everything to God’s will as such a fundamental subject, one takes God’s will for its will, and when one discovers the basis of subjectivity through the subjectivity of God an awareness of salvation is realized.

Within the standpoint of such a belief, nothingness related to the awareness of evil is overcome, and the self revitalizes as a new self, or a true selfhood that can rather bear the true nature of God. But, in this case, the true nature of God and the subjectivity of the human being are not completely identical. The subjectivity of the human being is actually cut apart from God and the human being is seen as something that does not possibly escape its own sinful nature, while at the same time the true nature of God appears to human reason as an absolute absurdity that is in the final analysis impossible to fathom. But the unity of subjectivity and the ordinary nature of truth is realized only when the subjectivity of the human being transcends the ordinary self through the awareness of sin and makes a decision based on faith to choose to adhere to the true nature of God. Moreover, such a transcendence of the self is possible only when God loses a sense of manifesting the self-transcendence of God by surpassing and crossing over the gap from the other world.

In contrast to the transcendent function of the moral self that is not the transcendence of the actual self but is simply the transcendence toward a standard self established objectively within the self trying in this way to seize such a self objectively, the transcending function of the standpoint of faith breaks through the whole realm of immanency. It is the entire self-transcendence that leaps into a relation with the transcending God, and in this case the objectification of the self as something that seizes the self objectively is entirely sublated. That is, within the standpoint of faith, along with the fact that the self of the human being is realized subjectively to the last end and, moreover, is realized as a complete self that has entered into an absolute relation with God, at the same time God appears not as God in a general sense but as a subjective, humanistic God. That is, God appears as

the “Thou” who voluntarily activates the will to save and tries to completely save the self of the human being. This is the very subjective, humanistic God that calls on this very subjective human “I.” The God of the philosophers is a God that has a common name, but the God of the religious believers must be a God that has a proper or personal name. This is a God that has a proper name and saves this “I” that has a proper name.

However, even if we say that the religious self is subjective, through the attitude of faith in such a God that sees Him as a “Thou,” it is a subjectivity that stands only as an object that receives the action of God as the fundamental subject. It rather entrusts everything to God because of the awareness of groundlessness (*Grund-losigkeit*), which indicates that by no means are we humans able through our own power to be subjective. By becoming the object of God’s salvation, we participate in the subjectivity of God and in this way we regain our own subjectivity. At this point, for the first time, the absolute actual self that, indeed, cannot be achieved through its own power becomes a true self because of God’s subjectivity.

Yet, only in the standpoint of faith is there the possibility that absolute reality, which is itself truth, mediates between the awareness of sin and salvation. In this process there is a split or divide that can be surpassed only by God, as well as a twofoldness that can become a oneness only based on God. After all, along with the fact that the self that stands on faith realizes itself as being a sinful self that rebels against God with the whole existence of the self, the self returns to God with the whole of such self-existence and realizes itself as a self that believes in salvation by God. This is based on the fact that the self that thus stands on faith is endlessly divided and consists of an opposition between the side of self that is completely sinful and the side of the self that is completely saved. That this self can actually exist as a complete self is based on nothing other than the reason that the self leaps into a relation with God in the midst of this division, and it becomes the container of the will of God through faith.

Therefore, the fact that there is a self that becomes one—even if the complete self as it is in itself is split transcendently into an opposition, as indicated above, and is not split immanently into an opposition as in the case of morality—is nothing other than the manifesting of a situation that is completely the same situation as the oneness of God and the self, which are split transcendently into an opposition. That is, on the one hand, even if the self is a faithless self that is contrary to God, on the other hand, because of the awareness of sin it returns to God as the faithful self that obeys the will of God. Then, the very thing that mediates the twofold split into an

opposition between the fundamental gap between such a self itself and God is the awareness of sin and salvation as being the will of God that penetrates the self through or the action of God's love.

Consequently, the reason for which it is said that the standpoint of faith has absolutely other-power-oriented existentiality lies in the action of God's love—which affirms and absorbs the sinful self that disbelievingly contradicts the will of God to offer salvation—as the manifestation of the absolute that the human self has difficulty evading. The very thing that surpasses the twofold split into an opposition previously discussed, and that unifies this from the direction of the transcendence, is nothing other than the action of the love of such a God. Within the standpoint of faith, the twofold that is split into an opposition to the end becomes one just because it is split in that way; but the one is not simply one, it is one just because it encompasses the twofold. The self is one with God because it is dichotomized from God and God is dichotomized from the self, and that is exactly why God absorbs the self and becomes one with it.

Along with the mystery of faith, we must wonder whether this standpoint of the twofoldness encompassed by oneness is also a problematic feature of faith.

II

Even if from the standpoint of faith the absolute split between the self and God is realized, it is ceaselessly surpassed through the transcendence from God, overturned, and elevated to a subjectivity that becomes one. But it must be said that there is some function of objectification to the extent that the oneness is not a pure oneness, but a oneness that includes the twofold. Nevertheless, even if we speak about a function of objectification here, it is not a function of objectification like the one found previously in the standpoint of morality that tries to grasp objectively the normative self and is transcendently established in the inner side of the self. This not being the case, the standpoint of faith completely sublates such an objectification and breaks through the immanency, and the complete self that stands before the transcendent God is a subjective standpoint to the end. Nevertheless, this subjective standpoint participates in the subjectivity of God by realizing the *Grund-losigkeit* of the self and completely becoming the object of the salvation of God as the fundamental subject.

From the standpoint of subjectivity that thus recovers from groundlessness and can be well founded, at this point is there not an objectification of God based on the self that is made in the form in which

the self becomes entirely the object of the salvation of God? This is the function of objectification that cannot be realized as an objectification that is not objectifiable. Then, the objective grasping of such a meaning of God is nothing other than the objective grasping of the self that is accomplished when grasping, in this way and at the same time, God objectively. The self grasps the self itself objectively in grasping God objectively. If we explain this more concretely, even in the standpoint of faith that has transcended the entire self, is there not left over a tinge of the shadow of the self in *the very action of the confirmation that further takes faith as properly faith?* Or, in the very process that absolutely negates self and world while transcending towards God or, further, establishing the self by facing God, is there not a self-affirmation *that is turned inside out?*

When this process tries to penetrate subjectively the standpoint of faith, does it not necessarily actualize itself and try to break up the very thing called faith? We should say that this involves a kind of antinomy in the standpoint of faith, in that the thoroughness of the standpoint of faith is in and of itself the biggest anti-faith act. Yet, at this point, we should pay attention to the fact that, even if we say that the self-affirmation that is turned inside out is actualized, this does not mean that there is a deepening of the awareness of the sin. Believing firmly in the certainty of salvation that appears more and more when accompanying a deepening of the awareness of sin is the standpoint of faith. For this reason, in the standpoint of faith, the deepening of the awareness of sin as egotism that rebels against God becomes the very proof of faith and by no means does it mean the dissolution of faith. That is the very paradox of faith, rather than the antinomy of faith.

The antinomy of faith that we are trying to define here is an antinomy that is lapsed into because of an objectification of God that is not brought to an appropriate level of self-awareness. In this way, a self-attachment that is only partially brought to an awareness, which lies hidden in the root of the standpoint of such a paradoxical faith, is nothing other than the revelation of self-affirmation that creeps into the very fact of emphasizing the paradox of such a faith. The repetition of the succession of faith, and of religious decision-making—and generally, the very fact of emphasizing the paradox of faith—is based on the persistence of faith, and as a result is there not a self-attachment that penetrates to what is called “faith”?

Such an awareness necessarily leads to the *awareness of falsity* as if keenly splitting oneself or to the awareness of the falsehood of the

fundamental self, such that the self that can bear religious truth does not completely free itself from the standpoint of self-attachment and love of self. The self that stands on faith, at the ultimate conclusion of the subjective thoroughness of that standpoint, realizes the root falsity that still lurks at the basis of that religious truth, breaks off relations with God within the awareness of this falsity, and for one moment is made to return to the absolutely real self. Therefore, at this point, we must say that it is not that absolute reality is itself directly the truth, but that the absolute reality is a matter of certainty itself certainty. One way or another, this means that even faith as self-negation is again realized as the activity of the transparent self, or as the radical self deeply refracted within itself—the most certain level of selfhood that cannot be negated by any other thing. That is the absolute self as the self, which as a self that has once been made transparent by negation from faith, finally negates again faith and is completed so that it takes “faith” for being a falsity. Moreover, this self is a self that does not transcend falsity within the awareness of falsity, but is more and more aware of the certainty of falsity within the awareness of falsity. It is a self that stands on a reliable sense of falsity simply without having any faith in truth, or a self that stands on a simple certainty of falsity without believing in any kind of truth.

By entering into a relation with God, however, the self overcomes nothingness encountered in the failure of morality and becomes the religious self, but at this moment it is drawn again into the dark abyss of groundlessness or nothingness because of the inevitable failure of faith to transcend falsity. Therefore, we must say that the awareness of falsity, along with being unified with the awareness of nothingness in and of itself, is an awareness in which the falsity that is surpassed by faith is thus made opposite to itself and is transformed into a twofoldness by being directly aware of itself once again. Now, if we call the awareness of nothingness due to the failure of morality a kind of nihilism based on the awareness of evil, this would imply the possibility of the self being overcome by believing in a transcendental divinity mediating within the human being as the nothingness faced in the very moment of the failure of immanent human reason.

Nevertheless, we must say that the nihilism implicit in the awareness of the falsity that we are now discussing, as the awareness of nothingness directly faced because of the failure of such a transcendental divine faith, is nihilistic in the most original sense of nihilism that cannot be overcome even through the transcendental God, not to mention the

immanent function of reason inside the human being. Then, if we suppose the existence of that which is called "true religion," this must refer to an experience of faith that which is able to overcome nihilism caused by such a profound awareness of falsity.