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Return to the Realm of Humanity – A Forum for “Kant” and “Nāgārjuna”

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1.
There are several difficulties in the comparison between Nāgārjuna and Kant. In general, with the lack of any absolute, unconditional authority, which these two philosophers must assent, no one's idea does not develop through time, especially with the cases of the compared two whose philosophical interests lie in an unavoidably very misty and profound realm, viz., the source of the limits/conditions of, as well as to, experience, and, predictably, the receptions, readings and discussions of the compared two remain highly controversial up to today. Nevertheless, happily but not out of contingency, the embarrassing corner the compared two struggled to approach must happen to be the same venue which exactly suffices the difficulties mentioned so far, suffice to reassure the absence of an absolute authority, to explain the unstable readability, et al. And beside of the venue, there is actually not much further misty and profoundness in us.

Moreover, the comparison still has a few more regional difficulties. With respect to Nāgārjuna, (1) the text (in this report restricted to Mūlamadhyamakakārikā, the Middle Way, by consultations with mainly Kumārajīva's 409 B.C. translation of Piṅgala's Commentary and Leutchford's Sanskrit grammatical analysis, 2002) is written in condensed verses with a very foreign language to modern languages; (2) Nāgārjuna has been constantly and widely commented as free of position, based upon which any comparison with Nāgārjuna especially to the western philosophers is held by some people to be but fruitless [1]. The two difficulties we have in Kant as well. (1') Kant's German, though is quite modern, is on the one hand remote to the present use [2], and on the other very creative and hence remote to his contemporary as well; besides, opposite to Nāgārjuna, the complexity in comprehension of the vast length of Kant's text (in this report mainly restricted to the first and the third Critique) causes no less barriers to entry. (2') Kant's “position” is so difficult to “grasp” that at the time when the second edition of the first Critique was published he had to add a “refutation” to indicate that the book was completely misread by everyone, and that at the present time we still have people who ask whether Kant has decent legitimate heirs or not at all [3]; and, there is a reason for the difficulty: the “position” in his transcendental idealism is not a common position in his own context. Nevertheless, it is a mistake itself already to assume that a text can rigidly grasp the driving soul behind, for even what the greatest writers can only do is the opposite. The difficulties must be bypassed or suspended, before different cut-ins for the dialogue between the two are found so that the difficulties become aids.

A person with pursue does not change the goal easily through time, whereas the paths can be random and diverse. If the pursue does not targets the mere appearances in experience nor the ungrounded beliefs, the representativeness of the goal for the person's pursuing is more credible and unique. Kant's conception of purposiveness is quite strategically adoptable here, that “a purpose is the object of a concept insofar as we regard this concept as the object's cause (the real basis of its possibility); and the causality that a concept has with regard to its object is purposiveness (forma finalis)” (the third Critique, Section 10), for the pursue of the two philosophers put in dialogue is not “anything empirical,” so that we find a cut-in for the formation of the forum: whether the purpose of Nāgārjuna's middle way and the purpose of Kant's transcendental idealism, with regard to the purposiveness between text and goal, are communicable.

Nonetheless, if the absolute authority is rejected, the interpretative authority should not become an issue at all, either; hence, any interpreter, even include the author himself insofar as what is textualized is really a “creation” [4], should not pretend to grasp the author's original intention, no matter how much proof he may happily and proudly grasp in hands [5]. Rather, it is more critical to propose interpretative questions and see what the interpreted may respond. If the clustered interpretative questions proposed here are “what is resulted in if we get clear the source of the limits/conditions of experience?” and “what then can we hope for?,” we find a cut-in, too, for as long as “we” are communicable, it is highly difficult to imagine that “we” do not have the same source and that “we” do not necessarily and consequently hope for the same target – some sort of soteriology, which is, in the end we will find, neither religious nor special-scientific (both of which, in my sense here, would be sharply isolated off experience

[6]).

And then, the suspended difficulties can then be used to resolve themselves, if, following the traces the cut-ins lead, we can find a central reason for them. This also forms another cut-in for the formation of the forum.

2.
Starting with the interpretative question “what is resulted in if we get clear the source of the limits/conditions of experience?”, we can divide the question into matrices as the following: (1) what are the limits/conditions of experience? (2) how are they in relation to the source and to experience? (3) can we answer to “what” the source is? (4) what's the consequence if the question (2)/(3) is responded?

Kant entitles the limits/conditions of experience “transcendental elements” which coordinate with each other under certain principles and make possible as well as give forms to experience as we have it. Such elements are ideas and not existents; we can find them in every instance of experience; in any instance of experience, they are real; but, they alone are only deducible (justifiable) ideas upon the ground that they are necessarily found in experience. The bringing up of the transcendental elements on the weaker side stands up valid and alone, for they find their correspondent “positions” in any instance of experience; on the stronger side, it opens up a realm between two perspectives of experience: the experience of sensible world and the experience of transcendence. It is because of the coordination of them under certain principles via which all experience becomes possible at all that all (possible) instances of experience must in certain relations with each other. The relations, among which causality is the most remarkable, are sourced from the necessary coordination and gives apodeictic objective affinity among all developing sensible objects in the universe. Accordingly we are allowed to know of a valid external world [7] and thus the world exists to us as it were in itself. The bringing up of the transcendental elements reverses the procedure of our world view; logically we know that all that we correctly know is the production of the coordination of the elements, and that the produced world is thus in valid order; the cause and the result exchange the position: it is not any more the case that the world in order outsides effects me so that I know something about the world, but the case that the world as such is caused by our knowing it as such. Without our knowing it as such with the coordination under certain principles, the world is to me not possible at all [8]. With such a view, the world is reassured as an affinity of intuitive manifoldness, ruling out the pre-critical world viewed as mere sensible or mere speculative/transcendent.

The world viewed as such is the basis of Nāgārjuna's criticisms [9]. In the first step, the world provides some criteria to indicate the contradiction between opinions. In the second step, by listing all the possible opinions and ruling out (with consulting the criteria) all of them one by one, a special OPINION is reached. Via the OPINION, in the third step, the world as such is reassured and first revealed to us for the obstacles of opinions have been removed. The OPINION is entitled “emptiness (view)” while the reassured world is entitled “truth (實相)” by Piṅgala [10]. On the one hand, without the world in order as a basis, no criteria is obtainable and no sense can be made with the criticisms, for the ruled-out opinions can not be held under the circumstance of missing such a world; on the other, without the world necessarily viewed as such, it is impossible to exhaustively list all the possible opinions, which must be the consequence of the necessary coordination of the limits/conditions of experience under certain principles, for they are in the service of enabling us “to categorize things” while the categorization rely solely on the affinity made via the necessary coordination [11]. On the contrary, it is just owing to the world's illusorily granting contradictory opinions to the holders, that a special OPINION which reassures the world devoid of illusions, is reachable by removing them. And except for the WORLD-so-OPINED, no other world view can make the world sufficient for both the improper opinions and for the OPINION when the improper ones are removed – for in the OPINION the world must maintain its objective validity, while if the world itself were viewed to have unconditional self-sourced order, there would actually be no opportunity for us to reach the OPINED world [12].

In Mūlamadhyamakakārikā (Verse 8, Chapter 18, Volume III), Nāgārjuna presents his famous four-cornered negation:

> sarvaṃ tathyaṃ na vā tathyaṃ tathyaṃ cātathyameva ca
> naivāthyaṃ naiva tathyametadbuddhānuśāsanaṃ [13]

The negation here is more likely a way of practice to see the true world than a theoretical construction. At the first sight, “sarvaṃ (everything) tathyaṃ (truth, as it is) na vā tathyaṃ (but not truth, not as it is)” draws the limits/conditions of seeing/experiencing [14], by means of which the experience is seen/categorized as it is and as it is not. But once you manipulate the two terms and speculate, you can hold the opinion that “tathyaṃ cātathyameva ca (both as it is and not as it is)” and the opinion that “naivāthyaṃ naiva tathyam (neither as it is nor not as it is).” There is a pseudo-mysterious transition from the mere manipulation of terms to an effective view via the later two opinions, so that one experiences everything as it is and as it is not and everything neither as it is nor not as it is. [15]

If the coordination of transcendental elements grants us the ability to negate the affirmation (existence), i.e., grants us the unknown-yet whole set of the four-cornered possible opinions so that the affirmation and negation become known (affirmation, when representations arises and determinations of mind is made, while negation, when representations ceases and determinations of mind is not made), we accordingly can group the experiences into existence (objects of cognition) and non-existence (cessation of cognition). But once we come to know that both the existence and non-existence are out there because we are so knowing them, i.e., it is exactly our grouping [16] the world as existence and non-existence that makes them possible as such, their both being as such, as mere representations, are equally accepted – everything is but a representation; everything is a representation and hence everything is as it is represented and not as it is represented, which is nonetheless a representation, too [17]. Everything is a representation, and hence it can (possibly) be represented or can (possibly) be not represented.

Once the being representations of the existence and non-existence is recognized, i.e., when the paradox of “everything is as it is and not as it is” becomes a consciousness, the intrinsic contradiction, i.e., the cause and result's exchange of position, directs to one more step: since what we believe about the world's (existence and non-existence) are mere representations, if there be such a thing as the true world, it must be distinct from the existence and non-existence. In return, the true world itself must be free of designation or otherwise there will be no distinction between the true world and the representations. Hence, we got the negative proof for the lack of self-nature (svabhāva) in the world itself. Besides, the sharp distinction encloses the realm of existence/representation, conserves the world's validity and makes it a basis offering useful criteria for Nāgārjuna's criticisms against the improper opinions.

Kant in the first Critique presents a deduction for the transcendental logic, proving that the sensible world must be embedded with logical order which is solely sourced from the subject, more precisely, from the synthesis of the transcendental elements. With the reconstruction from his further development in the third Critique, synopsis of manifoldness a priori in the sense (indeterminate representations) and the manifoldness of intuitions (determined representations) are found to be one and the same affinity [18], which is always empty to us, and yet enables us to know about everything via the determined representations. The true world, the pure affinity of all possible experiences, which is not merely “a” or “some” representations but the unity of “all possible” representations, is now not only passively perceived as “neither as it is nor not as it is”; it also allows for every representation. Then, Nāgārjuna's “sarvaṃ ca yujyate tasya śūnyatā yasya yujyate” [19] (Verse 14, Chapter 24) is constructively deduced. The absence of svabhāva is assured both logically and effectively now.

But, remarkably, the deductions here cannot be held to contradict the deduced thesis, for we are clearly aware of the deductions as in a process of idealization. In response to the Nyāya challenge against his thesis, that everything is empty, by questioning that the term “empty” itself has to be meaning-FUL, Nāgārjuna points out that as well as the objects terms refer to are empty (depending on the satisfaction of conditions of representation), the terms, as much as so dependent, are empty, too [20]. Since the idealization process is as much as so dependent, it itself deduces the thesis as well.

Then we can come back to the matrix questions. (1) The limits/conditions of experience are the necessary orders we can find in every instance of experience and under the satisfaction of them all entities arise. (2) Since their being embedded in the world makes the realm of experience (the affinity of every possible objects) sharply distinct from the (methodologically technical) non-representational realm of world, they conserve the validity of the experience, and existence as well, and at the same time rejects the imagined non-representational world's possession of any designation or authority. That is, the source does not lie outside of the world of representation;

the opinion about any external authority is refused. (3) But we cannot answer to the “what,” for such an answer must “group” the source to real representations, unless we “idealize (methodize)” it and make it clear that the source is “absolutely empty” but indeed has its functions. (4) Then, we become both logically and practically certain that there is no higher authority outside the realm of representation, and yet the world order is still valid. At this step, we enter the stage that the absolute [21] authority (as rational) inside the world is assured by removing the pre-critical authorities (the opinions). The world as mere appearances and the world as mere speculations exist only as opinions, and hence themselves are not true to our experience; the truth is, the WORLD to us really is, though we have to “connect” with it via our representations, owing to which we can have opinions about it, but opinions are not the WORLD and opinions must be partial and defective, and hence there are opportunities for the relations between opinions and the WORLD to be matters of correspondence or not, true or false.

With the OPINION, on the contrary, Kant's transcendental idealism can be properly appreciated then amidst the confused interpretations from the idealist camp (transcendental realists who believes in independent ultimate being owing to which the substance is offered) and the realist camp (empirical idealists who, with similar world model as the former, believes our knowledge can never fully comprehend the world and hence our knowledge misses necessity), especially with regard to the difficulties the former would run into. The post-Kantian German idealists, even including Heidegger, try to reduce the transcendental faculties to a singular power, given it is entitled absolute subject, spirit, or imagination. The mistake these philosophers might commonly make is to regard the transcendental faculties as objects empirically opined and hence as having certain self-substance. The regard there is based upon the opinion that the world is out there with certain order sourced from certain “ultimate being” owing to which certain independent substance must be offered a priori. On the way to the OPINION, it has been shown that the world viewed as with order in itself and with certain pre-critical authorities must be defect for such a world grants us no opportunities to hold such an opinion itself. Removing the opinion persisting in certain self-sustained being, the methodological significance of Kant's transcendental elements will stand out and the simple rationality of the pluralist requirement that the term “unity of subject” demands itself being non-singular entity will catch our attention as well: if the world were an absolute one, then there would be no need of unity; if a unity is needed, the world must be manifold; the unitary principles and the manifoldness must be co-sourced. In such OPINION, the teleological insight of the transcendental systems in the third Critique, explaining the unity of subject as plural faculties in certain purposive coordination, is moderately enough. Also, the reason why the principle of purposiveness is regarded as the principle explaining the power of judgment and why a critique of judgment is to complete the transcendental philosophy are put under a brighter position. Further reduction is too much, not only for the two whys will stay unexplained (inside Kant) but also for it will bring the critique to the pre-critical stage and destroy the transcendental ideality as badly as the empirical reality (in the practice). And it is exactly the paralogisms which destroy the transcendental ideality and the empirical reality that Kant's first Critique aims to criticize. By the way, we can find that Murti's comment criticizing Kant and Mādhyamika's granting the source of necessity and worldly order to the interpretative synthesis rather than, as Hegel and Vijñānavāda formulate respectively against the former two, taking “the given data of knowledge as the work of the mind, as an 'other' created by it through its own inner laws of self-expression,” [22] is actually weak. Indeed, as Murti has written, both views are in service of assuring the necessity and worldly order in experience, but both views as reconstructed there are just different expressions of the same OPINION. What really matters, as Kant and Nāgārjuna try to draw attention to, is how the “mind” is recognized. Is it a transcendental idea or a transcendental reality? Indeed, the WORLD is “the only Real,” but empirically real; also, it's fine to entitle the WORLD the mind, if the mind is recognized (opined) as not some transcendent reality. If Hegel or Vijñānavāda's mind had not implied a transcendent significance, I would find no contradiction between them and the OPINION; if it indeed had implied a transcendent significance, the debate would only make sense then[23].

3.
At the first level, the OPINION “For whom emptiness is acceptable, for him everything is acceptable (以有空義故一切法得成)” assures the factuality of the world; then, such an OPINION assures the value of the world as well. We have found that certain identical goals Kant and Nāgārjuna both may try to reach include: no self-objectness (self-nature of an object in itself, as cognition-free), due to which a correct understanding of experience and the experience as such is possible; ultimate reality is neither in grasping (著見) nor in doubt (疑見), but in finding the clear border line of different domains, i.e., reaching a proper OPINION (what is real are not the opinions; the WORLD-so-OPINED is real); reassurance of the acceptance of empirical world, especially the causality thereof.

Based upon the OPINION with the above characteristics, the possibility for morality is then what we can hope for.

A psychological approach to reveal the hope is rather relatively obvious. Like the existential emphasis on the awareness of death encourages the seeking of the meaning of life, if the matter of the momentary birth-and-death (生滅), of the arise and cessation of representations, is revealed by the OPINION, the extremely still serenity of life will be perceived, and then we will find what we keep wanting to grasp in hand and what we believe to have grasped in hand are only valid in relation to such a matter of birth-and-death and not valid as we have opined, not as more than representations. If the serenity is accepted, then the assumed reality of the grasped (grasping as well) will be negated, and consequently the absurdity of the striving grasping will be perceived. In the end, we don't grasp anything in hand. On the other side, however, the warm sunshine on the winter high twigs, the riots people have made around, the futile smile on the face of the love in your life that tries to detain the momentary happiness of life, things like these are so real and so precious that we would believe to be absolute and eternal, albeit we are so clearly aware that they must come to “the” end. They are valuable exactly for they are rare and momentary, and the extreme serenity is the touchstone ruling out the non-purposive grasping and making what is really valuable obvious. Only when you realize that in the end you have no choice but let go, you start to decide which of the grasped should be left as long as possible. And the efforts trying to detain the valuable become meaningful, even though we know they cannot help but be momentary – the result of these efforts seem to be more than mere facts. [24]

But the hope is more than that. Kant and Nāgārjuna's OPINION not only aims at showing the lack of any transcendent authorities so that we need to turn to the psychological soteriology, but also at justifying the matter of birth-and-death insofar as they are confined as cognition-dependent. In this OPINION, the efforts themselves are actively meaningful. To those who share the same world for they share the same condition of experience and hence live in the same reality, there are certain things universally purposive, and the value of them cannot ever be denied by these people. For it is exactly the realm of humanity that we all belong to. There is a transition from the judgment that it is something to the judgment that I am human. There is also a transition from the judgment that I am human to that we are human. But these two transitions are not in linear relation. The bringing-up of transcendental ideas or the arriving at the OPINION is required. A consideration about the WORLD-so-OPINED is also required. For only upon such required ground, the fact that I belong to the class of human is truly revealed – the affinity I can realize is identical with the affinity everyone else can realize; we are in the same world, in the same community; communications among us are genuine and more than information exchange.

Theoretically, we can understand the OPINION “For whom emptiness is acceptable, for him everything is acceptable (以有空義故 一切法得成)” as that since everything is representation with rules embedded in representing, and since the representing (with its synthetic unity) grants us the validity of the affinity both with regard to what can be brought into consciousness and what have been brought into consciousness, the openness for development in time (future), namely, freedom, and the orders such as causality are synchronically valid. Only then, it makes sense to us that there are options and we can hold or change opinions and make choices, also consequently carrying responsibility. As well as the conditioning in the formation of experience makes possible the objective effect, it also makes possible the moral effect – as much as mentioned in section 2 that only the WORLD-so-OPINED allows for our holding partial, imperfect opinions about it as well as the opportunity to remove them at once, only whose epistemic significance is added with practical insight now.

Kant tries to fill up the so-called gap between his epistemology and his moral theory with a critique of judgment; Nāgārjuna tries to expose the predicament in our opinions to reach the OPINION in order to fade the grasping (著見) and doubt (疑見) [25]; it has been shown that the forum where Kant and Nāgārjuna are invited to meet can reach some purposive dialog regarding each one's goal respectively. We can conclude the dialog here that the OPINION, which can be reached by removing the opinions or by digging into the source of the limits/conditions of experience, not only makes everything factual possible but also makes morality possible. To sum up, we must return to the realm of humanity, to which we are best classified. This may be called a soteriology in the realm of humanity, one needs no transcendent endorser. After all, it is still good albeit there is no transcendent authority.

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Notes:

[1] Robinson (1957); 鄭學禮 (1982).

[2] Obliged to the contribution of some Kant specialists in Germany such as Dieter Henrich, a lot of interpretatively critical terms' variation in language uses in Kant's time from the present uses have been identified.

[3] Ameriks (2006); 李淳玲 (2009). The reference here does not indicate any intention of mine for persisting in “legitimate heritage.”

[4] Creation means something that does not merely depict or imitate the already known.

[5] Hence, we converse to another belief about the relation among philosophy, philology and history. They are competitive companions now, not systematic, hierarchical team members.

[6] A religious system is built upon the basis that the world is created and controlled by certain superior unconditional authority from which the order in the world itself is sourced. A specific-scientific system is built upon the basis that the world, may or may not be created, has its own order, so that we can find and make use of it.

[7] Such a relation reaching out and distinguished from being intrinsic is also part of the affinity and sourced from the coordination.

[8] This is not an empirical thesis. It's not about whether the stone I've never come to know in the deep mountains exists. It's about as long as I can come to know a stone in the deep mountains, it is always possible for such a stone to exist to me.

[9] The world must be in order, so that it can give Nāgārjuna criteria for criticism against the improper opinions. Indeed the world in order, the world of sensible and the world of transcendence are identical and they are different only regarding to opinions, it is nonetheless not the world viewed as mere sensible which can give no order and then no criteria, nor the world viewed as mere speculative which already gives absolute laws so that requires no

criticism at all, that Nāgārjuna may take as the basis for criticism.

[10] See Piṅgala's long lines in Chapter 22.

[11] To exhibit the necessary coordination of the conditions in relation to the validity of classification, let's try to present a rather simplified version of the model. If you have only two possible min-terms of categorizing the worldly objects, you only have a basis to expand two to the second power logical spaces: let's put it the two terms are A and B, and they are in coordination of (A, B), there are four logical spaces for them: (0,0), (1,0), (0,1) and (1,1) where they mean “it is not A and not B,” “it is A (and not B),” “it is (not A but) B” and “it is A and B.” To this basis, the world cannot exist as something other than A and B. Hence group A and group B are sufficient for the exhaustive categorization. On the contrary, it takes the strange groups (1, 1) and (0,0) together with the logical pre-requirement “not” for someone who can only in the states of (1,0) and (0,1) to know the limits/conditions of such states completely. Nāgārjuna in his four-cornered negation has performed the productive power of the strange groups and the logical pre-requirement “not.”

[12] For we would then be everlastingly trying to find the Truth (實相), while our ability to know would be self-restricted by the view as everlastingly incapable of grasping it, unless one would dare entitle himself as super-being who could bypass the restriction and hence could intuit the affinity itself and predict the results of free development. But under such circumstance, the possibility of the improper opinions would become very questionable. Nāgārjuna's argument, for instance, for the implausibility of anyathābhāvas (change異, especially in chapter 1 and chapter 13) shows the predicament as well. If there is transcendent authority, there's no opportunity for change. (Similarly, there's no opportunity for holding opinions of birth-and-death 生滅, eternal-and-cut-off 斷常, and coming-and-going 來去.) Likely, if there is independent order, there is no opportunity to hold opinions which are not true, unless the scope of the opinions, as well as the ability to hold opinions, is restricted.

[13] Leutchford: “Everything is as it is, not as it is, both as it is and not as it is, neither as it is nor not as it is; this is the instruction of the buddhas.” Kumārajīva: “一切實非實 亦實亦非實 非實非非實 是名諸佛法.”

[14] Once the conditions “under which the entities arise” are satisfied, we experience that which enables us to say “yes” to the judgment about itself; then, once the satisfaction of the conditions ceases, we experience that which enables us to say “no” to the judgment about itself. Together, the experience of existence and that of non-existence support each other, from which limits and ultimate conditions may be drawn.

[15] The “opinions” here is written not as “OPINIONS” for the OPINION must consist of four of them. Separately, they are just opinions.

[16] “Grouping” is the process via which the affinity of the world is accordingly made.

[17] 楊惠南(1985): “not as it is” in Nāgārjuna's opponent Nyāya's tradition is regarded as something affirmative, too. This is understood as “not as it is” is regarded as a way of “representing” as well, for it seems to be the only option for the negation to be affirmative, and hence belong to the scope of representation and experience.

[18] Please see my “Between the Between the determined and the indeterminable” (2009) and my thesis Imagination in Kant (2004) for detailed argumentation.

[19] Leutchford: “For whom emptiness is acceptable, for him everything is acceptable.” Kumārajīva: “以有空義故 一切法得成.”

[20] Vigrahavyāvartanī, Verse 22: “我語言若離 因緣和合法 是則空義成 諸法無自體.”

[21] “Absolute” insofar as applied to experience.

[22] Murti (1955), pp. 296-297.

[23] Murti also makes an implausible comment in relation to the comment mentioned here saying that there is a

contradiction between Kant's negative attitude and Nāgārjuna's optimism about the removing of paralogisms as well as the intellectual intuition (299-300). The problem is also involved with a contradiction between Dignāga's priority placing indeterminate perception and determined perceptions and Kant's preference of truth view to the determined perceptions. However that would be too much for a footnote and deserve an entire article, so that I would have to put it aside here. But I can try to explain at little bit here. We can moderately accept Nāgārjuna's optimism as the practicability of the OPINION, which exactly admits Kant's negative attitude; however, if the optimism is accepted as the probability of an experience of the empty, it will be very non-Nāgārjuna to me.

[24] Interestingly, Dignāga's apoha theory, which holds what is affirmed is obtained by ruling out negative properties or cases, seems to somehow correspond with such an existential psychological process. By ruling out the less important things, it seems the real precious object of life can only appear. On the contrary, what arises automatically seems to easily be illusory.

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