



Does Nothingness exist? A Cross-Continental Dialogue

Symposium hosted by the Department of Asian Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, on May 17-19, 2024

Almost nothing exists when it comes to dialogues between scholars and philosophers, trained in Western and Asian philosophies respectively. But this significant nothing, which speaks for itself, could be transformed into a meaningful something, which becomes a beacon of existence in the distinctive milieu of Ljubljana. Right, in Ljubljana, a place that defies easy categorization as a city or a town, residing somewhere in between. Hence, it stands as an ideal setting to delve into the realms of the in-between, at the crossroads of Asian and European thought, where nothingness and existence converge and diverge.

Our dialogues, controversies, and discussions are framed by a paraphrase of Hans Küng's famous question, "Does God exist?". This rephrased inquiry spawns several sub-questions. If we ponder "Does Nothingness exist?" we are compelled to explore "If not, what is the reason?" and "If so, how and why?". Is nothing actually the contrary of being or is it, in fact, its *sine qua non*? What is the connection between nothingness and existence, and how do they correspond to the concepts of absence and presence? Can we presuppose that nothing is not a presence that we can directly encounter but an absence that we must acknowledge?

Given that these modes of thought have deep-seated origins in both Western and Asian philosophy, the concept of nothingness presents a valuable opportunity to foster dialogue between these traditions. Therefore, this symposium endeavors to combine voices from the East and West, nurturing an awareness of each other's existence, affirming that the Other holds a significance far beyond mere nothingness.

Our discussions of the concept of nothingness will extend beyond the absence of inherent meaning in life; we will also explore its role as the fundamental ontology of our existence. Furthermore, we will engage in a radical questioning of the concept of "ultimate truth" in relation to our fleeting existence, including a critical examination of the fundamental nature of change in our impermanent world. In doing so, we contemplate nothingness as a potential source of both the self and the world. As we grapple with the age-old question of how to traverse the path from nothingness to being, it becomes evident that we are inevitably drawn back to the question of existence itself. Additionally, we delve into the intricate relationship

between nothingness, freedom, and imagination, while also probing the confines that inhibit this state of liberation. And in the midst of our philosophical musings, we might ask ourselves and each other a tantalizing question: can nothingness define itself through an "in-the-world existence," simultaneously shaping and negating the very world it inhabits?

In this symposium, we aim to explore the bottomless depths of nothingness. We want to uncover fresh intuitions within the fuzzy realms of the in-between, reshaping our perspectives on the enigma of existence itself. However, regardless of the outcome, our dialogues will transcend borders and challenge conventions, serving as a reminder that in the quest for understanding, nothing is as it seems.