

6-2016

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Joshua Steen Leisner
Western Oregon University

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Familiarization

By

Joshua Steen Leisner

An Honors Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for Graduation from the
Western Oregon University Honors Program

Dr. Ken Kirby,

Thesis Advisor

Dr. Gavin Keulks,

Honors Program Director

Western Oregon University

June 2016

STEP 1: THE MEANS OF REASON

In this paper, a rational God is defined as being constructed with two components: a mode of reason, and a certain exoteric religion. Firstly, with regard to the former, within the confines of reason or the intellect, there are several intellectual or rational or more broadly speaking plenty of rational modes or ways, including when it comes to familiarizing oneself with God. This involves idea, concept, grasping, state of mind, phenomena, and other modes where the mind consciously and intellectually discerns. This thesis will primarily address God through the rational mode of conception, or concept. Note that this selection amongst modes of reason is completely arbitrary. Secondly, with regard to the latter, within the confines of religious traditions, there is even more diversity than there is regarding modes of reason, again including and this time especially when it comes to familiarizing oneself with God. But for the definition of exoteric itself, it more so has to do with the beliefs and practices, the rituals and the stories—the culture, so to speak—of a certain religion, such that without the specifically religious culture the religion would lack an exoteric component and would not technically be a religion. For the purposes of this thesis, a Judeo-Christian God has been selected as the religious lens through which an examination will be conducted. This selection is not arbitrary at all: such a religious lens when it comes to God has an outstanding prominence in the world. Therefore, with regard to the means of reason, God's familiarization via a Judeo-Christian concept of God will be addressed.

The Concept of God Proper

To understand God just as a concept, the nature of concepts must be understood first. After close examination it is realized that concepts are finite: take the example of an apple. How does one know that an apple is an apple? There are several qualities one could list. One could say that it is red, or green; that it is round, that the inside is fairly solid and white; that it is a fruit, etc. All of the qualities of an apple make an apple discernable. Now, take the example of an orange: instead of the inside being white, it is orange; and instead of the outside being green or red, it is also orange; the inside is not solid but it is rather squishy. Clearly, apples and orange are not the same thing. But could they ever be?

The only way for an apple and an orange to be the same would be for their abovementioned qualities to have no difference between each other— and this is surely not the case. Redness and orangeness are not at all the same thing; likewise, solidness and squishiness are not the same thing either. Moreover, orangeness can never become redness or the reverse because they are determined to always be as they are. Looking at this distinction, it seems that what keeps qualities distinct from each other is contained in their very nature. Qualities contain finitude—they have conceptual borders which make them discernable and distinct. If they did not, it would be entirely possible that orangeness could become redness and that an apple could eventually become an orange, for without their finitude, one would be unable to know the difference between the two.

In this way, concepts, including the concept of God, are necessarily distinct from one another, much like Descartes claims that all knowledge is clear and distinct

(Newman). Moreover, since it has been established that qualities are necessarily finite—where some end, others begin—one can now even say that if concepts did not have finitude, one would virtually have no discernable knowledge of the world. This is to say that concepts are separate from each other, that they are bordered. It is in this way that one can see how the concept of God is finite.

The Concept of God as Omni-Qualified

Among being defined in other ways, in Judeo-Christian religion, God is defined primarily by four attributes: omnipotence, omnibenevolence, omniscience, and omnipresence. These are God's "omni-attributes"; they are discussed just as much as their definitions are debated (Quinn, 229-286). And, since omni means all, they mean that God is all powerful, all good, all knowing, and all present.

The Concept of God as Immaterial

In Judeo-Christian religion, God is immaterial (Quinn, 271). In the Old and New Testament, however, God is discussed physically. For instance, God is discussed as having an "outstretched arm" (JPS Tanakh, Exodus 6: 6) when He lead the Jews out of Egypt. Moreover, God interacts with the physical world, such as parting the red sea, or having a son with a body. This may seem to cause trouble, since problems of dualism arise here. How can an immaterial substance have an effect on a material world? Though this question is valid, it should not cause one to at once deny the sense of God being immaterial. One could instead, having adopted the appropriate viewpoint, deem the world immaterial in order to solve this problem. One could also instead question scriptural

truth, specifically when it comes to the account of God interacting in physical ways. Either way, this is not to at once deny the immateriality of God.

The Concept of God as Personal

In Judeo-Christian religion, man is seen as “made in God’s image” (The Holy Bible, Genesis 1: 27). Moreover, several times in the bible, God talks to and interacts with people. In Judaism, the Torah instructs God’s law, in part. In the New Testament, Jesus is in a way identifiable with God. Prayer, which is talking to God, is incorporated into both Judaism and Christianity. There are several biblical examples and other examples beyond the ones here that allow one to establish that there is a connection or communication line between people and God. This makes a Judeo-Christian God a personal God; moreover, it makes it so that there is a God who communicates with individual selves or groups of selves. In this way, God is a party distinct from the party of the self, while God remains personal. Additionally, this personalism is a part of the exoteric component of religions, where there is a relationship between an individual and God, mediated through prayer and simply by following traditions and adhering to the culture of a certain religion.

The Concept of God as Infinite

God is eternal, and exists without beginning or end (Quinn, 257). This is to say that God is infinite. The importance of infinity as it pertains to God can be explained as such: if God were not infinite, God would be unrecognizable as God. God would then by necessity be considered finite—and a finite God is a limited God—a bordered, defined, formalized God. This would make God with beginning and end; it would make God have

size; God would no longer be beyond all the things that God is necessarily and indubitably not. Moreover, in Judeo-Christian religion, the greatness of God is praised, and God is praised because God is eternal and everlasting. If anything is to be sacrificed from the conception of God, infinity would be the last attribute one should sacrifice—it is the most fundamental characteristic of the concept of God.

This infinity aspect of God closely aligns with God as *omni*—however they are not the same. To say God is the all could still regard God as finite—that God is a collection of all finite things is a possibility even when God is *omni*-qualified. But to say God is infinite is to demand that God is the all without a doubt, for in this way the all would be a necessary infinitude—that there is a limitless amount of things and God is all of them. In this way, God as infinite remains more fundamental than God as all, since the infinite necessarily contains the all, but the all does not necessarily contain the infinite.

Moreover, to imagine a personal God as a finite God is to consider the possibility that at some point, the communication line between God and the self may cease. This is ridiculous. God is great because God is always there, and always there for one to talk to. And to imagine God as not having to be Judeo-Christian in general is not that difficult of a task—there are plenty other religions centered on God—but to regard God in any religion as finite would be to deem God as having an end, or a beginning—and to do so is to invite not only something like God that is just as great—it is to invite the possibility of something greater than God, as either before, after, or merely outside of or beyond God; and this mortality of God is not only a grave miscalculation, but an unrelentingly suffocating doom.

STEP 2: THE SHORTCOMINGS OF REASON

Several things can be said regarding God as omni-qualified. One of them is that logical problems arise between the attributes when one realizes that there are certain phenomena an omni-qualified God of the aforementioned sort cannot reasonably allow. Some aspects of the concept do not allow for others; they would be mutually exclusive if logic were to be in charge. In short, the concept of God being discussed here is of self-contradiction or paradox and defies logic.

The Problem of Evil

In Routledge's Encyclopedia of Philosophy,

The so called 'logical' problem of evil rests on the contention that the following two claims of biblical theism (I) God exists, and is essentially omnipotent, omniscient and perfectly good; and (II) evil exists, combine with the following plausible attribute analyses: (P1) a perfectly good being would always eliminate evil so far as it could; (P2) an omniscient being would know all about evils and (P3) there are no limits to what an omnipotent being can do, to form an inconsistent quintet... (Craig, 466-467).

This formulation of the problem of evil in particular first of all clarifies the problem of evil as a logical one, in spite of the fact that it is considered a "so called" logical problem in the aforementioned paragraph. Secondly and more importantly, it reveals that the problem extends beyond just stating God's omni-qualification, as elucidated by P1-3. These said propositions or qualifiers of God's omni-attributes show how they interact in order for the problem of evil to reveal itself. To reformulate: If God is omnibenevolent and omnipresent, how can evil exist? Or, to reformulate: if God is omnibenevolent and omnipotent, how would God let evil happen? Moreover, to look at God beyond omni-

qualified and as merely conceived through Judeo-Christian, since God is the Creator of the world, omnipresent and omni-benevolent, how can evil exist?

The Problem of Free Will

Another problem that stems from God's omni-qualification is the problem of free will:

“Roughly, the problem is that if there is an omniscient God, his knowledge would presumably encompass all of the future, including the future acts of human beings. And we would expect an omniscient deity's powers of knowing to be so strong that not only does he have no false beliefs, it is impossible for him to have false beliefs. But if it is impossible for God's belief about a future human act to be false, it seems impossible for that person to do otherwise. How, then, can her act be free?” (Quinn, 291)

In other words, if God is omniscient and omnipotent, and God's omniscience is infinite in its scope and infallible in its accuracy, how can people ever make free choices? How can one act freely if God knows one will act before one does? In this way it seems impossible to fix this maze of contradiction.

The Problem of the Self

Recall how a personal God in particular makes it so that there are two distinct parties: God and the self. Also recall how God is omnipresent. Here lies the problem of the self: If God is omni-qualified, the nature of God is all. It means to say that God is all things, and therefore that there is nothing that is not God, or no other thing that is not God. In other words, to say that something is all means, among other things, that there is nothing other than the all. Now, to say there is the all (simply that there is an all; simply that it exists) and that there is a self is to say that there is something other than the all—namely, the self. And if there is something other than the all, then the all is not really all.

Of course, this problem extends to virtually anything distinct from God. It illustrates God as separate from objects in general, whether that is an apple or a person. Anything besides God reveals God in a light where God is not all. Of course, there is a vast multitude of things which are not God. In fact, all other noted things besides the notion of God elucidate God as anything but the all. God as a concept, via juxtaposition of all other noted things, treats God as a single mass, and not at all an omni-mass. Furthermore, to bring about pantheism and say that God is in all things is to still denote separation or an “othering” between God and those things in which God is. In this way pantheism seems to be unable to solve the problem of the self. On a final note, it should be said that this problem is called the problem of the self and not the problem of the other because of the highly elevated significance of the self in Judeo-Christian religion, as noted earlier in the discussion of personalism and how it is a central part of the exoteric aspect of a given religion. To reiterate in short, God as a being is one with which communicating objects can communicate—and it is from this place in argument that the problem of the self extends to the problem of the other.

Sophisticated Problems: The Problem of Evil and The Problem of Free Will

To further understand the nature of a problematic omni-qualified God, one should see how the problem of evil and the problem of free will blend. Alvin Plantinga has a famous argument which attempts to solve the problem of evil—but it is called the free will defense. Beginning with the premises P1) God exists and P2) There is evil in the world, Plantinga provides a third premise consistent with P1 and that entails P2 (Bernstein, 1). With regard to this premise,

“According to Plantinga, an essence E suffers from transworld depravity if and only if, for every world W such that E entails the properties is significantly free in W and always does right in W, there is a state of affairs T and an action A such that a) T is the largest state of affairs God strongly actualizes in W, b) A is morally significant for E’s instantiation in W, and c) If God had strongly actualized T, E’s instantiation would have gone wrong with respect to A.” (Bernstein, 1)

To say the E’s instantiation would have gone wrong is to say that if God had strongly actualized T in w, E would be unable to perform or execute A such that A would not manifest and so far as it is known would not exist. It is to say that an agent E would be unable to perform an action A with any freedom, since God would have strongly actualized the world, given God’s omnipotence. In essence, to solve the problem of evil according to Plantinga is in a way to disallow human freedom in human action and thus to trade it for the problem of free will.

To understand Plantinga another way, one should see that God could not create a world with good and without evil, since to create a world without evil would be to not wholly allow free will within the world’s current state of affairs, at least in so far as being unable to perform evil acts with freedom (Lafollette, 1). This of course is to see Plantinga as having presumed free will before the problem of evil, as opposed to—as listed above—trading one problem for another. But this seems to allow for evil and discount the possibility for free will.

Moreover, the notion of human freedom or human evil versus natural freedom or natural evil has been brought up in response to Plantinga’s argument (Johnson, 1). For to say that evil is brought about by human freedom is not the whole story with regard to the problem of evil: natural evil exists as well. Moreover, it has even been gone on to say that natural evil is needed for human evil—for to act in a certain way requires knowledge

from experience of how to act a certain way, and there must have been at least one person who observed evil not from other people but from nature in order for them to know how to freely act in an evil way (Moser, 1).

Perhaps this is why Plantinga labels agents as “essences” (as seen above) and not as merely humans. Indeed this would be to say that an essence is free, human or otherwise. Evil in this way can still be brought about by freedom, but it does not need to be brought by human freedom. This is to say that natural forces are free, as the argument would entail. But whether or not this premise, though it seems to be entailed, is true is another discussion entirely. Here at minimum the entailed premise will merely be held to a standard of skepticism—that is to say, one should not at first glance take it as truth. In this way, one may see that the problem of evil extends beyond human evil; and that it is more widely mixed with the problem of free will.

Sophisticated Problems: God as Concept and God as Infinite

Problems arise here when it is realized the incompatibility between the nature of concepts and the nature of God, for, as it has been established, concepts are finite whereas God is infinite. In other words, one may struggle to see how this is possible: how is a finite conception of an infinite being possible? Perhaps the way to address this is to determine exactly how one familiarizes oneself with God with regard to reason. To be clear, it must denote exactly what is meant by conception.

There are two types of conceptions: purely linguistic or semantic conceptions and visual conceptions held by the mind’s eye. An example of the former would be the qualities of an orange (orangeness, roundness, etc.) as well as other things about it (such

as that it is a fruit). An example of the latter would be an image of an orange—a visualization in the mind’s eye. If one pays attention to visual concepts, one realizes that they are rather foggy—one does not see them as clearly as one does objects in the external world. But one sees that they have a similar element of distinctness—things in the mind’s eye alone remain discernable. Likewise, more immaterial or less sensory conceptions, i.e. linguistic conceptions are discernable in their own way as well. One knows the difference between orangeness and roundness and between apples and oranges simply by realizing that in this sentence two different things are being talked about.

Recall how God is infinite, immaterial, and personal and omnipresent. These rational ways of knowing God in particular come in to play here. To say God is immaterial is to at once disallow God to be known as a visual concept, but at this point, this is not to say that God as immaterial cannot be known in the linguistic conceptual sense—for one should understand what is meant by something being immaterial. Moreover, the external world as it is a sensory world is necessarily finite—things begin and end, are limited and have boundaries, etc. insofar as one’s conceptions of them- one understands the sensory world as full of distinction. But if God is infinite, can God even exist in the external world? Where else would God be? Would God be in one’s mind? If God is personal, God is other from the self, and God cannot be in solely my mind and at the same time other than me, since my mind is me. One could bring about the idea of a collective consciousness of God—but this is still to say that God exists only mentally. Should there be an external world, then this would be to deny omnipresence.

It seems here that where God exists must be addressed. One could argue the following: one can only know that God exists only insofar as one claims that God does.

This would not be redundant—it shows, for instance, that one has no way of knowing, but there is a God is nonsense, for to take such a claim—or any claim, for that matter—for what it really means is to take it as pretexted by one knowing about it. This dynamic would ultimately become then: one knows that one does not know, but one knows. This, of course, would be silly, and a contradiction. In this way, one's understanding, knowledge, or familiarization with God would be strictly confined to one's conception of it. What one would have to ultimately admit then is that God exists only insofar as one's conception of God, which would be to say that God, along with everything else, is conception in other words, that God is purely mental, and there is really no such thing as an external world, at least insofar as one knows.

But to say God is purely idea or concept and to furthermore deny the existence of a world external to one's mind would be to miss the mark with regard to a Judeo-Christian God. First of all, idealism in the strict sense is grossly preceded a Judeo-Christian God in a historical sense. Moreover, one never thinks that God is treated in any way other than under a realist approach—that is to say, to see God under a framework that does not involve an external world independent of one's mind seems rather ludicrous. There is no memorable place in Judeo-Christian religion that comes to mind where God is portrayed as idealistic. It simply seems beyond us. Of course, to once again denote God as externally real would be to visit once more the immateriality and infinity problems—for the external world is exactly what God is not in these senses.

Luckily, Anselm's ontological argument proves that God can't be just in the mind, for if God is "a being than which nothing greater can be conceived", God existing in the mind and in the external world is greater than God existing in just the mind (Internet

Encyclopedia of Philosophy). That said, this proof is rooted in the mind alone—it is a priori—and it has implications beyond the mind, which seems to be troublesome.

Moreover, proofs and arguments about God from other philosophers, like Augustine, are just as unprotected from such trouble. In short, even the most sound proofs are prone to problems. It is precisely because of this truth that reconciliation is required.

STEP 3: THE RECONCILIATIONS OF REASON

Now that the logical problems of such a concept of God have been laid out, it should be noted that logic or reason itself cannot solve the problems it has created. In other words, it would make no sense for the source of the problems to be the resolver of the very same problems: logic's rules are responsible for the aforementioned problems, and logic would have to forfeit these rules in order to reconcile such problems; but then logic would no longer be logic, since logic is logic on the very basis of these rules. In this way, such contradictions must be reconciled outside the confines of logic and reason; they must be resolved in other ways.

Kierkegaard's Paradoxical Faith

It is good to note that such a concept of God is one that is well-defined. However, still one runs into shortcomings and contradictions at every corner. Indeed, philosophy can aid this problem of religion. A philosopher by the name of Kierkegaard, in his book called *Fear and Trembling*, writes about the story of Abraham and Isaac, the relevancy of which will soon be revealed. He specifically writes how Abraham was asked to and was ready to sacrifice his Isaac, his son, to God:

"And God tempted Abraham and said to him, take Isaac, your only son, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah and offer him there as a burnt offering on a mountain which I will show you." (Kierkegaard, 10)

To begin the reconciliation of reason, one must first realize that this commandment to Abraham contained in the aforementioned passage is one of assorted contradiction: Abraham has not only been promised a bloodline; he has also been instructed to not kill. Moreover, to kill a son would be the most trepid killing of all

possible killings, to say the least. Nonetheless, Abraham has been instructed to kill his son from whom he was also told a bloodline would emerge; and he has been told not to kill, and to kill, specifically his son, by God. To say this commandment is a test of faith is, however accurate, a seemingly rash understatement of the nature of God's demand.

Among all the ways in which he can act with respect to the three stages on life's way (Stack), among the ways of the hedonist who seeks pleasure, the hero who follows a moral compass, and the religious man, Abraham acts in such a way that a religious man or a man of faith would act. And faith, according to Kierkegaard, is "the teleological suspension of the ethical" (Kierkegaard, 54). This is to say that one must disregard or at the very least temporarily suspend morality as grounds for action in order to perform an act of faith. Specifically this refers to Abraham's suspension of the biblical and moral law "do not kill" (amongst other immoral laws he would have broken with his act of killing) for it seems that such a moral basis must have been forgotten or transcended or in some way not ordinarily understood by Abraham in order for him to be able to kill his son. Moreover, faith is the individual being higher than the universal (Kierkegaard, 55). This speaks to faith not only as transcending the ethical but also as it being completely paradoxical in its very nature, for logically the universal is supposed to transcend or encompass the individual, not the reverse. In this way, faith seems to be a transcendence or suspension of not only morality but of reason as well.

However unintentionally, this is Kierkegaard's reconciliatory effect in the sense that he considers faith to be a paradox. For when he discusses faith as being paradoxical, though he means to or not, he solves the problems of reason with regard to the concept of an omni-qualified God. For if God is omni-qualified but as a logical consequence is

riddled with illogicality as well, though one's understanding of God in the rational sense may be bogus, to have faith in God in spite of this contradiction is what Kierkegaard suggests by analogy of the story of Abraham: though God made no sense with regard to reason, Abraham had still had faith in his transcendence of it.

To be even more clear, to reiterate some of the aforementioned logical problems from the perspective of faith, for example, is to say that one must not resort to atheism under contradictions involving God, but that when God cannot seem to be omnipresent and at the same time distinct from the self, and that when God cannot seem to be omnipotent and omnibenevolent with regard to the problem of evil, that one must have faith: have faith that God is omni-qualified, even though and in spite of the fact that an omni-qualified God ultimately makes no logical sense.

Furthermore, to address contradiction from the standpoint of reason would be to see it as a problem to knowledge; to address it from the standpoint of faith would be to see it not necessarily as knowledge but as a way to familiarize oneself with God, for such paradox and illogicality seems fundamental to faith. Moreover, paradox and reason all together exist purely mentally. To say that logicity and illogicality exist beyond the mind would be to misunderstand the nature of reason. Reason and problems thereof are mental phenomena. In this way, to shift one's perspective on the matter of contradiction insofar as contradiction is purely mental is to transform the nature of contradiction, for if reason cannot possibly exist beyond the mind, then anything influenced by or influencing reason or any elements of it—contradiction included—would be to at the same time necessarily change or transform the nature of reason or an element of it. In this way, the

paradox of reason in the mind's eye and in its totality literally becomes the paradox of faith.

In sum, one sees how reason with regard to an omni-qualified God falls short when measured against the standard of reason, but not against the standard of Kierkegaardian faith. All the same, to say that one must have faith in God in spite of this contradiction, or to realize that only through illogicality does one come to be faithful is to suggest a dependency faith has on reason, which is arguably a defect of faith. But, beyond this, faith in the way that has been explained above is successfully reconciliatory to problems of reason with respect to God.

Why one does this—why one teleologically suspends the ethical—is perhaps done for the very sake of reconciling reason, for knowing God paradoxically. As the story goes, Abraham did this because he was commanded by God to do so, but perhaps this was God's way of asking Abraham to know him in an extraordinary way. The teleological suspension of the ethical would then be a different way of knowing God. It would surely be a shock that that one would put so much at stake to just know God in a different way, but from this shock it would be evident that one would be missing the point.

Schuon's Transcendence of Symbolization

It is first and foremost important to establish that Frithjof Schuon's subject matter is the absolute. Evidence that attests to this includes the title of his book's first chapter, *The Sense of the absolute in religions*. Moreover, Schuon explains in the very beginning of this book entitled *Gnosis: Divine Wisdom* how the diversity of religion beckons one to know of the common essence hidden within and among all religious phenomena, i.e. the

absolute (Schuon, 1). Finally, on page 10 of his *Gnosis*, Schuon explicitly uses the word God in his writing (Schuon, 10). The absolute that Schuon refers to here is God, and that God is his discussion: for all religions aim at some object which is transcendent of a life without religious phenomena. It is higher thing; God. Moreover, terminology such as “gnosis” and “divine” refer to God.

Very early on in *Gnosis: Divine Wisdom*, specifically on page 10, Schuon explicitly mentions “the limitations of human logic” (Schuon, 10). However, he begins the general discussion of this Schuonian solution one page earlier. Schuon discusses “historicity” of religious phenomena, or the phenomena in a “mythological form” (Schuon, 9). This historicity is a component of the exoteric aspect of a given religion, such that it is a part of it's culture, and it is in this discussion of God first and foremost referring not to the contradictions of religion but to the mere historical or mythological backdrop on which it is fundamentally based. The prime example of this is the Bible in Christianity. Another example is the Torah or the Old Testament in Judaism. Each scriptural text is written in some storytelling mode, whether that be factual or not, and this is what Schuon means when he discusses historicity.

Regarding this historicity, Schuon claims that “there is no metaphysical or spiritual difference between a truth manifested by temporal facts and a truth expressed by other symbols... the modes of manifestation correspond to the mental requirements of different human groups” (Schuon, 9). This is to say that the temporal or historical expression of a truth is not different from a truth expressed in a different way—in this case, the truth being God. In other explanatory terms, each way is merely a different means of expressing or manifesting that which is being expressed, as each way is

contingent upon different mental requirements. To be clear, truth expressed temporally or historically demands a different cognition than truth expressed in a different way, or through a different means. Moreover, these means are not the same either: some means are temporal and historical and others are not. But to say that the means are different is to not see the whole picture, for they are not different in the sense that they express and are symbolic of the same thing. This thing that is expressed by multiple means is God.

In short, Schuon is arguing for the historicity of religion to be just one way of understanding God. He then goes on to say something more striking: “if certain mentalities prefer marvels that are empirically improbable over historical reality, this is precisely because the marvelous indicates transcendence in relation to terrestrial facts” (Schuon, 9-10). The key here is transcendence of terrestrial facts; however one must explain why it is so crucial first. Schuon brings up the notion of a marvel: by here he means miracle, or something similar to it. In essence a marvel is something that makes no sense on a rational level but happens nonetheless. Jesus rising, the Red Sea parting, the Burning Bush: it is an event, an impossible experience now made possible and real. And marvels are empirically based in reality. Schuon claims marvels are real in his presupposed notion of marvel: his very discussion of them denotes their inherency in his argument: he would not talk about them if they weren’t real.

Schuon also claims that some mentalities prefer these marvels as improbabilities. This is to say that mentalities abound (scientists, skeptics, etc.) doubt marvels as existing or real. Yet some people claim this over reality, which is to say that some people do believe that miracles are indeed real in history. And it is from the fact that some people doubt the existence of marvels and not believe in them that makes Schuon’s statement

regarding the transcendence of terrestrial facts valid. For to consider the marvelous as, in a mentality of a certain kind, making no sense, to not believe in them for the very reason that they are impossible by their very quality and essence is to deem the marvelous at least not grounded in the mentality of this sense, which is to say that miracles or marvels are unfamiliar to reason but not to a different mentality, for reason dictates this impossibility by its very structure, but other mentalities may not. Schuon elaborates: the aspect of this improbable or impossible or nonsensical attribute of the marvelous is precisely what makes it transcendent of reason itself (Schuon, 9-10).

Finally, on top of the nonsense of historicity of God according to reason with regard to marvels, Schuon finally includes logical problems in his wisdom as well to provide in all aspects how rational symbols on an intellectual level indeed point to something else:

The appropriateness of mythological marvels on the one hand and the existence of contradictions between religions on the other- which do not imply an intrinsic absurdity within any given religion any more than do the internal contradictions found in all religion- show in their own way that, with God, truth lies above all in the symbol's effective power of enlightenment and not in its literalness (Schuon, 10).

This is to say that, firstly, as was just mentioned, that the historicity of marvels in connection to God are only the half of it: there is contradiction as well. In this way, this historicity, which is empirical, is coupled with logic, which is rational. Up to this point, or so far as it has been revealed here, this coupling refers to the intellect in its entirety insofar as it is a knower or a familiarizer: one that observes sensory information and analyzes and in general cognizes rationally. Specifically, with regard to logic, Schuon references not only contradictions within religions (as discussed before) but also across

religions (one example that comes to mind is the claim that Jesus is the Messiah: in Christianity this is true while in Judaism this is not); and with regard to the empirical historicity, Schuon, as it has been mentioned, discusses marvels.

But in essence, marvels and contradictions seem to be the problems of the intellect in its entirety as a familiarizer or a knower. And yet, as this brings up a second point, Schuon claims that they do not imply an intrinsic absurdity. This is clearly not true from the standpoint or perspective of the intellect itself: according to the intellect, historicity with regard to marvels and contradictions seem completely absurd indeed. In this way, the only way such problems can escape or even resolve this absurdity is to understand them from a different angle.

Schuon claims that the truth about God lies above the symbol. This means that the symbol itself; and the intellect itself (the intellect produces the symbol, and so the symbol talk entails intellect talk) are insufficient for truth, as it has been explained, and that the real truth transcends the symbolization of the intellect, not in its literalness. Moreover, Schuon believes this very insufficiency of the symbol points at this transcendence. In a certain and quite peculiar way, without the problems of historicity and logic, the very transcendence of them would be unfamiliar. This is the talk of Schuon when he discusses the symbol's power of enlightenment: it begins with the insufficiency of the symbol and ends with leaving it for something higher.

Still, what remains to be pondered is this: what exactly *is* this something higher? What is this alternative to the intellect in its very entirety as it has been explained, what is this transcendent familiarizer? How must one familiarize oneself with God without the

intellect? Before this question is answered, it must not be forgotten how crucial the intellect is and moreover how the very thing that transcends it relies on it in order for God to be revealed to us.

In essence, the thing that transcends the intellect must completely leave it behind. This is to say that such a thing is the very absence of reason, the absence of empiricism. It is not irrationality but nonrationality. It is not unobservable but nonobservable. It is not the opposite of reason or the intellect or anything of the sort; it is completely beyond it and without it. In short, this transcendent familiarizer is a higher cognition or a higher consciousness.

But one can't even call it that. A higher consciousness, if too describable, seems remarkably strikingly similar to an ordinary consciousness, the one of reason and empiricism, the one through which the exoteric element of religions cannot be without, the one through which one operates. In this way, no more can be said beyond what has already been said, not just because that which is indescribable does not exist, but because it would be describing the indescribable, and because one is incapable of knowing about it from a place where one can describe it even in an abstract a way as this. In short, the only way to know about it is to experience it, to become it and think through: this consciousness, this new place. It is from here that this paper shall delve into the discussion of the mystic experience.

STEP 4: THE MEANS OF EXPERIENCE

Just like one can know or, in looser terms, familiarize oneself with God via reason or rationality, one can do the same with experience. And, just like there are several specific ways in which one can familiarize oneself with God within the confines of reason, there are several specific ways in which can do so within the confines of experience: supernatural experiences, shamanic experiences, unitive experiences in nature, and other similar experiences are all examples; but each of these is attributable to some kind of greater or more abstract experience where one becomes close to “something greater.” Whether that is nature, spirit, or what have you, this something more tends to be nonphysical and literally extraordinary; and this seems to point at the fact that phenomena of this greater sort are really just portions of or the whole of a greater being proper, which means that they are of God. Moreover, these aforementioned examples share a common element: unity or transcendence. Supernatural experiences of ghosts or supernatural phenomena or spirits point to something “beyond” the world as one knows it ordinarily or physically; experiences in nature are of unity with nature or of some euphoria which seems to transcend common states of being. In this way, unity and transcendence seem to become attributable to God. In either case, whether the experience is unitive or transcendent, the experiencer becomes acquainted with something “more.” Perhaps the most unitive and transcendent experience of all is one called the mystic or zero experience. It will be the focus of this section of this thesis.

The Mystic Experience under Scrutiny

Before explaining the mystic experience, it should be noted that the mystic experience in particular is an experience that would under a modern empirical lens be highly scrutinized (would be because it is undetermined if it indeed is scrutinized by modern empiricism). The foundation of empiricism is precisely physicality: that which is empirical or observable is nothing other than that which is physical (one perceives and senses with a physical body which is in turn physical and sensory); anything transcendent of it is excluded from empiricism. Indeed, modern science is the knowledge or information that is considered conventional or reliable today, in this age. Talk of such science today is taken as talk of truth. Likewise, talk of anything non-physical or of “believing without seeing” is tabooed and stigmatized; in fact, such talk is the center of fantasy movies such as the “The Polar Express” (*The Polar Express*), suggesting the nonreality or falsehood of such talk.

Personal religion itself is scrutinized under an empirical lens due to its emphasis on non-physicality (God is deemed incorporeal; fasts incorporated in several religions such as Judaism and Islam restrict one from eating, which is a physical activity and specifically one of the body; modern science’s story of evolution is rejected by devout Christians given the creation story included in the Old Testament). Even so, personal religion has a large enough presence in human culture today that such scrutiny can be overlooked, or at least is not as scrutinized as mysticisms or spiritual doctrines which are not as popular. One speaks of Christianity commonly- it is part of pop culture and the average Western civilian knows about it. Mysticism and spirituality is a different story: the esoteric and less practical or less tradition-based doctrines are held to a higher degree

of doubt and rejection—at the very least when held to an empirical measure (beyond holding such doctrines to this specific measure would be rejecting them on the basis of social inclusion, which in this case would be found in adherence to social stigma).

Personal religion is based in faith, whether that faith is community-based, scripturally based, or not based in any proof or reason at all, whereas mystical and spiritual doctrines, at least of the kind to which it has been referred to in this thesis, is based anecdotally or, if one should prefer, by baseless and thus pure faith.

The Mystic Experience as Personal or Anecdotal

The mystic experience is an experience. Others know that one has experiences because they trust one when one communicates to them that they have had them. In this way, knowledge of experience is either based in personal experience or in trusting that others' experiences are true. The mystic experience is no different. If one has not had the mystic experience themselves, they may rely on others' anecdotes of the experience for proof or evidence of its existence or realness. Beyond personal experiences, anecdotes may be the only way in which people know about the mystic experience. Even still, knowledge of the mystic experience insofar as it is anecdotal requires an element of belief as well, in fact fundamentally, such that anecdotes regarding the mystic experience, and all other experiences for that matter, are completely unknown if one does not trust the anecdote as truth. The validity of subjective psychological reports are also held under scrutiny. This is why, especially for experiences that are stigmatized like the mystic experience, this element of trust, the level of trust one gives to a friend, becomes even more important; and this is why it mustn't be forgotten that people simply struggle to believe what they themselves don't believe, and that this way of thinking is due in part to

human nature and in part to societal norms, neither of which are reliable sources of direct truth in and of themselves.

On a personal level, the mystic experience is truly nothing more than experiential; one cannot know it through rationality because it is not conceptual or idea-like. If anything, it may be a memory in which sensory data is contained, but this is not to say that it is rational; moreover, even to consider the proof of the mystic experience as a memory is inaccurate, the reason for which shall soon be revealed. In short, the mystic experience cannot be known beyond anecdote or “memory.” It literally is known only as an experience.

For the purposes of this thesis, the focus will primarily be on the mystic experience being known anecdotally. Fortunately, as Jordan Paper writes in *The Mystic Experience*, there are thousands of accounts of the mystic experience which can be found in the RERC (Religious Experience Research Centre) archives (Paper, 12). Paper himself draws at least a dozen for his work, presenting anecdotes of people whose stories have been recorded and collected for the RERC archives. These people range from different places across the globe; these people also differ in their ages as well. Such an experience such as the mystic experience then does not seem to favor any one type of person over any other; some are not even religious. Experiences of the mystic type therefore happen rather randomly. This is not to say that religious people do not have the mystic experience, however. Paper also includes anecdotes of “professional mystics” whose religions are Indian, Islamic, Christian, and so on (Paper, 23-28). In short, though the amount of people who have the mystic experience is a small percentage of the entire

human population, when un-compared and not held to any measure but its own, such a proportion should be seen as a plethora of people who have experienced it.

The Mystic Experience's Outline

In the very beginning of his book *The Mystic Experience*, Jordan Paper discusses his own mystic experience, the context in which it was brought about, and the general guidelines for the mystic or zero experience (Paper, 1-5). To very briefly describe his experience (which presumably prompted the creation of his here-mentioned work), Paper's experience in particular began in a place of peace: he was very still, lying down, relaxed, in a chill place. All of a sudden, a light descended to him and broke out into something more encompassing— the mystic experience.

In Paper's personal instance of the mystic experience, his state was one of stillness (Paper, 1-2); the light came to him instead of ascension to some overwhelming (yet bearable) light. Such variance in how one experiences this prolific light is just one of several different ways one can experience the mystic experience (Paper, 3-4). Prior to experiencing such light, one is either "still" or "moving in [automatic and not conscious] routinized movements" (Paper, 3). Then, one feels a "merging" or "unity", either as a union with all or all coming in to oneself. Such is the diversity but also the commonality of the mystic experience. Respectively, the background somatic state for the experiencer which acts as a kind of precursor for the mystic experience is uniform or consistent, either in the state's lack of or repetition of movement; though the described union with all is described diversely, in each description the experiencer feels a sort of merging. Finally, the unity with a sense or power of light, however it happens, still happens.

Such is the nature of the mystic experience prior to it being a zero experience: after initially experiencing becoming united with light, the unity's rate of speed increases (Paper, 4), almost as if it would bring one to "something." Interestingly, it does not. The increasing rate of speed in fact brings one to a state of nothingness. Moreover, though it is voluntary, and though one comes out of it, Paper writes that such a state is a "loss of self" (Paper, 4), and that some even choose to stay solid, for lack of better word (Paper, 12-24). Additionally, before and after the dissolution of the self, there is a loss of and subsequent regaining of the distinction of things (Paper, 3-4). This is of course very peculiar, on surface level and under examination. Certainly, questions come to mind upon describing the experience as one of nothingness and the experiencer as absent. The principle of sufficient reason states that something cannot come from nothing (Melamed). It is from here that this paper delves into the discussion of the shortcomings of the mystic experience.

STEP 5: THE SHORTCOMINGS OF EXPERIENCE

The fact that there is a loss of self in the mystic experience is to imply that the experiencer, let alone a self in general, is not present, which is to say they are not present in general nor more specifically are they present in order to experience to the mystic experience—or at the very least a part of the mystic experience. The problem here is a verifiability problem, and it is threefold: firstly, how can an experiencer have an experiencer when the experiencer is not present to have the experience? It is to suppose that something which ceases to exist even temporarily is able to create and does create and even more can remember something that exists, which is the experience. This is absurd, since that which does not exist cannot create that which does exist. Secondly, the very experience which is considered something is necessarily a state of emptiness or a “zero state.” If the experiencer is absent, it seems that the only thing an absent experiencer can generate is a state of absence or in other words a state of nothingness, for if something cannot come from nothing, nothing comes from nothing. In this way, the only experience an absent experiencer can have is of nothing. And what is an experience of nothing? Thirdly, how is it possible for a state of nothing to be describable, even as simply as it being described as a state of nothing? One understands the meaning of the term “nothing” in the abstract just as one understands it when juxtaposed to the term “something”; however, one does not understand and cannot understand the thing *of* which the state of nothing is. Given all of this, from here the first two formulations of this verifiability problem together will be addressed; then the third will be addressed.

The Intertwined Problems of Verifiability and Understanding

How can an experiencer remember an experience they were not there to experience? If an experiencer is absent, then nothing can have the experience, since nothing is there. In a way, to say that the experience does not belong to any present experiencer is the root of the problem as it is described in the primary formulation written about in this paragraph. Additionally, the experiencer cannot remember an experience if the experiencer is not there to experience it. This makes the experience unverifiable. Even more so, the absent experiencer cannot even himself personally perceive or mentally bring to him or herself the experience since again such an experiencer is absent. This makes the experience unperceivable or unrecordable. In this way, the experiencer makes the experience unowned, unverifiable and unrecordable.

Furthermore, how can a state of nothingness be experienced? What is it to experience nothing? As alluded to earlier in this section, the experience is a “zero state”: since an experience cannot exist without an experiencer, experiences are contingent not only upon experiencers but also the qualities these experiencers exhibit as well, including the quality of nothingness. Therefore, if the experiencer is *not*, the experience is *of* nothing. In other words, as it has been explained previously, something cannot come from nothing, and so nothing can come from nothing. In this way, one has no idea of understanding or knowing what the experience is of. On a final note regarding this formulation, one says that at this point, one understands how the focus in this formulation is on how the experience itself is problematic rather than how the experiencer makes it problematic (as it was explained in the formulation prior to this one).

In sum, to understand the dualistic problem of a dissolved self having an experience conjoined with the problem of an experience of nothing is to say that even though something (the experience, if it were of something) cannot come from nothing (the loss of self), maybe more nothing (the experience as it actually is) can come from it instead. Clearly, to say that more nothing can come from nothing sounds just as ridiculous as saying that something can come from nothing. It is true that nothing comes from nothing, but to say that more nothing can come from nothing is to imply that this nothing is quantifiable, which is absurd as only somethings are indeed quantifiable. To even deem nothing potent of generative power, even of nothing, sounds ludicrous.

The Problem of Ineffability

It has been established that in the mystic experience the self or the experiencer is not present and that the experience is of nothing. This is the backbone of the verifiability problem and the understanding problem. Beyond this problem lies the problem of ineffability: because it seems impossible to understand what the mystic experience is of, it beckons one to ask how one should describe it; even before this, it beckons one to ask whether such a task is possible or not. Of course the intuitive answer is quite simple: what one cannot understand, one cannot speak about, let alone think about—at least with clarity. Such an answerer may be inclined to say: “if the mystic experience is of nothingness, the entire subject matter is pointless.” Such an inclination to answer in such a hasty way is hereby called into doubt. Still, this phenomenon poses itself to be quite a confusing condition of the mystic experience—especially when looked at first glance.

The Significance of Nothingness in the Zero-Experience

It is important and certainly unworthy of removal to recognize how silly it is to deem a zero experience even an experience at all. Indeed, experiences are necessarily of things; to say it is not of anything but to say that it is an experience sounds horrifying. One can overlook this: although the zero-portion included in the mystic experience is only a portion of it (indeed, other portions included in the mystic experience which are not of nothing are indeed substantive and memorable, which in turn implies that one could forget about the zero-portion of the mystic experience altogether and accept what one can verify as enough), this portion of the mystic experience is paramount in its importance over the others.

The justification of the esteemed significance of this portion is multifold, but since to reveal the majority of them in this section would be to discuss what will be discussed in the following section, to avoid redundancy as well as getting ahead of myself, right now, what will be said is this: when it is recalled that the mystic experience's experiencer is still present for the period of time coming into and out of the immense being of powerful light (this is made apparent by their recollection of this portion of the experience); they are not present however while one with it. And since the rate of speed in this merging process increases yet ends at the zero-portion of the experience, it is grounds for believing that what such a merging leads to is the very heart and perhaps even the very root of the experience.

STEP 6: THE RECONCILIATIONS OF EXPERIENCE

With the problems of reason, it was made vividly apparent how contradiction itself was the root issue found hidden beneath each problem in particular. Given that, the reconciliation that followed addressed contradiction and limitations in reason directly, mostly so that each problem in particular was solved as consequential to the solution of the more general or inclusive problem. Such a structure of addressing the root and thereby healing the entire tree so to speak does not apply in this case. With experience, each problem in particular must be dealt with individually.

Reconciling the Intertwined Problems of Verifiability and Understanding

Recall how this problem can be reformulated as the intertwined problems of the dissolution of self (which leads to the problem of verifiability) and the problem of a nothing experience (which leads to the problem of understanding). In this section, the problem of a nothing experience is the best place to begin reconciliation.

An aid in the confusion of trying to understand the nothing or zero experience, it is paramount to suggest that such an experience is an experience of God. If one assumes that the mystic experience is an experience of God, one realizes that an experience of God—though it *must* not be—most sensibly *can* be an experience of either everything or nothing, and that an experience of everything or of nothing surely sounds like an experience of God, for God is the all, and the all is everything.

The argument for the above begins as such: to experience God in a *certain* way—which is to say, in a way that is substantive and positive, where the experience is of *something*—may very well to be misrepresent an experience of God, at least in God's

totality (to experience something may be to experience a part of God). For any experience of something must necessarily be defined (just like an experience of nothing is undefined); that which is defined cannot describe any more than what it defines (an experience of eating an apple cannot be described as hitting a nail with a hammer—the hammer description falls outside the definition of the experience of apple-eating, and so the definition of apple-eating only pertains to the experience of apple-eating, not beyond it); and, since God is all, to experience God is to experience all things. Moreover, to experience just something which is definable and therefore singular (like apple-eating) is not to experience all things. Such an experience is not one of God in God's totality. In short, any experience of something that can be described at all is missing something else. All substantive experiences are incomplete insofar as they fall short of the All, and so to have an experience of something would be to not have it of God in God's totality, since God is not incomplete in any way, for God is the All. Therefore, to experience God in one's totality is to experience literally everything.

The above argument continues: to experience God as everything is to experience God as nothing; there is no difference between the two experiences. To experience everything is to experience all things in their definition, in their distinctness and finitude. And to experience all finite things is to experience a finite amount of them. If things are finite, to have an infinite amount of them would eventually be to have an infinite thing. Imagine a grid on a piece of paper. Each individual and distinct thing in the world is comparable to the content each separate square within the grid contains and to which it forms and defines; all the squares comprise the totality of the grid, which itself is comparable to all that is. Now, take away the grid and ponder what remains. Formless

content, undefined being: conceivably, this amounts to nothing, but in reality, it remains everything. Such is the nature of the mystic experience, where the distinction of all things reappears when reemerging from its zero portion and disappears before it, where God, literally everything, is experienced without distinction, is experienced as nothing.

It is now seen how the problem of the understanding ultimately was “what is an experience of nothing of?” and it is clear that such an experience is of the indistinct All, of everything—of God. Furthermore, an experience of nothing and indistinctness clarifies the experience of a loss of self: if a self is distinct (and it is—from other selves and from all other things), to lose distinction is to include the loss of self. Indeed, this also makes the mystic experience more verifiable than it was prior to reconciliation. To understand that the self has not vanished but has only apparently disappeared, as its very definitional boundaries disappeared, is to understand that there remained throughout the entire mystic experience, including and with specific regard to the zero portion, a source, i.e. a self, that could verify and recall the events that took place before and after the experience of nothing. To say the experiencer vanished into thin air is not accurate: to say that the experience became nothing in the sense of the experiencer’s distinct and defined being is more on point. The self-indistinct is the self in God, and when the distinction of things nullify, oneself and the rest merge with the All. It is in this way, then, that the grid analogy in turn helps heal the problem of verifiability because it clarifies the loss of self and in broader terms the very definition of all things existing.

Reconciling the Problem of Ineffability

As it was explained before, the ineffability problem was based mutually on the problem of verifiability and the problem of understanding. Given that these two problems have been reconciled connectedly, one would hope that the problem of ineffability would be reconciled in a similar effect. One's hope would pay off. The ineffability problem at its core is tied directly to the problem of the understanding: what one may not understand, one cannot speak about. And now, what one understands, one may speak about.

Comparable Experiences

Perhaps a comparable experience to the mystic experience is the generation of symbols. Tilich says that "symbols have on characteristic in common with signs; they point beyond themselves to something else", but unlike signs, symbols "participate in the reality to which they point" (Tilich, 383-384). This comparison between symbols and signs defines the nature of symbols in several ways. Firstly, a symbol is distinct from the object to which it points. A waving American flag is a material entity, simply put. What it points, or the object of which it is symbolic, as convention would have it, is patriotism. Patriotism and a waving American are distinct, nonequivalent entities. Secondly, the symbol participate in the object to which it points. The flag , however distinct it may be from patriotism, participates in it. Symbols usual are symbolic of objects greater than the entities which symbolize them. In this way, much like players participate in a game, which is greater than even all of the players combined (it also has rules, referees, fans, goals, and so on) the verb of participation makes sense. Hence, the relationship between symbol and greater object is not distinct to the degree that the two are entirely separate,

but to a lesser degree. The exact degree to which they are separate, however, is unclear. Remarkably restated, the degree to which symbol and greater object are distinct is indistinct.

Tilich also explains how symbols “open up levels of reality which otherwise are closed for us” (Tilich, 384). A glorious singing performance is symbolic of some, for lack of a better word, sensation we experience but perhaps cannot even describe. While the performance is the symbol, this experience of awe we receive in our viewing of such a performance is this special level of reality, the access of which is only granted by experiencing the symbol, or the performance. Furthermore, Tilich explains that the symbol also “unlocks dimensions and elements of our soul which correspond to the dimensions and elements of reality”. If the soul is a knower of reality, symbols unlock our souls first and then our other-level experiences.

Symbols also emerge from the unconscious (Tilich, 384). Choosing what object becomes a symbol for another object is a rather arbitrary process which is made normal by convention, but the actual selecting of what objects become symbols seems rather arbitrary, at least on a conscious level. In this way, the selection of symbols is also unintentional and not deliberate. We cannot invent them or will them into being. Invention and intention are contingent upon being conscious, so if the selection is unconscious, it is also unintentional and not up to us.

In sum, symbols are distinct from the greater object to which they point to an indistinct degree; they provide special access into other-level reality; and their emergence is not up to us. This definition of symbols is very much relatable to the Mystic

Experience. The Mystic Experience is not up to us. It is most certainly an other-level reality, and like symbols are not completely distinct from that to which they point, after a Mystic Experience, we are not entirely distinct from it. Perhaps this incomplete separation post-experience can be best explained simply by understanding the fact that we leave it with a gift. If the Mystic Experience is truly as blissful and ecstatic as it is described, a memory of its splendor is nothing short of an amazing prize. The unconscious and unwilled zero experience, much like the unconscious and unwilled production of a symbol, ends with the reception of a token, or a way of manifesting the mysterious and making the ineffable effable. The experiences are not different from one another, but given what they share, it is suggested that pre-token they are of the same thing: an unmanifest nothingness, or God, from which creation begins.

Perhaps another comparable experience is laid out in Kierkegaard's *Unscientific Postscript*. In it, he claims that subjectivity becomes truth. In order to understand this, many other things must first be understood. These other things include but are not limited to Kierkegaard's concepts of subjective reflection and objective reflection, inwardness, infinite passion, and so on.

Subjective reflection is the reflecting on the relationship between subject and object. For example, if I reflect on my relationship with my mother, I am engaging in subjective reflection where I am the subject and my mother is the object. This is opposed to objective reflection. In objective reflection, I reflect only on my mother. I reflect only on the object (*Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 316). In this way, objective reflection lacks the personal component of subjective reflection, namely, the subject, or the I. This makes subjective reflection seem more complete than objective reflection.

Inwardness is very much related to subjective reflection. Since subjective reflection requires a subject, and subjective reflection does not involve just the object, and the object is, in this stage of thinking about Kierkegaard, external to the subject, the subject must play an internal role in subjective reflection. This internal role is either identical to or very closely resembles inwardness.

The passion of the infinite is very closely related to inwardness. At one point, Kierkegaard describes them as “the infinite passion of inwardness” (Concluding Unscientific Postscript, 317). This suggests that the internal role of the subject in subjective reflection is held in an infinitely passionate manner, such that subjective reflection specifically sparks intense passion in the subject. Kierkegaard’s meaning of infinite passion corresponds to the subjective truth becoming a paradox, and a forgetting of this paradox, whereby the subject transcends its own being, much like Abraham. Infinite passion is subjective truth becoming a paradox and then forgetting it.

The paradox is subjective truth and how it contains objective truth but is not identical with it. If subjective truth is found by reflecting on the relationship between subject and object, but is not objective truth which does reflect on the object, Subjective truth either cannot reflect on anything but itself, in which it becomes it’s own object (nodding to Fichte), or both can and cannot reflect on an object. Either way, Subjective reflection is a paradox. The former way is more on par with Kierkegaard’s talk of forgetting and becoming. Moreover, the paradox becomes in a Hegelian sense. It is a synthesis. The synthesis is atemporal, and strictly metaphysical.

In this way, in subjective reflection, subject and object are not different from one another. This aligns with his talk of the I transcending the I—this occurs in subjective reflection (Concluding Unscientific Postscript, 315). The I must be outside itself in order for it to see itself. The subject is outside the object but both are the I. What passion it must be, to be all that you are, and more than you are, all at once. What a culmination it must be, what an experience it must be, where subjectivity is of object and subject, of the whole picture, of the truth.

What a mystic experience it must be. Subjective reflection is the mystic experience. The transcendence of the I must be this. The dissolution of distinction characteristic of the mystic experience is the subject outside the object but identical to the object. The subject sees itself as an object. The distinction between subject and object dissolves, and is simultaneously revealed. It is forgotten and realized at the same time. It becomes and ceases to exist in the same instant.

At this point it has been made clear that knowing and not knowing have a special relationship. Knowing, i.e., in the way in which we are ordinarily conscious, in the way in which we analyze, use reasons, words, the intellect and the like, is not the way of enlightenment, of true, unillusive knowledge, of self-knowledge, and of God knowledge. This type of knowing is actually not knowing. Likewise, not knowing, as in the principles of ineffability, nothingness, indistinct being and the like—deconstructions of the former type of knowledge—are indeed the way of truth, the realization and awakening of the Absolute, of Being. There are several ways of conveying or expressing this latter type of knowledge, and up to this point, an adequate amount has been put on display. But perhaps the most accurate reflection of this mode of knowledge of Being is Vedanta.

Vedanta's esoteric attire in no way flaunts a suit at a dinner party, nor shames its exoteric counterpart, worship-based and culture-structured religion. Vedanta hones a neutral energy, and yet, the energy it hones can be understood no better than as an energy of mystery.

Revelation, an alternative or part of familiarization, has no revealer, which is a misnomer, and is authorless (*The Essential Vedanta*, 3). A revelation without a revealer is just as much a conundrum as Western religions' characterizations of God, but unlike these exotericisms, Vedanta includes an undertone of clarity rather than leaving us with confusion and confusion alone. The stroke of clarity is most easily understood in it being described as a misnomer. It strikingly resembles ineffability, or to be just as accurate, an issue of effability. Misnomers can either be traced to Babel or taken to be an element of revelation. In the Old Testament, God created with the word (God said "Let there be light", and there was light). But the authorless aspect of revelation implies no Creator, and no words needed to create. An author is useless without his pen, and only a pen can produce words. Metaphorically, this gets the point across. The misnomer aspect of revelation is one of silence—it is contrary to exoteric doctrine, for it understands that in its ineffability there is no language used, there is no ordinarily conscious way of articulating God. God is understood as mystery still and always, and God is understood as such. Truly, revelation is still concealment, and perhaps this is the true misnomer.

Recollection, an extension and indoctrination of revelation, is yet another paradox. To indoctrinate without authoring, to give name to the unspoken, to reveal the revelation but ultimately conceal it and at once create illusions of grander: the stories of the Faces, stories of war; they are all cyphers, expressions of the inexpressible, the literal

meaning of which sporadically reflects the Unseen but in their totality are pure illusion. The Bhagavadgita, a story of relating to Hindu faces is nothing other than a story of such cyphering. There is no word to describe it other than a cryptic one, no story other than an equally horrid, equally beautiful one, etc. To be cryptic is to be clear.

Moreover, recollection documents stories of good and evil, of waging war against desire, of evil emerging from untouchable excellence (The Essential Vedanta, 64). Symbolically, this tension is no less a tension than the tension in Western religions, and so here Vedanta's separation from exotericisms does fall short. But these very tensions are no less tensions than the tension of language rising out of the ineffable. The paradoxical structure undergoes a metamorphosis, from the abstract wordless to the word, to the evil emerging from good. The tension evolves into something more easily grasped, however less reflective of Truth it becomes, continuously. Oddly, this is what Vedanta proclaims in the literalness of its stories: departures, diasporas away from the indistinct untouched All. This synchronicity of literalness and pattern is no mistake, but rather a confirmation.

Recent talk of illusion is best conveyed in Vedanta by maya (The Essential Vedanta, 66). Maya means illusion, and it is the way in which Brahman is revealed to us. To experience Brahman full force would be overwhelming, and so maya, the element of illusion and manifest Brahman made apparent to us, is what is offered. But the overwhelming aspect of Brahman presumes there is someone to be overwhelmed. In the mystic experience, being overwhelmed is not a concern, mainly because that which overwhelms a self, a self unites with. Literally, one becomes overwhelmed and is thus not overwhelmed. This contrast then makes it clear that Vedanta is taking Brahman to be

something one cannot join, at least with regard to maya, for in truth one already is Brahman. In other words, one's experience is or would not be as vivid as the mystic experience, a kind of sedation and tolerability also found in familiarization. It would be perhaps superficial; Arjuna knows this all too well (*The Essential Vedanta*, 72).

Compared to the mystic experience, it is in this way that Vedanta and familiarization are close—they bask in the brightest light but do not blind any vision.

Perhaps the component of Vedanta most relevant to the mystery of God and the latter stages of familiarization is the nonduality of Atman and Brahman. Atman is the principle of individuation, the maker of multiplicity and differentiation. All that is finite is the work of Atman. Concepts are finite because of Atman. The self is separate from the rest of Being, and Being is not one but rather several because of Atman. Atman is the very crux of illusion. Atman is manifestation. Atman as Being is the ordinary physical world we commonly know.

Brahman is not the same, but it is not different. Brahman is the All, the indistinct, the precursor and nullifier of multiplicity. Brahman is nothingness. It is ungraspable, unmanifest and ordinarily unknowable, but by means of familiarization, knowable still. The opposite of Atman, Brahman may be the content of the mystic experience, where Atman becomes Brahman, as it would seem to begin with. The realization is that Atman is Brahman, that the illusion is no different than that which it conceals. Atman is another representation of that which is Brahman. The illusion of distinction and multiplicity in this case is not one of falsehood but one of truth.

Sachchidananda is not different from and is an indicator of Brahman (*The Life Divine*, 113). It is a compound word composed of three elements: being, mind or

consciousness, and bliss. In this way, being and mind are merely elements partaking in the same entity. The entity is positive and substantive, but it oddly has the element of being unbound or being without concrete form. It is without distinction but not exactly equivalent to nothingness. In the mystic experience, the entire experience is a mental event, but it is also metaphysical since one's consciousness and selfhood joins with and dissolves into the Absolute. The mystic experience shares this mind-being dichotomy with Brahman as sachchidananda.

As far as the bliss aspect of it, it does not exactly fall into the characterization of Vedanta having neutral energy. However, it is important to note that it would be wonderful if the undertone of Being was bliss and not neutrality, but perhaps overwhelming as well, a feeling that has already been addressed. Moreover, the dichotomy of good and bad, or the existence of a tension, seems to be deconstructed with the element of bliss, since there is no pain. This does two things. Firstly, it doesn't allow for any minimization of accuracy as tensions would evolve because there is none to begin with. Second, it changes the measure of accuracy from a tension to a single pillar, i.e. bliss. Often energy that is not neutral is held between two extremes in tension. Since there is no opposite of bliss to create such a dynamic, this is how Vedanta is neutral. The bliss element of sachchidananda is a monoelement, and it shows how Brahman is neutral.

THEMES

From all that has been written so far, two central themes emerge. First, God's omni-nature is reminiscent in both the rational more exoteric perspective and the mystically experiential perspective; they merely reform themselves in the latter case as distinguishable via juxtaposition with the dissolution of distinctness. Second, as far as the languages of understanding God goes, whether they be rational or mystically experiential, any sense contained within them turns out to be nonsense, and reversibly and equally true, any nonsense within them turns out to be sense. Expanding upon this, it should be seen how the entire process of understanding God is infinitely mysterious, literally.

The discussion of themes begins with the omni-qualification of God. Clearly it was explained in the means of reason section of this paper how God's attributes of goodness, power, knowledge and presence are omni-qualified. Though God has many attributes, many of them are omni-qualified, which is to say that the very omni-qualification of God is more central to the nature of God than say the mere all-goodness of God. Moreover, if the attributes were not omni-qualified (take for example God being powerful but not all-powerful, and still all good), the problems which arise from them would no longer exist. It is the omni-qualification itself then that is most central to God, and it is responsible for the high degree of contradiction within exoteric religion. This is how important the omni-qualification of God is.

By looking at the element of the dissolution of distinctness within the mystic experience, one sees how God is experienced as a being without any distinction. The omni-qualifications of God clearly are distinct from one another. However, to see them as

indistinct would still be to see them and God as omni-regarded, just not benevolent-regarded for example. This is much like how one sees God as indistinct in the mystic experience as nothing-everything being, but in this case more of an everything or all-omni being. The parallel here then is God as all as seen through God's omni-qualification in exoteric religion and God as an everything being in the mystic experience.

The discussion of themes continues with the dynamic of sense and nonsense. From the rational and exoteric point of view, the concept of God, given all of its parts, is self-contradictory in a plethora of ways. Yet these contradictions are taken as truth within the given conditions of certain exoteric religions; i.e., nonsense is held to a standard of high truth and sense. In other words, within the exoteric method, this structure, however irrational it may be, signifies truth within and for its domain. Moreover, the mystic experience is one where one is unaware of a state which is claimed to be real; the degree of experiential nonsense in this case is equally if not more insensible as the one in the exoteric traditions; yet it too, is taken to be a form of truth and sense. Thus, in both the exoteric and esoteric traditions, this element of nonsense, confusion and mystery has been concluded to be a pattern, if not a backdrop for their bases and structures.

The discussion of themes nears its end with an extension of the former paragraph. Clearly it can be noticed that the dynamic of sense and nonsense as described prior is itself insensible, at least from a rational point of view. Likewise, to understand God from a rational point of view simultaneous with a mystical point of view seems mentally impossible, at least from a rational point of view and not a mystical one; from a mystical point of view, it is allowed. Of course, the subject and instrument of one's analysis are the same and as such without any other tool of discernment one is unable to escape

redundancy (which, by the way, is circular yet only unacceptable from a rational point of view). One gains nothing new and is back to where one started. This structure seems to try to build upon itself, all the while being virtually static. No new information is gained yet the meta-structure grows infinitely. This mental state in understanding God is like a spiral staircase which, though it seems to reach toward the sky, only starts and ends in the same place. To understand God as infinite is to in this case realize how the method of understanding God is infinite and spiral. Perhaps one's mind courses through the spiral trying to find God, all the while God is in the center of it, untouchable. Or perhaps God is the staircase, and familiarization is climbing the steps.

The process of understanding God is then one that is infinite and mysterious. It is on a final note for this thesis important to declare that the omni-nature of God and the infinite nature of God are related in their limitlessness, for the all is unlimited in its inclusion of all that is and unlimited even in its own nature; one would intuitively say that the only thing the all cannot be is nothing—but, as one should recall, the all is nothing too; and the infinity of God is unlimited in its lack of end. That, and to say that God is a mystery is not to imply that the mystery is one to be solved; rather, to say that God is a mystery is indeed the very revelation of the form of God.

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