

**Similarities in the Religious Thoughts of Nishitani and Schleiermacher:
Personal Experience and Religious Plurality**

Edward J Godfrey

**Gustavus Adolphus College
Rel-399 Senior Seminar
Fall 2004**

Contents

Introduction	1
1. Nishitani Keiji	5
2. Friedrich Schleiermacher	16
3. The Mutual Refutation of Descartes and the Notion of No-Self	27
4. Metaphysics, Morals and the Nature of Religion	44
Conclusion	53
Bibliography	57

Introduction

This paper will draw attention to the similarities between two author's books, Friedrich Schleiermacher's *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers* (1799) and Nishitani Keiji's *Religion and Nothingness* (1983). Schleiermacher's definition of religion as "intuition of the infinite" and the experiences resulting from intuition bear a striking resemblance to Nishitani's Buddhist notion of "no-self." I will argue that Schleiermacher and Nishitani, while responding to modernism, as epitomized by the Cartesian ego, both conclude that personal experience and religious tolerance must play a central role in religion. This will be done by analyzing both authors' refutation of the Cartesian ego, experience of no-self, exclusion of metaphysics and morals from religion and their view of religion as a personal quest. The purpose of this paper is not to reduce one thinker to the other, but to answer the question, "Are they writing about the same thing?" If so, such a similarity found in different cultures separated by thousands of miles and 148 years would emphasize the individual's personal manifestation of religion. It would also suggest a universal mandate for religious pluralism and tolerance.

When I discovered Schleiermacher's *On Religion*, I was rather skeptical. "Sure." I thought, "Here is a Christian man writing in the middle of Germany in 1799 who is presuming to understand the most general definition of religion." When I began to read *On Religion*, my opinion quickly changed. In this book, I found concepts that I had previously thought existed only in Buddhism. It was also startling to discover that the majority of Schleiermacher's views, such as an exclusion of metaphysics, seemed to be heretical to his own faith. I finally grasped what Schleiermacher was saying when I realized that he did not write about any specific religion, but about the general *experience*

of religion. With Schleiermacher's preponderance of experience and what I believed to be Buddhist undertones, I could not help but engage in a more thorough comparison with a Buddhist author.

The other author I chose is Nishitani Keiji. I selected him because he is grounded in the Kyoto School of Philosophy and would thus be well prepared for a comparative study. Also, he wrote *Religion and Nothingness* in opposition to a modernizing movement in Japan, much like how Schleiermacher wrote during the European Enlightenment as a response to those who wanted to do away with religion.¹ These two writers wrote under a similar opposition and to a similar audience. Because of this, the topics they chose to emphasize are much alike. They both write on the experience of religion in the present moment rather than on religion's ancient doctrines.

The first two chapters will delineate, respectively, Nishitani and Schleiermacher's arguments and terms for the religious experience. In the third, I will describe a common phenomena that both believe hinders the religious experience, that is, the Cartesian ego. Such an ego is isolated from the world due to its rigid, unchanging nature founded on relational rational thought. The religious condition, for both authors, is quite contrary to this ego. They both suggest that our natural mode of perception is an immediate interaction with the universe where subject and object are unified. To consider this unification, I will see if Schleiermacher's notion of "self-annihilation" is compatible with Nishitani's concept of no-self. The fourth chapter will analyze the noted absence of

¹ Although *Religion and Nothingness* was published in 1983, the majority of it originally appeared as a series of lectures between 1954 and 1955. They were written in the after math of World War Two Japan where Zen had been perversely manipulated to support the war. Nishitani's audience was those who wanted to do away with Zen, much like how Schleiermacher's audience wanted to get rid religion and it's antiquated customs.

metaphysics and morals in each writer's concept of religion, followed by how both believe religion can only be understood through the personal experience of it.

Before I begin, it needs to be mentioned that both authors caution their readers about the inadequacies of language. The Buddha brought this to attention when he said, "My teaching is like a finger pointing to the moon. Do not mistake the finger for the moon."² He used many such metaphors and comparisons to allude to what he understood because there was no way to directly transmit his message verbally.

Schleiermacher, in turn, warns not to search for religion in the "dead letter." He admits that the religious experience may have been there at one time to animate the words, but one cannot duplicate that experience by just adhering to or mimicking the concepts in the words that are written down. Both authors are aware that words do no justice to the religious experience. But, they both acknowledge that words are the only means we have to communicate our religious *ideas*. This alludes to the fact that both writers find religion to be an experience not a concept.

In Buddhism there are two aspects of reality that are mentioned: the ultimate and the conventional. One must be careful to discern which one is being referred to. In the Buddhist concept of no-self, the self (in its actual nature) cannot perceive itself, as a finger cannot feel itself or an eye cannot see itself. If this is the case, the above mentioned can have no idea of themselves. It is in this sense that the word "self" never has any direct correlation to experience for the person using the word. So, in the ultimate sense, there is no self. There is nothing in its experience to correspond with "self", so it does not exist. However, in the conventional sense, the self, the finger and the eye do not

² Nhat Hanh, *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching: Transforming suffering into Peace, Joy and Liberation*, 17.

disappear, but are just hidden from their view, so they exist. The world that combines these two elements is Sunyata. This will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

In this paper, I will present the similarities between Nishitani and Schleiermacher. In doing so, I hope to demonstrate that they both believe that through recognizing the universal nature of religious experience, there arises an understanding and acceptance of religious plurality. If this is the case, these two books would be an ideal beginning for an interfaith dialogue.

1. Nishitani Keiji

Nishitani Keiji first began his book, *Religion and Nothingness* when he was asked to publish an article titled, "What is Religion?" His first article bore this title, but he did not think that it covered the entire scope of what he had hoped to say, so wrote three more articles addressing the same question from different perspectives. Later, he wrote two more articles, once again addressing the concern of "what is religion?" These six articles were then assembled and published under the title, *Religion and Nothingness*.¹

To understand Nishitani's definition of religion, the issue of consciousness needs to be addressed. For the human mind, consciousness, in its conventional sense, consists of an awareness of the relationship between the world and its sense of self.² In the words of Nishitani, "The field [of consciousness] that lies at the ground of our everyday lives is the field of an essential separation between self and things."³ The field of consciousness is composed entirely of relationships; in particular, the relationship of utility. When we, as a subject, look upon the world and its myriad things as objects, we ask ourselves, "What use do I have with this or that?" We tend to label everything in our world as such and assign varying values to different objects that will in some way satisfy our needs. These values then influence our behavior. An example is that we are far more prone to pick up a twenty-dollar bill off the street than we are to pick up a pebble. This is true because we have assigned a higher value to the currency and can find a plethora of uses for it. However, if we are a connoisseur of tiny stones, we may be more prone to pick up

¹ Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, xvii.

² This is not to be confused with "The Self." By "sense of self" I am referring to the mind's relational conception of its own existence. By "Self" I refer to the subjective being that cannot in any way postulate itself as an object.

³ Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 10.

the pebble. Regardless of the choice, the decision to act one way or another, in the field of consciousness, is governed by bodily impulses that request pleasure and avoid pain. By making value judgments on reality, we in turn assign values to ourselves. For an example, if I have a penchant for shiny rocks, I both consider rocks to be beautiful, and consider myself to be a connoisseur. Our physical impulses not only assign value to the world, but also assigns self-identity to ourselves. Through this relational mode of thinking, everything in our experience becomes separate. Our sense of self is separate from our thoughts, feelings, and urges and especially from the rest of the world.

The conventional mode of thinking is not an awareness of things as they are, but an awareness of the relationships that exist between things. Nishitani explains that we do this by assigning the role of master and servant to all things in reality.⁴ If one thing is to be master, then everything else must relate to it as a servant relates to his or her master. Take this piece of paper, for example, to be the master of the universe. Everything would then be subject to it. To understand the paper's color, white, we must have an idea of all other colors so that we can understand white as the combination of all colors. Our understanding of the paper is inherently rooted in our understanding of other colors. The paper's weight is defined not by itself, but by the gravitational attraction between it and the earth. In order to know its size, we can compare it to anything and everything else. Traditionally, in order to make measurements of size, we compare the paper to the pre-established "inch" and find it to be 8 _ by 11 of them. The examples of comparison are endless but they all suggest that our understanding of the paper is based solely upon its relationships to other things. If this paper is the master of the universe and all else are its servants, it holds a fickle position of power. This paper holds office only as long as we

⁴ Ibid., 147.

want to know about it. When we shift our mind's gaze, something else becomes the master, and the paper is reduced to servitude. If we are looking for the essence of a thing, we find in it all other things through our comparison. At the same time, a thing is not itself, but supporting evidence for the comparison of another thing. For Nishitani, when one understands the nature of the relational form of consciousness, one can then begin to understand religion.

Concerning the necessity of religion, Nishitani refers to it as "a *must* for human life."⁵ He states that religion is a necessity but not in the sense that food, water and oxygen are. Many people have lived without religion, but no one can live without food and water. Nishitani states that some people liken religion to learning and the arts. But, he believes that religion is far removed from this simple assumption. For the individual who believes religion can be found in an external text and assimilated into one's life, as one would study any other issue, religion remains hidden. This is because "our ordinary mode of being is restricted to these levels of natural or cultural life."⁶ Religion becomes necessary when one looks for insight into what lies beneath his or her ordinary mode of being.

When one asks such questions as, "What is religion?", "What is its purpose for us?", and "Why do we need it?"⁷, the questions are being conceived in the field of consciousness. Nishitani writes, "the fact that [one] asks the question[s] at all amounts to an admission that religion has not yet become a necessity for [him or her]."⁸ For

⁵ Ibid., 2.

⁶ Ibid., 2.

⁷ Ibid., 1.

⁸ Ibid., 1.

Nishitani, such questions cannot be directly answered, but lead to the realization of the necessity of religion and the beginning of the religious journey itself.

According to Nishitani, "Religion is at all times the individual affair of each individual."⁹ In other words, I will never be able to understand my own personal religious struggle by looking for answers outside of myself. Instead of searching for external solutions, I myself must persevere in order to comprehend whatever exists *in me* spiritually. Religions, in their external forms, are like roadmaps, not like chauffeurs. They can tell you how to get to your destination and generally what to expect when you arrive, but they cannot and will not take you there. When we stop searching for the purpose of religion in an external fashion and instead inquire internally into what our own purpose is, religion begins to manifest itself in its true form. Nishitani concludes that "The religious *quest* alone is the key to understanding it; there is no other way. This is the most important point to be made regarding the essence of religion."¹⁰

The quest that Nishitani speaks of is the quest for a more authentic experience of being alive. The key to understanding this quest is not to look for new ways of thinking, but to cast off old ways in order to achieve a "*real* self-awareness of reality."¹¹ This happens when we become more aware of our experiences, and by "reality realizing itself in our awareness."¹² For Nishitani, the term "realize" has a twofold meaning.¹³ It first contains the concept of understanding. To realize something is to grasp the truth of it, or to have a personal insight into its nature. The second meaning contains the concept of actualization. By our experience of reality, reality actualizes or affirms itself in us.

⁹ Ibid., 2.

¹⁰ Ibid., 2.

¹¹ Ibid., 5.

¹² Ibid., 5.

¹³ Ibid., 5.

When reality manifests itself in our perceptions, it then becomes the human reality of sights, sounds, smells, etc. In our realization (understanding), we in turn recognize that reality is realizing (actualizing) itself in us. In order to develop an awareness of this "self-realization of reality,"¹⁴ a radically different view of the mind and world is required.

What then can be said of the religious quest at this point? From where can it begin? Nishitani uses an excerpt from Dostoevski's, *The House of the Dead* as an example¹⁵ of where the religious quest makes itself known. The lead character in this novel has an extraordinary experience of concentration on a rather ordinary thing that is so profound that it moves him to tears. The character is so focused in his concentration that he loses himself in the experience. "For such commonplace things to become the focus of so intense a concentration, to capture one's attention to that almost abnormal degree, is by no means an everyday occurrence."¹⁶

When we fix our attention on an object with such force that we lose ourselves, the normal field of consciousness of separation between subject and object is transcended. Nishitani believes that in such an experience, one is participating in the religious quest. In this state, the subject and object are unified so that there is no longer subject, or object. The keys to such transcendence are contained within what we believe to be the field of consciousness.

Through the nature of our consciousness and the use of our reason, we assume that there is space between objects and ourselves. However, this assumption is based on the idea that we know both the subject and the object. From all of our sense data, our rational minds assemble a concept of what they believe external things are. We create a

¹⁴ Ibid., 5.

¹⁵ Ibid., 8.

¹⁶ Ibid., 8.

concept of what the *substance* of an object is.¹⁷ This substance is what we believe to be the elementary form of a thing, or what its attributes are. Substance is thought of as the true nature of a thing that emits the sensual data from an object. In the language of substance, when we see something, all that we are experiencing is light bouncing off a thing that reveals its color, shape, form, etc. The reality that we perceive is a compilation of sense data, not the substance itself. By its nature, we cannot know substance. That which we refer to as substance is nothing more than a mental concept that is assembled by means of our thoughts and imagination through the analysis of our sense data. An “infinite dispersion”¹⁸ arises when the innumerable modes of looking at a thing are taken into consideration. If there are infinitely many ways to label an object, any hope of understanding its unique nature is lost. With no unique nature to identify it, the substance cannot be known to us and it falls into nihility. Thus, the substance of a thing is “imperceptible to the senses”¹⁹ and the mind. It exists only in one’s imagination.

Due to the multiple interpretations one can have of a thing, the thing lapses into nihility, or in other words, chaotic uncertainty. Sense data and reason produce “systems of ‘existence’ set up as the negation of such an orientation toward infinite dispersion”²⁰ They attempt to “unify” our experience by giving one agreed upon way of perceiving things. When one has an insight into the nihility of a thing, one is also having an insight into the nihility of his or her systems. These mental systems are what one uses to cover up nihility. For Nishitani, the religious quest begins when one’s systems break down and one recognizes the nihility that exists in the world and in the mind.

¹⁷ Ibid., 119.

¹⁸ Ibid., 143.

¹⁹ Ibid., 119.

²⁰ Ibid., 143.

Nihility manifests itself in the mind when the mind stops deceiving itself of its own nature of nihility. When our eye perceives a photon, we have an immediate experience of sensation. However, the relational mind steps in and posits a source for that photon. The mind then has an image of the photon being both emitted and received, when in fact it has no idea about the substance that emitted it. This implies that we know the subject through our systems of reason and that we know who perceives the data. Both views are false. The correct view requires the omission of knowing the subject or the object.

To view this problem geometrically, the mind thinks of a photon as a line that is emitted at point A and received at point B. The fact of the matter is that the mind only perceives point B. The nature of the mind is that it cannot perceive its own perception of sense data, so B is cut off from reflective thinking. Point A, in turn, can only be conceived in the imagination, so it is not directly experienced. If we look at just the experience of the perception of the photon, the mentally posited gap between object and subject is closed and what was thought of as a line collapses into a single point. This point can be thought of as a combination of point A, point B and the observer. In such an experience, we perceive our senses for what they are without the confines and limitations of relational thought.²¹ The spacious field of consciousness closes up and we are left

²¹ In this inversion of consciousness, the relational mind does not disappear, but resumes its rightful place, subservient to subjective Self. The relational mind that discerned between logical extremes is loosened from its stagnating grip on what it believes to be "real." An example of this loosening is the mind's concept of size. The mind believes that an elephant is larger than the mind's body. Thus, it concludes, "an elephant is big." This is a relational definition that requires the mind's presence. With relationships out of the picture, the mind is "freed" of its absolute definition of the size of an elephant. Previously, the concept of "bigger" was inherently contained in the definition of elephant. Thus, the sense of self was also contained in the elephant. Now, the relational mind is subject to the Self and the Self is separated from its definitions of the external world. The mind will still conclude that an elephant is bigger than itself, but it will do so by *choice*. This decision will be made every time the mind experiences an elephant, but it will be made spontaneously without any prior forethought or definitions.

with but a plane of consciousness where there is no longer any space between the Self and the external world. Thus, the very notion we had of how things relate to the Self is gone. We become our experience, devoid of a notion of self. Or, as said earlier, reality realizes itself in us, as we realize our true nature in it.

This experience is the awakening to the true nature of one's existence. That which makes this experience possible is also manifest in all other external phenomena. Nishitani uses the example of fire.²² Fire, by definition, burns things. It is the embodiment of combustion and requires fuel to burn. However, this is only perceived on the relational field of consciousness. To grasp fire on its home ground and experience it for what it is, one needs to separate it from everything else in the universe and remove it from our traditional relational mode of thinking. Now, when looked at from the uniquely Buddhist sense, the Buddhist says, "fire does not burn fire." It is also said that, "water does not wash water" and "the eye cannot see the eye."²³ This may seem self evident, but this is clearly not our traditional definition of the "substance" of fire. The statement, "fire does not burn fire" is rather "the self-identity of fire as fire in itself, on its own home-ground: the self-identity of fire to fire itself."²⁴

The example of the eye mentioned above is far more interesting because it introduces the concept of consciousness. It makes perfect sense to say that the eye cannot see itself in its true nature.²⁵ In the relational sense, it is the nature of the eye to be a subject that perceives objects. However, in no way can the eye ever be the immediate object of its own subjectivity. The relational definition of the eye would be "that which

²² Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 113.

²³ Ibid., 116.

²⁴ Ibid., 116.

²⁵ Excluding mirrors and other representations, as they would only be reflected concepts of the image of the eye.

sees", which implies the eye and some anonymous object for its perception. But, in the ultimate sense, we need to introduce into this definition the concept of "not seeing." Only through not seeing can the concept of seeing be truly understood. In the world, we perceive at the ground of everything that we affirm a necessary nihility that is fundamentally bound up with the nature of a thing's being. At the elemental ground of an object as it exists in and of itself, that which defines an object is essentially bound to its own negation. For example, the definition of seeing must include a not-seeing of that which is doing the seeing; an eye sees, but cannot see itself. At the ground of everything we know there exists a fundamental nihility.

The religious quest is undertaken when one begins to apply this emptiness to his or her existence. Just as the eye cannot see itself, the Self cannot in any way ever experience itself as an object. None of the sense resources at the mind's disposal can turn around and take a peek, so to speak, of the Self in its original nature. As mentioned above, the mind cannot perceive the perception of its own senses. As an example, I once wondered what the hum of my eardrum sounded like when it was resonating with the sound it perceived. The thought came to me in passing so I was caught off guard when I understood the potential of the answer. Its answer was forever cut off from me by the nature of my ear. I was presuming to perceive my own perception. The very same goes for the mind. For the mind to exist in its own true nature, it cannot experience itself as an object. The Self must open up to the nihility that is necessarily bound to its own being. Buddhism teaches how to cultivate a mind that is free from the domination of an ego and that is properly unaware of itself. Zen Master Dogen explains this process.

To model yourself after the way of the Buddhas is to model yourself after yourself. To model yourself after yourself is to forget yourself. To forget yourself is to be authenticated by all things.²⁶

The spiritual quest leads to the forgetting of the self. When there is no remaining sense of self, there is only the pure perception of reality unhindered by relational thought. Reality is then allowed to freely express itself in the Self without any relational editing. Reality and its nihility realize themselves in the person, and the person realizes their own nihility and the true nature of reality.

The underlying nature of reality that makes this experience possible is the nihility that is coupled to every affirmation. In order for anything to exist as it is in its true nature, there needs to be a negation that supports its affirmation. Nothing can exist separate from this non-dual form of existence. If fire is said to burn, then not burning must be contained in its definition also. If this is not the case, then fire, for an example, must be dependent on the rest of the world to have an existence and thus could not exist on its own. There would need to be something external that "completes". The "substance" of everything inherently involves its very negation. This underlying nihility in Buddhist terminology is Sunyata.

Sunyata is the field of emptiness that is empty of the very concept of empty. This field underlies all things. This is not to say that everything has a negative opposite bound up with it. "Nothingness is not a 'thing' that *is* nothingness. In describing this nothingness as 'something' wholly other, we do not mean that there is actually some 'thing' that is wholly other. Rather, true nothingness means that there is no thing that is

²⁶ Kasulis, Zen action Zen Person, 87.

nothingness, and this is *absolute nothingness*.²⁷ Nothingness is often thought of as the opposite of being and thus thought of as a thing that *is* not-being. However, nothingness is not a thing that *is*. It is not a negation of something, as negations are things. It is empty of all concepts. In Sunyata, the notion of substance disappears. Instead of a thing that exists beneath sense data and reason, there is a thing and a not-thing. Nishitani uses the expression "being-*sive*-nothingness, nothingness-*sive*-being"²⁸ to explain the nature of Sunyata. Sunyata contains that which is both being and non-being.

When emptiness is realized as the root of all things, including the Self, the religious experience of life occurs. The relational mind that we hold such value to bends and distorts our minds and thus reality. It pushes what it fears away, and draws what it craves towards itself, warping our perceptions. A specious sense of self is also generated by the mind that compares itself to all other things. By defining one thing big, the mind must be small, thus forever isolating us from our own bodies and world. When the relational way of thinking is cast aside, and the sense of self is forgotten, emptiness envelops everything. When the emptiness latent in the Self exposes itself as our actual state of being and we completely forget the notion of Self, reality is truly presented to us.²⁹

²⁷ Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 70.

²⁸ Nishitani, 147.

²⁹ To use the word "us" here implies that there is someone who is receiving the presentation of reality. This is not the case. There is no one there to receive it, or no sense of self that is doing the receiving. There lies the frustration of the relational mind trying to receive reality. It is trying to make sense of reality and of itself at the same time. Its trying to unify the two. It accomplishes this by creating objective relationships between reality and itself. These relationships are constructed and not real. Thus, the mind can never experience reality by the very nature of its perceptions. If the mind wants to experience reality, the mind must disappear. For the mind, this is a frightening and quite contradictory endeavor. "What use can the true expression of reality have for me if I cannot use it for my own good?" the mind asks. This question contains the contradiction that prevents many people from beginning the Buddhist religious quest.

2. Friedrich Schleiermacher¹

Friedrich Schleiermacher wrote "On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers" in the midst of religious opposition during the European Enlightenment. This writing was a response to those who wished to do away with all forms of religion. Schleiermacher writes this response to the despisers' objections grounded in the assumption that they have no idea what religion actually is. Schleiermacher defines religion to be the intuition of the universe and of one's true infinite nature. He argues in such a way that his definition of religion must apply even to the despisers themselves. Thus, they are in no position to demand religion's dismissal. For Schleiermacher, religious intuition is an "irresistible necessity of [human] nature."²

Schleiermacher, when addressing the question of "what is religion", hesitates.³ For his definition of religion "does not deign to appear in any oft-seen familiar guise."⁴ Schleiermacher himself acknowledges that written language is a hindrance to the presentation and definition of religion. He writes,

Unlike other concepts and perceptions, religious communication is not [to] be sought in books. Too much of the original impression is lost in this medium in which everything is slurred over that does not fit into the uniform signs in which it shall go forth again, where everything

¹ I must apologize in advance for the sheer number of quotations and references found in this section. I found them very necessary due to the style in which Schleiermacher writes. He uses many examples to explain his religious beliefs, but then never mentions the actual definitions that his examples insinuate. His methods become more evident when he explains the importance of individual communication and his frustration with relaying religious intuition through writing (see footnote # 5). Schleiermacher does not define any system for his intuitions ("A system of intuition? Can you imagine anything stranger?" *On Religion*, 26.). In order to present his ideas, I had to rely heavily on examples. To have authentic examples, I needed to use the same ones that Schleiermacher originally used in the text. Thus, I needed to use a lot of references. Normally I would have just made a reference to Zen, and how it deals with the un-understandable through the use of parables and such. However, a comparison to Zen is the hinge of my entire paper. With this in mind, I felt it necessary to present Schleiermacher in his own terms with his own examples. If this brings the reader pain, I apologize.

² Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, 5.

³ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

needs to be presented two or three times, while the original act of presenting ought to be represented.⁵

Not only does this passage summarize Schleiermacher's frustration with the written word; it also suggests the difficulty (if not impossibility) of any attempt to reduce all religions to one solid definition. Schleiermacher recognizes this illusiveness of religion when he states, "Religion never appears in a pure state. After all, the corporeal world provides you with no primal element as nature's pure product."⁶

Even in the midst of this illusiveness, Schleiermacher asserts that religion is "the inner, irresistible necessity of my nature; it is a divine calling; it is that which determines my place in the universe and makes me the being that I am."⁷ In response to religion's despisers, he states that religion *does not* "originate from a rational decision or from hope or fear, nor does it happen in accord with some final purpose or for some arbitrary or accidental reason."⁸ He also states that religion must be completely free from metaphysics and morals.⁹ Religion needs to be devoid of metaphysics so that it does "not have the tendency to posit essences and to determine natures, to lose itself in an infinity of reasons and deductions, to seek out final causes, and to proclaim eternal truths."¹⁰ These ideas are all the fruits of human rationalization that conjure up purpose and underlying reason for the elements of our existence. Their specious nature lies in their derivation; they are never experienced, only imagined. Similarly, morals have no ties to Schleiermacher's definition of religion. Religious morality, he writes, "develops a system of duties out of human nature and our relationship to the universe; it commands

⁵ Ibid., 74.

⁶ Ibid., 21.

⁷ Ibid., 5.

⁸ Ibid., 5.

⁹ I will explore this issue in far greater detail in section four.

¹⁰ Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, 20.

and forbids actions with unlimited authority.”¹¹ He claims that religion “must not use the universe in order to derive duties and is not permitted to contain a code of laws.”¹²

Schleiermacher believes that when metaphysics and morals are introduced to religion, the concept of ethical good is mixed into metaphysics so that there is a *good* supreme being. This being is then given authorship to a universal code of laws that humans are supposed to follow. “But mix and stir as you will, [metaphysics, morals and religion] never go together; you play an empty game with materials that are not suited to each other.”¹³ In this light, one would easily find most religions stripped of their uniqueness. With this exclusion in mind, Schleiermacher, as a Christian, has the audacity to make reference to “the poorly stitched together fragments of metaphysics and morals that are called rational Christianity.”¹⁴ He considers himself Christian, but discards that which is most commonly known as Christian. Schleiermacher does not entirely eliminate god from religion. He states that “to present all events in the world as the actions of a god is religion.”¹⁵ He defines religion by a god. However, he goes on to say that “brooding over the existence of this god... [is] empty mythology.”¹⁶ We cannot know Schleiermacher’s god through metaphysics or morals.

Metaphysics and morals are not religious. They are used to derive purpose for an individual using the relationships of humankind to external sources. These aberrations of religion “see in the whole universe only humanity as the center of all relatedness.”¹⁷ If there is a god, then I was created by it and must find some way to please it and gain its

¹¹ Ibid., 20.

¹² Ibid., 20.

¹³ Ibid., 20.

¹⁴ Ibid., 12.

¹⁵ Ibid., 25.

¹⁶ Ibid., 25.

¹⁷ Ibid., 23.

favor. If there is a natural law, it is my duty to follow it. Although traditionally religious, these concepts are not in Schleiermacher's definition of religion. Schleiermacher excludes the external from his definition by stating that it is a denigration of religion to insist that it is to "have a purpose, and is to render itself useful"¹⁸ to human beings. With these external elements and their relationship to people eliminated, religion necessarily takes on a very personal nature. With all else excluded, the essence of religion according to Schleiermacher is the "intuition of the universe. [This] is the hinge of [his] whole speech; it is the highest and most universal formula of religion on the basis of which you should be able to find every place in religion, from which you may determine its essence and its limits."¹⁹

Schleiermacher defines intuition as "the immediate perception, nothing more."²⁰ It is only intuition that remains when metaphysics and morals are excluded from religion. Only through the act of intuition does one come to understand religion. He explains religious intuition through a metaphor where he likens it to an image being conjured for an observer. In order for this image to be seen (or intuited, as the metaphor suggests), the observer must "abstain from earthly thought" and engage in "holy silence."²¹ The observer must maintain an "unprejudiced sobriety of mind... neither seduced by old memories nor corrupted by preconceived suspicions."²² When this mental discipline is maintained and one focuses his or her attention on anything, the object of that focus

¹⁸ Ibid., 17.

¹⁹ Ibid., 24.

²⁰ Ibid., 26. The American Heritage College Dictionary defines intuition as "the act or faculty of knowing or sensing something without the use of rational process; immediate cognition" and "a perceptive insight."

²¹ Ibid., 18. I believe that by "holy silence", Schleiermacher is referring to the mental stillness that arises in contemplative prayer or meditation.

²² Ibid., 18.

appears on its own terms without any superfluous mental labels. Only with such an open mind can religious intuition take place.

The lack of knowledge or reason is a primary point of this intuition. In reason, the properties of things are understood so that we can understand a thing a certain way every time we encounter it. This is not the case for intuition. Every intuition exists for itself and cannot be related to another intuition. This is quite contrary to the systematic organization of reason. Schleiermacher emphasizes this when he writes, "A system of intuitions? Can you imagine anything stranger?"²³

Intuition is also intimately bound to feeling. Intuition and feeling are "originally one and unseparated."²⁴ Wherever there is an intuition, there is a unique feeling that accompanies it. William Christian believes that Schleiermacher is not referring to the term "feeling" in its traditional sense. He writes, "Having this feeling is not in the same class with having a feeling of pleasure or anger. It is rather a mode of self-consciousness."²⁵ For such a feeling to be considered a form of consciousness it necessarily must be far removed from any system of logic. It is quite clear that Schleiermacher believes intuition is unattainable through and decidedly separated from reason.

Intuition comes from the "irresistible necessity of one's nature."²⁶ It "springs up necessarily and by itself from the interior of [the] soul."²⁷ Intuition comes from within. It cannot be assimilated through learning a process in a logical sense. If intuition springs up from the interior of the soul and can't be learned, it must be some elemental portion of

²³ Ibid., 26.

²⁴ Ibid., 31.

²⁵ Christian, *Meaning and Truth in Religion*, 46.

²⁶ Schleiermacher, 5.

²⁷ Ibid., 17.

the human psyche that precedes or is at least free of knowledge and reason.

Schleiermacher defines a religious person as one who is “turned inward with his senses in the process of intuiting himself, while for now leaving everything external, the intellectual as well as the physical, to people of understanding.”²⁸ This suggests that intuition and reason are contrary. Both exist in the mind, but not at the same time.

Schleiermacher further describes intuition’s importance when he introduces the concept of infinity. He does this when he defines religion as “the sensibility and taste for the infinite.”²⁹ He also defines religion as infinite when he states “to accept everything individual as part of a whole and everything limited as a representation of the infinite is religion.”³⁰ For Schleiermacher, the infinite is not grasped in the sense that one could visualize the entire series of rational numbers. Nor is it understood in the logical sense where one could just add or subtract one to the number forever. It is grasped by recognizing the uniqueness of each number and the possibility of the infinite series from that. Infinity is better understood when it is used in its religious sense. Schleiermacher believes that each of us has our own definition of religion that we develop through our own intuition. Each of our religions is unique, like a snowflake. Infinity is then understood as the ability to recognize and accept each and every religion for what it is. In a sense, it can be thought of as learning to see past our rational and geometric labeling of snowflakes, and just seeing them all as ice. To further the metaphor, the infinite nature of snowflakes is like the infinite nature of religion. Infinity is introduced when you recognize their infinite natures. Humans (and snowflakes) are finite and religion (and ice) is infinite. “Religion is infinite and immeasurable, even for the understanding; it

²⁸ Ibid., 64.

²⁹ Ibid., 23.

³⁰ Ibid., 25.

must therefore have in itself a principle of individualization, for otherwise it could not exist at all and be perceived."³¹ The infinity of religion applies to all things. One must intuit every day things with the same openness that one intuits religion. For Schleiermacher, infinity is encountered when one recognizes the inherent plurality in all of our perceptions.

This infinity *is not* the immortality of conventional religion. The traditional immortality is the desire to carry the mind (and sometimes body) into the next world with us. Those obsessed with immortality are not concerned with "transcend[ing] humanity; they are anxious about how they will take it with them beyond this world."³² Infinity for Schleiermacher is the complete opposite. If there is to be a temporal form of immortality, it is found in the expression, "To be with the infinite in the midst of the finite and to be eternal in a moment, that is the immortality of religion."³³ Religious immortality is best understood as the intuition of the plurality of religion.

For those who do not agree with this statement, Schleiermacher writes, "If you do not want to have only a general concept of religion... then you must abandon your vain and futile wish that there might be only one religion, lay aside your loathing of its plurality, and, as impartially as possible, approach all those that have developed... during the course of humanity."³⁴ To understand and accept the plurality of religion, "each person must be conscious that his religion is only a part of a whole, that regarding the

³¹ Ibid., 97.

³² Ibid., 54.

³³ Ibid., 54. I understand this only through the unique nature of each individual intuition. Each intuition we have is individual and entirely separated from our other intuitions. Perhaps Schleiermacher is suggesting that immortality is somehow within the unique nature of each intuition. Maybe such a moment has no concept of past or present. It is unique in every way. If this is the case, it is born and dies, so to speak, in the same instant. Unfortunately, Schleiermacher does not go into great detail about what actually happens to produce this immortality. I will have to address this issue according to Zen later.

³⁴ Ibid., 97-98.

same objects that affect him religiously there are [other] views just as pious and... completely different from his own.”³⁵ This concept of religion is quite contrary to religions that make inflexible and dogmatic claims.

Intuition is free from reason and systems. In order to change and flow with each new intuition, intuition must be flexible. If Schleiermacher were to use the snowflake metaphor, he would say that we must become flexible and changing snowflakes in order to comprehend the spectrum of all other snowflakes. We must have infinite flexibility in our intuitions if we are going to be able to intuit everything. So, when he says that we must be “infinite in the midst of the finite”, he means that we must be infinitely flexible to adapt to an infinite amount of situations and people. Schleiermacher writes, “The outlines of personality that appear so definite to you disappear from my standpoint.”³⁶ The more one grows in his or her intuition, the less defined their personality becomes. It is a broadening of one’s personality that can adapt to and accept a greater number of people. The term “empathy” comes to mind. In order to understand another person, not just rationally, but intimately, you need to empathically understand them and their feelings; to find within yourself where the feelings that they are speaking about exist and in what combination. Schleiermacher writes that we have all gone through many different emotions, feeling and experiences during the different times of our lives. Through out the durations of our lives, in a sense, we have been many different people. He states that we are “a compendium of humanity; in a certain sense [our] personalit[ies] embrace the whole of human nature.”³⁷ According to Schleiermacher, to fully grasp the infinity of humanity you must “strive... to annihilate your individuality and to live in the

³⁵ Ibid., 27.

³⁶ Ibid., 40-41.

³⁷ Ibid., 41.

one and all; strive to be more than yourselves so that you lose little if you lose yourselves."³⁸

Contrary to what Schleiermacher finds to be conventional religious beliefs, "religion does not strive to bring those who believe and feel under a single belief and a single feeling. It strives... to open the eyes of those who are not yet capable of intuiting the universe, for every one who sees is a new priest."³⁹ Religion's goal is then not to dominate and assimilate, but to teach and awaken people to their own intuition. Schleiermacher believes masters should not find students, but that students must find masters. The very same applies to the church. A church founded on religious intuition would never proselytize. It would only make its teachings available so that those who are interested may inquire further. In the case of Schleiermacher's religion, it teaches only intuition or how to intuit. Again, there is no system that can be externally forced upon someone so that they can learn this. It necessarily must arise from within.

When one seeks out a master to learn from, nothing more than how to intuit can be taught. However, a primary intuition may be used as an example to describe the concepts of intuition. Intuition is free from reason, so it is difficult to communicate. Such an original intuition could be an example like the snowflake metaphor that I used earlier. This lends a symbolic vocabulary that the master and disciple can share. An important aspect of using such a metaphor is that both master and disciple understand that it is in fact only a symbol. Through the use of intuition, the master guides and coaxes the student into an original intuition. The student does not just learn the "dead letter" of religion, but understands a particular intuition as one of the many manifestations of

³⁸ Ibid., 54.

³⁹ Ibid., 28.

religion. "It is not the person who believes in a holy writing who has religion, but only the one who needs none and probably could make one for himself."⁴⁰ It is the goal of the student to become self-sufficient and independent in the religious world. "In whomever religion has thus worked back again inwardly and has discovered there the infinite, it is complete in that person in this respect; he no longer needs a mediator for some intuition of humanity, and he himself can be a mediator for many."⁴¹

For Schleiermacher, his intuitive religion is opposed to the more rigid forms of religion. His religion is "the only sworn enemy of all pedantry and all one-sidedness."⁴² The letter of religion has no life of its own. Those who mindlessly follow it are only fooling themselves. This, Schleiermacher defines as "the great evil."⁴³

That good people believe that their activity is universal and exhaustive of humanity and that if one would do what they do, one would then need to have no sense except for what one does... Whatever can be seen and comprehended from their point of view, that is, everything they consider valid, is a small and unfruitful circle without science, without morals, without art, without love, without spirit, and truly without letters... Indeed, they think they have the true and real world and that they are actually the ones who take everything in its proper context.⁴⁴

Schleiermacher believes that the opposition to intuition is found in religion that is derived by clinging to "dead letters", metaphysics and morals. Although these people oppose intuition, they are not intrinsically bad. It is very probable that they have the best intentions of everyone in mind, but their motivation does not come from their own inner intuitive voice. Their system also excludes those who are able to intuit religion. The infinite nature of intuition is not the goal of such a person. If an actual religious stirring

⁴⁰ Ibid., 50.

⁴¹ Ibid., 41.

⁴² Ibid., 29.

⁴³ Ibid., 62.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 62.

of intuition ever did arise in them, they would not be able to understand it, or even worse, not want to understand it. Their religion is bound up in the inflexible permanence of the personality and of the soul. The borderless nature of intuition is unknown to them. They only know one intuition that is not even theirs, which they cling to in the hopes of reaping its rewards. "To know of only one point of view for everything is exactly opposite of having all points of view for each thing; it is the way to distance oneself directly away from the universe and to sink into the most wretched limitedness, to become a true serf, bound to the place on which by chance one may be standing."⁴⁵ Such a rigid belief is contrary to the intuition of religious plurality.

Schleiermacher's concept of religion is founded on the intuition of the infinite and religious multiplicity. This intuition by nature is free of metaphysics and morals. Within religious intuition, the uniqueness of an individual's style of intuition is mandatory. This infinite spectrum of human feelings and religion must find finite ways of manifesting themselves in each individual. This is how Schleiermacher mandates religious plurality. One cannot be taught, in a conventional sense, how to intuit religion. "Religion can be understood only through itself and that its special manner of construction and its characteristic distinction will not become clear to you until you yourself belong"⁴⁶ to one of them.

The religions that Schleiermacher believes will lead to plurality and intuition he calls "positive religions."⁴⁷ Each of these has a determinate form, or agreed upon vocabulary, but hold intuition and plurality to be their goal. I again mention the snowflake analogy. Such an example is in a determinate form, but it does not make any

⁴⁵ Ibid., 62.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 113.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 98.

absolute claims. A positive religion for snowflakes would probably consist of recognizing that they are all made of ice. The opposition to "positive religion" is "natural religion." This, Schleiermacher states "is usually so refined and has such philosophical and moral manners that it allows little of the unique character of religion to shine through; it knows how to live so politely, to restrain and accommodate itself so well, that it is tolerated everywhere."⁴⁸ Natural religion is based on metaphysics and other absolute claims and is the antithesis of the intuition-based religion that he supports. Positive religions based on intuition do not have the mandates and constraints of the natural religions. Instead, they encourage the individual's personal religious quest, even if it must drive the individual away. Positive religions can only be understood through "an unending multitude of thoroughly determinate forms."⁴⁹ In such a multiplicity, each religion intuits the merits of the others. It is in this sense that positive religions make up a spectrum religion and thus necessitate religious plurality and tolerance.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 98.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 100.

3. The Mutual Refutation of Descartes and the Notion of No-Self

The most notable similarity between Nishitani and Schleiermacher is their concepts of self. Nishitani uses Sunyata to explain his theory of “no-self” while Schleiermacher mentions a “self-annihilation”¹ startlingly similar (if not identical) to “no-self”. I found it useful to begin this comparison by first introducing the conventional concept that obscures one’s understanding of no-self. That which stands in the way of the religious understanding of the self is the Cartesian ego. Both authors outright refuse such a concept and its consequences in their writing as they believe it to be a most irreligious idea. This refutation is not a personal attack against Descartes, but an attack against his “ego” and the rationale behind it.

Rene Descartes’ *cogito ergo sum* psychologically posits an independent observer contained within the human being that is responsible for thinking and receiving perceptions from the senses. This “Thinking Thing” is separate from the external world and is the only thing that Descartes can be sure exists.

Descartes argues that the only thing that he can know for certain is that he is thinking. He reaches this conclusion by finding sufficient reason to doubt all other phenomena. His first doubt is to question whether or not he is able discern between being asleep or awake.² At first one intuitively feels that there are clear and obvious distinctions between the two states of consciousness. But, on second thought, one finds there are occasions when the difference isn’t quite so obvious. A particular dream comes to mind

¹ Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, 68. Schleiermacher, having no underlying explanatory tool like Sunyata to tie all of his ideas together, mentions no-self in passing. I do not believe that he himself understood the nature of Sunyata, but he strongly affirms the importance of the lack of self in the religious condition.

² Descartes, *A Discourse on Method: Meditations and Principles*, 75.

whose seemingly universal nature makes an excellent point. As a student, it has been the case that some aspect of my academic life has crept into my dreams. In this dream, something is causing me great deals of stress. It's normally missing a deadline, forgetting an assignment or neglecting to go to a class for an entire month. The common thread between these dreams is the feeling of dread. Much to my relief, I always wake from these dreams, still overcome with their negativity, and realize that what ever was troubling me in them was not the case. I was fooled. There are also many waking states where the converse of this error seems to be true. In the case of severe drowsiness, or intoxication the characteristics of the sleeping world seem to blend into that of the waking. Even during alert sobriety, there's always a nagging suspicion that what we perceive is only a dream.

Another example Descartes mentions is the altered mental state of the clinically insane. Flagrantly deficient states of mind exist where objects of dreams, such as creatures that are not there or an altered self-identity invade the insane persons waking thoughts. What would be the case if such a person was suitably adapted to society, but their deficiencies were completely unknowable to others or even themselves? Their illness would go completely undetected and they would have no way to verify that what they experience is false. The lack of verifiable distinctions between the dream-state and the waking state is ample reason for Descartes to doubt that anything he sees is real.

Descartes then brings up the case of logic, such as the fact that $2+3=5$ and that a square has four sides.³ These are universal truths of mathematics and geometry. It seems that such fundamentals would be evident for a person regardless if they are awake or not. However, Descartes brings up the case where he finds someone else to be "in error

³ Ibid., 77.

respecting matters of which they believe themselves to possess a perfect knowledge.”⁴

Such an example is the astronomer, Ptolemy. He believed with absolute certainty that the earth was at the center of the universe and that he had the mathematics to prove it. He was certain to such a degree, that no argument could in the slightest way sway his beliefs to the contrary. Regardless of his confidence and the external support of his theory by the scientific community and the church, he was still wrong.⁵ So what does that say about what we hold to be absolute truths? A square is comprised of nothing but 90-degree angles. But, if we look at the surface of a sphere, a triangle can also be comprised of right angles.⁶ Especially in this age where Newtonian Physics has been replaced by Einstein’s Relativity, the “fundamental” laws of the universe are not at all what they appear to be. This discrepancy between the foundation of our logic and our perceptions is another cause for Descartes to doubt his senses.

Descartes third reason to doubt his perceptions of the material world stems from his belief in an all-powerful God.⁷ If God is in fact omnipotent, ubiquitous, etc., then it very well could be the case that every perception we have of the world is directly given to us by God. Such a powerful entity would not need an actual “base reality” for us all to collectively experience, but could just generate all of our perceptions for us. If that were the case then nothing outside of us could be thought of as real and solipsism would become a feasible conclusion. If none of our perceptions were certain, we could then doubt every aspect of the universe without hesitation. Also, Descartes acknowledges the possibility that if it is not God who is generating our perceptions for us; it could very well

⁴ Ibid., 77.

⁵ In fact, he was so wrong that he got an insult referring to high magnitude ignorance named after him.

⁶ If you take a sphere and divide it into eight equal pieces, each eighth will have three equal sides that meet at three right angles.

⁷ Descartes, *A Discourse on Method: Meditations and Principles*, 76.

be a malignant demon⁸ that is deceiving us. In this possibility, all we experience could be some malicious illusion. The result is the same, that Descartes is left being uncertain to whether or not he even has a body, let alone senses.

Descartes has now nearly convinced himself that the only thing that exists for certain is "that there is absolutely nothing certain."⁹ But then he realizes that he was nearly persuaded that nothing exists. If this is to be the case, there must have been something that was persuaded. Likewise, if some deity or demon deceived him, then there must necessarily be something that was deceived. With this rationale in mind, Descartes concludes,

Doubtless, then, I exist since I am deceived; and, let him deceive me as he may, he can never bring it about that I am nothing, so long as I shall be conscious that I am something. So that it must, in fine, be maintained, all things being maturely and carefully considered, that this proposition I am, I exist, is necessarily true each time it is expressed by me, or conceived in my mind.¹⁰

Descartes, now satisfied with the fact that he exists, goes on to wonder *what* he is. Previously, he believed that he was a man, which he defines as a rational animal¹¹. The ability of self-locomotion and the requirement of sustenance from its environment would then define such an animal. These requisites are all based on sensual perceptions of the external world. For an animal to be aware of its motion, it must be aware that some portion of its anatomy is dedicated to movement. In order for this awareness to occur, these parts of the body must be seen with the eyes, felt with the hands, heard, smelled or tasted. But, all perceptions of the body are subject to deceit by a higher power and must

⁸ Ibid., 78.

⁹ Ibid., 79

¹⁰ Ibid., 80

¹¹ Ibid., 80

be doubted. By doubting every way that we can come to know a body, Descartes concludes that there is absolutely no part of his body that he can even claim to be his own. Thus, he cannot consider himself to be an animal with an extended body.

With nothing material left in his own essence, Descartes then wonders,

I am - I exist: this is certain; but how often? As often as I think; for perhaps it would even happen, if I should wholly cease to think, that I should at the same time altogether cease to be. I now admit nothing that is not necessarily true; I am therefore, precisely speaking, only a thinking thing, that is, a mind, understanding, or reason, -terms whose signification was before unknown to me. I am however, a real thing, and really existent; but what thing? The answer was, a thinking thing.¹²

Descartes now defines himself as nothing other than a thinking thing. In order to imagine what such a thing is, he can do nothing but call up images that he borrowed from the doubtable material world to form ideas. Again, he refers to his argument against the reality of the world. If all of his thoughts are extracted from the doubtable world, then the images conjured by his imagination must also be doubted. Thus, he has no perception of the thinking thing, and he can not even imagine what he is. He is left then with no understandable idea of himself. From this, he concludes that the "knowledge of (his) existence... is not dependent on [external] things... or on any of the things that (he) can feign to imagine."¹³

What then are the characteristics of a thinking thing? Descartes first claims that a thinking thing is that which perceives the information that is received by the sense organs. If the eyes see, then something necessarily needs to be there to receive this visual data. If the ears hear, then something needs to be aware of the sound. But, as mentioned

¹² Ibid., 81.

¹³ Ibid., 82.

before, sensual objects, the sense organs and the body itself cannot be thought of as absolutely real. Regardless, Even if the senses are doubted or if one is dreaming, whatever the body seems to perceive, the thinking thing is that which is aware of the perceptions.

Along side of being that which is receptively experiencing the world, a thinking thing is also that which makes critical decisions about its perceived environment. Doubt is one such event that rises from the decision making process of a thinking thing. After the mind perceives an object or an act, thought analyzes data and makes decisions based on its reasoning. It then assigns values to the results, such as affirmation or denial. In Descartes' case, because he (a thinking thing) finds ample evidence to doubt that which his body perceives he can rationalize denying the validity of all of his sense data.

Imagination and understanding are the last characteristics that Descartes assigns to the thinking thing. To illustrate this point, he uses the example of a ball of wax.¹⁴ Originally, this ball of wax begins with a distinct set of properties. Its appearance has a decided color and form to it. It also sounds a certain way when struck. When smelled, it still has the odor of the flowers from which it was produced. Its tactile sensations let us know that it is smooth and firm. It even has a taste of honey on it. These seem to be the characteristics that define this particular piece of wax. However, if the wax is placed near a fire, these characteristics begin to change. Its color fades, the taste and smell leave and it becomes liquid. What is left has entirely different properties than that which we started with. The wax did not disappear, for something is clearly present. "It must be admitted that it does remain; no one doubts it [.] What then, was it I knew with so much

¹⁴ Ibid., 84-85.

distinctness in the piece of wax?"¹⁵ The nature of wax and other things bothers Descartes. The senses are used to assign attributes to objects so that we can know them. If an object exists in two contrary forms, such as water being a solid and liquid, it can never be in both forms at once. Without this direct experience memory and reason need to be called upon to mentally grasp the nature of an object. We can easily call to mind the concept of wax melting, but our senses will never be able to simultaneously perceive a piece of wax in two different states at once. "I must, therefore admit that I cannot even comprehend by imagination what the piece of wax is, and that it is the mind alone which perceives it."¹⁶

Descartes concludes that the external world, to include our own human body and all of its senses, cannot be for certain. If this is the case, he must doubt its very existence. The only thing that he can be sure exists is himself, which he defines as a thinking thing. "Bodies in themselves are not properly perceived by the senses nor by the faculty of imagination, but the intellect alone; and since they are not perceived because they are seen and touched, but only because they are understood, I readily discover that there is nothing more easily or clearly apprehended than my own mind."¹⁷

Nishitani writes, "The self of contemporary man is an ego of the Cartesian type."¹⁸ It is for this reason that I have included Descartes derivation of the ego. The standard consciousness that we think about is the *cogito* that posits relationships between the world and the ego. However, both Schleiermacher and Nishitani seek to look deeper instead of accepting what appears on the surface.

¹⁵ Ibid., 84.

¹⁶ Ibid., 85.

¹⁷ Ibid., 87

¹⁸ Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 13.

Nishitani begins his critique of the Cartesian ego by describing how the ego is seen on the field of consciousness. In this field, the Cartesian ego exists opposed to the external world. In each perception, the relational mode of thought is used. So, in each thought the both external object and the subject are included. However, "because [Descartes thought] the *cogito, ergo sum* was self-evident, he did not see any further problem with it; which is to say, he was satisfied with thinking about the *cogito* from the standpoint of the *cogito* itself."¹⁹ In other words, relational thought is used to verify relational thought. If you apply the emptiness of the eye analogy to this case, the ego's self-evidence vanishes. The eye cannot see itself in the same sense that the self cannot think itself. Descartes (as well as the rest of us) conceive of the ego on the field of consciousness, so he believes that he can objectively know himself. From this basis, the ego will always appear decidedly dual, or opposed to the external world because what he knows about himself comes from comparisons with the external world. Descartes' mistake was to assume that awareness of one's own thinking was the actual awareness of the subjectivity of the self.

When the underlying field of Sunyata is introduced to this equation, the argument collapses. The self cannot in any way perceive itself. The self that Descartes "proved" is only a mental construction of the self. Sunyata contains the notion of "I am" as well as "I am not." Descartes was clearly unaware of the negation of self that is inherent in self. The relational mode of thinking that he used in his derivation was incapable of reaching this conclusion.

¹⁹Ibid., 13.

I define thought to be the application of past memories and future speculation to experiences. The self takes a snapshot (so to speak) of one of its infinite experiences and then assigns value judgments to it based off of its memories, reason and speculations. The present moment doesn't "sit still" long enough for the ego to address it personally. In order for the relational mind to make sense of the present, it drags a memory from the past along with it into the ever-changing present. This memory can then be called up again in the present moment into the field of consciousness and analyzed. In this form of thinking, all that the mind needs to operate is a set of old memories. It is in this sense that Descartes can rationalize away all of his experiences. He doesn't need the present moment to know that he exists. All that he requires to believe that he is real is his own thoughts of past memories.

Schleiermacher's notion of religious intuition is quite contrary to the Cartesian ego because of the ego's firm foundation in reason. Schleiermacher requires spontaneity as opposed to reason and rationale. Each person must develop his or her own sense of religion through intuition. But "the rage of the understanding does not allow this sense to arise at all. [Everything in the rational mind] unites to bind us to the finite and to a very small spot of it, so that the infinite is removed from our view as far as possible."²⁰ The rational mind seeks continuity and predictability in a never ceasing mission to find permanence in the world. For Schleiermacher, this is not the case. His definition of intuition demands constant flux so that one who intuitu can properly adapt to *all* situations.²¹ Schleiermacher does not believe that it is religion's doubters, scoffers,

²⁰ Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, 59.

²¹ This reminds me of my career in the Army Reserve. For years I would go to College for a month and then *completely* change my personality so that I could attend a weekend Army drill. This was a terrible source of stress for my life. I essentially had to be two different people to survive in two nearly

atheists or immoral people who deter religious development, but that it is "prudent and practical people [who] are the counterbalance to religion."²² The prudent and practical are the ones who reason away their infinite nature and lock themselves away in a citadel of their own egos. In turn they look to share their views with others by mentally unifying them under their rigid belief whether they participate or not. They only know one way of thinking about religion and cannot understand any other ways. Their beliefs are founded on rigidity and permanence and thus exclude any other religion and those who have developed religious intuition.

Nishitani partially agrees with Descartes in the sense that they both place great weight on the concept of doubt. Descartes doubts everything that is not him, whereas the Zen Buddhist, Nishitani, doubts *everything*. He calls this the Great Doubt. This is a psychological state of sorts that arises in religious practice. The Great Doubt is not the systematic doubting that Descartes performs, but an internal manifestation of doubt itself. Such a doubt must be a profound doubt. Questions such as "what am I" or "why do exist" invoke the proper magnitude of religious doubt. Nishitani sights the example of an eighteenth century Buddhist monk named Takusui who would doubt "who" is hearing sounds²³. The conventional answer is "I am hearing sound", but we cannot be aware of our subjective selves in that sense. To ponder the "who" behind the reception of hearing is a proper doubt.

When cultivating such a doubt, "the self is concentrated single-mindedly on the doubt alone, to the exclusion of everything else, and *becomes* the pure doubt itself

contradictory environments. Schleiermacher would say that my pain was caused by the inflexibility of my ability to intuit and my desire to have only one solid personality. I think I agree with him.

²² Ibid., 59.

²³ Nishitani, 20-21.

(samadhi). This much is certain, since it is no longer a question of a self that doubts something on the field of consciousness, but rather a point at which the field of consciousness has been erased."²⁴ This can be thought of as a collapse of the field of consciousness where the mental discernment between subject and object disappears. In this case, relational logic realizes that it cannot apply itself (and never actually could). It is a presentation of the nihility of the self. The self returns to its original mode of existence where it is not able to perceive itself. In other words, it returns to its nature of no-self. With no field of consciousness to dwell in, the ego's awareness of itself disappears.

Descartes differs from Nishitani because he stopped doubting when it came to doubting himself. Descartes began with the same questions that would initiate the Great Doubt, but he stopped doubting. He was afraid that if he "should wholly cease to think, [then he] should at the same time altogether cease to be."²⁵ Had he only doubted a little bit further, he would have inevitably experienced the nihility of the Great Doubt and what Nishitani and Schleiermacher would have considered a religious experience.

I would like to think that in his ruminations, Descartes encountered this Great Doubt. But, upon finding it, he felt his entire field of consciousness shudder on the verge of collapse. Perhaps such an experience of an encounter with Schleiermacher's "feeling" prompted him to write on this subject in the first place.

The presentation of the Great Doubt is called the Great Death.²⁶ It is not death in the traditional sense but the death of the ego. This death is the transformation of consciousness to a form of pure subjectivity. It is a "dropping off of the mode of being in

²⁴ Ibid., 19.

²⁵ Descartes, 81.

²⁶ Nishitani, 21.

which 'self' is seen as agent."²⁷ The self returns to subjectivity and can no longer be seen. In returning to its original nature, it hides from itself and returns to its proper place in Sunyata.

Schleiermacher appears to address the non-dual nature of the self when he writes about the fleeting moment "where sense and its object have, as it were, flowed into one another and become one."²⁸ Schleiermacher does not possess the non-dual vocabulary of Sunyata, so he writes in a romantic metaphorical sense in an attempt to capture such an experience. He writes,

Would that I could and might express it, at least indicate it, without having to desecrate it! A manifestation, an event develops quickly and magically into an image of the universe. Even as the beloved and ever-sought-for form fashions itself, my soul flees toward it; not as a shadow, but as the holy essence itself. I lie on the bosom of the infinite world. At this moment I am its soul, for I feel all its powers and its infinite life as my own; at this moment it is my body, for I penetrate its muscles and its limbs as my own.²⁹

For Schleiermacher, "this moment is the highest flowering of religion."³⁰ This section delineates such an experience where the borders of self and object are blurred if not all together destroyed. It also reminds me of Nishitani's dual use of the word "realize." I believe that if this experience is the "highest flowering of religion" then it could also be referred to as the realization of one's intuitive nature. Also, if "a manifestation" or "an event" becomes so intimately involved with a person's self-identity, then reality is "real-izing" itself in the person. I believe that in this passage, Schleiermacher is suggesting some form of selflessness. Louis Roy supports this

²⁷ Ibid., 21.

²⁸ Schleiermacher, 31.

²⁹ Schleiermacher, 32.

³⁰ Ibid., 32.

conclusion when he writes, "[the] feeling [that Schleiermacher couples with intuition] is found in the realm where the antithesis between subject and its objects is abolished."³¹

Schleiermacher similarly addresses no-self in another passage. He writes,

Observe yourself with unceasing effort. Detach all that is not yourself, always proceed with ever-sharper sense, and the more you fade from yourself, the clearer will the universe stand forth before you, the more splendidly will you be recompensed for the horror of self-annihilation through the feeling of the infinite in you.³²

In this paragraph, he uses much more assertive terms that cannot help but to be compared to the Great Doubt. First, he mentions self-observation with unceasing effort. This is mentioned in Nishitani's section on Takusui's doubt. He writes, "Only doubt more and more deeply, gather together in yourself all the strength that is in you."³³ To detach all that is not yourself seems to me to be the same as discarding one's relational way thinking where the concept of the object is still bound to the concept of the subject. In the field of consciousness, the mind makes judgments about itself by comparing itself to external things. In releasing relational thought in the field of consciousness, one does not release the external world, just its comparison to oneself. It is a detaching of all that is not *oneself*. The horror of self-annihilation is not the annihilation of the individual, but of the individual's ego. It's the horror of the Great Death: a horror that also belongs to the ego. Perhaps it is this horror that prevented Descartes from seeing through his concept of self. Learning to meditate or learning to intuit both intend to seek the death of the ego. Although Schleiermacher does not intentionally identify a concept of no-self in

³¹ Roy, *Mystical Consciousness: Western Perspectives and Dialogue with Japanese Thinkers*, 96.

³² Schleiermacher, 68.

³³ Nishitani, 20.

the preceding examples, it is rather clear to me that he is describing it, whether he is aware of it or not.

Schleiermacher makes reference to a biblical passage that he interprets to suggest self-annihilation. He cites Matthew (10:39). "Whoever loses his life for my sake, will find it, and whoever would save it will lose it." He believes that this passage is understood by his definition of immortality in the moment. "In search of an immortality, which is none, and over which they are not masters, they lose the immortality they could have... Strive here already to annihilate your individuality and to live in the one and all."³⁴ Schleiermacher, through intuition, seeks to expand the boundaries of the personality. I believe Schleiermacher's notion of personality is intimately bound up with the ego and in some cases, synonymous with it. If the ego is one's perceived self-identity, then it is very much intertwined with the personality. The ego clings to the personality as a definition of its own being. A broadening or loosening of the personality would necessarily expand the boundaries of the ego. To broaden the ego to the point of infinity would make it unintelligible. It would destroy it. To cling to one standard and limited form of personality is to create a concrete ego that is not flexible and is incapable of intuition.

Coincidentally, Nishitani sites the same passage but explains it through the use of a preceding passage, Matthew (10:34). Jesus said "do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword." Nishitani interprets this by comparing it to a Zen saying. "In Zen this is known as the 'sword that kills man' and the 'sword that gives man life.' It negates the ego-centered self of man, the self of elemental

³⁴ Schleiermacher, 54.

sin, form the very ground of its being.”³⁵ With this sword in mind, one does not lose their life, just their ego. Both Nishitani and Schleiermacher would paraphrase this biblical passage, “Who ever looses the boundaries of their ego, will find their true life. Who ever clings to the rigidity of their ego, will never discover their true life.”

Nishitani believes that “the self of contemporary man is an ego of the Cartesian type, constituted self-consciously as something standing over against the world and all the things that are in it.”³⁶ He applies this thinking to the mechanization of human kind. As we develop more machines to do our work, we also develop machine-like theories for how *we* work. The human being is then reduced to an over rationalized machine that is free to pursue its desires. The basic urges and impulses of the body intermingle with our logic and we reach conclusions based on our physical impulses. An example is that if my body has a penchant for chocolate, then I can rationally deduce that chocolate is good and I must obtain more chocolate.

Schleiermacher addresses this issue by identifying two opposing drives in people. He does not identify them as such, but they are both “non-intuitive” types that are more akin to the Cartesian way of thinking. Schleiermacher writes, “The human soul... is merely a product of two opposing drives.”³⁷ The first drive “strives to draw into itself everything that surrounds it, ensnaring it in its own life and... wholly absorbing it into its innermost being. The other longs to extend its own inner self even further, thereby permeating and imparting to everything from within, while never being exhausted itself.”³⁸ The first type of person is driven by enjoyment. He or she sees no other

³⁵ Nishitani, 27.

³⁶ Ibid., 13.

³⁷ Schleiermacher, 5.

³⁸ Ibid., 5.

purpose than to strive after the sources of their pleasure. He or she is "quieted so long as [he or she has] grasped one of [his or her sources of desire]." ³⁹ The other type of person is opposed to pleasure and seeks only meaning, reason and purpose in the world. The work of the Cartesian ego is present here. The first is alienated from its desires and the second is obsessed with rational thought. Schleiermacher writes, "Those who lie at the extreme ends of this great series are fervent natures, who are turned in upon themselves... They never get beyond perceptions of the individual phenomena; always occupied with egoistic concerns." ⁴⁰

However, when these two drives are in balance in a person, they represent a human ideal for Schleiermacher. Such people in "whom both tendencies are combined in a more fruitful manner" ⁴¹ are employed by the deity to translate its wills and works. Again, I am reminded of Nishitani's two-fold notion of "realization." I am also reminded of Buddhism and its emphasis on the middle way.

This section delineates my proposal that Nishitani and Schleiermacher are writing on a very similar, if not identical experience. Both have sighted the relational mode of thinking of the Cartesian ego as an obstacle that obstructs the religious experience by speciously objectifying the subjective self. The primary goal of this section that I wanted to demonstrate is that Nishitani's notion of no-self that arises from Sunyata could very well be the self-annihilation that Schleiermacher writes about. They both write about the dismissal of the Cartesian ego and warn against its hindrance to the religious experience. They also recognize the appearance of no-self (or the disappearance of the self).

³⁹ Ibid., 5.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 6.

⁴¹ Ibid., 6.

4. Metaphysics, Morals and the Nature of Religion

Nishitani and Schleiermacher share a similar belief as to the purpose that metaphysics and morals serve in religion. The belief that they share is that they do not belong at all. They reject these notions because their derivations necessarily come from external sources. Both Nishitani and Schleiermacher believe that religion is solely a personal endeavor. Thus, any metaphysics or morals must come from the religious practitioner themselves. This is not to say that there is no higher cause, or that one has no need to behave well. It states that metaphysics and morals cannot be *given* to a person, they need to be understood through personal insight and intuition. The Buddha taught only the source of and the release from suffering. Although there have been many metaphysical postulations in Buddhism since the Buddha taught, the Zen perspective that Nishitani writes from is uninvolved with such. For ethics, the Buddha did create rules for living well. The difference is that they were suggestions and not mandates. They were guides for living well, not a list of "thou shall not"s. Schleiermacher also excludes such ethical mandates from religion along with metaphysics. With no God, no resurrection and no commandments, Schleiermacher appears to be quite heretical when viewed from a Christian perspective. Fortunately, he is freed from the label of "heretic" because he does not write about Christianity; only *On Religion* in general.

Schleiermacher concedes that metaphysics and morals are *similar* to religion in the sense that "both have the same object as religion, namely, the universe and the relationship of humanity to it."¹ However, he also notes that "this similarity has long

¹ Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, 19.

since been a basis of manifold aberrations.”² For Schleiermacher, the purpose of religion is to learn and in turn to teach others how to intuit themselves and the universe. This is the only relationship humanity has to the universe. We can only understand the infinitude of the universe when we learn to intuit it. No logical formula can grasp its chaos better than our own open perceptions and intuitions. If metaphysics and morals are to have any validity, they cannot be mediated by a secondary source. They must also be personally understood, or allowed to manifest themselves from within. Even then, they must make no absolute claims and must remain tolerant and open to plurality. Metaphysics and morals can arise only when they follow a personal intuition. If not, they can only be rational derivations and optimistic speculations that are created to lend life purpose.

Schleiermacher defines those who seek purpose and fulfillment from some higher power not to be religious folk, but metaphysicians. Such a person is not interested in the religious experience that can be found through intuition. They seek only to comprehend some concept of a higher power that contains in it a prescribed purpose for human life. According to Schleiermacher, this is far removed from religion. Religion “must not have the tendency to posit essences and to determine natures, to lose itself in an infinity of reasons and deductions, to seek out final causes, and to proclaim eternal truths.”³ Schleiermacher believes that any concept of god is only fruitful in the realm of metaphysics. “Brooding over the existence of this god before the world and outside the world may be good and necessary in metaphysics, in religion even that becomes only

² Ibid., 19.

³ Ibid., 20.

empty mythology.”⁴ For Schleiermacher, metaphysics lies in the realm of reason, outside the sphere of human experience where intuition takes places.

Schleiermacher then defines those who first posit a god or a purpose, and then believe that its will is the highest function of their being, as moralists. Such a person seeks a purpose or a rationalization for their behavior. They have developed their own set of moral laws in some fashion, but now seek a divine author for it. Such a divine author would then lend authentication to such laws. This would give the followers of such laws authority to assign meaning and purpose by commanding and forbidding certain actions. Morals, if they are to be thought of as religious, cannot be deduced in such a way. Religion “must not use the universe in order to derive duties and is not permitted to contain a code of laws.”⁵ Schleiermacher doesn’t believe that morals don’t exist. He is just insisting that religion cannot lay claim to them.⁶

The nature of religion strongly opposes metaphysics and morals because the individual can never personally experience them. This is the primary reason why my Catholic upbringing did not take to my mind. As much as the same information was pressed repeatedly into my mind, it never stuck. This was due to the fact that I could not identify within my own person where these ideas were supposed to “land.” I could not find the parts of my being that the concepts and words were supposed to represent. Schleiermacher, having a similar notion writes,

⁴ Ibid., 25. Schleiermacher flat out states that gods are for metaphysics and not for religions, thus earning him the title of “heretic.”

⁵ Ibid., 20.

⁶ An example of this is that one does not need a religion to figure out that murder is bad. Kant’s ontological imperative comes to mind. It is essentially the “do unto others as you would have them do unto you” found in most forms of ethics. Kant believes that one can rationally conclude this. However, Kant then states that we can deduce this because God left these deductions for us, much to the dismay of Schleiermacher.

What one commonly calls belief... wanting to ponder and empathize with what someone else has thought and felt, is a hard and unworthy service, and instead of being the highest in religion... it is exactly what must be renounced by those who would penetrate into its sanctuary. To want to have and retain belief in this sense proves that one is incapable of religion... that one does not understand it.⁷

Schleiermacher's concept of religious intuition is free of any rigid concepts and dogma. It is up to the individual to understand and cultivate their religious understanding of intuition. It must come from within; it must be intuitive. Schleiermacher's concept of religion "stops with the immediate experiences of the existence and action of the universe... each of these is a self contained work without connections with others or dependence upon them; it knows nothing about derivations and connections, for among all things religion can encounter, that is what its nature most opposes."⁸

In Schleiermacher's defense, he is not completely negating morals. It is clear that morality can be taught, but it must be taught properly. In the case of teaching a child the difference between right and wrong there are two choices. The first (and easiest) is the "because I said so" approach, where good behavior is rewarded and bad behavior is punished. Although this is an effective method, it is the method that Schleiermacher objects to. Granted, he is not teaching religious intuition to a two-year-old, but his teaching of ethics would come from directly imparting the truth of an action without the need of positive or negative reinforcement. This would have to be done by some how teaching the student to intuitively recognize the pain or pleasure of an activity with out the use of external stimuli or judgment.

⁷ Ibid., 50.

⁸ Ibid., 26.

Learning ethics through intuition would require the *student* to be the source of value judgments. As a living organism, we do not need external incentives to preserve life. Self-preservation as an intuition is even present in the animal kingdom in the form of instinct. Conversely, I believe that the "because I said so" method implies a subjugation or a submission of sorts that removes the student from the very source of the decision. When one recognizes his or her nature as a living thing, then ethics about life can be intuited. However, when the "because I said so" is used, it shifts the focus from the individual as a living organism to the "I" who says so. Ludwig Feuerbach addresses this issue when writes about his notion of the human construction of god. He writes, "To enrich God, man must become poor; that God may be all, man must be nothing. ... What [man] takes from himself is not lost to him, since it is preserved in God."⁹ In this sense, one's reverence for life becomes reverence for god. Preservation of life is then a mandate from god that circumvents the individual's personal intuition of his or her nature. This is such a metaphysical derivation that Schleiermacher wishes to remove from religion.

Nishitani, as a Buddhist, has a far easier time rejecting metaphysics. For the entire duration that the Buddha taught, he said over and over again, "I teach *only* suffering and the transformation of suffering."¹⁰ The Buddha was asked many times by many people questions about the universe and its workings, but he never answered them. He would flat out ignore people who were asking questions in the hopes of discovering some sort of system or theory.¹¹ Through the recognition of what keeps us bound to the illusory world of relational thinking and suffering, we can find our release. Only when

⁹ Feuerbach, *The essence of Christianity*, 26.

¹⁰ Nhat Hanh, *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching: transforming Suffering into Peace, Joy, and Liberation*, 3.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

we reject the dominance of the ego can we become what we are supposed to be; Buddhas. The Buddha never spoke about higher powers and purpose that only he was privileged to understand. With this simple teaching, the Buddhist need not be concerned with metaphysics. Granted, there are many permutations of Buddhism that do rely heavily on metaphysics, such as the Pureland or reincarnation, but Nishitani's Zen is not one of them.

One objection that I can find here is that one could postulate Sunyata as a form of metaphysics. It is a non-dual concept that lies completely outside the scope of relational (dual) reason. In other words, it can in no way be understood or derived by the ego and could appear to be a mystical abstraction. In this sense it can be thought of as that existing beyond or every day mode of being. But that is the very nature of Sunyata. Sunyata is not metaphysics because it is the nature of the self in its true ego-less subjectivity. The individual can intuit this nature once he or she has had that experience. Does it not seem odd that the ego could be forced to learn non-dualism? Any concept of no-self the ego understands is pale and pathetic compared to the actual experience of no-self. From this perspective, it is the ego itself that seems to be a constructed explanation of our existence.

The morals that one will find in Buddhism are the Five Precepts. These precepts highlight certain aspects of life that the Buddhist is encouraged to draw his or her attention to. A Buddhist must show reverence for life, be generous, be sexually responsible and be mindful of their speech and consumption. At first, these precepts may appear to be just another "to do list" full of thou-shall-nots and rules, but their purpose is far removed from mandating behavior. Their purpose lies in the identification of the

sources of suffering that the Buddha spoke of. Contained in each of these precepts is the potential to cause the individual or those around them great amounts of suffering. When one can clearly see the potential for suffering and pain inherent in these activities, they intuitively recognize it and learn to eliminate the destructive forms of ego centered behavior. As opposed to laws, they can be thought of as areas of life that the Buddha drew attention to so that we could explore them more thoroughly with our own insight and intuition.

According to Schleiermacher, one cannot understand religion by reading about it in a book, nor can it be given to someone as a gift. It is not a system of causes or origins, nor is it a guideline for proper behavior. It does not appear in any recognizable external form. The key to its understanding is through participation. He writes, "I fear that religion can be understood only through itself and that its special manner of construction and its characteristic distinction will not become clear to you until you yourself belong to some one or other of them."¹² The manifestation of intuition comes from the individual. A teacher can tell a student where to find intuition, but they will never be able to force them to intuit. This is the spirit of religion and it is found "among those who live in it as their element and move even further in it without nurturing the illusion that they are able to embrace it completely."¹³

Similarly, Nishitani believes that religion is "at all times the individual affair of each individual."¹⁴ It is individual in the sense that it is intimately wrapped up in the being of the individual. Only the individual has access to their being. Nishitani would say that religion is the process of recognizing Sunyata as the nature of our being. This

¹² Schleiermacher, 113.

¹³ Ibid., 113.

¹⁴ Nishitani, 2.

cannot be understood in any relational or external terms. The only way to understand religion is to participate in it. Nishitani writes, "the religious quest alone is the key to understanding it; there is no other way. This is the most important point to be made regarding the essence of religion."¹⁵

Through this "quest" one becomes a religious person. This quest will cultivate intuition and mindfulness, which will broaden an individual's perceptions of the world. This is done in both cases by deposing the ruling ego in favor of no-self for Nishitani, and either no-self (as he insinuates) or a broadened "spectrum of self" for Schleiermacher. Schleiermacher speaks of having an infinite number of views of one thing as opposed to one view for all things. This too is present in Buddhism. The Buddhist is to cultivate Right View according to the noble eightfold path, but "all views are wrong views. No [one] view can ever be the truth."¹⁶ Only the view where self is negated is the right one. One can only understand such a view by experiencing just what it is first hand.

A Zen story tells of a Chinese emperor who asked Bodhidharma, the founder of Zen in China, "how much merit he had earned by building temples all over the country. Bodhidharma said, 'none whatsoever.' But if you wash one dish in mindfulness, if you build one small temple while dwelling deeply in the present moment... the merit from that act will be boundless."¹⁷ It is in this sense that one acts with religion along the path of the religious quest.

Schleiermacher also defines this mindfulness to be essential to religion. He writes, "To have the soul full of religion while performing a calm action that must

¹⁵ Ibid., 2.

¹⁶ Nhat Hanh, 56.

¹⁷ Ibid., 61.

proceed from its own source, that is the goal of the pious.”¹⁸ Both examples demand that the religious practitioner be grossly involved in what ever they do. Nothing should be done for religion, but everything should be done with religion. In this light, it is easy to see how foolish metaphysical debate, proselytizing, and the influence of religiously supported morals on politics are. They are not the goal of religion, but of the “proud, the ambitious, the covetous, and the schemers”¹⁹ who seek not the holy grace of religious leadership, but the power that it lends. This is most opposed to the spirit of religion.

The religion Schleiermacher speaks of is the personal manifestation and cultivation of intuition in the individual. When one learns to intuit, they are then exposed to the infinite realm of experience. Their individuality is decreased as the borders of their personality expand. They become more open to changes in their environment because there is no longer one constant view and its necessary likes and dislikes, but a spectrum of views that are ready to interact with all opinions. This openness leads to tolerance, which is absolutely mandatory for the resulting and necessary plurality of religions. Nishitani’s religion is a quest to return to the true subjective nature of the self. In such a state, one experiences Sunyata when their ego realizes that it never really could posit itself as an object. One dies to their ego in order to be born again in their true nature. Both of these concepts of religion are devoid of metaphysics and mandatory morals and believe that the true nature of religion can only be understood through personal participation and experience.

¹⁸ Schleiermacher, 31.

¹⁹ Schleiermacher, 86.

Conclusion

Joseph Campbell mentions the universal nature of experience as opposed to the divisional force of words in religion when he wrote, "The different between a priest and a shaman is that the priest is a functionary and the shaman is someone who has had an experience."¹ He continues with a story about a friend of his who attended an international meeting of the Roman Catholic meditative orders.

The Catholic monks had no problems understanding the Buddhist monks, but that it was the clergy of the two religions who were unable to understand each other. The person who has had a mystical experience knows that all the symbolic expressions of it are faulty. The symbols don't render the experience, they suggest it.²

I can just imagine the poor clergy yelling at one another and furiously pointing at their holy texts in the hopes that they will convince the other priests that they are right.

Schleiermacher writes, "the matter of religion is so arranged and so rare that a person who expresses something about it must necessarily have had it, for he has not heard about it anywhere."³ This statement combined with his idea of intuition and religious plurality make it very clear to me that Schleiermacher was motivated by personal experience to write his book. I believe that the intuition of which he wrote was a regular experience for him.

I can also imagine that a meeting between Schleiermacher and Nishitani would be very interesting. Although I speculate, the two had all ready met in a sense.

Schleiermacher knew of "eastern religion" as he writes, "To find the universe on the path

¹ Campbell, *The Power of Myth*, 73. When Campbell draws the division between priest and shamans, I am sure that he is not stating that all priests have not had a religious experience, nor is he stating that all shamans have had religious experiences. I believe that he is using this vocabulary to draw a distinction and not to alienate the priesthood from religious experience.

² Ibid., 73.

³ Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, 9.

of the most abstract self-contemplation was the business of ancient oriental mysticism, which, with admirable boldness, joined the infinitely great directly to the infinitely small and found everything bordering on nothingness.”⁴ Nishitani, in turn, cites Schleiermacher by name. “Furthermore, it is possible to regard the essence of religion, as Schleiermacher does, ...as the intuition of the infinite in the finite, as ‘feeling of the Universe.’”⁵ These two writers did not write in a vacuum. Nishitani studied western philosophy extensively. Just how much Schleiermacher knew about Buddhism is uncertain, so I can only speculate on how much he was influenced by it if he was influenced at all.

Schleiermacher’s concept of positive religion and its intuition and religious plurality blend effortlessly into Buddhist beliefs. Nietzsche noticed this and wrote, “Buddhism is the only genuinely *positive* religion to be encountered in history.”⁶ The only one-sidedness of the exchange between Schleiermacher and Nishitani is the language of Sunyata that Buddhism uses. For the Buddhist, Sunyata is the underlying nature of our selves that is obscured by our specious egos. It is the nothingness at the ground of no-self. In this imaginary meeting between Schleiermacher and Nishitani, I would love to see how the open intuition of Schleiermacher would react to Nishitani’s Sunyata. Would he accept it? Would he reject it?

I believe that Schleiermacher would accept this theory that explains the nothingness at the bottom of all of our experiences. All of the experiences that he believes are crucial to his notion of religion are explicitly mentioned in Buddhism and Sunyata. Schleiermacher’s weakness is that he doesn’t explain any teaching tools for the

⁴ Ibid., 68.

⁵ Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 5.

⁶ Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, 35.

cultivation of intuition. Roy lends insight into this when he writes, "The purpose of Schleiermacher's rhetorical 'speeches' is not to offer a philosophical analysis, but to evoke for his readers a unitary experience that approximates pre-reflexive consciousness."⁷ Perhaps what Schleiermacher was missing for a "philosophical analysis" was an understanding of Sunyata.

I like to think of non-dualism and no-self as a paradox for the ego to deal with. It is a seed of chaos that is planted in the mind that the ego cannot grasp. The paradox can be dealt with in two ways. It can either be discarded so that the ego can relax with out having to worry about such a mess, or it can be confronted. In such a confrontation, where one examines the ego with sustained effort, both Schleiermacher and Nishitani would agree, insight into nihility is gained. Something inside of Schleiermacher stirred him to push the limits of his personality. What was it? Only he knows, and I believe that he would intuitively find it akin to Sunyata. I believe that there is *one* religious experience unique to Homo Sapiens, and that both Schleiermacher and Nishitani are writing about it.

For Schleiermacher and Nishitani, personal experience and religious plurality are essential features to religion. The significance of this statement lies in the fact that these writers were separated by thousands of miles and 148 years. These two writers are advocates of acceptance and tolerance. What I find to be the most striking about this is that they are referencing the same experience to make their arguments for such tolerance. It is not the metaphysics or the unique character of religion that unifies people, but the experience that religion suggests. The nature of this experience mandates an acceptance of the individual's unique contribution to the plurality of religions. It is then up to the

⁷ Roy, *Mystical Consciousness: Western Perspectives and Dialogues with Japanese Thinkers*. 99.

individual to intuit the contributions of others. Nishitani and Schleiermacher would like religion's emphasis to change from attempting to unify people under one view, to encouraging the inherent beauty of an infinite number of views. The fact that two authors from different times, cultures and continents advocate the same religious tolerance is evidence that there is a possibility of actual peace and understanding in our world.

Bibliography

- Campbell, Joseph. *The Power of Myth*. Edited by Betty Sue Flowers. New York: Anchor Books, 1991.
- Christian, William A. Sr. *Meaning and Truth in Religion*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964.
- Descartes, Rene. *A Discourse on Method: Meditations and Principles*. Translated by John Veitch. London: Orion Publishing Group, 2003.
- Feuerbach, Ludwig. *The Essence of Christianity*. Translated by George Eliot. New York: Prometheus Books, 1989.
- Kasulis, T. P. *Zen Action/ Zen Person*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Anti-Christ*. Translated by H.L. Mencken. Tucson: See Sharp Press, 1999.
- Nhat Hanh, Thich. *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching: Transforming Suffering into Peace, Joy, and Liberation*. Berkley: Parallax Press, 1998.
- Nishitani, Keiji. *Religion and Nothingness*. Translated by Jan Van Bragt. Berkley: University of California Press, 1983.
- Roy, Louis. *Mystical Consciousness: Western Perspectives and Dialogue with Japanese Thinkers*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003.
- Schleiermacher, Friedrich. *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*. Translated and edited by Richard Crouter. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

