**“Of A Religious Nature”**

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This particular critique will explore the multiplicity of perspectives encompassing both the paradoxical and the reassuring qualities of the religious pursuit. We will address how it happens that socially-established religious figures in history have managed to acknowledge the quandaries and contradictions of religious life; while we will also analyze those existentialists and writers of post-modernism (whose arguments we typically regard as being primarily secular in their claims) have also expressed a degree of appreciation for some undeniable practicality of the faith experience within the human condition. An excellent literary example of this latter point, which I will employ for my arguments, is that of the renowned existentialist, Soren Kierkegaard. Each one of the many metaphysical considerations, whether its foundation lies in theology, the sciences, phenomenology, or existentialism can agree that this notion of the “faith experience” is a theme that has revealed itself, historically, as a prevalent concern to humanity since the Neolithic periods when humans first began to record experience. Although few of these schools of thought seem to agree on the legitimacy behind the experience of faith in accordance to truth, not one of them has attempted to blatantly deny that there exists some reasonability to the experience itself.

The concept of “religion” is often times misleading in its context. Religion, by its definition, is ultimately the social institution which regards itself with the faith experience, and doesn’t necessarily solely serve that experience itself.(that may be best captured by the word “spirituality” or “faith”). The agenda of religion is a dualistic one, for its services address both the demands of the spiritual experience and those of social politics. Inequalities between the two primary obligations of religion, spiritual and social, can result in extremities in either case. Religious extremities may resemble anything from social radicalism (which becomes less concerned with a genuine faith experience and increasingly loyal to the social contract which it inspires), to personal feelings of alienation in our faithfulness to the spiritual life. This imbalance of reason is much like that which Hegel addresses in his own phenomenology. (Phenomenology- meaning the study of the structures of consciousness as an experience of the first-person perspective or position. Although this seems to imply obvious subjectivism due to its emphasis on the “individual experience”, phenomenology also assumes that the structure of an experience is rooted in its intentionality, it’s being directed toward some concrete thing or idea, as it is ultimately an experience of or concerning something objective.) Only, the objects of reason Hegel regards is distinguished as the “practical” and the “theoretical” objects of reason, rather than the “social” and the “personal” objects we have explored in religion. If we are to consider the two obligatory relationships that religion requires (the one we hold to the initial “faith experience” and the contractual one we hold with one another) as being “reasons” in themselves, then we can understand how Hegel’s conception of the “balance” of reasonability can be applicable for our own arguments encompassing religious reasonability.

If we are to incorporate reason into our investigations of the religious experience, it may be most appropriate to clarify our meaning of “reason.” For our purposes, we will avoid deviating from its utilitarian definition, which identifies it as a “basis” or “cause” for an action or thought. Now, we can pursue our analysis of religious experience while understanding reasonability as being equitable to “causality.”

Universally, and not unlike science, religion strives to maintain an “active” relationship to some objective truth outside of the “self”. Our understanding of “self”, in this case, is not entirely reducible to the “individual”, for it may stand to signify the “collective self” of humanity as well. “Active” because the self, both in the individual and collective sense, are engaging in some present-tense of the experience, meaning the experience is still taking place. In Hermann Hesse’s portrayal of Siddhartha, he is also confronted with this notion of “present-ness” tied to the spiritual *being*. Siddhartha, himself, describes the immediate state of the “self” as being liken to a child’s state of awareness, where perhaps a significant amount of objective reference (such as a notion of “time” outside the realm of the *present)* is taken out of experience, and replaced with a purely subjective, “current” sense of self relative to experience.

Both Hinduism and Buddhism acknowledge this particular mode of *being* in the present through the concept of “Samsara.”(“continuous movement”) However, the two Dharmic schools of thought tend to differ in their approach to the self within Samsara, if only because the two traditions regard the *self*, initially, in such opposing manners. Hinduism can appreciate a need for the self to seek periodic liberation from the cycle of Samsara (almost as an acknowledgement of the self’s need to break the constant subjective flow of experience, in order to step back and gain an objective clarity into our state of being; which may indicate Hinduism’s exceptional emphasis on “balance” in contrast to Buddhism.) Buddhism denies to pursue the *self* at all, and therefore, for Buddhism, Samsara stands to signify the absolute death or liberation from the *self* along with all notions of time attached to it. This characteristic of Buddhism may encourage some to regard it as being somewhat “pessimistic” toward the individual; and by its very claims, it is. Though a similar “pessimism” regarding individuality may be as effectively expressed through Christianity or Islam due to their pervasive theme of the Self’s dependency on God. Although Buddhism would deny that this act was motivated by any one objective goal, for Buddhism rejects the proposition of objective pursuit as being genuine causality. This indicates one of the primary paradoxes within Buddhism in its apparent objective motivation toward the denial of all objectivity. This is an apparent contradiction.

The signature character of objectivism within a religion is most typically held by the very object of truth (presumably outside, but in direct relation to the *self*), whether this position is occupied by “God” or any other “ideal” of a divine essence. “Divine” in that it is pertaining to a “Supreme” *being,* where the concept of supremacy suggests a hierarchy of *being* and this hierarchy places a greater value on the object of divine *being* over that of human *being*. Philosophers have struggled with the task of trying to make sense of this spiritual tendency of human beings for centuries, and the subject of religion continues to be a point of contingency amongst those whom it may concern.

The philosopher, Martin Heidegger (who was not so willing to casually state his own religious persuasion, and thus, is often regarded as being somewhat religiously “indifferent”) rejects an affiliation with purely secular reason, although still managing to avoid prescribing any one spiritual methodology for himself. Heidegger states, “ It is not only rash but also an error in procedure to maintain that the interpretation of the essence of man from the relation of his essence to the Truth of Being is atheism.” He also claims, “It is, however, the case that through an illumination of transcendence we first achieve an adequate concept of Da sein (Heidegger’s signature concept of *being* which translates as: “ the being who questions being”-presumably within a present context of time), with respect to which it can now be asked how the relationship of Da sein to God is ontologically ordered.”

Soren Kierkegaard, being of the existential persuasion that would later promote post-modernism, accepts all of the recognized conventions of existentialism and the authority of *self*, somewhat incompletely. For Kierkegaard, “subjectivity is truth” and “truth is subjectivity.” However Kierkegaard, unlike many existentialists who would follow, is not comfortable with the idea of completely divorcing truth from some form of real objectivism. This makes Kierkegaard unique, because his suggestions not only exemplify his reasonability as a philosopher who could appreciate the influence of subjective experience on the validity of truth, but it also demonstrates him as being a man who was incapable of denying a faith in God, that he felt was absolutely necessary to his condition as a human being. Thus, Kierkegaard goes on to make his most notable distinction from the subjectivism he already accepts as being “conditional” to being, in claiming that, in addition to this first condition, human beings are also partial to “leaps of Faith” which requires the allowance of objective truth.

This attention to the periodic breaks in subjective realism (most reminiscent of those we identified within Hinduism) not only reinforce the existence of objective truth or *absolute* truth, but it promotes the idealism that drives both science and religion.

It is evident in contemporary politics, that science continues to have an increasing influence on our collective pursuit of truth, but this reality has done very little to displace the role religion serves to humanity. It seems that now, as it has always been, religion serves to provide humanity with truth in accordance to where we seek it. I don’t believe that there exists a source of answers which could stand to suffice for those we find in our spiritual search. Religion seems to be intrinsically tied to our existence as a species, and it would be unreasonable to assume this would ever cease to be the case.