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5/15/14

Comparative Religion

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The Apple of Religion

For centuries, humans have wondered why we are on the Earth. What could our existence entail? To what extent does our capacity to think distinguish us from the rest of the biological organisms in the world? These are troubling existential questions that people ask everyday. They have wondered it in their consciousness, communicated it with other people, recorded it in text. In many areas of religion however, it seems language fails us in our ability to explain certain concepts and experiences. Theologians have labeled this failure of language with the idea of ineffability – that which cannot be communicated adequately. These concepts and experiences that are ineffable include but are not limited to the characteristics and nature of an ultimate reality, indescribable mystical experiences of this ultimate reality, and other ways in which this ultimate reality may try to communicate to humans.

While ineffability is that which cannot be communicated, an analysis of ineffability reveals that there are different kinds of ineffability that will be deemed as absolute ineffability and relative ineffability. Relative ineffability is ineffability in the sense that one cannot adequately express that which is comprehensible. It results from the failure of human language but still within the gravity of human understanding. Absolute ineffability on the other hand is ineffability in the sense that one cannot express that which is completely incomprehensible. The distinction between absolute and relative ineffability is that the unspeakable aspect of absolute

ineffability is a result of lack of understanding and human concepts. This absolute is taken to extent that humans cannot possibly know of it whatsoever.

Concepts that would seemingly, but not actually as it will be discussed later, fall under this category of absolute ineffability are often the deities or ultimate realities such as God in Christianity, the Dao in Daoism, or Brahman in Hinduism. These are “things” that are claimed to be unknowable forces that transcend human knowledge. Concepts that would fall under relative ineffability, on the other hand, encompass almost everything else that are claimed to be ineffable. Such examples are often the ways in which the Divine communicates to people like mystical experiences and even suffering. Relative ineffability can also include the natural such as the exact thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of watching the sun set on a Caribbean beach. Certainly some experiences and events are more effable and relative ineffability can represent all of which that is even slightly ineffable. Relative ineffability however never enters the proximity of absolute ineffability. Absolute ineffable “things” are that which humans cannot have capacity to comprehend or have an idea. Consequently those “things” are not even “things” at all and people cannot have any idea of them. The implications of this distinction are pertinent in discussing the nature of ultimate realities and ineffability as a whole. Though they are claimed to be, even absolutely ineffable “things” like Brahman, God, and the Dao are not absolutely ineffable because there are still ideas and even characteristics of them that are asserted and pervasive across several theologians.

In Advaita Vedanta, Brahman is considered to be absolutely ineffable. “Its nature transcends all definitions that are based on distinctions” (Rambachan 89). As a direct contradiction to that statement however, Rambachan describes brahman in as freedom. “It is simply freedom. Not freedom in any political or individualistic sense but inner freedom from

everything that circumscribes or conditions the sense of infinity one has within, that is, freedom from all relation to the cause and effect of karma within or without” (Rambachan 62). It must then not be absolutely ineffable if such a concept were to be applied to brahman. Furthermore, Rambachan’s description is not vague and in fact, it tries to be very precise. He explains exactly what kind of freedom Brahman falls under and the mechanism through which it achieves this. For something that is supposed to be absolutely ineffable, such a description would imply otherwise, suggesting that it is not only effable but clearly understandable.

One of the other ideas in Advaita Vedanta is idea of atman, which is the self. It involves the assertion that brahman is atman and atman is brahman. They are one in the same and it is, “The sense of separation from *brahman* is described as a problem of ignorance about one’s true nature” (Rambachan 32). It is this idea of brahman/atman that Advaita Vedanta draws upon a defense to circumvent criticism on brahman’s absolute ineffability. “To objectify the self, another self would be necessary. A second self does not exist, and the self cannot be both subject and object...the self does not know itself” (Rambachan 37). It is a linguistic argument asserting that since brahman and atman are the same thing, one cannot know brahman. Whether or not this linguistic defense is effective, the absolute ineffability of brahman is still in question. The very joint relation between brahman and atman at least reveals that brahman is intimately connected to the self. That statement alone would prove there is something that is known about brahman and thus excludes brahman from being absolutely ineffable.

The other defense Advaita Vedanta utilizes is the idea of nirguna brahman and saguna brahman. “The higher brahman is presented as nirguna brahman, the absolute, non-dual brahman, transcending time, space, causation, and relations. It is beyond all change and action and free from all names and forms...Saguna brahman is God as appearance and not as reality”

(Rambachan 84). Saguna brahman is brahman as it is thought of whereas nirguna brahman is brahman as it actually is. Rambachan however criticized this idea. “It seems to me that the main purpose of Advaita interpreters, in proposing a higher and lower brahman, is to account for the origin of the universe in an intelligent being, brahman, while at the same time, insulating or protecting brahman from what these interpreters perceive to be the drawbacks of ascribing creatorship to brahman” (Rambachan 85). Rambachan’s argument does make a solid point about the contradiction with brahman’s non-dualistic nature but it will be discussed later as to why the hierarchy of an ultimate reality is ineffectual.

In Christianity, God transcends all human concepts but the Bible and theologians still manage to describe him as omnipotent and omniscient. These are thus tangible human concepts, concepts that have a general if maybe vague understanding of, that have been attributed to God and as such there is some kind of understanding of Him. In the proposed mystical experiences, “God is light, a light infinite and incomprehensible...everything to do with God is light” (Fanning 41). This idea of God derives from Christianity’s roots in mysticism. Christian mysticism was primarily focused on developing a relationship with God through mystical experiences. The mystics achieved these experiences through a negation technique. “One could only reach God only by entering into a darkness of unknowing, for God transcends all human language and concepts” (Fanning 36). The process of negation effectively removed all knowledge that one has until there is a blank state and only then can one experience God. This account is contradictory though to his partialness to, “stress the unknowability of God” (Fanning 41). That is to say that even though God cannot be known, He is light, He is that which comes from the sun and from light bulbs, and He is a culmination of many photons behaving both as

particles and as waves. To say anything at all regarding God's characteristics or even the way in which He communicates and interacts with people negates His absolutely ineffable quality.

A similar contradiction in absolute ineffability is found in Daoism, "the dao that can be spoken is not the constant Dao" (Komjathy 111), and yet there are texts that go into great detail about what the Dao is, how it pertains to the natural world, and how to grow closer to it through meditation. There are even specific characteristics to the Dao that say that, "the Dao has four primary characteristics: (1) Source of all existence; (2) Unnamable mystery; (3) All-pervading sacred presence; and (4) Universe as cosmological process" (Komjathy 112). It does not seem consistent that an absolutely ineffable thing like the Dao could have such distinguishable qualities and that is even further supported by the numeric fashion in which Komjathy uses. It states that the Dao is this, this, and this but he's also ineffable. One of the ideas that Daoism uses to explain this contradiction is the negation technique. Another such text is the *Tao Te Ching* that uses vague and poetic writing to convey Daoist ideas but even then it is still trying to describe the Dao.

Daoism also involves a heavy emphasis on meditation. According to Dr. Komjathy at his lecture, it involves the process of going from a state of nondifferentiation to differentiation, then differentiation to nondifferentiation, and back to differentiation – alternating states of being and nonbeing with the progression towards not-knowing. In some ways, it could be similar to the process of negation involved in Christian mysticism. Just as it has been repeated though, there are a couple problems that absolute ineffability has with this concept. The fact that Dr. Komjathy was able to describe the process of differentiation and nondifferentiation at all casts doubt into the idea of these experiences being absolutely ineffable. Furthermore if this process is taught to

Daoists hoping to experience the Dao through meditation, it is likely that this process influences their movement towards it.

To explain the prime issue of saying things about a supposedly ineffable thing, Daoism utilizes a similar method as in Hinduism because it emphasizes the distinction between the Dao as it is thought of and the Dao as it actually is. “From a Daoist perspective, veneration of the Dao and commitment to realizing the Dao involves both recognition of the character as a placeholder” (Komjathy 111). In other words, the placeholder of the dao is used to represent whatever the actual Dao is (being []) because one cannot know the actual Dao. However it differs from Hinduism in that it uses the hierarchy concept to circumvent the issue of ascribing creation onto brahman. Daoism’s use of a hierarchy is directed as a linguistic solution to talk about the Dao. Regardless both Hinduism and Daoism reach the end-state of discussing the lower level of the ultimate reality to discuss the qualities of the higher level of reality.

All of the religions discussed thus far have had a common trend. They are claimed to have an absolutely ineffable aspect to their beliefs but proceed to discuss those absolutely ineffable aspects in great depth. Brahman, God, and the Dao must then be considered relatively ineffable seeing as they are still comprehensible and effable in at least some regards. This applicability disqualifies them from being absolutely ineffable and regardless of whether such descriptions accurately define and state the nature of ultimate realities, the fact that religions try to describe and understand, despite their claims of the ultimate realities’ transcendent nature, is paradoxical. If they transcend human concepts, it is mystifying why they decide to still describe with human concepts for it would lead to a sense of cognitive dissonance. There must be some sort of compromise for ineffability to maintain coherent sense in religions. Either they are trying to understand that which cannot be understood in futile attempts or the ultimate realities are not

actually ineffable due to lack of comprehensibility and are thus only relatively ineffable. Only the latter would maintain the integrity and legitimacy of ineffability and mystical experiences within religions since an absolutely ineffable being would not be able to be experienced through a mystical experience and one would certainly not know if it was the absolutely ineffable if they were. Absolute ineffability then does not work in a structured religion because it tries to understand what cannot be understood.

Furthermore, this shows how the defense of separating the “thing” as it is thought of and the “thing” as it actually is with regard to the Dao and Brahman can be deconstructed. It seems unfocused to understand the dao as it is thought of, or saguna brahman if it is not in any way related to the Dao/nirguna brahman because those ideas do not gravitate towards their intended target. However, it would seem that the very nature of a higher and lower version of something lends to it some sort of relation between the two even insofar as both levels invoke the same name; if this were the case, that there is even the slightest relation between the higher and lower levels, both the Dao and nirguna brahman would thus be comparable and by extension, effable. The argument against these defenses is the same reasoning to the argument against absolute ineffability. They are trying to understand the higher level that cannot be understood in or the lower level is related to the upper level and the upper level is also not absolutely ineffable. Therefore in many ways, the defensive strategy of hierarchies represents the contradiction of absolute ineffability as a whole.

The incoherency of absolute ineffability is not limited to religious structures alone. Forman’s hypothesis of PCEs argues that absolutely ineffable experiences are possible through pure conscious events because of their nature. As Forman asserts, PCEs or pure conscious events are described as, “a wakeful though contentless (nonintentional) consciousness” (Forman 8). To

reach such a state, one must utilize a forgetting technique to ensure that all frames of knowledge and thinking do not distort the pureness of the event in much of the same way that, “we soon cease hearing the ticking of a clock, the whine of an engine, or the calling of birds outside our window” (Forman 37). Forman claims that this hypothesis is able to explain mystical experiences in a way that gets around the criticism of constructivism. To clarify, constructivism is the idea that people’s preconceived beliefs and cultures essentially construct the experience and meaning of mystical experiences. There are however two distinct issues with Forman’s hypothesis that make it unsatisfactory. The first is that if they are contentless, then there is a lack of significance. There is no point in a conscious event that contains absolutely nothing, and to say that there is something defeats the purpose of a pure conscious event by going against the contentless part of it. Its ineffability relies on the fact that there isn’t anything to talk about. The second is that Forman’s “forgetting” technique fails to consider the fundamental, sub-conscious part of the brain that is evident in nearly every human being – human beings being a constant in every mystical experience. So even then Forman’s PCEs does not present a valid concept to legitimize absolute ineffability. Rather, his hypothesis lends itself as an example as to why absolute ineffability does not function.

With the religions that were explored, similarities were observed that illuminated certain aspects of ineffability like the upper and lower levels of an ultimate reality. Hick’s perennial hypothesis, on the other hand, tries to find a reason for why these similarities exist with regards to an ultimate reality. This hypothesis centers around the idea that all of these religions have a particular perspective on this ultimate reality, this Real in Itself. They are all trying to understand the Real in Itself but their view of it is skewed because culture plays an undeniable role in shaping experiences with the Real in Itself. This would mean that all religions are partially

correct in that they are perceiving the same thing but also partially incorrect in that they are not perceiving it in the absolute purest form. As with the other religions though, Hick claims that the Real in Itself is absolutely ineffable. There are some arguments that support this idea like the assertion that none of the religions have the correct perspective on the Real in Itself.

Unfortunately this argument would also work against Hick because these religions also have an idea of the Real in Itself as portrayed through their cultured views of the Real in Itself. Otherwise Hick would not have made any sort of relation to the ultimate realities in other religions. Seeing as Hick's hypothesis draws on the notion of these multiple religions having an idea of the same "thing", that is with relation to this Real in Itself, there is an intrinsic flaw in his argument with regard to the Real in Itself's absolute ineffability. As a side note, it could be interesting to point out that Hick's initial comparison between the religions fulfilled the role of negating absolute ineffability. Perhaps this could indicate that any sort of comparative approach on ineffability has the logical inevitability of disproving it by the very nature of comparison.

Moving on, the generous application of absolutely ineffability is clear. There is a tendency to apply absolute ineffability to ideas that are still somewhat effable and it should be brought into question as to why they are asserted so vehemently to be absolutely ineffable. The best approach to this issue would be to explore reasons associated with psychology. After all, psychology is the study of human behavior and tendencies, and humans are an integral aspect of any religious belief or practice. It should be noted that the psychological terms used for this discussion are some of many stand-alone concepts found in modern psychology and the connections between them (as in to each other) and how what they mean for religion are my own interpretation.

Scharfstein had some ideas of psychological influences on the reasons behind ineffability in religion but he may have had a stronger argument if he did not use Freudian psychology to explain reasons for ineffability. While Freud was revolutionary in the field of psychology, there were many criticisms to his work and modern neuroscience has even disproven many of the ideas that he had. Nevertheless, Freud's work provided a baseline for psychology and a substantial amount of his ideas are still utilized today. Notably, much of Freud's work emphasizes the effect of childhood on the personality of a human. While modern psychological observations support the importance of childhood, Freud had more of an emphasis on the confusing and repressed sexual feelings that a child has to explain their thoughts and behaviors. To say then that there are psychological Freudian explanations for ineffability would be to imply the entirety of Freud's ideas as Scharfstein didn't seem to indicate. Modern psychologists have gravitated this importance away from sexual feelings and more towards a sense of belonging and comfort whether it is in a social or parental situation modern psychologists place less importance on childhood as a whole.

One such example of Scharfstein's argument using Freudian psychology is found in reading his analysis of reason behind the exalters and devaluers of words. He mentions that, "unresolved and unresolvable debate between the exalters and devaluers of language may reflect their respectively satisfying or unsatisfying communication with others in early childhood" (Scharfstein 185). As mentioned, there has been evidence that supports childhood having an effect on the individual through certain timeframes in their lives called critical periods in which imprinting occurs. However, "today's developmental psychologists see our development as lifelong, not fixed in childhood" (Myers 539). They place more importance on stages after childhood to emphasize that people's personalities and behaviors are constantly changing

throughout one's life but plateau and become more static with age. To say then that their experiences and frustrations as a child in trying to communicate translates to their opinions of words in their adulthood may be too much of an extrapolation. He neglects to consider the effects that maturation and experiences after childhood have on their opinion of words.

In another example of Freud's shortcomings in Scharfstein's text, he argues that, "the feeling of merger with the essence of things or of oneness with something totally protective appears to go back to the early relation between child and mother and the experience for which Freud borrowed the name oceanic" (Scharfstein 191). He references the Freudian concept that there is an intimate bond with the mother and child that is evident in the child's adult years as he searches for that same intimate bond. The now adult manages to find this comfort in a higher power – an idea that will be explored later. The criticism with this Freudian concept is in the nature of which Freud viewed the intimacy of the mother and child. He named this idea as the Oedipus complex – the idea that a male child has repressed sexual feelings for his mother and feels jealous of the father. Freud's attribute significance of sexual feelings towards the mother have since been disproven and is often attributed to his tendency of denouncing reports of sexual child abuse to this sexual repression. Still however, there is merit to Scharfstein's claim that a feeling of comfort is imperative within human beings. Thus there are ideas in Scharfstein's argument that fully hold up in regards to the psychology of ineffability that will be further discussed. In a similar way that Scharfstein reduces psychological reasons behind ineffability and religion and attributes them to Freud's childhood experiences, I will reduce the psychological reasons to emphasize the need for comfort derived from one's instinct of survival.

This exploration of psychology should continue with another psychologist called Jean Piaget. Mainly focused on the cognitive development from childhood to adulthood, he observed

certain psychological traits are evident at different stages of child development. For example, he observed that egocentrism is present around the ages of 2-6. While modern psychologists now believe that such psychological traits are not static and confined in the given timeframes, many of his findings have been supported today. One of his ideas involved the concept of schemas – “concepts or mental molds into which we pour our experiences” (Myers 179). People use these schemas to interpret feelings and experiences with regards to our current beliefs and understandings in a process of assimilation – the process of when experiences offer new insight and perspectives that also adjust those existing schemas.

Once a belief has been ingrained in a person’s schema however, it can be extraordinarily difficult to convince otherwise or adjust their schemas especially in terms of one’s religion. Part of this reason is because schemas are an unconscious part of our personality, which *is* a Freudian concept that modern research in psychology has supported. This specific phenomenon in psychology is something different called confirmation bias – the idea that there is, “a tendency to search for information that supports our preconceptions and to ignore or distort contradictory evidence” (Myers 354). One explanation for this could be that evidence supporting one’s beliefs generates a sense of comfort within a person. The desire for correctness is amplified in understanding something as grand as our existence in the universe. This concept is also bolstered by the propensity of overconfidence in humans. In going back to Forman’s PCEs, these unconsciously stored schemas would inevitably have an effect on the nature of the event. First in that schemas would cause someone to unconsciously expect their mystical experience to reflect their past preconceptions and so forgetting does not necessarily lead to a “pure” event. Secondly, schemas determine ways in which one interprets things and one who enters a PCE will interpret

it as that of the Divine in part of confirmation bias. Otherwise there would be nothing else to interpret because again, PCEs are contentless.

Evidently there are many different concepts working on the way people think and act that have an effect on the way people perceive and interpret things. After exploring these aspects of human thought, it may be easier to reduce them into the aforementioned need for comfort in one's life and the implications on religion and ineffability. One of the results of incorporating ineffability in religion is the convenience that arises when the familiar sense of comfort explained in Scharfstein's text coincides with beliefs. Ineffability may then be as sincere as religion itself in that it exemplifies our desire to understand the world and our meaning in the universe. Theodicies, or the reasons as to why suffering happens, provide the best example illuminating how ineffability can lend itself to psychological harmony. Suffering and death are difficult things to cope and understand. Peter L. Berger in *The Sacred Canopy* makes a convincing argument that religions have played the role of ascribing human significance to the universe. People look for meaning in their lives and particularly in suffering and death. Ineffability can fill this gap and provide an explanation for that which is not clear by ascribing those confounding factors to that which we cannot possibly understand.

This ability for ineffability to cover this gap of explanation is the comfort of correctness in one's belief as supported by confirmation bias. Why does the Divine allow/make suffering happen? It may be because the Divine is ineffable with characteristics and powers that are beyond our comprehension. If this is the case, ineffability maintains the possibility that everything that does happen, including suffering, happens for a greater, ineffable reason and that it is part of its ultimate plan made possible by his ineffable abilities at least in religions pertaining to a personal God. Berger refers to this idea as a sort of shield. "The sacred cosmos,

which transcends and includes man in its ordering of reality, thus provides man's ultimate shield against the terror of anomy" (Berger 26). The aforementioned anomies include disorder like suffering, injustice, and death. Confirmation bias assists in interpreting these events as mystically significant. There is comfort to be taken in the idea that bad things have good eventualities. The concept of internal locus of control that exemplifies a lower amount of anxiety when one feels a sense of control over one's life.

There may be two factors that go into this sense of control though. The first is what has control and the other is how much control does that thing have. There is more control in one's life when the person himself is exerting it rather than a random person. The Divine however, who is transcendent, omnipotent, and omniscient, has an infinite amount of power and control over the universe that one cannot even begin to understand, as people claim. Therefore, there must be an inevitable amount of comfort that comes with the feeling that there is also this transcendent Divine watching over us and protecting us. Berger agrees with this point when he says, "In any case, when the nomos is taken for granted as appertaining to the 'nature of things,' understood cosmologically or anthropologically, it is endowed with a stability deriving from more powerful sources than the historical efforts of human beings" (Berger 25). There are tangible benefits to this aspect of religion. Several studies have provided evidence that support the role of religions and spiritual beliefs in psychological and neurological health. One specific study by a team in Columbia University illustrated that those with various religious and spiritual beliefs were more associated with thicker brain cortexes, a characteristic that helps against the development of depression. (Miller et al. 2014) It is likely that the comfort of religion bolsters the psychological defenses that protects one from anxiety and stress.

To further explain his point, Berger develops the idea of legitimations and the different kinds. “Legitimations are answers to any questions about the ‘why’ of institutional arrangements” (Berger 29). They are grasps for some sort of explanation or justification as to why bad things happen and this is an aspect that he believes religion has extensively used in the past. The most powerful legitimation that these religions is, “the conception of the institutional order as directly reflecting or manifesting the divine structure of the cosmos, that is, the conception of the relationship between society and cosmos as one between microcosm and macrocosm” (Berger 34). In other words, it is the idea that a religious institution is representing the ultimate reality like God or the Dao and one can gain a point of contact with this ultimate reality through participation in that religious institution. This claim is what gives these religious institutions its legitimacy and it is most apparent today with the Catholic Church. Above more than anything though, these legitimations reinforce the idea of an inherent meaning to life – and the bad events that occur in life – that is intimately related to a higher power. “This permits the individual through these situations to continue to exist in the world of his society – not ‘as if nothing had happened,’ which is psychologically difficult in the more extreme marginal situations, but in the ‘knowledge’ that even these events or experiences have a place within a universe that makes sense” (Berger 44). Berger agrees that there is comfort to be found in those situations where religious legitimations are used.

From this analysis, one can come up with three kinds of comfort that are derived from ineffability. There is comfort in control, comfort in meaning, and comfort in correctness in one’s belief. The comfort in control appeals to the idea that there is an ultimate reality that plays a role in one’s life, protecting, guiding, or watching over us. The comfort in meaning appeals to the idea that when unfortunate or tragic events occur, there is some overarching, perhaps

unknowable meaning to it in the grand scheme of the universe. The comfort in correctness legitimizes the first two comforts and reinforces that they are objective parts of reality. All of these comforts though can be categorized under the basic human instinct of survival, a component of the subconscious. While survival does mean an increased longevity in the tangible world (the one we live in now) in the context of this discussion, it also manages to transpose into a concern for survival for the imagined world (the afterlife). That is to say that after the tangible world comes to an end, one can still be conscious and aware in the imagined world. There is a great amount of appeal to believing in this second world and it tends to all three types of comfort. Berger makes the assertion that “Death presents society with a formidable problem not only because of its obvious threat to the continuity of human relationships, but because it threatens the basic assumptions of order on which society rests” (Berger 23). Perhaps even more notably however is the expectation of the alternative. To believe in the imagined world is to also entertain the possibility of the feared world (the underworld) whose characteristics act directly against two types of comfort, excluding comfort in correctness. Thus the prospect of the imagined world and the anxiety of the feared world both work to perpetuate the eagerness and comfort in correctness.

One of the notable statements from Rambachan concerning religion as a whole discussed his view on the role of Advaita Vedanta. “The gist of the Upanisadic solution to the human problem is to point out that the seeker is the sought. In other words, one is already the immortal and full being that one desires to become” (Rambachan 32). He directly address here that Advaita Vedanta solves issues such as the desire for meaning and the apprehension of death. The reasoning behind it is that it asserts atman, or the self, is one with brahman. In one instance he invokes the metaphor of a play to illustrate how the relationship would work. “So the show

becomes so mad, with the actors' involvement and anxiety rising out of control, that the prompter behind the stage must send out messengers to remind them that it is only a play, to remind them who they really are" (Rambachan 72). The metaphor utilizes the prompter to illuminate brahman's role in having a preordained structure to his plan for the world. It mentions the actors' anxiety becoming too great for them to manage to symbolize suffering. Ultimate reality is already within people and brahman uses certain techniques to remind them of that idea, that there is a plan for them found within themselves. Notably the text emphasizes that brahman has a sense of order and control over the course of world. That is an idea that Advaita Vedanta, according to Rambachan, uses to help people understand that there is meaning to the events that occur and that it will conclude as brahman intends on it. Therefore brahman invokes the comfort that there is control and that there is meaning. This is a concept that appears to work similarly in Christianity with God.

Theodicies aren't limited to the more popular religions either. A similar sense of ineffability is shown in African religions through the diviners and their job to interpret the reason behind disease and misfortunes. It is the, "diviner's task is to match the patient's symptoms to the spiritual power corresponding to them" (Ray 74). They assert there is a mystical reason for their ailment or misfortune, whether it is infertility or illness. Each case is unique to the individual according to their actions. In one case, "the wife was unable to carry out a normal term pregnancy because the wife's relatives were dissatisfied with the number and quality of cattle given by the husband's family" (Ray 75). Often if they had not made a proper sacrifice or if an ancestor is unhappy with them, spirits or even other people would impose these ailments on the individual. Only these diviners are privy to the supernatural reasons and so they are ineffable except to them, which gives them a sense of authority that is difficult to question. It is interesting

to speculate why the social structure has been designed in such a way. It may be in part of that, “Traditional diagnosis does not allow for the Western idea of chance or coincidence” (Ray 73). If events like illness happen for a mystical reason then it generates a greater sense of control over this aspect of life. They are able to respond in a way, such as sacrifice, that directly improves their situation perhaps in a more meaningful manner. There is comfort to be taken in this kind of control and meaning.

Daosim is not as concerned about theodicies. It tends to value ideas such as balance and unity. There still however a connection between ineffability and comfort. Specifically, Daoism appeals to the comfort in correctness. One of the biggest differences in Daoism is their characterization of the Dao in that, “the Daoist view of the Dao is primarily impersonal” (Komjathy 105). The comfort in belong and control are not involved in the ineffability of the Dao. The main force behind ineffability in Daoism is therefore the comfort in correctness, which at first may seem contradictory to Daoism’s ontological mindset and emphasis on not-knowing. Essentially though, this desire for comfort in correctness is evident in the vagueness of the Dao for both factors of vagueness and not-knowing contribute to the legitimacy of an ineffable Dao. This legitimacy is grounded on the fact that Daoists don’t necessarily claim anything said about the Dao is true. “the dao that can be spoken is not the constant Dao” (Komjathy 111). Daoism then takes a much more humble view on the Divine, which is described as more of a force (the Dao) than a deity as in Christianity. It is not that they are correct but that they aren’t incorrect.

Berger also discussed the problem with such theodicies. “This is the point that there is a fundamental attitude, in itself quite irrational, that underlies all of them. This attitude is the surrender of self to the ordering power of society” (Berger 54). He is suggesting that the individual develops a masochistic attitude in light of the implications that a higher power would

have. They become so enthralled by the benefits of being in favor of an ultimate reality that they essentially decide to become a tool or vessel through which they can be used. This may very well be the case but Berger does not seem to focus on the most significant implication of this masochism idea. Theodicies provide comfort and meaning so rewarding that it becomes almost too enticing not to believe in. It cannot be emphasized enough how comforting it feels to think that tragic events have a benevolent reason, that the good will be rewarded and the bad will be punished, that death is not the end to our existence. Legitimations not only provide incentive to believe in an ultimate reality, they cause people to feel it is their only choice to secure their place in the universe.

It's a sympathetic issue involving how people want meaning and control over their lives but it highlights the implication that the idea of ineffability likely derive from exactly these desires. They want a secure place in the universe in relation to a higher power to reaffirm humanly inherent insecurities. There is thus more evidence that ineffability is a human construction rather than the quality of any sort of mystical or supernatural being and that raises doubt to the existence of mystical and supernatural beings entirely. The psychological explanations behind ineffability in religion are more concrete than the theological explanations. As Scharfstein said about mystical experiences, it is hard to be convinced of a non-personal reason that any religion has accurately and ontologically laid out the format of the universe and an ultimate reality because of their lack of objectivity. Therefore, religions are likely as Berger says, "The audacious attempt to conceive of the entire universe as being humanly significant" (Berger 28). In other words, religions are sociological phenomena that result from our desires to find meaning and provide comfort in life. That does not however have to be entirely negative. In fact, there is more than enough evidence from a sociological perspective that reveals religions as

a whole are a positive force in the world. They provide benefits like defense against anomies and a sense of cultural unity, both of which are not to be underestimated in their implications.

I would like to conclude this paper with a few of my own personal thoughts about ineffability. My psychological explanations for ineffability reflect my own desire to understand the world and our meaning in the universe. I recognize there is a human element at work in every religion and psychology and sociology give a consistent and logical explanation for similar and different aspects and phenomena in religions. This approach at understanding the world is not without its conflicting feelings however. In some ways, I feel a little melancholy of the feelings of comfort that come with having an explanation for that which we cannot understand and the circumstantial misfortune. It has come to the point where I am unable to believe in the mystical out of respect for my own desire to understand the world. These are not the sole reasons that I have chosen to not believe in any sort of ultimate reality or follow any certain religion, in fact these are reasons that arose long after I developed secular beliefs, but these are issues that cannot be ignored. After all, it is only in illumination of criticisms can one test and decide what they truly believe in.

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