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The Dynamics of Doubt

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Introduction

In the polemics surrounding religion in contemporary society, few voices ring more loudly than Richard Dawkins'. An evolutionary biologist at Oxford University, Dawkins unapologetically attacks religion and blames it for a host of societal ills. In his best-selling book, *The God Delusion*, Dawkins constructs a seven part spectrum of religious belief. He notes that the spectrum is continuous, but it is encapsulated by two poles of 'certainty': The first pole is "1. Strong theist. 100 percent probability of God. In the words of C.G Jung, 'I do not believe, I *know*." At the other end of the spectrum we find "7. Strong atheist. 'I know there is no God, with the same conviction as Jung 'knows' there is one'" (Dawkins 73). While these two positions lie at opposite extremes of the spectrum, they nonetheless share the common of element of certainty. Each side is utterly and unquestioningly convinced of the validity of its own propositions.

It is this sort of certainty with which this paper does not concern itself. Rather, throughout this investigation I seek to further illumine the implications of doubt in the lives of religious persons. More often than not, the term doubt is confounded with *disbelief*. Yet it is vital to distinguish between these two terms. As philosopher Geddes MacGregor points out, the term 'doubt' comes from the Latin *dubito*, derived from the Old Latin *dubo*, from *duo* or 'two.' MacGregor therefore notes that doubt "is not to be equated with belief or unbelief but rather with a vacillation between the two opposites: unbelief and belief" (2424). As such, the word *doubt*, "although often regarded as the opposite of *belief*, signifies primarily vacillation, perplexity, irresolution" (Geddes 2424). Therefore, doubt is not taken as an expression of disbelief but of *uncertainty*.

I first attempt to detail the dynamic potentialities of doubt within religious life. In this respect, doubt can play two equally powerful, yet diametrically opposed roles: it has the ability to be a wellspring of creativity or a source of crippling stagnancy. Secondly, I seek to understand the sociological factors present by which doubt emerges within a specific time and space, particularly modern, 'secular' society. In so doing, I seek to move the focus away from individual experience of doubt to illumine possible societal contexts which are conducive to engendering doubt. Ultimately, a broad survey of doubt—whether focusing on the lived experience of individuals or larger sociological trends—demonstrates that doubt is by no means a unitary phenomenon.

With respect to individual experience of doubt, the character of

such doubt is dictated by several factors. It is important to distinguish the object towards which doubt is directed. The range is expansive: we may doubt the existence of ultimate metaphysical reality; we may doubt the religious activities and symbols we employ in order to stand in relation to that reality; or we may even doubt our own ability as agents to be effectively in accord with transcendence. Religious individuals have directed doubt towards these various objects, and in so doing found either the ability to respond creatively or faced the possibility of a stifling skepticism. Protestant theologians Paul Tillich and M. Holmes Hartshorne prove especially insightful in further understanding the first possibility of doubt's creative potential. The Greek school of Skepticism elucidated by Sextus Empiricus further elucidates the second option, namely the stagnating capacity of doubt.

Apart from doubt's creative and/or crippling potential, we can see how— specifically through St. Augustine as well as the Zen notion of the Great Doubt—doubt in and of itself can be integral to religious experience. Further, contemporary psychological studies illumine the mental effects doubt has in the lives of religious persons. As is evident, the focus on doubt will be construed through many lenses in the following pages. It is my hope that by looking at doubt in the lives of religious men and women—albeit in varying times, places, and religious traditions— we can come to see more clearly the dynamic nature of uncertainty in religious life. What we doubt, and how we respond to such doubt, vary radically.

Perhaps the truest thing that can be said about doubt is that its only essential element is uncertainty.

The Creative and Crippling Potentialities of Doubt

Insofar as we question, look upon the world critically, and challenge the certainty of any given proposition, we act as doubters. 'The unexamined life is not worth living,' proclaimed Socrates. Philosopher Robert M. Baird explains that in so doing, "Socrates meant that to be a rational human being is to have a kind of creative doubt about one's fundamental value beliefs, a creative doubt that promotes, within reason, a continual reappraisal of such beliefs" (Baird 172). In this instance, doubt doesn't engender a destructive state of hopeless despair in which one becomes disenchanted with what he or she deeply believes and values. Rather, doubt acts a sort of refining mechanism—a means by which one tests and appraises what he or she holds to be true. In proceeding as such—especially with respect to religious belief—Baird argues that one's doubt offers the possibility of significant creative potential.

However, Baird cautions that doubt's creative potential is limited to certain contexts. As a foil to Socrates' call for an open-minded inquisitiveness towards our beliefs, Baird highlights Spanish author Miguel de Unamuno's renowned work, *San Manuel Bueno, martir* (St. Emmanuel the Good, Martyr). In Unamuno's short story, we come to know the parish priest San Manuel, who is deeply beloved by the townspeople of Valverde de Lucerna. We also see a

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profound tension: just as San Manuel serves as a model of religious inspiration and devotion for his flock, he personally harbors deep seated doubts about God. Yet he doesn't disclose his secret, and instead chooses to take it to his grave rather than shake the faith of the people who love and adore him so much. Throughout the book, San Manuel undergoes extreme duress in wrestling with his doubt. Yet he ultimately conceals his doubt so as not to arouse a devastating threat to the faith of the townspeople.[1]

Baird explains that in this instance we see "an age-old conflict. Socrates versus Emmanuel. Truth versus happiness. And the reason it is an age-old conflict is precisely because the competing claims of the two values—truth and contentment—are both so compelling" (173). Socrates calls his students to doubt so that they may better know truth while San Manuel conceals doubt so as to not rupture the contentment of his flock. Consequently, Baird posits that doubt ought to be approached differently, depending on whose beliefs are subject. Presumably, embracing doubt will have different consequences for curiously committed individuals seeking truth as opposed to "a ninety-five-year-old grandmother

whose dogmatic and inconsistent views are her abiding source of joy and comfort" (174). Given this premise, Baird presents four foci around which doubt can manifest its creative potential, even though he acknowledges "that there are other settings in which such activity would be inappropriate" (174). He identifies these four foci as 1) acknowledging human limitations; 2) keeping fundamental beliefs alive; 3) challenging the adequacy of symbols; and 4) challenging the quest for certainty. In these four areas Baird seeks to show the domains in which doubt functions as a wellspring of vitality as opposed to inhibiting uncertainty.

With respect to the first domain, 'Acknowledging human limitations' Baird focuses specifically on Paul Tillich's conception of faith. In *Dynamics of Faith* Tillich argues that faith is the state of being 'ultimately concerned': "Faith is a total and centered act of the personal self, the act of unconditional, infinite, and ultimate concern" (Tillich 9). Faith is the means by which we become engaged with whatever it is that we consider to be the Absolute. Baird argues that doubt can potentially play a creative role when directed towards our 'ultimate concern' to the extent that we use doubt as means to acknowledge our limitations. That is, as doubters we critically ask ourselves if we are truly standing in relation to the ultimate. Baird explains, "The very fact that faith can be misplaced, that is, that one can take as ultimate that which is not ultimate at all, is a reflection of the logical possibility that a person may be mistaken" (175). Baird's presumption is that through doubt, we recognize our possibility for error, and thus enact our

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[1] A 2004 study published in *Sociology of Religion* entitled "Religious Doubt and Health: Exploring the Potential Dark Side of Religion" found that religious doubt had psychologically deleterious effects for religious Americans. The study also found that religious doubt has a "more deleterious effect on the health and well-being of individuals who occupy formal roles in the church, than on rank and file members who do not have a formal church role" (36).

creative capacities in order to correct and avoid error, or misplacement of faith.

Baird concludes that "creative doubt is a constructive expression of the recognition that one is not God, and therefore, just may be mistaken" (175). In recognizing that we may be mistaken, we are called to be actively refining our faith, and this is where doubt's creative potential arises.

The Buddha's response to the dominant Vedic religious traditions of his time illustrates this specific facet of doubt's creative potential. As historian Jennifer Michael Hecht explains, "Siddhartha Gautama created a way of living that actively addressed the seeming rupture between the human world and the nonhuman universe, and he did so while profoundly doubting God or gods" (Hecht 111). In particular, Siddhartha expressed a great uncertainty towards the Vedic notion of True Self, or 'atman.' Hecht continues, "The religion of the Vedas held that human beings who had reached the stage of the Brahman could come to know their true self, their atman, and thereby reach bliss and release" (104). Yet throughout his religious endeavors, Siddhartha was never able to realize such a notion. In fact, quite the opposite occurred.

Upon becoming enlightened he sought to fundamentally redirect our 'ultimate' focus: "Instead of using [Vedic] techniques to find our atman, our truest self, we are to use these techniques, the Buddha instructed, to come to understand Anatman, the doctrine of noself—the Sanskrit negation 'an-' attached to the great Hindu ideal,

'atman' (Hecht 104). The Buddha doubted the traditional rendering of God and gods commonly expounded at the time. Yet in doubting God he didn't negate that there was ultimate meaning to reality. Rather, through his doubt he articulated a different means by which people come to engage with such meaning. For the Buddha, *dharma* not Brahman would be of ultimate concern.

Historian of Religion Wilfred Cantwell Smith explains that each caste in Indian society had its own *dharma* or "pattern of religio-social behavior" (Smith 13). He additionally explains that *dharma* was only important to the extent that it facilitated the "truly major endeavor" of transcending the mundane world to "attain a numinous Reality ("Bhraman") beyond it" (14). Smith continues that what "the Buddha did was to reverse the order of these levels. For him Brahman and the Gods, while not negated, became part of this world; while *dharma* was elevated to finality, to absolute transcendence" (14). That is, the Buddha maintained that *dharma* , right living in this world, should be of ultimate concern, not attaining an otherworldly Brahman status. Smith concludes that for the Buddha, "the only final truth is goodness, that a human life well lived reflects, exemplifies, transcendent reality. The point is not to transcend the world but to live well in it" (14). Here we see Baird's first facet of doubt's creative potential manifest. The Buddha felt that an ultimate orientation towards 'atman' and Brahman was a human error. He doubted the dominant religious conceptions of his time and in so doing articulated a new means by which men

and women could partake of transcendence.

Baird's second focus maintains that doubt also has the power to revitalize old beliefs and practices. He specifically claims that doubt plays a role in 'keeping fundamental beliefs alive': "Most basic beliefs and value commitments are initially inherited from parents, peers, and society at large. If these beliefs and commitments are not challenged by creative doubt, they tend to become simply verbal professions having little vitality" (175). Baird's point here is simple: passively accepting the veracity of a statement without ever questioning its integrity can potentially lead to stagnant, seemingly dogmatic engagement. Doubt can be creative if it stimulates a vivacious, inquisitive spirit with respect to inherited religious beliefs and commitments.

The third facet of doubt's creative potential, argues Baird, is its 'challenge to the adequacy of symbols.' In most religious traditions there is heavy use of symbols as a means of expressing conceptions of and relations to the ultimate. As Baird points out, the confounding of symbols and the object to which such symbols point is the basis of idolatry. And it is with respect to idolatry that we see doubt's creative capacity:

> [T]he one who never doubts the adequacy of his symbols is worshipping his symbols. To worship symbols is to worship the pointers to God rather than God; and to worship something other than God is, by definition, idolatry. Creative doubt,

then, may serve as a check against idolatry itself. (177)

Protestant theologian M. Holmes Hartshorne echoes this sentiment, noting that not just symbols, but religious practice itself, can fall prey to idolatrous tendencies. In *The Faith to Doubt* he contends, "Without doubt, faith easily becomes idolatrous, and religious activities and beliefs usurp the place of God...like all else human the church's doctrines are subject to error and bias, and only radical doubt can prevent their employment as symbols" (Hartshorne 102-103).

Within the Protestant tradition, Martin Luther's 'radical doubt' played a fundamentally creative role. In fact, Hartshorne argues that the central Protestant notion of justification by faith is the product of Luther's doubt creatively directed toward idolatrous tendencies. Hartshorne notes that Luther through "bitter experience...discovered the endemic impurity of all human motives" (94). Luther saw these impure motives acutely present in the Church, specifically through the church's "separating men from God by fostering an idolatrous dependence upon their own religious zeal" (94). That is, Luther felt that the Church's stress on good works and the importance of the sacraments (not to mention the sale of indulgences) too heavily redirected focus away from God and back onto humans' own productive efforts. In expressing his uncertainty in the efficacy of such practices, Luther helped revitalize the notion of justification by faith. "For

Luther," Hartshorne remarks, "the discovery that God's grace was accessible to simple trust of the heart, was the source of hope and healing" (94). We here see doubt's creative capacity being used to question the adequacy of symbols and practices. As Hartshorne concludes, "The power of doubt to clarify our thinking, to judge our idolatries, to renew our honesty and our respect for truth, is an aspect of what Luther experienced as the grace of divine forgiveness" (100). Thus, through doubting the teachings and practices of the Church, Luther set in motion the process by which new and vibrant modes of being religious would emerge.

The fourth facet of doubt's creative potential, Baird argues, lies in "challenging the quest for certainty." He states, "The quest for certainty (and the avoidance of doubt) often manifests itself in the effort to find some authority to whom burdensome freedom and responsibility can be surrendered" (177). Baird goes on to point out that, "To flee from this burden, however, is to flee from the very freedom that is a defining characteristic of the fully human" (178). Construed as such, doubt is an essential facet of creativity; by abdicating one's freedom and responsibility, one loses the ability to think critically and come up with new ideas.

Turning once again to Hartshorne, we can see how doubting the quest for certainty has played a creative role in the Christian tradition. He writes,

> The confidence of the Pharisees in their knowledge of God's will is condemned by Jesus as pride and

heartlessness; he himself did not know what a day might bring forth but only that the hour for serving God was always present. The Cross of Christ points to the ultimate and radical insecurity of life in the service of God. (102)

In calling into question the legal certainty of the Pharisees, Jesus sought to orient people towards God in a radically new manner. This new orientation towards God, argues Hartshorne, hinges on doubt rather than certainty. He asserts, "The presence of God is utterly ambiguous….The sign which the Pharisees sought was the certainty which legalism and literalism promise, and this is idolatry. The sign that was given them—i.e., the crucified Messiah—they could not accept" (87-88). In this instance, doubting the quest for certainty creates a new mode of addressing ultimate concern. Instead of putting full trust in the Law, there is a new call to become an example of Christ. As Hartshorne points out, doubt about God's intentions and whether he could accept God's call were hallmarks of Christ's life.

Thus far, an analysis of Baird's four foci of doubt's creative potential (acknowledging human limitation, keeping fundamental beliefs alive, challenging the adequacy of symbols, and challenging the quest for certainty) has more or less followed a rather simple schema: someone expresses uncertainty with respect to the integrity or veracity of a religious ideal or notion. From this questioning, practices or ideas may be refined or entirely novel means by which one can be religious are created.

Yet to Baird's four foci, I believe it is possible to add a fifth facet of doubt's creative capacity. Looking to St. Augustine as well as the Great Doubt in Zen, we can see how doubt helps create the circumstances of religious conversion. 'Conversion' in this sense does not necessarily mean changing allegiance from one tradition to another, although this may certainly be the case. Rather, I take conversion to mean profoundly a transformative experience whereby one comes to a higher sense of connectedness towards or understanding of that which he or she takes to be the ultimate. Philosopher Mark O. Webb argues that one manner in which this type of experience unfolds is via the 'doubt-resolution-belief' sequence. The sequence begins with a feeling of anxiety, and ends with a sense of resolution. Webb explains that "part of the initial anxiety is a doubt about some proposition or set of propositions, and part of the final peace is confidence in a new belief about some proposition or set of propositions" (83). Doubt engenders a sense of anxiety as well as an impetus for resolving such anxiety. And it is in this resolution that such 'conversion' is manifest.

Augustine is particularly illustrative of Webb's 'doubt-resolution-belief' sequence. Before becoming a Christian, Augustine had varying levels of commitment to a range of Greek, Hebrew, Eastern, and Roman religious traditions (Hecht 198). Throughout this time, Augustine exhibited sensual and prideful tendencies. These tendencies prompted a profound sense of self-doubt when Augustine attempted to convert to Christianity. Hecht argues that

Augustine "did not feel he was a Christian until he could give up all sex, all food beyond his barest needs, and all worldly enterprise" (195). However, he found himself continually unable to meet these standards and fully dedicate himself to God. In his *Confessions* he writes:

> I was deeply disturbed in spirit, angry with indignation and distress that I was not entering into my pact and covenant with you, my God...in the agony of hesitation I made many physical gestures of the kind men make when they want to achieve something and lack the strength. (Augustine 146-147).

In this instance, Augustine's doubt isn't directed towards God, but rather towards his own abilities to love God fully. He is trapped by his earthly desires, and no matter how hard he tires, he does not feel he has the strength to break their ever-more suffocating hold. Hecht mentions, "We are now on the other side of doubt...hearing not from someone whose doubt is all about getting to the bottom of what's real, but rather from someone whose doubt is all about actively trying to commit oneself to belief and, momentarily at least, failing" (197).

Augustine's profound sense of failure engendered by his self-doubt helps to create an accordingly profound religious experience. In the midst of such turmoil, the voice of a small girl chanting 'pick up and read' causes Augustine to pick up the Bible and open to Romans 13:13-14 where Paul says, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh in its lusts." Upon reading this

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sentence, Augustine writes in his *Confessions,* "I neither wished nor needed to read further. At once, with the last words of this sentence, it was as if a light of relief from all anxiety flooded into my heart. All the shadows of doubt were dispelled" (153). In this instance, doubt plays an integral role in setting the stage for Augustine's conversion experience. Mark O.Webb comments that the longer doubt remains, it tends to become more intense. As such, "the subject must regain equilibrium somehow in order to continue to function in the world, so a radical readjustment of the whole belief system takes place under the pressure of persistent doubt" (84). It is not clear that Augustine underwent a 'radical readjustment' of everything he believed, yet there was nonetheless a shift. He had presumably read Paul's words in Romans before, but it was under the sense of duress caused by his sense of self doubt that Paul's words seemed to offer a rather bereaved Augustine a new found solace and understanding.

The Great Doubt found in the Zen tradition also illustrates the manner in which doubt can help create transformative experience. Zenkei Shibayama, former Zen Master of the Nanzenji Monastery in Kyoto, explains that the Great Doubt,

> is not our ordinary intellectual doubt, but the fundamental doubt, or quest, of man that drives him to the last extremity of his dualistic discriminating consciousness in order to break through it in the Great

Death.[2] It is the inner spiritual doubt that motivates the student's search for the fundamental meaning of his existence, and finally revives him as a new man of real freedom (345).

In this instance, doubt is creative in so far as it seeks to transcend one's false 'dualistic consciousness,' point to 'fundamental meaning' of existence, and revive a being of 'real freedom.' In turning to the koans presented in Shibayama's *Zen Comments on the Mumonkan,* we can see how this theoretical rendering of the Great Doubt unfolds in the lived experience of Zen Buddhists.

The Mumonkan is a collection of Zen koans, teaching, and commentary complied in 13th century Japan. Shibayama oversaw the translation of this text into English in the 1980's, and in his comments, or *teisho*, on the koans contained within this text, the constituent elements of the Great Doubt find further illumination. The 45th koan of the Mumonkan reads, "Our Patriarch Master Hoen of Tozan said, 'Sakyamuni [Buddha] and Maitreya [The Buddha to come] are but his servants. Now tell me, who is he?'" (307). In his teisho, Shibayama comments, "Who is this 'he'? Arouse the Great Doubt in yourself and see!"(308). He then goes on to state:

> Inquire, inquire, and inquire exhaustively until the whole universe is just one lump of Great Doubt. At this extremity, if you do not stop but

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[2] Shibayama writes that the Great Death means to "be dead through and through—to transcend both life and death" (345). To experience the Great Death is to have fully transcended duality and to be in accord with the world of Reality (112).

go on doubting and inquiring further, then, when the opportunity is ripe, the time will come when the Great Doubt will naturally be broken through by itself, and you will directly come upon 'him.' (308)

How then are we to understand the relation between the Great Doubt and 'him'? Shibayama tells us, "The ancient Masters were never tired of pointing out that 'he' is not someone standing over against 'I'…that he is one's original True Self" (308). It is this True Self, one's 'Buddha nature' so to speak (which transcends all dualistic distinctions between 'he' and 'I') that is realized and intimately known by pushing through the Great Doubt.

Shibayama refers to this realization as 'satori,' the fundamental experience in Zen. In order to experience satori, "One has to cast his ordinary self away and be reborn as a new self in a different dimension…to transcend the dualism of yes and no, subject and object" (25-26). Satori is experienced via the Great Doubt when one doubts in order ultimately to transcend the self. There is an interplay between one's own self effort, and the arising of Satori in which 'self' is transcended. As Shunryu Suzuki Rōshi explains, "We must make some effort, but we must forget ourselves in the effort we make" (Carter 118). It is this forgetting of the self towards which the Great Doubt orients us. From the standpoint of 'self' we employ a discriminating consciousness which propagates false dualities. In proceeding to doubt with more profundity the constituent ideas that make up the notion of 'self' we begin to doubt all else that is a product of the self's

discriminating consciousness. In pushing through the Great Doubt we break through the separation that is the self; we break through the endless dualities that are engendered by the self. In turn, Buddha Nature arises. As Shibayama explains, "All sentient beings have Buddha Nature. This is the fundamental truth of nondualism and equality (24). We see doubt's creative capacity as a facet of transcending the discriminating nature of the self and experiencing nondualistic Buddha Nature.

Thus far, I have attempted to show the manner in which doubt can serve a creative purpose within the life of religious persons. This doubt has been manifest in various ways, including doubting whether our faithful efforts are truly directed toward the ultimate; doubting the adequacy of religious symbols and practice; as well as via the self-doubt of Augustine and the doubting of 'self' in Zen. Given the wide-ranging foci of doubt, what are the conditions necessary that doubt might function in a 'creative' manner within religion? There appear to be two constituent criteria: 1) The ultimate is not the object of doubt, but rather our relation to the ultimate; and 2) such doubt must not be 'skeptically dogmatic'. Hence, criterion one establishes doubt's focus and criterion two details doubt's character.

Hartshorne directly addresses the first criterion, placing it in a specifically theistic frame. He states that a man is "given the courage to doubt creatively only as he experiences in doubt itself the self-destroying, self-creating power of truth—not some particular truth, not some particular god, but truth as the

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power of being, the power of God" (101). Creative doubt opens up an avenue for God's truth. But this doubt is not directed towards God, but to the 'truths' and 'gods'— the finite and idolatrous facets of religion—which we as finite beings construct. As these finite things are projections of ourselves, when we doubt them we experience the 'self-destroying' detailed by Hartshorne; we subsequently engage in 'self-creating' by recognizing our true relation to God. Doubt's creative potential—as manifest in Baird's four foci—hinges on its object. Implicit in Baird's four foci is that doubt isn't directed towards whether or not there is an 'ultimate' about which to be concerned; rather we question the veracity of our notions and the manner in which we stand (or fail to stand) in accord with the ultimate.

The second criterion dictates that doubt will not take on a 'dogmatic' character. This dogmatic doubt is best exemplified by the ancient Greek school of Phyronnian Skepticism. The Skeptical attitude, as articulated by the 3rd century A.D. scholar Sextus Empiricus, has three constituent parts: *isostheneia, epochē*, and *ataraxia*. Political philosopher Petr Lom explains, "The Skeptic finds that for every proposition he examines in any area of inquiry, there is always another contradicting it, and he is never able to come up with a criterion to resolve these differences" (33). This stage represents the first part of Skepticism, *isostheneia*, in which "an 'equipollence,' or seemingly equal persuasiveness of all claims considered" (32). Lom explains that Skeptics used philosophy to evaluate the truth claims of a given proposition, but continually found a contradictory claim

of equal validity. Thus, "[u]nable to decide which was more convincing in all of the inquiries they undertook, they were led to *epochē*, or to the 'suspension of judgment'" (32). This suspension of judgment is the cornerstone of the goal of the Skeptical attitude, *ataraxia*, a state of 'tranquility, or freedom from disturbance" (32). The Skeptics held that belief, especially with respect to opinions about good and evil, was a primary source of human suffering. Yet, by:

> [S]uspending judgment about the nature of good and evil, the Skeptic avoids this chaotic pursuit of fragile and uncertain belief: 'neither avoiding nor pursuing anything with intensity.' In this way he is freed from imaginary fears, and so 'his feelings are moderate.' (Lom 33)

Avoiding intensity and moderating feelings constitute the tranquility of *ataraxia* which the Skeptics believed could only come about through the suspension of judgment. In this sense, Skepticism epitomizes dogmatic doubt because the pursuit of truth is necessarily bracketed. Under this attitude, one does not question his or her doubting attitude towards belief.

This attitude proves destructive for doubt's creative capacity. Hartshorne specifically addresses this skeptical attitude, taking into consideration its destructive capacity:

> [D]oubt is also a sign of defensiveness, expressing our distrust of genuine passion. Men also doubt in order that they may relieve the finality of utter commitment...where doubt refuses the discipline of reason and fails to honor the demand for

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truth, which give it its integrity and power, it is transmuted into its opposite: dogma. (96-97)

Hartshorne is decrying doubt when it is used as an excuse to not take a stand. This is precisely the base upon which the *ataraxia* derived from *epochē* in Greek Skepticism rests. In Hartshorne's view, when doubt or uncertainty is taken as 'ultimate,' then any genuine search for truth is thwarted. Doubt becomes unquestionable and hence dogmatic. Tillich specifically refers to this stance as 'skeptical doubt.' He explains, "The skeptical doubt is an attitude toward all the beliefs of man, from sense experiences to religious creeds....It is an attitude of actually rejecting any certainty" (22). Baird's fourth focus contends that doubt helps us evade the quest for certainty and in so doing avoid the stifling of creativity that comes with the 'certainty' of religious dogma. Yet when doubt itself cannot be questioned, it transforms into its own dogma; in this sense, doubt loses its creative capacity within religion because it becomes a stagnant agnosticism.

There appear to be two general potentialities of doubt within the lives of religious persons. On one hand, doubt is the means by which we exercise a critical attitude towards our religious ideas, beliefs, and capacities. In this sense, doubt can serve a creative function; it compels us to reanalyze, reconfigure, and reconstruct the means by which we faithfully engage our ultimate concern. On the other hand, doubt can have a crippling capacity. When doubt is not dealt with critically, we may find ourselves unable to feel and relate to the

transcendent, convinced that ultimate truth is inevitably beyond our grasp. Or, as Hartshorne so deftly asserts, doubt may be the means by which we choose to reject truth, 'in order that we may relieve the finality of utter commitment.' Given these parameters, how might encountering doubt in a creative, as opposed to crippling, manner psychologically affect religious persons? In turning to psychological studies of religious doubt, the implications of experiencing doubt in one of these two general capacities become manifest.

Psychologist Neal Krause examined doubt in older, religious Americans and his research illustrates the varying psychological effects caused by either creative or crippling doubt. Krause's 2006 study, "Religious Doubt and Psychological Well-Being: A Longitudinal Investigation," surveyed Americans "who were Black or White, noninstitutionalized, English speaking, and at least 66 years of age" (291). Additionally, all those surveyed were self-professed members of the Christian tradition. The study sought to "see if religious doubt is associated with change in three measures of psychological well-being over time: Life-satisfaction, self-esteem, and optimism" (287). Additionally, Krause investigated whether the educational attainment of older Americans influenced the manner in which they experienced doubt. Across the three spectra of life-satisfaction, self-esteem, and optimism, Krause found that doubt about one's religion had a deleterious psychological effect (298). However, Krause found that the deleterious effects of doubt in these three areas were significantly mediated given

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one's degree of educational attainment. That is, doubt had a larger psychological impact on the life satisfaction, self-esteem, and optimism of older Americans who had fewer years of education. Doubt produced less severe psychological effects in Americans with more years of formal education (298).

Krause theorizes that, "Given the lifelong influence of schooling and occupational experiences, people with higher levels of educational attainment are more likely to apply their skills in wrestling with, and resolving, religious doubt" (290). This theory suggests that the greater intellectual resources (specifically critical thinking skills) afforded to individuals with higher education give them greater capacities to reason with and confront the challenges presented by doubt. Conversely, Krause posits that,

> In contrast to those with a good education, older people with less schooling are likely to lack the skills needed to grapple with and resolve doubt. As a result, the options open to them are more limited and less attractive. If doubt cannot be resolved, then one option is to ignore, dismiss, repress, or deny it. (290)

Data gathered from the survey also revealed that older adults with less education "are more likely to feel that having doubts about religion is wrong...and they are less likely to forgive themselves when they encounter doubt about their faith" (298-299). Krause's longitudinal survey data suggest that these facets—feeling that one can only deal with doubt via repression or denial,

and additionally feeling that doubt is wrong and unforgivable— are why doubt diminishes more severely the life-satisfaction, self-esteem, and optimism of older Americans with less educational attainment.

It is worth mentioning that that these psychological survey data reflect the sentiments of a certain group of people operating within a specific time, place, and religious tradition. It would be implausible to suggest that Krause's findings concerning the relationship between doubt's psychological effects and educational attainment could be extrapolated to comment on religious persons in differing historical, social, and religious contexts. That being said, the data provided by this study give grounding to the general dichotomy between creative and crippling doubt detailed earlier. With respect to the older Americans with higher degrees of educational attainment in Krause's study, doubt engenders a creative response. Critical thinking skills were used to create new understandings and outlooks which would mitigate doubt's effects on psychological well-being. On the other hand, those who were not able to confront their doubt critically were forced to repress or deny it. In this way, doubt has a paralyzing effect. It becomes non-resolvable, constantly lurking and not offering any opportunities for escape. Responding creatively to doubt mitigates its psychological effects; it is when doubt is dogmatic (ever present and non-resolvable) that the greatest psychological stress is caused.

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Doubt and Secular Society

What might be the sociological conditions that ground doubt in a 'modern' secular society like the one in which the individuals in Krause's study find themselves? In the following pages I turn the discussion away from the role of doubt's potentially creative and/or incapacitating potential and its subsequent psychological effects. Rather I seek to illustrate the manner in which secular society offers grounding for doubt. I further seek to show the manner in which a key element of contemporary society, modern science, institutionalizes doubt within its internal functioning.

In its 2008 'U.S. Religious Landscape Survey,' the Pew Forum on Religious and Public Life sought to gain a better understanding of American religiousness. Over 35,000 American adults were surveyed in the study, which sought to measure various facets of their religious lives including 'Frequency of Prayer,' 'Importance of Religion' and 'Frequency of Attendance.' One section in particular measured the degree of certainty concerning 'Belief in God or Universal Spirit by Religious Tradition.' The survey included Americans from a variety of religious backgrounds as well as people 'Unaffiliated' with a religious tradition. Those surveyed were asked to respond to the following series of questions: "Do you believe in God or a universal spirit? [IF YES, ASK:] How certain are you about this belief? Are you absolutely certain, fairly certain, not too certain, or not at all certain?" Overall, with respect to 'Total Population's Belief in God' the survey found that 71% of Americans were 'Absolutely certain,' 17%

were 'Fairly certain' and 4% were 'Not too certain/Not at all certain/Unsure how certain.' These data suggest that theological doubt is relatively uncommon amongst Americans, as roughly 88% of people express high degrees of certainty concerning God's existence.[3]

However, religious studies professor Jack Miles, in conducting research for his Pulitzer Prize winning book *God: A Biography*, met many Americans who did not fit into this mold of widespread certainty. While talking to Americans about God he continually came across a defiant attitude which questioned whether doubt and religion were incompatible: "If I may doubt the practice of medicine from the operating table, if I may doubt the political system from the voting booth, if I may doubt the institution of marriage from the conjugal bed, why may I not doubt religion from the pew?" (2). Miles notes that this attitude of 'doubting religion from the pew' was most often manifest in "newcomers" to the expression of doubt as well as "newcomers" to the pew. Generally speaking, we might characterize these individuals as being in a liminal or intermediary state: they may not have been 'religious persons' before, and still may not 'believe' in the truth claims of a religious tradition, yet they nonetheless decide to insert themselves in a religious community. How might

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[3] All information regarding the Pew Forum's findings, including survey techniques and statistical analysis can be found at http://www.pewforum.org/. Data and statistical analysis specifically concerning 'Belief in God' can be found at http://www.pewforum.org/Topics/Beliefs-and-Practices/Belief-in-God/

one understand the phenomenon of doubters nonetheless attending religious services?

Miles suggests that we focus on endemic American individualism. He argues that religion has been a counterforce to American individualism, but "religion has not been the only corrective available. Innumerable secular forms of association have also tried to deliver the psychological and moral counterbalance that American individualism requires" (2). Miles contends that the phenomenon of the 'doubter in the pew' reflects that "Americans have not so much recovered their faith in religion as lost their faith in the alternatives" (3). As such, these people find themselves in a sort of intermediary state—they are not convinced of the validity of religion nor do they find a sense of fullness in secular alternatives. Miles concludes:

> What appeals to them in the first instance may be the social and esthetic refuge provided by religion, but they arrive with open minds regarding belief. This openness is the defiance I noticed in my book-tour conversations. It is the defiance of the doubter in the pew. (3)

While Miles' evidence is largely anecdotal—we don't have statistics about the prevalence of 'doubters in the pew'(I would imagine that the phenomenon is exceedingly rare)—it nonetheless encapsulates a situation indicative of a larger sociological trend. While most Americans may never find themselves as a 'doubter in the pew,' they nonetheless live in a time and place in which the range of options and alternatives concerning religion are apparent.

Doubt, in this instance, engenders an attitude whereby individuals engage in an odyssey of sorts. Individuals may find themselves unsure as to which option (religious or otherwise) will provide a sense of meaning or fulfillment. In *A Secular Age* Charles Taylor highlights the lived experience of 'secularity,' and this conceptualization helps us further ground the phenomenon of doubt in contemporary society. In detailing the secular, Taylor notes that he wants specifically to "focus attention on the different kinds of lived experience involved in understanding [one's] life in one way or the other, on what it's like to live as a believer or an unbeliever" (5). He offers a schema whereby we understand our lives in terms of 'fullness,' 'exile,' and a 'stabilized middle condition' between the two. (5-6). He notes that religious and non-religious persons have different means of attaining this state of 'fullness.' For the former, it is often found 'outside' of the self, specifically in relation to an external religious tradition and/or religious community. For the latter, "the predicament is quite different. The power to reach fullness is within" (8). That is, this sense of 'fullness' can be achieved through our own natural capacities and social constructs; one is not dependent on a higher, transcendental force.

Thus, we see the 'doubter in the pew' caught between two or more competing alternatives in his or her search for fullness. And it is this idea of competing alternatives that, according to Taylor, truly characterizes living in a

secular age. In characterizing the secular, Taylor chooses not to focus on institutional separation between church and state (what he refers to as 'secularity 1') or on declining belief in God/church attendance (secularity 2) (3). According to Taylor these two notions focus on institutional and quantifiable aspects of secularism, and do not focus primarily on lived experience as it relates to the search for 'fullness.' As such he proposes 'secularity 3,' "which came to be along with the possibility of exclusive humanism, which thus for the first time widened the range of possible options, ending the era of 'naïve' religious faith" (19). 'Naïve religious faith' in its most extreme context implies a religious atmosphere in which it is literally impossible to conceive of alternatives to the dominant religious tradition. Taylor argues that this state effectively characterized much of Medieval Europe.

Less severe gradations of this naiveté still produced a near impossibility of alternatives. That is, although there may have been a milieu of various traditions, "these alternatives were scarcely substitutes for the overarching authoritative reach of the dominant religious system" (Giddens 194). However, the secular age is characterized by competition between feasible alternatives. That is, no one is able to live 'naively' as if their religious tradition were the only conceivably viable option. Additionally, disbelief has come to be a widely accepted option. Accordingly, the lived experience of secularity consists of having to choose between options (whether they be 'religious' or 'exclusively humanist') in one's quest for 'fullness.' Secularity 3

gives rise to an 'Index of doubt.' This index means that religious persons

> live in a condition where we cannot help but be aware that there are a number of different construals, views which intelligent, reasonably undeluded people, of good will, can and do disagree on. We cannot help looking over our shoulder from time to time, looking sideways, living our faith also in a condition of doubt and uncertainty. (Taylor 11)

The secular condition is optimized by an ever-present doubt stemming from the apparent validity of an array of competing options for fullness, both religious and secular. The possibility of 'naïve' certainty is all but usurped. As such, the Pew Forum's findings concerning the certainty or near certainty of Americans' belief in God must be understood in a context of alternatives: "No one today can but be conscious that living according to the precepts of a determined faith is one choice among other possibilities" (Giddens 181). While Americans may profess to be certain, they are almost certainly aware that their notions necessarily compete with other options, of which disbelief is a prime contender. Giddens further explains that "doubt filters into most aspects of day-to-day life, as least as background phenomenon. So far as lay actors are concerned, its most important consequence is the requirement to steer between the conflicting claims of rival types of abstract system" (181). The prevalence of so many alternatives— be they religious or secular 'abstract systems'— is key in helping to fully understand the

sociological situation from which doubt arises in a secular, modern state.

Besides the institutionalization of 'alternatives' within modern society, doubt also finds grounding within the realm of modern science. In one sense, modern science can be construed as an 'alternative' interpretation of reality in contrast with the worldview encapsulated by various religious traditions. Perhaps this tension is most acutely seen in the often polemical conflict between biblical literalists and scientists concerning Intelligent Design and Darwinian Evolution. The competition between these two notions could act as a wellspring of doubt for those who are unsure as to which is more valid; curiously enough, one might argue the opposite, seeing as the polemical nature of this debate often causes those on either side to become more ardently attached to their already chosen position. Yet regardless of the ability of hot-button scientific issues such as these to inspire doubt, there is another manner in which modern science helps foster a doubting atmosphere. Through a historical analysis of the development of modern science, we can see the manner in which doubt has become an intrinsic part of this institution.

In the time of the Enlightenment, "The original progenitors of modern science and philosophy believed themselves to be preparing the way for securely founded knowledge of the social and natural worlds" (Giddens 21). This idea of 'securely founded knowledge' essentially held that through science and philosophy, the natural world could be rendered intelligible in terms of immutable truths. This notion of 'securely founded knowledge' grounds Baconian science. Educational historian Julie A. Reuben illustrates that until the 1870's Baconian science was the dominant paradigm in American universities. Under this system, "science was based on careful, unbiased observations of nature" and the subsequent classification of these observations into categories (Rueben 38). Reuben notes that the collection and classification of this data served to uncover natural law. Then, once "a true law was identified, it would become part of an unchanging body of knowledge....Scientists assumed that a finite number of natural laws would eventually account for all phenomena" (39). Yet the predominance of immutable bodies of knowledge would be short lived, specifically undercut by the implications of Darwinian evolution.

Reuben argues that in demonstrating the evolution of natural entities over time via natural selection, Darwin helped usher in a new era of 'Progressive' science: "According to this view, science could not be considered simply the discovery of regularity in nature because nature was not necessarily regular" (Rueben 45). Thus, many scientists rejected the system whereby immutable natural objects were organized into categories of immutable natural law, and rather embraced a process which hinged on the verification/falsification of hypothesis and an open attitude of inquiry (Rueben 48). While some specific facets of progressive science were later dropped, new 'objectivist' forms of science still held on to this attitude of open inquiry

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(Rueben 193). Indeed, the attitude of open inquiry about the natural world, hinging on notions of verification and falsification, is an enduring hallmark of science, especially as it is practiced today: "Science depends, not on the inductive accumulation of proofs, but on the methodological principle of doubt. No matter how cherished...a given scientific tenet might be, it is open to revision—or might have to be discarded altogether" (Giddens 21). As such, doubt is an intrinsic facet of the scientific process as the certainty of any proposition is never guaranteed.

I do not intend to show that the prevalence of modern science necessarily acts as a wellspring of doubt for religious persons, although this may be the case in some instances. Rather, the intrinsic function of doubt in modern science shows a heavy parallel between science and the viewpoints espoused earlier by theologians such as Hartshorne and Tillich. Certainly not all religious persons would accept these theologians' understanding of doubt; yet each nonetheless shows that doubt can have significant creative potential in the lives of many religious individuals. In the same way, scientific creativity hinges on the notion that any proposition is subject to critical analysis. It is through the process of doubting by which theories are refined or entirely new ones are created. As mentioned, doubt may also play a stifling role in religious life. Yet in the scientific realm, stagnation primarily occurs when people have quit doubting. As such, we can see how doubt plays a prominent role in the activities of persons acting both secularly or

religiously. For in both camps, doubt has creative potential.

Doubting the Ultimate

The examination of doubt up until this point has been articulated through a range of lenses. Greek philosophers, St. Augustine, Zen monks, 20th century liberal Protestant theologians, contemporary psychologists, and theorists of modernity/secularism have all contributed perspectives by which we may come to further understand the complicated intricacies of doubt in the lives of religious persons. In examining these perspectives, I have largely focused on a certain type of doubt—that is, doubt directed toward finite entities such as the self and the self's ability to stand in relation to the ultimate. The first criterion of 'creative' doubt mentioned earlier stipulated '1) The ultimate is not the object of doubt, but rather our relation to the ultimate.' That being said, individuals throughout history have doubted the ultimate, and it is to the implications of this doubt that I now turn.

Uncertainty as to whether or not there is a meaningful ultimate towards which humans may stand in accord is perhaps the most profound focus of doubt. As Hartshorne hauntingly relates, "Many a sincere Christian has knelt to pray, only to watch his prayer fall limp to earth, destroyed by the lurking suspicion that it is but the weak voice of hope sounding hollowly in the immense emptiness of nature" (92). This 'lurking suspicion' is not limited to the Christian tradition alone; it is a suspicion that men and women from any number of contexts

have had to contend with in questioning whether or not the universe is empty of an ultimate meaningfulness to which they can relate. What responses have men and women employed with respect to the possibility of such emptiness?

Some people have indeed found ultimate meaning in emptiness. Nagarjuna, an early Indian Buddhist philosopher articulated how this might be the case, via his explanation of *śūnyatā* and *svabhāva* . The Sanskrit word *śūnyatā* , generally defined as 'emptiness,' "derives from the recognition…that implicit in thinking and speaking resides a tendency to create an illusion (of self-sufficient realities) that is itself the cause of that suffering" (Streng, 8856). The notion that there are completely autonomous, self-sufficient entities which possess "own-being" (*svabhāva*) is antithetical to *śūnyatā.* We construct conventional truths, creating discriminations between one object and another. To these objects we attribute *svabhāva*, yet fail to recognize that everything is made of constituent parts. Ultimate truth maintains that "all things are empty of own-being, or are dependently arisen" (Mitchell, 144). Thus, for Nagarjuna and the many people who have responded faithfully to his thought, *śūnyatā,* or emptiness*, is* ultimate truth and meaning.

To be sure, not all have found meaning in emptiness. For many, the deepest expressions of doubt stem from uncertainty as to whether or not the universe is indeed empty of all meaning. With respect to the finite-oriented doubt mentioned earlier (that is, doubt directed towards ourselves and/or our religious

symbols, practices, etc.), doubt may engender either a creative or an inhibiting response. This possibility of a dual response is at play concerning questions of 'ultimate doubt' as well, although this twofold response is more adequately rendered in terms of 'trust' and 'distrust.' Turning to H. Richard Niebuhr we can more clearly see the wellspring from which 'ultimate doubt' issues and how we might characterize responses to such doubt in terms of 'trust' and 'distrust.'

H. Richard Niebuhr posits that we are radically contingent beings, and the manner in which we are 'contingent' provides the foundation from which 'ultimate doubt' proceeds. In *The Responsible Self,* Niebuhr maintains that:

> The action by which I am, is not one by which I was thrown into existence at some past time to maintain myself thereafter by my own power….I live but I do not have the power to live. And further, I may die at any moment but I am powerless to die. It was not in my power, nor in my parents' power, to elect my *self* into existence. Though they willed a child or consented to it they did not will *me."* (114)

We did not will our particular selves into being, nor do we know what happens to us after we die: "We can choose among many alternatives; but the power to choose self-existence or self-extinction is not ours" (115). In this sense, we are contingent upon the 'radical action' which prompted our existence: Niebuhr thus contends that as embodied selves, we are here (and sustained in life, and possibly after death) by some radically

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other force. We *know* that we are here, but we do not *know* what action or force rendered our existence. Niebuhr explains, "The radical action by which I am and by which I am present with this body, this mind, this emotional equipment, this religion, is not identifiable with any of the finite actions that constitute the particular elements in physical, mental, personal existence" (112). The constraints of our 'physical,' 'mental' and 'personal' existence do not let us *know* what force engendered our existence. We do not know if this force is ultimately meaningful or empty. Hence, Niebuhr maintains that uncertainty towards the ultimate is a fundamental facet of our existence.

Yet just because we cannot ascertain certainty nor fully understand the 'radical action' by which we are is not mean we cannot relate to such action nor proceed to understand it. Niebuhr explains that 'faith' is the means by which we engage in such relation: "Our primordial interpretation of the radical action by which we are is made in faith as trust or distrust. Between these two there seems to be no middle term. The *inscrutable* power by which we are is either for us or against us" (119, emphasis added). In so far as this power is inscrutable, we lack certainty. Thus, in some sense we are forced to doubt, or profess an attitude of uncertainty, towards this ultimate, radically other power.

That being said, how might doubt be faithfully expressed as either 'trust' or 'distrust' of this 'inscrutable power'? I have previously quoted Hartshorne as saying, "Men also doubt in order that

they may relieve the finality of utter commitment" (96-97). This type of doubt exemplifies an attitude of distrust. Doubt is taken as an excuse to abandon the search for truth; through doubting whether or not there is a meaningful 'ultimate,' the 'finality of utter commitment' is avoided. This sentiment is paralleled in the Buddhist notion of Vickicchā. Vickicchā is a form of doubt hinging on "'the not wishing to understand or think.' It has doubting as a characteristic, as nature wavering, as manifest undecision or not accepting fully, as foundation, the paying of unwise attention to doubt" (Nyanatiloka, 164). Vickicchā essentially reflects the Skeptical doubt detailed by Sextus Empiricus. When our uncertainty is directed towards the ultimate itself, 'skeptical doubt,' ('Vickicchā') is the means by which we reject the search for ultimate truth.

Conversely, Paul Tillich illustrates the manner in which doubt about the ultimate may still reflect an attitude of 'trust.' He writes:

> An act of faith is an act of a finite being who is grasped by and turned to the infinite….faith is uncertain in so far as the infinite to which it is related is received by a finite being. This element of uncertainty in faith cannot be removed, it must be accepted. And the element of faith which accepts this is courage. (18)

Given the finite confines of the self, certainty with respect to the ultimate is beyond our grasp. Tillich contends that although we may lack certainty, this does not mean we cannot seek to engage the ultimate. We may doubt—be

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uncertain— as to whether or not there is an ultimate significance to which we can meaningfully relate. Choosing to respond 'trustfully,' given the fact that we doubt, is an expression of courage. We do not know if we will find ultimate meaning or only emptiness. This is doubt. Yet Tillich contends that in choosing to proceed with this element of uncertainty, we indeed act courageously.

Doubt thus plays an integral role in relation to ultimate truth. It may be the means by which we reject the search for truth and express an attitude of 'distrust' towards the ultimate; at the same time, doubt necessitates that we act courageously should we decide to pursue an engaged relationship with ultimate truth. In this latter sense, doubt is a fundamental facet of 'trust' or faith in the ultimate. We may then understand doubt having two sets of dual natures, depending on its focus. Concerning the finite orientations of doubt, we see both creative and crippling potential; in doubt's orientation toward the 'ultimate' we see the possibility of 'trust' and 'distrust.'

Doubt's stifling capacity is intrinsically linked to this attitude of 'distrust.' From an attitude of 'distrust' we do not seek to find out if ultimate truth exists in the first place, much less try to meaningfully engage with it. The Skepticism of Sextus Empiricus, the Buddhist notion of Vickicchā—both represent an attitude of distrust because doubt is taken to be ultimately meaningful and non-questionable. For individuals living life religiously, seeking ultimate truth, such doubt may prove incapacitating. On the other hand, as

both Hartshorne and Tillich contend, doubt is a fundamental facet of faith in the ultimate. To expect certainty, to be free from doubt, is to ignore the conditions of our present state: in Tillich's terms, we are finite entities trying to stand in relation to the infinite; in Niebuhr's rendering, we are beings 'contingent' on a radically other force about which we can only be uncertain. But because we doubt does not mean we cannot seek to understand.

Conclusion: A Personal Reflection

I would like to conclude this journey through uncertainty with…a commencement. That is, I wish to share some words from the commencement baccalaureate sermon delivered by M. Holmes Hartshorne on June, 1st 1975. In the Colgate Chapel, filled with young men and women like myself about to graduate, Hartshorne remarked:

> It takes courage to doubt—to face unflinchingly the frightening questions posed by a world in dissolution or forced on you by the reluctant awareness that your life is pitifully superficial and your ultimate concerns little else than your own fears and frustrations. If your graduation is in fact a commencement, this will in good measure be because Colgate has helped you to think critically, radically, in spite of great inner resistance. Such radical doubt is no mere technique: it is the fruit of an attitude, a communal attitude of men and women who somehow have

together found the courage to risk peace of mind for the sake of truth and conscience. (2-3)

As I continued to write about the doubt of men and women, it became increasingly apparent to me that I was indeed living my thesis. I have felt profoundly uncertain as to whether or not the ideas contained within this work are accurate reflections. My doubt towards what I have written has indeed engendered creative response: In some cases I simply scrapped ideas about which I felt uncertain and sought more refined ways of articulating novel thoughts. I hope to have had some success in this endeavor. More often than not, however, I have been unable to wrestle with my doubt. There are ideas I've put forth in this paper about which I feel deeply uncertain. Yet instead of confronting my doubt about them, I have let them lie as imperfectly articulated as they are. In this sense my doubt has crippled my search for truth.

In pursuing this project, my self doubt has been profound. Hours upon hours in the library, poring over texts and reaching for ideas in what feels like a boundless abyss of knowledge I cannot even being to truly understand has made me perpetually question my ability to put forth a meaningful body of work. More often than I would like to admit, finishing this thesis has been my 'ultimate concern.' But it is of course not ultimate, and all of the anxiety I have felt in writing it reflects, as Hartshorne says, that my ultimate concerns are 'little else than my own fears and frustrations.' And for as much time as I spent 'ultimately concerning' myself with putting these ideas down on paper, I am sure that I will not be able to recall most of them in a short time from now. Be that as it may, I will always know what it is to doubt. I know the thrill of doubt creating previously unimagined thoughts and insights. I also know the despair of giving up in the face of uncertainty. In both of these respects I am by no means unique. I merely have had the privilege to wrestle with thoughts on doubt as articulated by some truly profound people.

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