UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Suzuki's Stone Bridge

by

Willow Alexis Keeling

A THESIS

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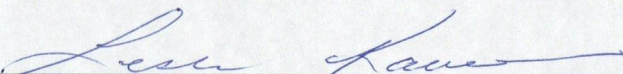DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES
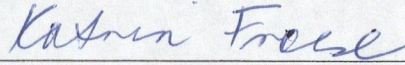
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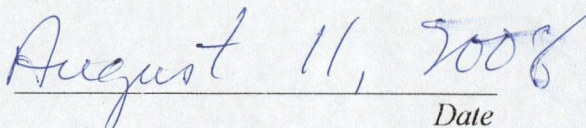
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KATRIN FROESE, RELIGIOUS STUDIES

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LLOYD SCIBAN, COMMUNICATION AND CULTURE

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Abstract

As a pioneering scholar of Zen Buddhism in the West, D.T. Suzuki attempted to build a bridge of understanding between the East and the West by comparing Western mysticism with Zen *satori* and relying on the category of religious experience as the analogous common denominator in both traditions. Suzuki has been both praised and criticized for his use of Western ideas to explain Zen.

This thesis explores some of the problems and issues surrounding the definition of religious experience and in particular the applicability of various Western definitions to the *satori* experience. The current dominant Western models of mystical experience—the constructivist model and the 'pure consciousness event' model—are examined and assessed with specific focus on the issues of language, ineffability and knowledge within these models and certain problems within these models, such as the intentional definition of experience will be considered. A solution to these problems is explored through the assessment of Buddhist models of religious experience from both Mādhyamikan and Yogācārin textual sources. Finally, Suzuki's own description of the *satori* experience is examined to determine the suitability of using Western mystical terminology to describe Buddhist enlightenment.

Acknowledgements

In the midst of what can often be a lonely and daunting task, I have many people to thank for helping me along the way. I want to offer my sincere gratitude to my supervisor and long-time professor, Dr. Leslie Kawamura, for his unwavering generosity, support and guidance throughout my academic career. I would not be where I am now without him. In addition, I would like to give thanks to Dr. Victor Sōgen Hori who was kind enough to read my thesis proposal and gave me many useful suggestions and advice. I would also like to acknowledge the financial support I received from the Social Studies and Humanities Research Council, the Faculty of Graduate Studies and the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Calgary which greatly helped to make my work possible. Finally, I could not have completed this thesis without the moral and practical support of my family, friends, roommates and colleagues with whom I am especially grateful for sharing my love of knowledge and ideas.

Dedication

To my parents, Michael and Elaine Keeling, for their steadfast faith and support in all of my interests and adventures and letting me be free to be me.

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Abbreviations and Notes

Abbreviations

PCE – pure consciousness event

PCT – pure consciousness theory

Buddhist Texts

LS – *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*

MMK – *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*

Foreign Words

All foreign words (e.g., *satori*) are italicized throughout the work followed by the English translation or equivalent in parentheses after the first occurrence of the word or vice versa unless defined in situ.

EndnoteX1

All of the footnotes and bibliographic references in this work have been formatted using EndnoteX1 software. Due to idiosyncrasies in the software, some diacritical marks and characters may be missing or appear incorrectly and some foreign words may not appear in italics.

INTRODUCTION

Joshu's Stone Bridge

> A monk asked, "For a long time I've heard about the famous
> stone bridge of Chao-chou (Joshu), but coming here I saw only
> a common wooden bridge."
> > The master said, "You saw only the wooden bridge, you
> > have not seen the stone bridge of Chao-chou."
> > The monk said, "What is the stone bridge of Chao-chou?"
> > The master said, "Cross over! Cross over!" [1]

What is the stone bridge of Joshu? Generally speaking, the stone bridge is a

metaphor representing the Zen master Joshu's particular brand of Zen Buddhism, a Zen

that is solid, reliable and enduring. Yet despite how famous and extraordinary this stone

bridge of Joshu's is, the monks seeking it are not able to see it clearly and are only able to

perceive an ordinary wooden bridge. These vignettes highlight a central concern in

Buddhism and indeed the essence of enlightenment itself: seeing reality as it really is.

While Joshu's stone bridge and the wooden bridge perceived by the monks underscore

the fundamental sameness of the reality perceived by the two parties (the concept of a

bridge being the same), the difference lies in the manner in which this reality is

perceived. Joshu's perspective of reality is from an ultimate, enlightened viewpoint,

while the monks perceive reality from merely an ordinary, conventional stance. This idea

of differing viewpoints of the same reality is affirmed in the writings of famous Zen

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[1] Shih Chao-chou, *The Recorded Sayings of Zen Master Joshu*, trans. James Green (Boston: Shambala Publications, Inc., 1998), verse 331.

scholar, D.T. Suzuki, who discusses several of the teaching methodologies of Zen master Joshu in some of his Japanese works. In his discussion of Joshu's skilful use of 'object teaching' (実物教授, *jitsubutsu kyōju*), Suzuki elaborates on how the difference between the enlightened Zen viewpoint and the ordinary viewpoint can be made subtly apparent:

禅の見方と普通の見方との差違をいくらか髣髴させる
ことができる。「仏とは？」と尋ねるに対して、趙州
は「殿裡低」と答えた。平たくいえば「仏さまはお厨子
の中にござる」というようなものである。趙州の場合
では七堂伽藍中の仏殿裡をさしたことはいうまでもない。
ところが、問者は満足せぬ、「それは泥かん塑像では
ないか」となじった。彼は元来そんな仏を尋ねたのでは
なかった。趙州ももとよりそんなことは百も承知である。
が彼の答えは「その通り」というのであった。問者はさら
に「如何是仏」とやった。この僧なかなかわからぬとみえる。
ところが、趙州はいつまでも「殿裡低」、始めとかわらぬ。
老婆親切をきわめている。普通の考えで見ると、趙州は人
を馬鹿にしたようにも思われる。しかし彼は禅の見方を
ここで丸出しにしているといってよい。文字の上に囚われ
ているものから見れば、語頭はいつも殿裡に向かって進む
ようであるけれども、趙州の意は問者の意を十分に理解して、
問答往復の中に真の仏の現前しているのを直指している。

The difference between the Zen viewpoint and the ordinary viewpoint to some extent can be made subtly apparent. Confronted with the question, "Where is the Buddha?," Joshu answered, "Inside the hall." Plainly speaking, he said, "The Venerable Buddha is in the shrine in the temple." In Joshu's case, it is obvious that he indicated the Buddha shrine in the temple complex. However, the questioner was not satisfied. "That's a clay image, isn't it?" His intention was not asking about such a Buddha. Joshu also understood that full well from the beginning. But his answer was "That's right." Still the questioner said, "Where is this Buddha?" It seems that this monk was quite dense! However, Joshu continuously replied, "Inside the temple", not changing from the start. He was extremely kind. Seen from ordinary thought, one may think that Joshu was making fools out of people. However, here it can be said that he effectively exposed totally the viewpoint of Zen. Seen from the view of being under the thrall of words, the capping phrase always seems to point toward the temple hall, but Joshu's mind sufficiently had apprehended the questioner's mind

and in the *mondo* exchange he was pointing directly at the authentic Buddha in front of one's eyes.[2]

The difference between the two viewpoints is highlighted by Suzuki here in his observation that the questioner, in his ordinary state of mind, is overly attached to words and their literal meanings and is thereby unable to see the reality of his own Buddha nature clearly in front of him. What is being emphasized here is the direct apprehension of reality, without attachment, without discrimination and without dualistic notions of self and nonself. It is a way of seeing reality that can only be indicated or pointed to but not explicitly stated in words.

Throughout his long career, Suzuki wrote a great deal both in English and Japanese consistently stressing the inability of words to accurately access or express *satori*, the experience of awakening or enlightenment that is the aim of Zen Buddhist practice. Focusing on the concept of *satori* as experience, Suzuki affirms that while only another enlightened being can fully understand the inner experience of the Buddha, "where there are no corresponding experiences, no amount of technique one may resort to will be possible to awaken them in others".[3] This idea of correspondence seems significant in Buddhist thought not only in terms of the relationship between ultimate and conventional reality, but here Suzuki is extending this idea to include religious experience as well. In order for the idea of correspondence to be applicable, there must a common ground that acts as a foundation for the apparently opposing elements involved.

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[2] Daisetsu Suzuki, 禅の見方、禅の修行 *(Zen No Mikata, Zen No Shugyō)*, vol. 9, Suzuki Daisetsu Zen Zenshu (Tokyo: Shunjyusha, 1975), 10. My own translation.
[3] Daisetz T. Suzuki, *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1957), 53.

As mentioned above, the two truths (or viewpoints) theory rests on the idea that they are simply two differing perspectives of the same reality. In the case of *satori*, Suzuki categorizes this phenomenon as a type of religious experience and as an experience it should thereby have something in common with ordinary, everyday experiences. The importance of having a common ground between these ideas is due to the need for comprehensibility and transferability between these two differing elements. Otherwise any movement between these two kinds of experiences would be volitionally impossible and the experience of *satori* would be entirely incomprehensible and inexpressible to others.

Suzuki's Stone Bridge

> The stone bridge of Joshu represents the ever-functioning dynamic spirit of Zen—Zen in action—which has been transmitted, from mind to mind to mind, from generation to generation, in the history of Zen.
>
> Throughout his long life of ninety-five years, Dr. Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki lived a life of the stone bridge in the exact sense Joshu meant.[4]

In D.T. Suzuki's early English writings he asserts that "to understand the East, we must understand mysticism".[5] While his opinion regarding whether or not Zen Buddhism

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[4] Akihisa Kondo, "The Stone Bridge of Joshu," in *A Zen Life: D.T. Suzuki Remembered*, ed. Masao Abe (New York: John Weatherhill, Inc., 1986), 181.
[5] Daisetz T. Suzuki, *The Essentials of Zen Buddhism: Selected from the Writings of Daisetz T. Suzuki*, ed. Bernard Phillips (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co. Inc., 1962), 7.

could be categorized as a mystical tradition varied and changed over time, he clearly saw mysticism as a useful, explanatory concept for introducing Zen thought to the West. Suzuki resorted to the use of the terminology of Western mystical traditions (among other devices) to explain the Zen *satori* experience that he perceived to lie at the heart of the Buddhist religion. The analogy he set up between mystical experiences and enlightenment experiences is useful for highlighting certain similarities between these two types of religious experience, particularly their presumed 'ineffability' and the often problematic language used in their expression. While Suzuki certainly has had his share of supporters and detractors regarding his interpretation of Zen, two points regarding his work should be kept in mind. First of all, Suzuki's work is multi-vocal in the sense that he is speaking not only as a scholar, but also as a philosopher, a missionary and an insider of the tradition who had had his own *satori* experience as a young man in Japan. The other point to keep in mind is the very nature of the task that he set for himself as his life's work. He was writing about Zen at a time when Buddhist thought was relatively unknown in the West, save for a handful of dedicated scholars and reports (largely negative) from Christian missionaries living and working in Buddhist cultures. The differences between Buddhist and Christian thought should not be underestimated and the translation of foreign concepts into mutually intelligible ideas is very difficult without some common foundation or framework of reference. This very notion of the necessity of a common basis for intelligibility is the very argument made by some scholars with regard to the relationship between religious experience and linguistic expression.

In Buddhism, there is much emphasis on *upāya* (skilful means) used by Buddhist teachers to lead unenlightened followers to a proper understanding of the *Dharma*

(Buddhist teachings). Joshu's stone bridge and his 'object teaching' are examples of some of the skilful techniques used by Zen masters. Like Joshu exhorting his followers to "Cross over! Cross over!" his stone bridge to reach enlightened understanding, Suzuki was attempting to build a bridge of his own between Western and Eastern thought. While *upāya* can be understood as a means necessary for reaching the end goal of enlightenment, or in Suzuki's case for providing an intellectual understanding of Zen for his Western audience, as the monk who questioned Joshu about the Buddha demonstrates, it is entirely possible for the potential beneficiary of the teaching to mistake the finger for the moon and misunderstand the teaching entirely. Then we are left to ask the question: Who is to blame for this misunderstanding? Are the master's methods at fault for misleading the student or is the student simply not ripe for understanding the master's teaching? Is Suzuki's stone bridge misleading to those seeking a genuine understanding of Zen? While Suzuki was in many ways a groundbreaker in early Zen Buddhist scholarship in the English language, his presentation and interpretation of Zen have been both praised and criticized by scholars. Some, like Torataro Shimomura, praise Suzuki for addressing the difficult problem of translating Zen to the West and rising to the challenge by utilizing Western terms to convey Zen thought.[6] Others, such as Luis O. Gomez, while paying homage to his significant achievements as a scholar, also points out that there are certain problems and shortcomings of Suzuki's Western treatment of Zen.[7] In light of these criticisms it is clear that Suzuki's stone bridge is in need of some

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[6] Torataro Shimomura, "D. T. Suzuki's Place in the History of Human Thought," in *A Zen Life: D. T. Suzuki Remembered*, ed. Masao Abe (New York: John Weatherhill, Inc., 1986), 65.
[7] Luis O. Gomez, "D. T. Suzuki's Contribution to Modern Buddhist Scholarship," in *A Zen Life: D. T. Suzuki Remembered*, ed. Masao Abe (New York: John Weatherhill, Inc., 1986), 91.

analysis and assessment to ascertain if it is indeed solid, reliable and enduring like the stone bridge of Joshu.

In essence, the study of Suzuki's stone bridge is a study of comparative methodology. Founded on the common ground of religious experience, the 'bridge' is Suzuki's method of carrying Zen ideas over to the West using the terminology of Western mysticism. The use of Western terms is clear in Suzuki's schema listing the eight chief characteristics of *satori* which include: *irrationality, intuitive insight, authoritativeness, affirmation, sense of the beyond, impersonal tone, feeling of exaltation* and *momentariness*.[8] These features have much in common with William James' psychological description of mystical experiences which he explains as having the following four marks: *ineffability, noetic quality, transiency* and *passivity*.[9] The apparently overlapping qualities of *satori* and mystical experiences provide a fruitful basis for the discussion and comparison of Eastern and Western religious traditions. When discussing these types of experiences, scholars of mysticism tend to focus to a greater or lesser extent on two characteristics in particular. Both *satori* and mystical experiences are usually deemed to be 'ineffable' by those who have had these particular kinds of experiences. Suzuki's category of *irrationality* is also an expression of the essential incommunicability of the enlightenment experience. Despite this assertion, much ink has been spilled by Western mystics and Zen Buddhists alike concerning these experiences. The problem of this asserted 'ineffability' has been much discussed and

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[8] Daisetz T. Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism: Second Series* (London, England Rider and Company, 1953), 31-9.

[9] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Penguin Books Ltd., 1982), 380-1.

debated by scholars in light of the sometimes baffling language used in the expression of these experiences, such as negation, metaphor, analogy and most notably paradox. The inevitable use of language by mystics has also led scholars to examine the relationship between language and experience and how mystical expressions and their preceding experiences should be understood. The manner of understanding mystical expressions and the experiences to which they are linked also concerns James' category of *noetic quality* which is roughly equivalent to Suzuki's category of *intuitive insight*. Experienced as states of knowledge by mystics, the expressions of these experiences have been examined by scholars with regard to the noetic content which they may reveal and the apparently paradoxical nature of their 'ineffable' content.

The accurate assessment of Suzuki's method of comparison between Zen and Western mysticism must rely on the above problems and issues that are emphasized in both traditions. In order to judge the comprehensibility of Suzuki's method, it is necessary to examine both Western and Eastern methodological perspectives on these subjects to determine their compatibility and ultimately their applicability to the Buddhist enlightenment experience and to Suzuki's aim. An examination of the methods used by Western scholars to understand religious experiences compared with the perspectives offered by Buddhist scholars and foundational texts will serve to highlight the inherent assumptions and emphases to be found in each method.

CHAPTER ONE: THE RHETORIC OF 'RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE'

While Suzuki may have been one of the first scholars to highlight certain parallels between Zen and Western mysticism, the study of mysticism has grown considerably over the past few decades with more and more scholars of religion and mysticism attempting to form ideas and theories that include not only Western mystical traditions, but those from the East as well. The basis for these studies lies mainly in the study of what is commonly referred to as 'religious experience'. Throughout his writings, Suzuki consistently describes *satori* or Buddhist enlightenment in experiential terms and thereby finds an analogous common ground in Western mystical traditions with their emphasis on experience as well. In fact, Suzuki makes the claim that "all religion is built upon the foundation of mystical experience, without which all its metaphysical or theological superstructure collapses".[10] As this category of 'religious experience' serves as the foundation for Suzuki's comparison between Zen and mysticism, it is therefore both necessary and useful to begin our analysis here.

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[10] Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism: Second Series*, 191. I must note here that while most mystical experiences are arguably religious experiences, not all religious experiences are mystical. Despite his interest in mystical experience, Suzuki hesitates to categorize *satori* as a mystical experience. The concept of mysticism is of Western origin and I also hesitate to apply it to Buddhist experience. Therefore, in order to avoid importing any unwanted bias into this thesis, I will use the term 'religious experience' as an equivalent term for 'mystical experience' when specifically discussing Buddhism.

The Placeholder Theory

Buddhism and Christianity as religious traditions both date back at least two millennia and many of the source materials used by scholars who study mysticism can be centuries old. As modern scholars examining texts left behind by ancient peoples, we must be careful that we do not inappropriately project or import our modern sensibilities and assumptions into our readings of these works if we want to genuinely understand the intentions the authors. However, some scholars argue that the concept of 'religious experience' is of modern origin and may not accurately represent the sort of terminology that ancient peoples may have used for describing their religious activities. Wayne Proudfoot was one of the first scholars to make this criticism arguing that the idea of religious experience emerged among religious philosophers in the late eighteenth century and that the interest in this concept "was motivated in large measure by an interest in freeing religious doctrine from dependence on metaphysical beliefs and ecclesiastical institutions and grounding it in human experience".[11] He asserts that this movement of religious interest away from theology and towards experience was essentially a protective one; designed to protect the integrity of religion from reductionism and potential conflict with secular (i.e., scientific) knowledge.[12] Despite his concern over the construction and use of this concept by religious apologists, Proudfoot acknowledges the utility of this category for the study of religion stating that "the insistence on describing religious experience from the subject's point of view, the stress on the reality of the object of an

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[11] Wayne Proudfoot, *Religious Experience* (London, England: University of California Press, Ltd., 1985), xii-xiii.
[12] Ibid.

experience for the person who has that experience, the avoidance of reductionism, and the distinction between descriptive and explanatory tasks are all important for the study of religion".[13]

Outlining the distinction between descriptive and explanatory tasks is essential to Proudfoot's understanding of religious experience for two reasons: to avoid reductionistic descriptions of mystical phenomena and to obviate the protective strategies maintained by apologists that hinder the study of religious experience. In making this distinction, Proudfoot is attempting to preserve both the integrity of the experience for the subject and the possibility for the experience to be an object of study by scholars. He defines *descriptive reduction* as "the failure to identify an emotion, practice, or experience under the description by which the subject identifies it".[14] Basically Proudfoot is asserting that if a subject describes their experience in religious terms, scholars must treat it specifically as a religious experience and resist attempting to describe the phenomena strictly in historical, psychological or sociological terms. While Proudfoot condemns this type of reductionism, he maintains that while scholars should not discount the religious value of the experience for the subject, scholars should be free to engage in *explanatory reduction* which "consists in offering an explanation of an experience in terms that are not those of the subject and that might not meet with his approval".[15] By encouraging scholars to explain religious experiences using terminology and concepts that may be foreign to the subject, Proudfoot is bypassing the protective

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[13] Ibid., xvi.
[14] Ibid., 196.
[15] Ibid., 197.

strategies of apologists who attempt to shield religious experience from outside inquiry by monopolizing the terms through which the experience may be explained and sometimes even masking the experience from any sort of real explanation at all. The manner in which these explanatory commitments are often avoided involves the subject making a claim about the inherent 'ineffability' of the experience. The issue of whether or not religious experiences are truly ineffable is much debated by scholars and Proudfoot makes a novel argument for how this oft-made claim should be understood. Of course the concept of 'ineffability' can be understood only in relation to language and he argues that "since something can be ineffable only with respect to a particular symbol system, the ineffability of an experience must result from its logical or grammatical component".[16] Basically, Proudfoot is arguing that the claim of 'ineffability' should be understood grammatically rather than as a veritable description of the experience. Therefore, the term 'ineffability' should be interpreted as a grammatical operator that serves the special function of acting as a placeholder designed to prevent any definitive descriptions of the experience in question.[17] Proudfoot's placeholder theory is a theory concerning mystical language that is predicated on his acceptance of 'religious experience' as a useful concept for the study of religion. While Proudfoot insists on certain guidelines for the use of this concept to avoid reductionistic tendencies, his placeholder theory has been recast by Buddhist scholar, Robert Sharf, to refute the legitimacy of the category of 'religious experience' specifically in the study of the Buddhist tradition.

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[16] Ibid., 126.
[17] Ibid., 126-27.

The Rhetoric of 'Meditative Experience'

In his critique of modern Zen Buddhist scholarship, Sharf applies a hermeneutic of suspicion to the subject, examining the image of Zen that is presented in the West and the manner in which it is studied by scholars. While Proudfoot sees the mystic claim of 'ineffability' as a placeholder lacking in any true descriptive quality, in the context of Buddhism, Sharf sees the notion of 'experience' as a rhetorical placeholder without verifiable precedent in Buddhist thought. Despite his rejection of the applicability of the concept of 'religious experience', Sharf essentially is making the same argument as Proudfoot, in that both placeholders function as protective and apologetic strategies for religion. Sharf argues that the rhetoric of 'experience' much like 'ineffability' can successfully accomplish this because "by situating the locus of religious signification in phenomenological 'inner space,' religion is securely sequestered beyond the compass of empirical or social-scientific mode of inquiry".[18] Unlike a ritual practice or written treatise, this 'inner space' is inaccessible to those who have not had a religious experience and thereby all legitimate knowledge and understanding of religion are funnelled into the hands of the select few who can claim to have had such an experience. Sharf attributes this modern rhetoric of 'experience' in Zen Buddhism mainly to the Kyoto school of philosophy which betrays significant influence both from the New Buddhism movement of the Meiji period (1868-1912) and Western philosophy.[19] In particular, figures such as Kitarō Nishida and D.T. Suzuki both rely heavily on the

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[18] Robert H. Sharf, "Buddhist Modernism and the Rhetoric of Meditative Experience," *Numen* 42, no. 3 (1995): 229.
[19] Ibid.: 247.

concept of an unmediated 'pure experience' (*junsui keiken*) which is presented as a native

Japanese term, but in fact was likely appropriated from the works of William James and

other contemporary Western scholars.[20] In a statement echoing some of Proudfoot's

arguments, Sharf states that "Japanese Zen apologists, conversant in contemporary

Western philosophy, emphasized the role of religious experience in order to counter the

threat posed to Buddhism by modernization, secularization, and science".[21]

While the notion of 'pure experience' may show tell-tale signs of Western

influence and may have been wielded by nationalistic Zen scholars as an ideological tool,

I do not think that these reasons fully warrant the dismissal of the category of 'religious

experience' from the study of Zen. As Victor Hori suggests, "simply because a concept

has been used in a political or ideological context does not mean that it has no

epistemological value".[22] While it is important to be critical and circumspect when

dealing with concepts such as 'pure experience' which can and do carry a lot of

ideological and cultural baggage, the application of a novel concept can in fact offer a

fresh perspective on the topic at hand and subsequently bring about a deeper and more

nuanced understanding of the subject matter. For example, Sharf points out in his work

that the vast majority of Buddhist treatises and texts contain very little evidence of first-

hand testimonials or accounts of Buddhist experiences, meditative or otherwise.[23] He

concludes that contrary to the arguments of some other scholars, Buddhist texts have

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[20] ———, "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism," *History of Religions* 33, no. 1 (1993): 20-21.
[21] Sharf, "Buddhist Modernism and the Rhetoric of Meditative Experience," 243.
[22] G. Victor Sōgen Hori, *Zen Sand: The Book of Capping Phrases for Kōan Practice* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003), 13.
[23] Sharf, "Buddhist Modernism and the Rhetoric of Meditative Experience," 238.

primary been used as devotional objects for gaining merit and developing morality rather than as guides for achieving meditative experiences.[24] On the one hand, I do not think that Sharf's conclusion here is incorrect. The ritualized use of texts is certainly very common in various schools of Buddhism, including Zen, and in Buddhist thought as a whole there is a great deal of emphasis on moral development and proper behaviour. However, I think that his argument fails to tell the whole story. Sungtaek Cho argues that "the teachings of the Buddha, as incorporated in the narratives of the Buddhist texts, appear in the form of either a 'theory' or a 'description' of the enlightenment experience".[25] If we accept that the Buddhist tradition is founded upon the story of Siddhartha Gautama with the highlight of the story being his enlightenment under the Bodhi tree, it is difficult to imagine this moment as anything other than the type of 'inner experience' against which Sharf is arguing. The devotional practices and moral training were developed afterwards when the Buddha was teaching his disciples about his insight into the nature of reality. The Buddhist texts basically contain the Buddha's enlightened view of reality which can be concisely summed up in the Four Noble Truths which are called Noble due to their enlightened viewpoint in contrast with the ordinary viewpoint of us unenlightened individuals.[26] While Sharf points out that the authors of the Buddhist path treatises do not provide any experiential evidence for the meditative states they

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[24] Ibid.: 241-42.

[25] Sungtaek Cho, "The Rationalist Tendency in Modern Buddhist Scholarship: A Revaluation," *Philosophy East and West* 52, no. 4 (2002): 430.

[26] Of course when we speak of the Buddha's teachings, we are actually talking about the texts recorded by the Buddha's followers long after his death. As is usually the case with second- and third-hand accounts, many variations and discrepancies have developed over time which can cast doubt upon their veracity and even upon the personage of the Buddha himself. However, there are many paths to reach the same goal and I do not think that these textual issues refute the inherent nature of teachings which is the enlightened way of life.

describe,[27] this does not necessarily mean that these texts were not intended to be used as guides for meditation practice. Furthermore, one cannot ascribe intentionality to the author of a text based merely on its subsequent usage by devotees as it may and often likely does differ from what may have been originally intended by the author.

A further problem with Sharf basing his argument on the nature of Buddhist texts and their distinct lack of personal testimony is that he assumes that the paucity of first-hand reports translates to a lack of interest in experience and therefore questions its validity as an epistemological category. 'First-hand' accounts do exist although they are found mainly in heavily mythologized hagiographies usually written by the fervent disciples of charismatic teachers. Whether or not these accounts are trustworthy is certainly a valid question worth exploring, but we should also be questioning further why there is apparent lack of personal anecdotes in Buddhist literature as a whole. Perhaps the omission of personal accounts says more about cultural settings, social mores and religious sensibilities than simply indicating a lack of interest in experience as Sharf suspects. Perhaps Western traditions and cultures that emphasize an eternal, individual soul would naturally produce more individual accounts of religious experiences as opposed to Buddhist traditions and cultures that emphasize the values of collectivism and the inherent lack of a permanent ego-soul. From the lack of reports of Buddhist religious experiences it does not necessarily follow that they do not exist or that they are not important.

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[27] Sharf, "Buddhist Modernism and the Rhetoric of Meditative Experience," 238.

Ironically, I think that Sharf may also fall prey to some of his own Western assumptions concerning the notion of 'experience' that for him seem to confirm its lack of applicability to Zen Buddhism. According to Sharf, "the rhetoric of religious experience, predicated as it is on Cartesian dualism, allowed scholars to distinguish the universal experiential ground of religion on the one hand, and its diverse culturally bound manifestations on the other, creating an opposition that recapitulates the classical Cartesian bifurcation of mind and matter".[28] Sharf is quite correct to point this out because many other scholars, including Proudfoot, assume a universalized and dichotomised Cartesian understanding of experience based on intentionality. Conscious experience must be an 'experience of' something; there must be an object of experience that presents itself to the subjective consciousness. I think that Sharf is quite right to question the suitability of applying such a dualistic interpretation of experience onto Zen, but he appears to accept this definition of experience as the only possible one. I think that there is another manner in which experience can be defined and it involves making a grammatical shift away from Cartesian subject-object dualism. Hori takes up this argument in his discussion of *kenshō*, a Zen term usually translated as "seeing into one's own nature" that is often used synonymously with *satori*, a word that etymologically means "understand". He argues that the category of 'experience' is often misapplied in interpreting *kenshō* stating that "in Cartesianism, mind is dualistically separate and distinct from body, and if one interprets *kenshō* according to Cartesian assumptions, then it becomes a state of pure consciousness separate and distinct from body and

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[28] Ibid.: 230.

behaviour".[29] What Hori is arguing for here is a shift away from the notion of

'experience' as a purely mental event to an understanding of 'experience' as embodied

activity. Rather than interpreting *kenshō* as an 'experience of' something to be attained,

he points out that *kenshō* can also be used in its intransitive verbal form to indicate a way

of experiencing reality.[30] In his study of *nirvāṇa* (enlightenment) and ineffability,

Asanga Tilakaratne makes the same argument for the interpretation of *nirvāṇa* stating

that "instead of saying that one experiences nirvana, we would rather say that one

experiences 'nirvanically'".[31] So clearly there are different ways in which the concept of

'experience' can be interpreted and applied and while a Cartesian model may not be

suitably applied to Zen Buddhism, there are other possibilities that appear to work and

thereby should not be discounted.

The dualistic, Cartesian interpretation of experience is not the only argument

provided by Sharf to highlight some of the Western assumptions embedded in the notion

of 'religious experience'. He also draws attention to the one-sided presumptions made by

modern scholars regarding the pre-eminence of 'inner experience' within the Buddhist

tradition:

> "One often hears scholars describe contemporary monastic
> practices under the rubric of 'routinization' or 'banalization',
> implying the degeneration of an earlier and supposedly purer
> practice in which 'outward form' was subordinated to 'inner experience'[32]

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[29] G. Victor Sōgen Hori, "Kōan and *Kenshō* in the Rinzai Zen Curriculum," in *The Kōan: Texts and Contexts in Zen Buddhism*, ed. Steven Heine and Dale S. Wright (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 295.
[30] Ibid., 290.
[31] Asanga Tilakaratne, *Nirvana and Ineffability: A Study of the Buddhist Theory of Reality and Language* (Colombo, Sri Lanka: Karunaratne & Sons Ltd., 1993), 69.
[32] Sharf, "Buddhist Modernism and the Rhetoric of Meditative Experience," 246.

Here Sharf underscores the bifurcation made between 'outward form' and 'inner experience', but rather than question the validity of the assumed opposition between these two elements, he seems to just place himself on the other side of the fence of the scholars he is criticizing and emphasize the greater prominence of ritual performance and disciplined behaviour in Zen Buddhism. However, there is a third option that Sharf fails to address: the possibility of a complementary relationship between 'outward form' and 'inner experience' that is inclusive of both. Hori indicates that in the Zen monastic system, ritual and formal behaviour are not merely empty form, but are in fact skilful means of training consciousness and thereby gaining mystical insight.[33] Now this idea brings about a sort of chicken and egg debate about which comes first: the religious behaviour or the knowledge/belief system. Of course, knowledge/belief systems are not necessarily synonymous with experience, but implied in the usage of the term 'religious experience', as it is used by many scholars, is that this particular experience is a source of knowledge that contributes to a specific worldview or set of beliefs. Usually the Western tendency is to ascribe priority to the belief system which is seen to act as a foundation and precursor for particular behaviours. As mentioned above, it is logically feasible to argue that the superstructure of moral discipline within Buddhism was preceded by and founded upon the insight gained by the Buddha during his enlightenment. However, unlike the Buddha, most Buddhist practitioners have yet to gain this insight and therefore must rely on various techniques and practices to achieve their goal. In the minds of most Westerners, the primary technique for gaining wisdom and insight in Buddhism is the

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[33] G. Victor Sōgen Hori, "Teaching and Learning in the Rinzai Zen Monastery," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 20, no. 1 (1994): 28.

practice of meditation and more specifically in Zen, *kōan* practice. However, in reality, the majority of Buddhists the world over are lay people who likely do not practice meditation. But there are practices that are common to virtually all Buddhists, lay and monastic alike: the five moral precepts. The question remains, however, as to the effectiveness of these practices in cultivating a *nirvānic* frame of mind. As mentioned above, Sharf emphasizes the preoccupation with morality within Buddhism and he is quite right to do so, but he fails to explore the possible impact that the adherence to a moral code of behaviour could have on one's worldview and even one's manner of experiencing the world. In Western religions, we are used to the idea of ethical rules received from on high that, if not followed, could result in an eternity of damnation and punishment for the unrepentant sinner. For Buddhists, the violation of the precepts also provokes the fear of external retribution in the form of an undesirable rebirth, yet the motivation for moral behaviour seems to have its primary basis in Buddhist ideas concerning relationships and intentional behaviour.

In his anthropological studies of Buddhist villagers in Sri Lanka, Martin Southwold noted that according to most of the villagers, the very essence of Buddhism was to be found in the practice of the first precept: not to kill animate beings.[34] What relationship this simple rule has with the exalted state of *nirvāna* was a conundrum for Southwold until he decided himself to put this precept to serious practice. In his conscious effort to avoid killing even the most tiny and seemingly insignificant life-forms,

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[34] Martin Southwold, *Buddhism in Life: The Anthropological Study of Religion and the Sinhalese Practice of Buddhism*, ed. David Turton, Themes in Social Anthropology (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), 66-7.

he experienced what he called "the most extraordinary transformation of consciousness" that may have not been the perfected state of *nirvāṇa*, but "was unmistakably of nirvanic kind".[35] While Southwold does not assume that the villagers he was studying experienced this same sort of transformation as this practice has always been a part of their everyday lives, he does note that their aversion to the taking of life appears quite genuinely internalized and reflects a focal concern with moral intentions and the primacy of mental states.[36] Indeed, Southwold's practice of the first precept engendered a shift in perception for him that opened up for him a new viewpoint on the world and a different way of experiencing the world; one where he lived in relationship with other creatures and recognized the interconnectedness of the world.[37] Through his observation of the Sinhalese villagers and his own experience, Southwold came to the conclusion that "ethical conduct is an alternative means by which people can come to adopt and internalise a world view, that it too can create and sustain belief".[38] While members of Western traditions also often internalize ethical rules and are concerned with moral intention, the rules have their origin in a personal divine lawmaker which presupposes their external origin and perhaps even their openness for debate. For Buddhists, these rules and precepts are entirely impersonal and are perceived simply to reflect the nature of reality and through their adherence, the best way to live in harmony with the world. The religious goal of Buddhism is basically to "see things as they really are" and if, as Southwold demonstrates, the practice of moral precepts can change our perception of the

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[35] Ibid., 68-9.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid., 176.

world, then it seems quite possible that moral discipline can be used as a means to achieve some kind of *nirvāṇic* experience and therefore the overarching emphasis on morality in Buddhism should not deter us from exploring the complementary notion of 'religious experience' as well.

As is the case with many scholars, Sharf is mainly concerned with Buddhism as practiced by monastics and may be tempted to label Southwold's experience above as a modern phenomenon of "conversion experiences" that "might be fine for lay patrons, but they were never considered full-fledged substitutes for monastic discipline".[39] He argues that Westerners have used the Buddhist rhetoric of *upāya* to displace the importance of traditional forms of Buddhism and promote the centrality of meditative experience.[40] While there is certainly some truth to these statements, hidden in these statements is the assumption that Buddhist wisdom is available only to monastics by means of a strict monastic lifestyle. Ironically, this line of thought seems to parallel the basis of his argument against the category of 'experience' as a political tool that upholds the primacy and superiority of experiential knowledge over and above other means. Sharf warns that Buddhist scholars should be careful when using the hermeneutic of *upāya*, stating quite strongly that "the rhetorical maneuver of *upāya* inevitably lies in the interests of a hegemonic and universalizing discourse—invoking *upāya* allows the usurper to disavow difference and rupture, while arrogating the right to speak for the displaced other".[41] However, by making a blanket statement politicizing the perspective of skilful means he

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[39] Sharf, "Buddhist Modernism and the Rhetoric of Meditative Experience," 267.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.: 268.

succeeds in not only dismissing the argument made for the centrality of experience, but also in denying the validity of religious practices performed by lay people and monastics alike. By privileging monastics and monastic practices, he discounts to a certain extent the effectiveness of certain aspects of the Buddhist path for the attainment of wisdom, such as the moral precepts, that can and are practiced by both lay people and monastics to varying degrees. While I agree with Sharf that the concept of *upāya* can and is often misused and misapplied, like the concept of 'experience', it has its usefulness and applicability in Buddhist studies and for this paper in particular, I think that the question of whether or not Suzuki's method of comparison between Zen and mystical experience is a practical form of skilful means is a valid question for consideration.

CHAPTER TWO: DEFINING 'RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE': TWO COMMON APPROACHES

Now that we have assessed the validity of the idea of 'religious experience' for the study of Buddhism and have gained some insight into what 'experience' might refer in a Buddhist context, we need to set up some parameters to outline more precisely what we mean when we use the term 'religious experience'. Due to its ambiguous and fluid nature, the specific characteristics that designate a 'religious experience' are much debated by scholars and it is necessary to find a definition or description that best suits the subject matter which in this case is the *satori* or *kenshō* experience found in Zen Buddhism. Currently there are two main schools of thought in the debate over the nature of 'religious experience' and we will be investigating both to determine their applicability to Buddhist experience and the ramifications these theories have for our understanding of the relationship between language and mystical experience. The two explanatory models we are considering tend to stand in extreme opposition to each other in terms of their interpretations of 'religious experience'. The 'pure consciousness event' (PCE) model suggested by Robert Forman is based in part on his own personal experiences as a meditator, his interpretation of specific Buddhist meditative states and the assumption that the mystic claim to the ineffability of these experiences should be taken at face value. At the other end of the spectrum is the constructivist model whose main proponent is Steven Katz who casts suspicion on the feasibility of a truly ineffable experience by

arguing that all experience is linguistically and culturally constructed and that mystical

experience is no exception to this rule.

Constructivism

> This much is certain: the mystical experience must be mediated
> by the kind of beings we are. And the kind of beings we are require
> that experience be not only instantaneous and discontinuous, but
> that it also involve memory, apprehension, expectation, language,
> accumulation of prior experience, concepts, and expectations, with
> each experience being built on the back of all these elements and
> being shaped anew by each fresh experience. Thus experience of
> x—be x God or nirvana—is conditioned both linguistically and
> cognitively by a variety of factors *including the expectation of what
> will be experienced.*[42]

This statement basically sums up the constructivist position on mystical

experiences according to Steven Katz. The two main points that he emphasizes here are

the mediated nature of *all* experiences, including mystical ones, and the role that

expectation plays in the production of these experiences. Katz suggests that there is no

such thing as an experience that is unmediated and free from linguistic concepts and

structures, for instance like the 'pure experience' promoted by Suzuki, and that the idea

of such an experience is empty and self-contradictory.[43] In making this assertion, he is

denying the mystic claim of the ineffability of mystical experience and in an argument

that seems to echo Proudfoot he states that "the terms 'paradox' and 'ineffability' do not

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[42] Steven T. Katz, "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism," in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, ed. Steven T. Katz (London: Sheldon Press, 1978), 59.
[43] ———, "The 'Conservative' Character of Mystical Experience," in *Mysticism and Religious Traditions*, ed. Steven T. Katz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 4.

function as terms that inform us about the context of experience, or any given ontological 'state of affairs'. Rather they function to cloak experience from investigation and to hold mysterious whatever ontological commitments one has".[44] According to Katz, mystical language is not so much descriptive as it is transformative, using the example of the *kōan* tradition in Zen to illustrate the how a person's consciousness can be existentially transformed through linguistic means.[45] Unlike scholars like Forman who argue that the mystical experience is that of an unconditioned state, Katz prefers to interpret it as a reconditioned state arguing that:

> Properly understood, yoga, for example, is *not* an *un*conditioning or *de*conditioning of consciousness, but rather it is a *re*conditioning of consciousness, i.e. a substituting of one form of conditioned and/ or contextual consciousness for another, albeit a new, unusual, and perhaps altogether more interesting form of conditioned-contextual consciousness.[46]

Unfortunately, the latter half of the above quotation seems to reduce mystical experiences to mere novelty which is certainly contrary to the significance that are ascribed to these experiences by mystics themselves. However, by asserting that these experiences are conditioned much in the same way that ordinary experiences are, Katz is claiming that they can be studied in a similar manner. One way in which this can be done is by studying the methods and means by which these experiences are attained. Katz focuses on the intentional language used by mystics to underscore the intentional behaviours of mystics such as the practices of yoga, meditation and prayer which they

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[44] Katz, "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism," 54.
[45] Steven T. Katz, "Mystical Speech and Mystical Meaning," in *Mysticism and Language*, ed. Steven T. Katz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 6.
[46] Katz, "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism," 57.

use to achieve such states. While he warns that linguistic intentionality does not guarantee ontological commitments, "we must . . . recognize the epistemologically formative character of intentional language mirroring as it does intentional acts of consciousness".[47] Implied in the statement is not only the direct correlation between language and states of consciousness, but also the intentional nature of the experience itself. Most constructivist scholars seem to support this intentional model of experience, but as discussed above, this is not the only model of experience available and may not the most suitable model for interpreting Buddhist experience. Katz does not seem to consider the possibility that some of the difficulties that language poses for mystics may originate from the inherent intentional grammatical structure of language which may not necessarily reflect the reality of the experience itself. This is not to say that language cannot have a transformative effect on consciousness, but that the end result may not reflect that initial intentionality and I think that by focusing his attention primarily on the intentional behaviours of mystics (i.e., what comes before or what causes the experience), he is missing out somewhat on the significance of the final and enduring impact they have for mystics.

However, by focusing on the mystical techniques employed by mystics, Katz does highlight the need for scholars to investigate the cultural and linguistic constructs in which mystical experiences occur. As Peter Moore points out, "the tendency to neglect mystical techniques in the philosophical analysis of mystical experience is a further consequence of viewing this experience as if it were somehow a self-contained

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[47] Ibid., 63.

nucleus".[48] Moore argues that much of the misunderstanding and misinterpretation of mystical language would be remedied if more attention were paid to the cultural and linguistic background of mystic reports.[49] This constructivist position is useful as it acts as a corrective for reductionistic tendencies that often come into play when religious experiences are studied as isolated events, rather than parts of a greater whole (i.e., the religious tradition within which the experience occurs). This also indicates a movement away from a guarded suspicion of language as extraneous to the experience toward a more complete understanding of the role that language plays both in cultivating the experience and in its final expression. Frederick Streng emphasizes the significance of both of these points especially when considering the transformative effect of these experiences stating that "an analysis of the relation of language and conceptual awareness to mystical awareness is especially important when the mystical awareness is seen as more than a momentary experience and as a transformation of all subsequent conceptual and perceptual awareness".[50]

There are some Buddhist scholars such as Robert Gimello and Dale Wright who support a constructivist interpretation of religious experience within the context of the Buddhist tradition. Like Sharf, Gimello questions the primacy and centrality of experience assumed by some scholars asserting that the term 'mystical experience' is not usually used in Buddhism in connection with the concept of liberation, but "rather,

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[48] Peter Moore, "Mystical Experience, Mystical Doctrine, Mystical Technique," in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, ed. Steven T. Katz (London: Sheldon Press, 1978), 112.
[49] Ibid., 115.
[50] Frederick J. Streng, "Language and Mystical Awareness," in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, ed. Steven T. Katz (London: Sheldon Press, 1978), 144.

Mahāyāna enlightenment is said to be a way of life, a pattern of conduct, a manner of acting".[51] Here he seems to be moving away from intentionality, but in his writings he still tends toward an intentional interpretation of experience and the manner in which experience is used in Buddhist practice. Removing the idea of 'religious experience' as being the goal of religious training, he instead views experience, specifically meditative experience, as merely expedient means for reaching enlightenment. First of all, he makes an important distinction between two different forms of meditative practice in Buddhism: absorption (śamatha, samādhi) and insight (vipaśyanā, prajñā). While many scholars of mysticism may try to categorize absorption as a type of mystical experience, Gimello points out that "it is discernment, or its perfection as insight (prajñā), which is the proximate cause of enlightenment, not [absorption] śamatha or samādhi".[52] The importance of making this distinction, especially in light of the constructivist argument, is that while higher levels of samādhi may appear to correspond nicely with the ideal of a non-conceptual, ineffable mystical experience, the practice of vipaśyanā does involve the use of concepts in concert with religious experience. More specifically, Gimello asserts that discernment "is rather an intellectual operation which, though it may be abetted by mystical experience, is also *performed upon them*. It is a form of meditative analysis, employing the concepts and propositions of Buddhist doctrine, for which mystical experience is both enabling condition and subject matter, especially the latter".[53] So here we see religious experience cast as both the object and support of conceptual analysis, a

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[51] Robert M. Gimello, "Mysticism and Meditation," in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, ed. Steven T. Katz (London: Sheldon Press, 1978), 190.
[52] Ibid., 185.
[53] Ibid., 189.

position that Gimello further supports citing Buddhism's natural wariness of experience due to its potential for creating delusion in the mind, therefore weakening its reliability as an occasion for the formation or reinforcement of beliefs.[54] I think that overall he makes some very valid points, especially with regard to the important distinction between absorption and insight, but his description of *vipaśyanā* practice still maintains a heavy intentional tone that while I do not think that it is entirely incorrect to interpret it in this manner, it threatens to reduce the practice to a merely insular, intellectual enterprise that does not fully encapsulate the overall transformative effect that a breakthrough enlightenment moment has on a person. This sense of intentionality is especially problematic when we consider Zen techniques, such as *kōan* practice, which aim precisely to break down intentional thought in order to facilitate a nondualistic experience.

Wright is another Buddhist scholar who challenges the idea of an unmediated 'pure experience' that transcends language, but instead of relying on intentionality to make his argument, he turns instead to the notion of nonduality and the relationship between language and experience. He suggests that in the West, "our understanding of Zen experience has presupposed a structural dichotomy between the immediately given data of experience and a subsequent interpretation that we (knowingly or unknowingly) place upon the data".[55] What Wright is suggesting here is that by separating language from experience we are not truly transcending duality, but actually creating a new, artificial dualism. This is the starting point for his constructivist argument and like other

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[54] Ibid., 193.
[55] Dale S. Wright, "Rethinking Transcendence: The Role of Language in Zen Experience," *Philosophy East and West* 42, no. 1 (1992): 121.

constructivists; he emphasizes the importance of considering cultural and linguistic background when looking at religious experience. In fact, he attempts to close the gap between language and experience by asserting that "language and culture function to make human experience what it is by structuring, in advance, a perceptual field of relevant features, self-evident relation, possible responses, and so on. Upon this foundation, the Zen master thinks and acts 'naturally'—without abstract reflection—in response to the immediate situation".[56] Wright is arguing here that language shapes our experience even at the most basic perceptual level, so that perception and interpretation actually occur together simultaneously. Without this linguistically shaped perceptual background, even an enlightened Zen master would having difficulty performing everyday tasks and responding to the external world in a functional manner. This is a valid point as many of our most basic interactions with the world are based on a pre-reflective conceptual understanding of the things that occupy our world; actions such as opening a window or pouring a cup of tea, for example, are performed almost automatically without requiring any intervening or subsequent interpretation. Wright further suggests that this interpretation of language and experience allows for social institutions, such as Zen monasteries, to shape the minds and subsequently the experiences of the monks through the language and the practices of the institution. If this interpretation holds true, then Wright argues that "Zen experience would be dependent upon prior education or socialization in the skills, customs, and beliefs valued by the Zen

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[56] Ibid.: 123.

monastic community. The novice monk who enters this context of training is gradually formed into the kind of self for whom Zen experience is a possibility".[57]

While I do think that there is some validity to this interpretation of the relationship between language and experience, especially with regards to the notion of transcendence and the power of discourse, it does present some potential problems in its application. For example, Wright does not make it clear just what makes Zen experience any different from ordinary experience. If all experience, including the Zen master's, is conditioned by one's linguistic and cultural background to the extent that it forms the pre-reflective conceptual basis of all experience, how can the Zen master's experiences and subsequent behaviours be understood as being more natural, free or spontaneous than those of the novice monk? What would be the difference between the Zen master who acts and the novice who imitates? To what would one be 'awakened' in a Zen experience? Unfortunately, the idea of acting without abstract reflection does not seem to be a strong enough distinction as unenlightened people are just as able to behave in such a manner. Wright, himself, asks these questions but does not really provide a concrete answer; only suggesting the difference may be a linguistic one where Zen is "an awakening *to* rather than *from* language".[58] Perhaps the point is in the overall effect of language on the mind and one's manner of interacting with the world.

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[57] Ibid.: 125.
[58] Ibid.: 133.

The Pure Consciousness Event (PCE)

Another problem that is not clearly addressed in Wright's constructivist position positing the social and linguistic conditioning of the mind is taken up by Robert Forman, the main proponent of the argument for the 'pure consciousness event' or PCE. There are two aspects to this problem and both rest on the intrinsic spontaneity of religious experience. Any scholar who studies mysticism would readily admit that while mystics do employ various techniques for the goal of achieving these profound states, the occurrences of these desired experiences are often quantitatively rare and ultimately beyond the intentional control of the mystic. But as some modern scholars have documented, experiences that seem to exhibit many of the same traits as mystical experiences also sometimes happen to nonmystics without any sort of preparation. By emphasizing so strongly the intentionality of mystics and the absolute role that language plays in shaping experience, Forman argues that "constructivism is hard pressed to handle mystical experiences which come 'out of the blue' to the uninitiated, as well as experiences of the initiated whose shape is unpredicted and utterly surprising".[59] Of course this argument does not negate the overall religious value of these experiences for mystics and the means by which they are realized, but he does make a legitimate point. Mystical experiences are not exclusive property of mystics and even the author of this thesis, herself, has had a few rare experiences that were certainly beyond the ordinary, but occurred outside of a religious context.

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[59] Robert K. C. Forman, "Paramārtha and Modern Constructivists on Mysticism: Epistemological Monomorphism Versus Duomorphism," *Philosophy East and West* 39, no. 4 (1989): 395.

The fact that nonmystics can spontaneously access these sublime experiences, underscores the second part of the problem with the constructivist position. According to Forman, in the formulation of their argument, constructivists commit a logical causal fallacy, namely *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*. He accuses them of taking the mystics' intentions and expectations as the cause of their mystical experiences and asserts that while they may be correlative, "the relationship between experience and expectation may be contingent, not necessary".[60] Certainly if we accept the absolute constructivist position, we find that not only can it not account for novelty within mystical experiences, but it implies that mystical experiences are somehow guaranteed by the mystics' expectations and actions and this is indeed not the case. In fact, one of the reasons that mystical experiences are considered so special and are a favourite object of study for scholars is their relative rarity. While few scholars seem to offer any sort of statistical evidence for their frequency,[61] it appears that mystical experiences only happen to a minority of people and even then the incidence of repeat experiences seems pretty low perhaps with the exception of professional mystics. If mystical techniques and social conditioning are as reliable predictors of experiences as constructivists suggest, we would

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[60] ———, "Introduction: Mysticism, Constructivism, and Forgetting," in *The Problem of Pure Consciousness: Mysticism and Philosophy*, ed. Robert K. C. Forman (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1990), 19.

[61] I have come across only two scholars who have offered any kind of statistical information for the percentage of people who have mystical experiences and their reported numbers vary greatly. Jordan Paper bases his estimate of 10% on reports from his own students. Robert Forman bases his considerably higher numbers, ranging from 43–48%, on a formal study conducted by David Hay. While Forman's estimates may be more objective and likely based on a larger study sample, the differences in estimates may reflect the lack of consensus among scholars as to a proper definition of mystical experience. Paper, for example, does not agree with Forman that the 'pure consciousness event' qualifies as a mystical experience. See Jordan Paper, *The Mystic Experience: Descriptive and Comparative Analysis* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004), 6, 48-9. Also see Robert K. C. Forman, "Mystical Consciousness, the Innate Capacity, and the Perennial Psychology," in *The Innate Capacity: Mysticism, Psychology, and Philosophy*, ed. Robert K. C. Forman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 3.

think that there would be more evidence of more people having more mystical experiences. In Buddhism, this apparent causal 'hiccup' is sometimes attributed to a person's karmic background. Some people are understood to be more 'karmically' ripe than others to have an experience of awakening and often the Zen masters whose extraordinary stories populate Zen literature are deemed to be 'karmically' more advanced than ordinary people.

While Forman presents further examples in his argument against constructivist approaches to mystical experience, they are almost uniformly based on his particular definition of what constitutes a mystical experience, so we will begin by investigating his PCE to determine its applicability to the Zen *satori* experience. Unlike the pluralist position of the constructivists, Forman aims to discover a core experience that is common to all religious traditions. He claims to have found this in a "phenomenon which is found in virtually every major religious tradition [and] is defined as a transient phenomenon during which the subject remains conscious yet devoid of all mental content".[62] Like the constructivists, though, he focuses his argument on a model of mystical technique employed for reaching these unusual states. Rather than seeing it as a process of constructing the experience, he interprets it as being "more like one of unconstructing" . with the use of what he calls a 'forgetting model' to achieve a "wakeful but objectless consciousness".[63] This 'forgetting model' is based on the *via negativa* found in many mystical traditions whereby the 'ultimate goal' of the experience is described in purely

[62] Robert K. C. Forman, "Mystical Knowledge: Knowledge by Identity," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 61, no. 4 (1993): 708.
[63] Forman, "Mystical Consciousness, the Innate Capacity, and the Perennial Psychology," 7.

negative terms and the mystic is encouraged to temporarily set aside or 'forget' all

linguistic concepts, beliefs, et cetera. Correlative to this technique is what Forman

declares is the essential innateness of the PCE and mystics' claims that this 'forgetting'

technique works not by *affecting* the experience, but by *uncovering* what has been there

all along. Forman asserts that it is possible not only for this method of 'forgetting' to be

effective, but that it means that the mystic claim for the 'ineffability' of the experience

can and should be taken literally.[64]

Related to his affirmation of the actual ineffability of mystical experiences is his

assertion of the nonintentionality of the experience. He implies that the constructivist

modeling of mystical experience on ordinary intentional experience mirrors language use

because he points out that "mystics sometimes use intentional grammar to speak or think

about their experience" and that this intentionality is the basis of the intelligibility of their

statements.[65] However, he declares that in actuality there is no external intentional object

encountered in mystical experience and hence his preference for the term 'event' rather

than 'experience' which assumes intentionality.[66] If there is no external object

experienced by mystics, then just what sort of 'event' is occurring? Just as the term 'pure

consciousness event' suggests, Forman states that "in different ways and with differing

emphases, these mystics are suggesting that what is encountered in these mystical events

is the subject's sheerest awareness itself".[67] Specifically, he indicates that contrary to

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[64] ———, "Introduction: Mysticism, Constructivism, and Forgetting," 41.
[65] ———, "Mystical Knowledge: Knowledge by Identity," 705.
[66] ———, "Paramārtha and Modern Constructivists on Mysticism: Epistemological Monomorphism Versus Duomorphism," 405.
[67] ———, "Mystical Consciousness, the Innate Capacity, and the Perennial Psychology," 13.

many Western philosophical definitions of consciousness, this is nondualistic, nonintentional consciousness existing independently of any object as subjective awareness. At its most fundamental level, Forman defines this consciousness as "that which is capable of responding to certain phenomena"[68] and it is this object-independent basic consciousness that he understands to be the basis for the PCE. As this consciousness is both the subject and object of analysis, Forman admits that it resists specific definition, but this deferral of meaning looks suspiciously similar to Proudfoot's and Sharf's placeholder theories concerning the political uses of the concepts of 'ineffability' and 'experience'. In an effort to overcome this definitional obstacle, Forman relies on our own experience of being conscious as the most logical foundation for understanding the PCE. In addition to providing some 'clues' to help us understand the meaning of being conscious, he suggests that essentially our knowledge of consciousness is *knowledge-by-identity*: we know we are conscious by virtue of being conscious.[69] He emphasizes that in our ordinary waking life, even if we do not remember the content of our thoughts at any given time, we can usually remember being conscious and there being some kind of continuity within it.[70] While affirming that this contentless awareness involves some form of memory that would distinguish it from simply being 'blacked out' and unconscious, based on his neo-Advaitin meditative experiences, Forman is unable to make any further distinctions to help clarify his definition of the PCE:

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[68] ———, "Mystical Knowledge: Knowledge by Identity," 717.
[69] Ibid.: 726.
[70] Ibid.: 730.

> One thing that initially surprised me about my own pure
> consciousness experiences was that there is no felt-difference
> between being conscious during such thoughtless moments and
> being conscious at other times. Though objects may drop out of
> my attention, what it is like to be conscious does not change.[71]

It seems that the PCE is so basic and simple that it begs the question as to whether

or not it could even count as an experience by any definition. Further to this, even

though one may remember being conscious during the event, Forman acknowledges that

as an entirely homogenous, contentless 'event', the state of awareness in a PCE

transcends one's experience of time which impairs to a certain extent one's recollection

of the event.[72]

In his study of Yogācāra thought,[73] Forman admits that the Yogācārin

interpretation of language and experience pretty much falls along the same lines as

modern constructivist scholars such as Gimello.[74] However, Forman points out that in

Buddhist thought there is a strong inclination to inhibit the constructive and

discriminative process of the mind through the practice of *nirodhasamāpatti* (cessation

meditation) which he categorizes as a mystic event similar to a PCE.[75] While he ascribes

some soteriological significance to this state as per the Buddhist path, he distinguishes it

from "the most advanced form of mystical experience, *nirvāṇa*, which involves a change

in the epistemological character of all of one's experience, even 'ordinary' waking

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[71] _____, "Mystical Consciousness, the Innate Capacity, and the Perennial Psychology," 14.
[72] Ibid., 24.
[73] The Yogācāra school is one of the foremost schools of Buddhist philosophy that forms the philosophical and conceptual foundation for many East Asian Buddhist sects, including Zen.
[74] Forman, "Paramārtha and Modern Constructivists on Mysticism: Epistemological Monomorphism Versus Duomorphism," 401.
[75] Ibid.: 403.

experience".[76] This statement brings to mind a couple of questions that I think are important to consider with regard to mystical experience in general and more specifically to our understanding of the Zen Buddhist experience of *satori*. Generally speaking, one aspect of mystical experiences that seems to make these experiences so significant to mystics is their transformative value. While the experience itself may be momentary, the effect that it has on the mystics' value system, perception of the world and overall attitude towards life is often profound and long-lasting. The PCE, as Forman has described it, seems rather bland and unconvincing as an experience that has the potential to change a person's life. In fact, his description of the PCE as simple consciousness without content makes his argument appear to be more of an argument for the independent existence of consciousness rather than for a particular mystical experience. While I do not doubt that this type of experience of consciousness is possible, I do doubt its salvific value. Even Forman seems ambivalent on this point stating both that "I do not claim that it is everywhere, nor necessarily claimed to be, ultimate or salvific"[77] and yet for most people who have had a mystical experience he declares that "though most keep their tales of these extraordinary experiences largely private, many of this near majority have oriented vital aspects of their lives around them".[78] Like the constructivists, Forman has chosen to focus his scholarly attention primarily on the mystic event itself and the causal factors involved in creating the experience, but largely ignores the after-effects of experience on the mystic. If we accept that most mystics are engaging in goal-oriented behaviour in the cultivation of these states, perhaps scholars should consider whether or

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[76] Ibid.: 404.
[77] ———, "Introduction: Mysticism, Constructivism, and Forgetting," 9.
[78] ———, "Mystical Consciousness, the Innate Capacity, and the Perennial Psychology," 3.

not the lasting value of the experience should play a role in defining whether the

experience is mystical or not. One scholar who has addressed this question is Samuel

Brainard who suggests a couple of useful categories for defining mystical experience:

nonordinariness referring "specifically to this sense of not being explainable within a

conventional, naturalistic context"[79] and *profundity* "as intending experiences that

transcend penultimate concerns".[80] I think that the category of *profundity* in particular is

an especially useful concept to keep in mind when we are considering mystical

experiences.

With regard to the relationship between the PCE and *satori*, I am reminded of

Gimello's argument concerning the important distinction between *samādhi* and

vipaśyanā and their relationship to traditional conceptions of mystical experience. He

states that "the ecstatic and unitive experiences of the contemplative (i.e., *śamatha*,

samādhi, et cetera), which are just the experiences usually cited by those who aver the

essential identity of Buddhist mysticism with the mysticism of other traditions, . . . have

no liberative value or cognitive force in themselves but to be only the psychosomatic

circumstances in which one can exercise discernment (*vipaśyanā*) of the truth of Buddhist

doctrine".[81] Now the Buddhist experience that Forman equates with a PCE is called

nirodhasamāpatti which, according to Tilakaratne, is the highest absorption in the

development of *samādhi* that is "marked by complete absence of all mental, physical and

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[79] Samuel F. Brainard, "Defining 'Mystical Experience'," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 64, no. 2 (1996): 373.
[80] Ibid.: 375.
[81] Robert M. Gimello, "Mysticism in Its Contexts," in *Mysticism and Religious Traditions*, ed. Steven T. Katz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 63.

verbal activities".[82] While this clearly seems like the most comparable experience to Forman's PCE, like Gimello, Tilakaratne describes this highly concentrative state as only a basis for insight meditation which alone leads to enlightenment.[83] So this seems to indicate that the PCE theory cannot be suitably applied to the Zen experience of *satori*. The PCE is clearly most analogous to the *samādhi* experience which cannot be identified with the awakening of *satori* and in fact, *samādhi* cannot be labelled as strictly only a Buddhist practice anyhow. The utter lack of content presents a further problem for accepting the PCE model when we consider the method of *kōan* practice and its relation to the awakening experience. The following is a personal account of this experience written by the famous Japanese Zen master, Hakuin (1683–1768), and translated by D.T. Suzuki:

> When I was twenty-four years old I stayed at the Yegan Monastery of Echigo. ["Jōshu's Mu" being my theme at the time] I assiduously applied myself to it. I did not sleep days and nights, forgot both eating and lying down, when quite abruptly a great mental fixation (*tai-i*, great doubt) took place. I felt as if freezing in an ice-field extending thousands of miles, and within myself there was a sense of utmost transparency. There was no going forward, no slipping backward; I was like an idiot, like an imbecile, and there was nothing but "Jōshu's Mu". Though I attended the lectures by the master, they sounded like a discussion going on somewhere in a distant hall, many yards away. Sometimes my sensation was that of one flying in the air. Several days passed in this state, when one evening a temple-bell struck, which upset the whole thing. It was like smashing an ice-basin, or pulling down a house made of jade. When I suddenly awoke again I found that I myself was Gantō (Yen-t'ou) the old master, and that all through the shifting changes of time not a bit [of my personality] was lost. Whatever doubts and indecisions I had before were completely dissolved like a piece of thawing ice. I called out loudly: "How wondrous! How wondrous! There is no birth-and-death from which to escape, nor is there any supreme knowledge (*Bodhi*) after which one has to strive. All the complications (i.e. kōans) past and present, numbering one thousand

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[82] Tilakaratne, *Nirvana and Ineffability: A Study of the Buddhist Theory of Reality and Language*, 61.
[83] Ibid., 62.

seven hundred, are not worth the trouble of even describing them.[84]

The first half of this account deals with Hakuin's cognitive state in the days leading up to his *kenshō*. This state is often in Zen referred to as '*kōan samādhi*' as the mind is in a state of intense concentration. Hakuin's vivid account certainly demonstrates some aspects of Forman's 'forgetting model' where there is clearly a disruption in his cognitive and perceptual abilities and a dropping off of conceptual thought. However, unlike the PCE, there is still something resembling an object of consciousness in Hakuin's mind, namely the famous *kōan* known as "Jōshu's Mu". As Hori explains it, the experience of '*kōan samādhi*' is best understood through a 'realizational' model in the following manner:

> . . . when the *kōan* has overwhelmed the mind so that it is no longer the object but the seeking subject itself, subject and object are no longer two. This entails a "realization" in two senses of the term. By making real i.e., by actually *becoming* an example of, the nonduality of subject and object, the practitioner also realizes, i.e., *cognitively understands*, the *kōan*. The realization of understanding depends on the realization of making actual.[85]

A couple of things to note in this model are that first of all, there is no mention of the *kōan* as an object of cognition being dropped by the mind. Rather, the *kōan* is absorbed and identified with the subject, essentially forming the background of the subject's consciousness. Secondly, this actualization of nonduality is coterminous with a cognitive understanding of the *kōan* which suggests that the *kōan* is no mere device, but

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[84] Daisetz T. Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism: First Series* (London, England: Rider and Company, 1949), 254-55.
[85] Hori, *Zen Sand: The Book of Capping Phrases for Kōan Practice*, 8-9.

also contains meaningful content. Forman's method of dealing with the problem of the intentional model of experience seems to rely on simply dropping the object altogether, leaving only consciousness, but as we have already discussed above there is another way of circumventing the problem of intentionality and the 'realizational' model of *kōan* practice expresses the very solution to the problem. In his discussion of Zen monastic training, Hori uses the example of a logic formula to explain the intuitive insight inherent in the experience of "just seeing". He explains that "in the experience of 'just seeing', the logic formula is no longer the object I am *attending to*; it becomes part of what I, as subject of experience, am *attending with*".[86] If we replace the logic formula with the *kōan*, then we can get an understanding of how through "realizing" nondualistic identity with the *kōan*, it can inform and indeed transform the way in which one "sees" and interacts with the world. From merely being "what" one sees, the *kōan* becomes "how" one sees.

By rejecting the possibility of any content within the PCE and describing the experience in purely psychological terms, it seems that Forman has been overly reductionistic in defining the parameters of mystical experience. As mentioned above, Forman's method of divorcing the concept of consciousness from intentionality leaves us with a kind of awkward and seemingly incomplete definition of consciousness that makes it appear like some kind of spectre that just floats around unattached to anything in a Cartesian manner. Also, his claim for the pre-existent innateness of consciousness as something that is "uncovered" in the PCE may sound similar to some Buddhist

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[86] ———, "Teaching and Learning in the Rinzai Zen Monastery," 8.

expressions, but in reality most Buddhists probably would be uncomfortable with reifying consciousness in this manner. In fact, it may help us to have a brief look at the most basic understanding of consciousness in Buddhism to highlight its incompatibility with Forman's stand-alone model of consciousness. The Buddhist 'wheel of life' or 'wheel of becoming' as it is sometimes known, not only illustrates the teaching of *pratītya-samutpāda* (dependent co-arising), but as Tilakaratne points out, it also indicates the reciprocal relationship between consciousness and the psycho-physical constituents that make up the human personality.[87] Therefore, he states that "consciousness in this context is not the mere act of being conscious by the psychological factor which is responsible for continual existence of human personality through *saṃsāra* (wheel of existence). The relationship between this 'consciousness' and personality is a reciprocal one: they depend on each other for existence".[88] Consciousness described in this way clearly cannot exist independently of other factors and Buddhists would argue that its contingent nature also indicates its impermanency. The Western tendency to view consciousness as a type of objective 'substance' that apprehends other objects is also negated by the Buddhist understanding of the five factors of existence "not as fixed entities but as processes or functions".[89]

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[87] Tilakaratne, *Nirvana and Ineffability: A Study of the Buddhist Theory of Reality and Language*, 46. There are five mutually conditioning psycho-physical constituents that make up the human personality: material form (*rūpa*), feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saṃjñā*), volition (*saṃskāra*) and consciousness (*vijñāna*).
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid., 47.

CHAPTER THREE: DEFINING 'RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE': AN ALTERNATIVE VIEWPOINT

As we have seen, there are problems both with the constructivist model and the PCE model for interpreting mystical experience and more specifically, Buddhist experience. Both models have difficulty moving away from an object-oriented model of intentionality and in their zeal to explain how mystical experiences occur, obscure the differences between them and ordinary experiences. The constructivist model seems too rigid and predictive to adequately explain novelty within these experiences among both novices and professionals and the sometimes tenuous casual relationship between mystic technique and experience. The PCE, on the other hand, is too reductionistic, removing these experiences from their religious contexts and reducing them to a single kind of experience that is underwhelmingly bland and insular and deprived of any apparent religious value. There are several scholars who have argued against both models equally, highlighting their weaknesses that seem to lie in the extremities of their viewpoints. These scholars have therefore recommended a middle path between the two that I think we will find more appropriate for understanding and explaining religious experience in Buddhism.

Nirvikalpajñāna and the Middle Path

> In the *Lin-chi lu*, the story is told of Yajnadatta, a very handsome
> young man who used to look in a mirror every morning and smile
> at his image. One morning, for some reason, his face was not reflected
> in the mirror. In his surprise, he thought his head was lost. Thrown
> into consternation, he searched about everywhere for it, but with no
> success. Finally, he came to realize that the head for which he was
> searching was the very thing that was doing the searching.[90]

The predominant interpretation of experience as intentional by Western scholars is criticized by Paul Griffiths who suggests an alternative model that separates the phenomenological aspects of mental events from their content in order to allow for the possibility of an experience that does not conform to a subject-object structure.[91] He criticizes the presumed force of intentionality, using the example of an ostensibly nonintentional experience such as pain, to show that the intentional model "seems to separate mental events too sharply from their intentional objects . . . or from their phenomenological attributes and content, . . . raises the question of what ontological status the intentional objects of mental events have (and with it the specter of psychologism) and seems to prejudge the (purely phenomenological) question of whether, in fact, mental events always do have a dualistic subject-object structure."[92] If we take the example of pain, some ambiguities and difficulties with the intentional model become apparent. First of all, when we speak of pain, what specifically is the object? If we

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[90] Masao Abe, *Zen and Comparative Studies* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), 64.
[91] Paul J. Griffiths, "Pure Consciousness and Indian Buddhism," in *The Problem of Pure Consciousness: Mysticism and Philosophy*, ed. Robert K. C. Forman (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1990), 74.
[92] Ibid., 73-4.

consider the sentence, "I feel a pain in my foot", one could conceivably argue that the object of the experience is the pain itself. However, if the sentence is expressed as "My foot hurts", it is possible to interpret the object of this experience as the foot. Griffiths would likely argue that the pain is the phenomenological aspect or attribute of the experience (feeling presentation) and the foot is the object or as he prefers to call it, the content of the experience. As Griffiths further suggests, the intentional model blurs ontological categories and differences through its assumption of the presence of a 'mental' object. This model is therefore incapable of revealing the ontological status of the object as to pertaining to a real, existing object or merely a mental sensation and providing a clear representation of the relationship between the subject and its intentional object. So Griffiths suggests replacing the traditional *subject-predicate-object* model with an *event-attribute-content* model that he argues is more appropriate for discussing Buddhist experience, especially the Yogācāra idea of *nirvikalpajñāna* (unconstructed awareness).[93]

After establishing an alternative model for understanding the phenomenology of experience, Griffiths naturally turns his attention to the investigation of various theories regarding the correlate of any experience, namely consciousness. He begins with Forman's PCE or 'pure consciousness thesis' (PCT) as he prefers to call it, noting that an event that is entirely devoid of content or phenomenological attributes would be virtually indistinguishable from dreamless sleep.[94] He acknowledges that Forman's judgement of

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[93] Ibid., 74-5.
[94] Ibid., 75-6.

the Buddhist state of cessation as a form of PCT seems correct at first glance and notes

that some ambiguities in the definition of the *ālayavijñāna* (store-consciousness) which is

said to persist in the mindless attainment of cessation in Yogācāra Buddhism would also

appear to support the designation of this state as a form of a PCT.[95] However, although

Forman provides his 'forgetting model' to explain the attainment of this state, Griffiths

points out that there is an inherent lack of potentiality within this state which as a state

without phenomenological attributes and content seems to totally obliterate *any* form of

consciousness. Therefore he suggests that "it seems that the reasons why the proponents

of the store-consciousness felt it necessary to postulate the persistence of some kind of

consciousness in the attainment of cessation had to do not with any desire to embrace the

PCT (*pace* many of its Western defenders), but only with the need to provide some causal

account of the re-emergence of mental life from such an apparently mindless

condition".[96] Considering the strong interest and concern with causality in Buddhism,

this certainly does not seem like an implausible hypothesis.

While Griffiths appears uneasy about supporting the PCE, he seems to be

somewhat sceptical of the constructivist position as well. He separates Katz's argument

into two separate theses; the first being that particular conceptual schemes are required to

produce particular experiences, a thesis that Griffiths finds intuitively plausible.[97] The

second thesis states that "the phenomenological attributes and content of any (mystical)

experience occurring to any subject at any time are constituted by, and inevitably reflect

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[95] Ibid., 83-4.
[96] Ibid., 85.
[97] Ibid., 76.

the content of, the conceptual scheme possessed by that subject—a conceptual scheme which, remember, is a necessary condition for the occurrence of that experience in the first place".[98] Griffiths finds a flaw in this thesis in that while the conceptual scheme may be able to dictate the precise content of an experience, he finds no reason to accept that differing conceptual schemes producing differing content cannot produce similar phenomenological attributes. Essentially, he is arguing that the phenomenological attributes of an experience can be separated out from the precise content of that same experience.[99] If we apply this idea to our pain example above, one could argue that in two separate experiences of hurting feet, while in both of the experiences the phenomenological attribute would be the pain, the content could be said to differ if in one case, the subject stepped on a nail and if in the other case, the subject was suffering from the 'phantom pains' associated with amputation.

The middle path that Griffiths sees fit to carve between these unsatisfactory theses is a 'nondualistic consciousness thesis' exemplified by the experience of *nirvikalpajñāna* which he states as having a very high soteriological status in the Yogācāra school of Buddhism.[100] He argues that the use of strictly negative language by Buddhists to describe this state is not "because unconstructed awareness is without phenomenological attributes or content; rather it seems, the apophatic method is used for the more pragmatic reason that those who have not experienced unconstructed awareness will not be able to

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[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid., 77.
[100] Ibid., 85.

understand it".[101] This statement seems to potentially turn Forman's 'forgetting model'

on its head and instead of seeing negation as a meditative method, perhaps it may be

more useful to view it as a pedagogical method for loosening attachment to constructed

concepts. Citing Yogācārin scholar Asaṅga, Griffiths states that, despite the

'nondualistic' tag he places on the experience, the perceptual object (*dmigs/ālambana*) of

unconstructed awareness is the "Thusness of absence of self" (*bdag med de bzhin

nyid/nairātmyatathatā*).[102] In order to explain the relation of this object of no-self to the

subject in what he argues to be a nondualistic experience, he turns to an analogy and

synonym of *nirvikalpajñāna*, the notion of *ādarśajñāna* (mirrorlike awareness). Like a

mirror, the subject reflects imagistic content (*rnam pa/ākāra*), but does not conceptualize

what it reflects and "cognized and cognizer are seen to be identical when this kind of

awareness is reached not in the Vedāntin monistic sense (in which the two are identical

because of the view that there is only one unique undifferentiated substance in the world),

but rather in the sense that both (cognizer and cognized) are concepts (and terms) without

a referent".[103] The missing referent here is the constructed idea of self-identity or essence

which in Buddhism is considered a false view of reality. In this experience of

unconstructed awareness, it appears that there are two levels of nondualism being

experienced. Firstly, while recognizing the particular appearances of the content

preserves the multiplicity of the objects of perception, "seeing things as they are"

(lacking self-existence) allows for a nondualistic experience of this content. Secondly,

this concept of no-self takes on a perceptual quality in the experience, arguably as its

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[101] Ibid., 87.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Ibid., 90.

phenomenological attribute, and as such it cannot be separated from the subject as it informs the manner in which the subject experiences the content.

So by way of the Buddhist example of *nirvikalpajñāna*, Griffiths here has made a plausible argument for a nondualistic experience that contains both content and phenomenological attributes, but is strictly nonintentional. This clearly rules out the possibility of the PCT, but he acknowledges that with regard to the constructivist argument, "the possession of certain conceptual schemes might be a necessary condition for the attainment of the states in question. But this does not entail that any element of the schemes in question need be reflected in the phenomenology of the altered state".[104] His conclusion here becomes clearer when we consider that the *kenshō* state engendered by *kōan* practice as discussed above appears to reveal a very similar experience to unconstructed awareness despite the variance of techniques and practices used by different Buddhist sects for the attainment of this state.

Further evidence of this phenomenological similarity can be found in Hori's description of *kōan* practice and the experience of *kenshō*. Arguing against Forman's PCE theory, Hori emphasizes the differences between *samādhi* and *kenshō* experiences stating that:

> *Kenshō* is not the self's withdrawal from the conventional world, but rather the selfless self breaking back into the conventional world. It is only when this *samādhi* has been shattered that a new self arises. This self returns and again sees the things of the world as objects, but now as empty object; it again thinks in differentiated categories and

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feels attachment, but now with insight into their emptiness.[105]

Resembling the experience of *nirvikalpajñāna*, the experience of *kenshō* is not defined by its lack of content or even conceptuality, but by being coloured and pervaded with the quality of emptiness. Hori notes that while it is tempting to construe the "seeing things as they are" description of *kenshō* to mean "without conceptualization", it could also mean "without attachment" or "without value judgement" [or indeed, "without self"], but that these distinctions are not usually made by scholars.[106] Furthermore, echoing Wright's constructivist argument, he asserts that "all seeing that has meaning is 'seeing-as,' seeing according to concepts" and that "without the investment of conceptual activity in perception, the phenomenal world would become a blur of amorphous patches of color, sound that we would not recognize as speech, sensations without meaning".[107] So here we have the affirmation that the experience of *kenshō*, as a perceptual experience, necessarily must contain some form of conceptual content. But this content is not just a mere by-product or a correlate of perception, but as Hori points out, it is intrinsic to the nondual nature of the experience. He argues that according to the logic of nonduality, an experience of 'pure consciousness' actually reinforces dualism by setting up this nondual state over and against ordinary dualistic experience.[108] Therefore, he asserts that "if one takes nonduality to its logical conclusion, one must negate even the standpoint of nonduality and move to a second-order nonduality, the nonduality of duality and

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[105] Hori, *Zen Sand: The Book of Capping Phrases for Kōan Practice*, 7.
[106] ———, "Kōan and *Kenshō* in the Rinzai Zen Curriculum," 284.
[107] ———, *Zen Sand: The Book of Capping Phrases for Kōan Practice*, 11.
[108] ———, "Kōan and *Kenshō* in the Rinzai Zen Curriculum," 299.

nonduality ('the mountains are mountains and the rivers are rivers')".[109] Thus we have a

return to conventional consciousness, but reimagined with a 'Both/And' logic that

reflects the combined dual and nondual aspects of all experience.

In the same manner that second-order nonduality cuts a middle path through the

dualism of duality and nonduality, like Griffiths, Hori also wants to reach a middle

ground between the PCE and constructivist interpretations of experience. Contrary to

Katz's claim that the attainment of mystical experience involves reconditioning rather

than deconditioning,[110] Hori claims that it is quite feasible to understand *kōan* training as

entailing both, stating that:

> This training program might justly be called reconditioning, since
> it proceeds not by intellectual understanding but by the ritualistic
> repetition of the kōan. But it might also justly be called deconditioning,
> since it leads to the insight that our daily distinctions hitherto thought to
> be absolute are not.[111]

Of course, in this statement Hori is not denying the extensive literary and

intellectual study that forms the basis of *kōan* practice and aids in the reconditioning

aspect of Zen training, but he wants to strongly emphasize the deconditioning aspect that

involves challenging the conceptual assumptions embedded in thought and language and

'deconstructing' notions of innate selfhood and independent self-existence. Furthermore,

his reasoning for the ascribed 'ineffability' of the *kenshō* experience is also similar to

Griffiths' as he follows the same logic as his interpretation of the apophatic discourse

[109] Ibid., 301.
[110] Katz, "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism," 57.
[111] Hori, "Kōan and *Kenshō* in the Rinzai Zen Curriculum," 295.

used by Buddhists concerning religious experience. He asserts that "the experience of realization in a *kōan* is not intrinsically indescribable, but only indescribable relative to the repertoire of experiences of the people conversing".[112] Just as if one has not had an experience of no-self as emphasized in the experience of *nirvikalpajñāna*, if one has no context or common referent for understanding the *kōan* in question, one will not be able to comprehend the expression of the resulting experience.

Pratītyasamutpāda and the Theory of Correspondence

> Without relying on everyday common practices (i.e., relative truths), the absolute truth cannot be expressed. Without approaching the absolute truth, *nirvāṇa* cannot be attained.[113]

Clearly both Griffiths and Hori conclude that the PCE theory is a logically inadequate analogue to the enlightenment experience and they are more inclined to accept a constructivist interpretation of the experience, albeit a limited one. However, while both of these theories appear to assert some kind of relationship between ordinary experience and religious experience; neither is able to clearly delineate the differences and similarities between them and the basis of their relationship. Hori states that in the Zen Buddhist tradition, "the training system presupposes that Zen mystical insight is in some sense connected to ordinary experience (negation is a kind of connection) and that

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[112] ————, *Zen Sand: The Book of Capping Phrases for Kōan Practice*, 11.
[113] Nāgārjuna, *Nāgārjuna: A Translation of His Mūlamadhyamakakārikā with an Introductory Essay*, trans. Kenneth K. Inada, vol. 127, Bibliotheca Indo-Buddhica Series (Dehli: Sri Satguru Publications, 1993), XXVI:10.

there is a logic to its development".[114] In order to understand just what forms the root of this connection, it is necessary to take a closer look at the central attribute of the enlightenment experience, namely the perception of selflessness or emptiness, to determine its content and connection to ordinary experience.

Many scholars, such as Leslie Kawamura, stress that the content of the Buddha's enlightenment experience was the realization of the truth of *pratītyasamutpāda*.[115] As mentioned in the introduction to this paper, D.T. Suzuki lists *intuitive insight* as one of the defining characteristics of *satori* which suggests that *satori* is experienced as a state of knowledge and that therefore one can expect some resulting truth-claims from this experience. Of course, the notion that this experience contains some kind of truth-content may seem at odds with above assertions concerning the non-objectified nature of the experience that appears to be more perceptually-based than content-based. However, the Buddhist way of "seeing things as they are" is not strictly perceptual but is certainly based on a particular perspective of reality and the acquisition of a definitive type of knowledge or insight. The nature of this knowledge, however, is not of the ordinary kind acquired through reason and other traditional means. Tilakaratne notes that such kinds of fact-based knowledge are not capable of cleansing the mind of deeply-rooted defilements and therefore cannot account for the inner transformation caused by mystic knowledge. Therefore, he argues that it is necessary to "draw a distinction between two forms of

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[114] Hori, "Teaching and Learning in the Rinzai Zen Monastery," 6.
[115] Leslie Kawamura, "Mysticism in a Buddhism Context," in *Mysticism and the Mystical Experience: East and West*, ed. Donald H Bishop (Cranbury, New Jersey: Associated University Presses Inc., 1995), 264.

knowledge: knowing by understanding and knowing by realization".[116] Like Hori's 'realizational' model of *kōan* practice, the point here is that Buddhist knowledge acquired through study and introspection, such as the Four Noble Truths and dependent co-arising, must be made 'real' by fully absorbing and becoming one with it. Tilakaratne further emphasizes that this realization indicates not a difference in content, but a difference in the quality of knowledge as compared with conventional knowledge.[117]

In the constructivist section in the last chapter, Streng was quoted as stressing the need for an examination of the relationship between language and conceptual awareness and mystical experience. From this we can extrapolate this also to mean a need to understand the relationship between ordinary experience and mystical experience. For although he supports the idea that religious experience in Buddhism includes both language and thought, like Griffiths and Hori, he supports only a limited form of constructivism and seeks out a middle path to better explain the Buddhist experience. To find this middle path, Streng turns to the Madhyamaka school of Buddhist thought whose very name suggests a middle way beyond the extremes of constructivism and pure consciousness theory. In particular, he focuses his attention on the Mādhyamikan philosophers, i.e., Nāgārjuna's (c. 150-250 C.E.) *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (MMK) arguing that "a focus on these texts (MMK, et cetera) may reveal that at least part—the earliest expression—of the Madhyamaka school had different epistemological and ontological presuppositions than a dualism of conditioned illusion and Unconditioned

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[116] Tilakaratne, *Nirvana and Ineffability: A Study of the Buddhist Theory of Reality and Language*, 67.
[117] Ibid., 68.

Reality".[118] These presuppositions that Streng intends to highlight concern the

Mādhyamikan view of reality and its expression through conventional (*saṃvṛtisatya*) and

ultimate (*paramārthasatya*) truths which in turn, correspond to ordinary and enlightened

experience.

> We declare that whatever is relational origination is *śūnyatā*. It
> is a provisional name (i.e. thought construction) for the mutuality
> (of being) and, indeed, it is the middle path.
>
> Any factor of experience which does not participate in relational
> origination cannot exist. Therefore, any factor of experience not
> in the nature of *śūnya* cannot exist.
>
> If everything were of the nature of non-*śūnya*, then there would be
> neither production nor destruction. Then also the non-existence of
> the Aryan Fourfold truths would accordingly follow.[119]

In these verses, Nāgārjuna asserts that the middle path is found in the reality of

pratītyasamutpāda, which in essence is the same as *śūnyatā* (emptiness). The basis for

this assertion, to put it in simple terms, is that the production and dissipation of all

dharmas (factors of existence) is dependent on causes and conditions, thereby making

them mutually conditioned and interdependent. There can be no uncaused causes;

therefore there can be no independent, self-existent *dharmas* and everything in existence

is subject to change, impermanence and suffering. We can understand this as the

conventional truth or reality of everyday, ordinary experience. However, we can also

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[118] Frederick J. Streng, "The Significance of Pratītyasamutpāda for Understanding the Relationship between SaṃvṛTi and Paramārthasatya in Nāgārjuna," in *Two Truths in Buddhism and Vedānta*, ed. Mervyn Sprung (Dordrecht-Holland: D. Riedel Publishing Company, 1973), 27.

[119] Nāgārjuna, *Nāgārjuna: A Translation of His Mūlamadhyamakakārikā with an Introductory Essay*, XXVI:18-20.

understand dependent co-arising as the ultimate truth or reality of enlightened experience.

If independent, self-existent *dharmas* cannot come into being or go out of being in the

same manner as conditioned *dharmas*, then these conditioned *dharmas* must be empty of

self-nature and are therefore an expression of *śūnyatā*, the essence of enlightenment.

> *Saṃsāra* (i.e., the empirical life-death cycle) is nothing essentially
> different from *nirvāṇa*. *Nirvāṇa* is nothing essentially different from
> *saṃsāra*.
>
> The limits (i.e., realm) of *nirvāṇa* are the limits of *saṃsāra*.
> Between the two, also, there is not the slightest difference whatsoever.[120]

In Streng's investigation of Nāgārjuna's argument, he asks an important question

that I think is pertinent to our concerns in this chapter: "How can dependent co-

origination account for the experience of *saṃsāra* without necessarily perpetuating

saṃsāra in such a way that a qualitatively different reality is required to affect a release

from it?"[121] In other words, if *saṃsāra* is experienced as impermanent and full of

suffering because of its basis in *pratītyasamutpāda*, how can one make the movement

from *saṃsāra* to *nirvāṇa* without postulating an eternal, unconditioned reality above and

against the reality of dependent co-arising? Streng stresses that it is important to take

seriously Nāgārjuna's equivalence of *pratītyasamutpāda* with *śūnyatā* and emphasizes

that emptiness is twofold in nature; it is applicable both to everyday experience as its

conditional essence of things arising and dissipating and to the state of highest knowledge

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[120] Ibid., XXV:19-20.
[121] Streng, "The Significance of Pratītyasamutpāda for Understanding the Relationship between SaṃvṛTi and Paramārthasatya in Nāgārjuna," 29.

and liberation from suffering.[122] Moreover, he argues that the means of realizing the liberating emptiness of *pratītyasamutpāda* is through conventional reality. He stresses that dependent co-arising as conditioned existence is not evil by nature, but rather neutral and that suffering arises as a result of our acting *inappropriately* towards the elements of existence (i.e. ascribing self-existence to these elements).[123] However, he goes on to assert that:

> Contrariwise, the insight that leads to the cessation of these inappropriate acts is an awareness that the conditions and relations by which we define our experience are empty. Thus, ignorance and insight both require the situation of dependent co-origination, but ignorance is the superimposition of a partial truth (the crystallizing of the non-eternal quality of life into an eternal entity) on the dynamic character or reality.[124]

So, in effect, the movement from *saṃsāra* to *nirvāṇa* is not the movement from one reality to another transcendent reality, it is simply a change in attitude towards the same reality. Through our experience of *saṃsāric* reality and reflection on the impermanence of the factors of existence and their arising, duration and cessation, we can come to know and experience reality as empty of self-nature and thereby reach a *nirvāṇic* state of mind. This reflection on reality and realization of emptiness is what is normally cultivated by means of Buddhist meditation practices, particularly the practice of insight meditation. John Fenton argues that Buddhist practices such as meditation and *kōan* practice are the conventional means which link ordinary experience to religious experience in the sense that through these means one practices at being enlightened and

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[122] Ibid.
[123] Ibid., 30.
[124] Ibid., 30-1.

experiences "foretastes" of the goal, all the while relying on ordinary human capacities such as mindfulness.[125]

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[125] John Y. Fenton, "Mystical Experience as a Bridge for Cross-Cultural Philosophy of Religion: A Critique," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 49, no. 1 (1981): 56.

CHAPTER FOUR: DEFINING 'RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE': THE YOGĀCĀRIN VIEWPOINT

Griffiths' and Hori's middle path and the Madhyamaka philosophy of Nāgārjuna appear to provide a viable alternative to the constructivist and PCE models of religious experience. Griffiths and Hori have shown us how it is possible to construct a nonintentional model of experience that is at once both nondualistic and admits content. Through Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka philosophy we have seen that the basis of ordinary experience and religious experience rest on the same ontological reality (i.e., *pratītyasamutpāda*) and therefore a corresponding relationship exists between the two. This in turn solved the potentiality problem of the PCE because Nāgārjuna's theory acknowledges causally conditioned reality as the foundation of both *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. The Buddhist reality of *pratītyasamutpāda*, especially as it is equated with *śūnyatā*, also seems to be a better alternative to the constructivist, overly inflexible and prognostic model of the relationship between conceptual schemata and religious experience. While the constructivist model appears to favour a strictly linear cause and effect approach, the web-like nature of the causes and conditions of dependent co-arising seems more subtle, complex and fluid by comparison. Finally, if as Griffiths suggests, we can separate the phenomenological attribute of an experience (in this case, emptiness) from its content, then we can imagine a variety of means and methods that could produce this attribute without having to rely on a single, rigidly prescribed conceptual scheme.

In our very brief look at Madhyamaka philosophy, it is clear that the concept of *pratītyasamutpāda* is central to understanding the Buddhist conception of conventional reality and experience, especially as it gives meaning to the Buddhist conception of ultimate reality and experience, *śūnyatā*. While some Buddhist scholars, such as Robert Thurman, argue that Zen Buddhist philosophy is primarily based on the hermeneutical tradition of the Madhyamaka school[126] and arguably there is surely some influence, the majority of scholars place Zen firmly within the Yogācāra school of Buddhist philosophy. One of the most influential and central texts in the Zen tradition belongs to the Yogācāra school and is considered especially important by scholars for its hermeneutical description of Buddhist experience. D.T. Suzuki spent many years translating this text, known as the *Lankāvatāra Sūtra* (c. 300 C.E.), into English[127] and wrote a preliminary commentary on the text. This *sūtra* (discourse of the Buddha) has also been the focus of various studies by other modern Buddhist scholars. Therefore, the contents of this *sūtra* will comprise the subject matter of this chapter in order to construct a particularly Yogācārin viewpoint of religious experience. We will begin by briefly examining the text itself and Suzuki's commentary on it before comparing it with comments and arguments made by other scholars.

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[126] Robert A.F. Thurman, "Buddhist Hermeneutics," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 46, no. 1 (1978): 35.

[127] Suzuki completed the first ever translation of the *Lankāvatāra Sūtra* into English in 1932 and while it has been studied and discussed by many scholars, another complete English translation was not produced until recently with the publishing of Geshin Tokiwa's translation in 2003. For the sake of comparing Suzuki's viewpoints on the *sūtra* with those of other scholars, I will be relying solely on his translation for this chapter.

The Three Natures Theory in the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*

> Thus it is said:
> In all things there is no self-nature, words too are devoid of reality;
> as the ignorant understand not what is meant by emptiness, yes, by
> emptiness, they wander about.
>
> In all things there is no self-nature, they are mere words of people;
> that which is discriminated has no reality; [even] Nirvana is like a
> dream; nothing is seen to be in transmigration, nor does anything
> ever enter into Nirvana.
>
> As a king or a wealthy householder, giving his children various
> clay-made animals, pleases them and makes them play [with the toys],
> but later gives them real ones;
>
> So, I, making use of various forms and images of things, instruct my
> sons; but the limit of reality (*bhūtakoṭi*) can [only] be realised within
> oneself.[128]

According to D.T. Suzuki, it is not possible to precisely situate the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* (LS) within a particular Buddhist school, in part due to its early date, and because it expresses tendencies that could have evolved into the Yogācāra school as well as the Madhyamaka school.[129] Despite the fact that the LS does appear to be a rather formative, early text and includes quite a mixed bag of various Buddhist ideas; the concepts and language used in the text are certainly more reflective of the Yogācāra school, particular the Mind-only or *Cittamātra* school. No matter to which school the LS may belong, Suzuki asserts that "the main point we must never forget in the study of the *Laṅkāvatāra* is that it is not written as a philosophical treatise to establish a definite system of thought,

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[128] Daisetz T. Suzuki, *The Laṅkāvatāra Sutra: A Mahāyāna Text*, trans. Daisetz T. Suzuki (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), XXXIV:145-48.

[129] ———, *Studies in the Laṅkāvatāra Sutra*, vol. 27, Supplement of Asian Folklore and Social Life Monographs (Taipei, Taiwan: Orient Cultural Service, 1930), 170.

but it is to discourse on a certain religious experience".[130] This certainly seems to be the

case when considering the manner in which the text jumps around from topic to topic in a

seemingly random way, its overwhelming concern with the nature of consciousness and

perception and the terminology used in the text. The LS is a very long, complicated *sūtra*

that discourses on some very subtle subjects and in a manner that makes a clear-cut

interpretation very difficult. For the sake of clarity and brevity, for our purposes here I

will be examining only one aspect of the text and its interpretation by Suzuki and also

some comments by other scholars on the use of language in the text. While the

Madhyamaka school focuses on the concepts of *pratītyasamutpāda* and *śūnyatā* to

expound their theories of ontology and epistemology, these concepts are not so

significant in the LS. In fact, the conception of emptiness in the text seems very different

from the Madhyamaka conception of *śūnyatā*.[131] However, the text does include a

schema that appears to function as a kind of correlate to the Madhyamaka theory of the

relationship between conventional reality, ultimate reality and dependent co-arising. This

system is known as *trisvabhāva* or the three natures theory and as the name suggests,

represents the three aspects of reality: *parikalpita* (imagined nature), *paratantra* (other-

dependent nature) and *parinispanna* (perfected nature).

> By reason of false imagination (*parikalpita*) all things existent are
> declared unborn; as people take refuge in relative knowledge (*paratantra*),
> they get confused in their discriminations.

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[130] Ibid.

[131] While the Mādyamikan school tends to illustrate emptiness as an absence of something, many scholars
note that the Yogācāra school tends to view emptiness positively as in the statement, "There is emptiness
there". Jay L. Garfield, *Empty Words: Buddhist Philosophy and Cross-Cultural Interpretation* (New
York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2002), 176.

> When relative knowledge is purified by keeping itself aloof from discrimination, and detached from imagination, there is a turning-back to the abode of suchness.[132]

Suzuki uses the rope-snake analogy to explain what is meant by the three natures as presented in the LS which he states should be understood as epistemological terms.[133] He describes *parikalpita* as both the affective and perceptive misjudgement of objects, for example mistaking a piece of rope for a snake and the fear associated with that misapprehension, and that it is imagined in the sense that has no objective support as it is only a mental image.[134] As we can see from the above *sūtra* quotations, it also appears to include the misjudgement of objects as having real, independent existence and therefore *parikalpita* is the hallmark of *saṃsāric* existence and conventional reality (*saṃvṛti*). Related to and dependent upon the imagined nature is *paratantra* which, as its name suggests, is dependent upon an objective support and involves the discrimination of objects according to their individuality and generality based on factual knowledge which, in the case of the snake, would be the examination and recognition of the snake as in fact only being a piece of rope. Despite this factual and proper discrimination of the rope from the snake, the other-dependent nature, like the imagined nature, does not recognize the true selflessness of all subjects and objects.[135] Both of these states are mutually-conditioned, yet they also represent an incompatible dualism; the duality of being (*paratantra*) and nonbeing (*parikalpita*). While the language of the LS sometimes appears to conflate the two natures, it also hints at the nature of *paratantra* as being

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[132] Suzuki, *The Laṅkāvatāra Sutra: A Mahāyāna Text*, Sagathakam:150-51.
[133] ————, *Studies in the Laṅkāvatāra Sutra*, 158.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Ibid., 158-59.

indicative of the realm of causality, subjects and objects coming and going in and out of being and subject to causes and conditions.[136] In this manner it could be interpreted as an analogue to *pratītyasamutpāda*, albeit with the added characteristics of the discrimination and conceptuality of a *saṃsāric* nature.

Ultimate reality (*paramārtha*) is represented in this system by *pariniṣpanna*. In our rope-snake analogy, this is the viewpoint of reality where names, appearances and all forms of discrimination are transcended and the true nature of the rope is seen.[137] Suzuki states that from this perfected perspective:

> It is not an object constructed out of causes and conditions and now lying before us as something external. From the absolutist's point of view which is assumed by the *Laṅkāvatāra*, the rope is a reflection of our own mind, it has no objectivity apart from the latter, it is in this respect non-existent. But the mind out of which the whole world evolves is the object of the Parinishpanna, perfectly-attained-knowledge.[138]

In this state of perfected knowledge, the duality of *parikalpita* and *paratantra* is dissolved into a state of imagelessness (*nirābhāsa*).[139] Now this is where things get a little tricky with the three nature theory and Yogācārin thought in general. While the Madhyamaka school asserts *pratītyasamutpāda*, as the basis of both external reality and emptiness, to be ultimately real, the LS seems to be suggesting that both the imagined and other-dependent realities must cease in order to reach enlightened reality. Suzuki's interpretation of the Sanskrit term *nirābhāsa* as 'imagelessness' is also suggestive of the

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[136] ———, *The Laṅkāvatāra Sutra: A Mahāyāna Text*, Sagathakam:138-39.
[137] ———, *Studies in the Laṅkāvatāra Sutra*, 159.
[138] Ibid.
[139] ———, *The Laṅkāvatāra Sutra: A Mahāyāna Text*, Sagathakam:569.

ultimate reality in Yogācāra to be some kind of monistic idealism that denies the

existence of external reality. Further to this, much of the discourse in the LS concerns

the restraint and cessation of the sense-consciousnesses, which can give the impression

the goal of *nirvikalpajñāna* is to be attained through the creation of a nonconceptual,

contentless state.

> The Parikalpita and the Paratantra are mutually dependent and are not differentiated; thus with matter and impermanency, they are mutually conditioning.
>
> Apart from oneness and otherness the Parikalpita is not knowable; so with matter and impermanency; how can one speak of their being and non-being?
>
> When the Parikalpita is thoroughly understood [as to its nature], the Paratantra is not born; when the Paratantra is understood, the Parikalpita becomes suchness.
>
> When the Parikalpita is destroyed my Dharma-eye (*netrī*) is destroyed; and there takes place within my teaching [the controversy of] assertion and negation.[140]

These verses seem to make it clear that the dissolution of the external world is not

what is intended in this text. To destroy the reality of the external world would amount to

nihilism and a descent into the dualism of being and nonbeing. Therefore what is

required is not the destruction of the imagined, but a thorough understanding and

transformation of the imagined into the perfected. The basis for this transformation lies

in the ceasing of the discriminative faculties. On the surface, this may appear to be a

regression into a sort of 'pure consciousness' state, but I think that the text is not referring

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[140] Ibid., Sagathakam:527-30.

to the complete removal of content from the consciousness, but to a purification of one's attitude to the content present in the mind. The *Laṅkāvatāra* clearly rejects the possibility that mental states of tranquillization (*samāpatti*) are effective for extinguishing the subtle habit-energy of consciousness that keeps one in the wheel of rebirth.[141] Rather, the LS emphasizes that what is meant by ceasing false discrimination is the ceasing of one's attachment to names and to objects. More specifically, the *sūtra* declares that "by attachment to names is meant . . . to get attached to inner and external things [as realities] [and] by the attachment to names is meant to recognise in these inner and external things the characteristic marks of individuality and generality and to regard them as definitely belonging to the objects".[142] So it would appear that the problem is not so much with discrimination per se, but with incorrectly discriminating things and becoming attached to false ideas about those things. Therefore I think that Suzuki's interpretation of the word *nirābhāsa* as 'imagelessness', which gives the impression of a monistic, nonconceptual mental state, could be better translated to signify 'without fallacious appearance'.[143] In this sense, we can understand this state to be one that does include content, but content that is perceived correctly as to its nature without attachment and thereby does not leave an 'impression' on consciousness in such a manner as to contribute to the creation of habit-energy in the mind. This interpretation would be in accord with Griffith's *event-*

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[141] Ibid., Chapter 2:IX. The Yogācārin conception of consciousness is quite different from the Mādhyamika school and is the source of much debate among scholars. The most basic form of consciousness in the Yogācārin system is the *Ālayavijñāna* or store-house consciousness which is the repository for karmic 'seeds' or the habit-energy that produces 'fruit' in the form of future experiences and keeps one in the realm of *saṃsāra*. Therefore the attainment of enlightenment requires the purification of the *Ālaya* consciousness and the prevention of the creation of new seeds.

[142] Ibid., Chapter 2:XXIII.

[143] Sir Monier Monier-Williams, "Nirābhāsa," in *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Private Publishers Limited, 1995), 540.

attribute-content model of the nonintentional experience of *nirvikalpajñāna* where the

phenomenological attribute of the experience would be *nirābhāsa*.

The purpose of the nonintentional experience of *nirvikalpajñāna* is to overcome

the false duality of subject and object, grasper and grasped. However, Suzuki's

interpretation of the three natures theory is conceptualized according to the dualism of

being and nonbeing which gives the impression that the issue at hand is a matter of

ontology rather than epistemology. In his translation and interpretation of Vasubandu's

Tri-svabhāva-nirdeśa, Thomas Kochumuttom asserts the epistemological basis of the

three natures and delineates Vasubandu's definition of the three natures in terms of

subject-object duality:

> (i)   *pariniṣpanna-svabhāva* (the absolutely accomplished nature)
> is that state of existence in which the individual is characterized
> neither as a subject nor as an object;

> (ii)   *paratantra-svabhāva* (the other-dependent nature) is that state
> of existence in which the individual is bound to see things as
> distinguished into subjects and objects of experience;

> (iii)   *parikalpita-svabhāva* (the imagined nature) is that state of
> existence in which the individual is seen an object or subject
> of experience.[144]

Much like in the LS, the *parikalpita* and *paratantra* closely resemble each other

in their definitions, but Kochumuttom is able to make the distinction between them

clearer. He equates the *paratantra* with *citta* (mind) which mentally constructs the

abstract idea of subject-object duality and is the cause of *parikalpita* which is the

[144] Thomas A. Kochumuttom, *A Buddhist Doctrine of Experience: A New Translation and Interpretation of the Works of Vasubandu the Yogācārin* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1982), 90.

manifestation of the form of subject-object duality onto external reality.[145] If, as

Kochumuttom suggests, the *parinispanna* is the absence of this form,[146] then it is possible

to interpret Suzuki's experience of 'imagelessness' not as a contentless state, but as an

experience untainted by the false conception of subject-object duality and any subsequent

attachments. Kochumuttom affirms that the three natures are representative of differing

viewpoints of the same reality and that the realization of *parinispanna* requires the

correct understanding of the mistaken perception of *parikalpita* and the rejection or

stopping of the *paratantra*.[147] By the rejection of the *paratantra*, Kochumuttom means

that the meaninglessness of the mental forms of subject-object duality must be

intellectually understood.[148] In this manner, we can see that the *paratantra* can function

in a similar manner as *pratītyasamutpāda* by providing the basis for both the

conventional understanding of dualistic reality and the enlightened understanding of

nondualistic reality.

Linguistic *Upāya* in the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*

One of the difficulties with clearly understanding the content of the *Laṅkāvatāra*

Sūtra is highlighted by Winston Barclay in his examination of the language use in the

text. He points out that the LS effectively makes a distinction between what the truth is

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[145] Ibid., 91-2.
[146] Ibid.
[147] Ibid., 120.
[148] Ibid., 123.

and how it is taught.[149] This distinction is underscored in the text through the concepts of *deśanā-naya* or "the teaching by discourses" and *siddhānta-naya* or "the teaching by the establishment of self-realisation".[150] Barclay claims that the differentiation between these forms of teaching indicates that the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* should be understood in light of the Buddhist notion of *upāya* or skilful means and that the purpose of this text is "not to establish a new and truthful ontology, but rather to free the ignorantly attached people of the world from all discrimination and ontological speculation".[151] Bernard Faure also notes that there seems to be some tension in the LS when it comes to the efficacy of language as it emphasizes the complementary nature of the approaches of *deśanā-naya* and *siddhānta-naya*, while at the same time the text strongly stresses the ineffability of the truth.[152] Therefore when reading this text, it is necessary, as the text itself indicates, to know the difference between words (*rūta*) and meaning (*artha*)[153] and the words used to state the truth about reality and the words used as rhetorical devices to sever attachment to reality. While Suzuki also recognizes the significance of the text's distinction between words and meaning,[154] it seems that he does not always recognize the use of skilful means in the text, for example in his commentary on the one hundred and eight negations in Chapter two of the LS (which he only briefly summarizes in his translation), he refers to them as "another example of the irrationality of the

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[149] Winston F. Barclay, "On Words and Meaning: The Attitude toward Discourse in the Laṅkāvatāra Sutra," *Numen* 22, no. 1 (1975): 76.

[150] Suzuki, *The Laṅkāvatāra Sutra: A Mahāyāna Text*, Chapter 3:LXXII.

[151] Barclay, "On Words and Meaning: The Attitude toward Discourse in the Laṅkāvatāra Sutra," 76.

[152] Bernard Faure, "Fair and Unfair Language Games in Chan/Zen," in *Mysticism and Language*, ed. Steven T. Katz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 163.

[153] Suzuki, *The Laṅkāvatāra Sutra: A Mahāyāna Text*, Chapter 3:LXV. Using the analogy of a lamp brightening up a dark room, the LS indicates that "words are neither different nor non-different from meaning and that meaning stands in the same relation to words".

[154] ———, *Studies in the Laṅkāvatāra Sutra*, 108~.

Laṅkāvatāra"[155] without speculating on the possible effect or purpose of this type of

discourse found in the text. Alex Wayman argues that the profuse use of negations in the

texts of both the Mādhyamikans and Yogācārins "serve both as practical directions for

spiritual accomplishment and as metaphysical statements of realization".[156] Edward

Hamlin also asserts that the use of language as *upāya* is central to understanding the

Laṅkāvatāra, arguing that:

> The irrationalities with which Suzuki found the text to be riddled,
> while they are no doubt due in part to the vagaries of translation and
> revision, are often explicable through a careful consideration of the
> work's overall symbolic structure - a structure which strategically
> incorporates both contradiction and paradox as powerful tools of
> *upāya*, skillful means.[157]

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[155] Ibid., 41.
[156] Alex Wayman, "The Buddhist "Not This, Not This"," *Philosophy East and West* 11, no. 3 (1961): 114.
[157] Edward Hamlin, "Discourse in the Laṅkāvatāra-Sūtra," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 11, no. 3 (1983): 310.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUZUKI'S STONE BRIDGE

In Suzuki's translation and commentary of the *Lankāvatāra Sūtra*, we can see some of the apparent difficulties that arise in his interpretation of the text. As the first translation of this text into English, his is certainly a commendable effort and he did not intend for his commentary to be a necessarily complete and thorough investigation of the contents of the LS. However, some of his tendencies and biases do become evident in his presentation of the *sūtra*'s subject matter. For example, his interpretation of *pariniṣpanna* tends towards an idealistic monism that some Buddhist scholars, such as Kochumutton, would find objectionable.[158] Furthermore, this inferred monism is reflected in the language he chooses and implies a kind of 'pure consciousness' transcendentalism that we have already argued against, but has influenced the work of some scholars like Florin Sutton.[159] Finally, his emphasis on the 'irrationality' of the LS leaves the impression that like the absolute monism he asserts, he also is asserting the absolute ineffability of the self-realization of enlightenment. As we have seen in the previous chapters, the idea of absolute ineffability does not seem to be logically tenable and there is the possibility that Suzuki does not accurately perceive the extent to which the notion of *upāya*, particularly linguistic *upāya*, plays a role in the understanding of this complex and sometimes contradictory text.

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[158] Kochumuttom, *A Buddhist Doctrine of Experience: A New Translation and Interpretation of the Works of Vasubandu the Yogācārin*, 1~.

[159] Florin Giripescu Sutton, *Existence and Enlightenment in the Lankāvatāra-Sūtra: A Study in the Ontology and Epistemology of the Yogācāra School of Mahāyāna Buddhism* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1991), 182~.

As mentioned in the first chapter, Suzuki seems to have been influenced to a certain extent by the work of psychologist, William James, especially with regard to James' idea of 'pure experience' and his list of the characteristics that make up mystical experience. There are several points of intersection between James' conception of mystical experience and Suzuki's description of the experience of *satori*. The two most notable correlations between their two systems both involve the status of language and knowledge in these experiences. As these two aspects are of particular interest to us in this thesis and to the general assessment of religious experience, we will examine and compare these facets of religious experience as they are presented in both James' and Suzuki's schemata to determine both the relative extent of James' influence on Suzuki and if indeed these two schemata correspond well to each other and the manner in which they reflect mystical experiences and *satori* respectively.

William James and the Characteristics of Mystical Experience

> Religion, therefore, as I now ask you to arbitrarily to take it, shall mean for us *the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider divine*. Since the relation may be either moral, physical, or ritual, it is evident that out of religion in the sense in which we take it, theologies, philosophies, and ecclesiastical organizations may secondarily grow.[160]

From James' basic description of religion, some of his basic assumptions about

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[160] James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 31.

religion become clear and these assumptions have significant bearing on his explanation

of mystical experience. First of all, he clearly attributes primacy to religious experience

over and against the social institutions associated with religion and perhaps his interest in

religion as a personal, private phenomenon reflects his interests as a psychologist. In

concert with this experiential bias and contrary to constructivist arguments, James also

argues that religious experiences should be judged not by their antecedents, but by the

fruit that they bear.[161] So arguably, James is not only concerned with the experiences

themselves, but with their soteriological components as well, in terms of the lasting,

beneficial effects that these experiences have for mystics. The second assumption that

we find in his definition of religion is the supposition that the target of religion, and more

specifically religious behaviour, involves some kind of 'divine' object. Of course, James

recognizes that some religions, such as Buddhism, deny the utility of a personal God or

postulate the existence of some transcendental realm in place of a concrete God.

Therefore, he states that "we must interpret the term 'divine' very broadly, as denoting

any object that is god*like*, whether it be a concrete deity or not".[162]

The primary context in which this 'divine' object is encountered is within the

mystical experience. James gives a brief summary of the four marks that denote this type

of experience— *ineffability, noetic quality, transiency,* and *passivity*—but he remarks

that the first two characteristics are sufficient for designating any experience as

mystical.[163] Therefore, the majority of the following discussion will focus on these two

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[161] Ibid., 15.
[162] Ibid., 34.
[163] Ibid., 380-81.

characteristics. Simply put, *ineffability* means that the content of the mystical experience defies linguistic expression. The reasoning for this, according to James, is that the mystical experience is analogous to a sensory experience in that it involves an immediate, direct experience of the mystical object that cannot be transmitted to others and that "in this peculiarity mystical states are more like states of feeling than like states of intellect. No one can make clear to another who has never had a certain feeling, in what quality or worth of it consists."[164] As discussed above, the notion of absolute ineffability, which James seems to be asserting here, presents some logical difficulties that cast some doubt on the legitimacy of this category. For example, stating that mystical experiences are similar to emotional states does not strengthen James' argument for their ineffability for, as many scholars point out, although ordinary experiences are also ineffable to a certain extent, we do have affective language by which experiences can be expressed. As discussed in chapter one, Proudfoot states that the term 'ineffability' functions as a grammatical operator that acts as a placeholder to defer meaning. While this point may not hold true in an absolute sense, which would seem to make mystics out to be liars; he does make a useful point about the relationship between language and experience. Unless the experience is like the contentless PCE, the logic of applying the linguistic term of 'ineffability' onto an experience does not seem to hold. We cannot logically extrapolate that language is in a direct one-to-one correspondence to experience. Meaning is just one dimension of language and Proudfoot argues that the grammatical functions of language must be considered as well.[165] Therefore, the mystic's claim to the

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[164] Ibid., 380.

[165] Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*, 129.

ineffability of mystical experience does not have to be accepted as to the term's literal meaning. On the other hand, one aspect of James' argument that does serve to strengthen his argument for ineffability is the need for some kind of common context or ground for the linguistic sharing experience, including ordinary experiences. As discussed earlier, this explanation for ineffability has also been suggested by some Buddhist scholars, such as Hori. One example that James gives to illustrate this theory is the ordinary experience of love; he argues that "one must have been in love one's self to understand a lover's state of mind".[166] While ordinary experiences such as pain and love are common enough that a mutually intelligible referent is easily found, the relative extraordinariness of mystical experiences both in their quantity and quality of feeling makes creating a context of meaning for expressing these types of experiences a much greater challenge and in this sense they can be said to be ineffable.

The second determinate mark of mystical experience, according to James, is that the experience must possess a *noetic quality*. He states that:

> Although so similar to states of feeling, mystical states seem to those who experience them to be also states of knowledge. They are states of insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect. They are illuminations, revelations, full of significance and importance, all inarticulate though they remain; and as a rule they carry with them a curious sense of authority for after-time.[167]

From this description it is clear that although James considers mystical experience to be a state of knowledge, it is not knowledge of a rational, intellectual kind, but more

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[166] James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 380.
[167] Ibid., 380-81.

akin to a kind of intuition. His choice of words in his description of this knowledge as "illuminations" and "revelations" appears to be tied to idea that religious experiences are predicated on encountering some kind of 'divine' object. One of the further marks of mystical experience that he posits is *passivity* about which he describes that "although the oncoming of mystical states may be facilitated by preliminary voluntary operations, as by fixing the attention, or going through certain bodily performances, or in other ways which manuals of mysticism prescribe; yet when the characteristic sort of consciousness once has set in, they mystic feels as if his own will were in abeyance, and indeed sometimes as if he were grasped and held by a superior power".[168] There are two interesting aspects to this description of how mystic knowledge is attained. While this description could account for the relative spontaneity and novelty of these experiences, it contains the assumption that the experience is somehow 'bestowed' upon the mystic by some external power. Also his description of the techniques commonly used by mystics in the cultivation of these states focuses only on concentrative and bodily techniques without acknowledging the conceptual role that the mystic's religious and cultural background plays in the production of religious experiences. This seems to further emphasize the notion that the origin of mystic experiences is some kind of outside force essentially beyond the control of the mystic. Proudfoot takes up this notion from James, suggesting the 'logic of miracle' can be used to explain mystical experience stating that:

> The phrase *mystical experience* can be construed as either (1) a simple description of certain mental and/or physiological states, independent of any judgement about their explanation, or (2) not a simple description but, like *miracle*, a phrase that includes among the rules for its proper application as explanatory commitment - namely, the judgement that

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[168] Ibid., 381.

whatever physiological or mental states are being identified as mystical could not be accounted for in naturalistic terms.[169]

Implied in Proudfoot's 'logic of miracle' is the notion of transcendence and the assumption that mystics necessarily claim that their experiences are of supernatural origin. These presuppositions made by James and Proudfoot are problematic when applied to Buddhist experience. Rather than being 'supernatural', the experience cultivated by Buddhists is intended to be 'suprapersonal'; it is not meant to be an experience of transcending the natural world, but of transcending one's attachment to the notion of a permanent 'self'. Furthermore, the concept of miracle in Buddhism differs from the West in that, as Hamlin illustrates for example, the miracle-making activities performed by the Buddha in the introductory chapter of the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* represent the illusory nature of conventional reality and are used by the Buddha as skilful means to guide his followers to an enlightened understanding of reality.[170] Miracles are no measure of ultimate reality and in their use as skilful means are not guarantors of an enlightenment experience. Buddhist thought presupposes that enlightenment cannot be transferred from one being to another and that it is only through diligent, personal practice that one can reach the goal.

While Proudfoot appears to accept James' supernatural interpretation of mystical experience, he does question James' basis for asserting the authoritativeness of the experience for mystics. James does state that this sense of authority holds only for

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[169] Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*, 138-39.
[170] Hamlin, "Discourse in the Laṅkāvatāra-Sūtra," 274.

mystics and not objectively for others; however he contends that the evidence presented by mystics to support their beliefs is based on perceptual evidence in a similar manner to 'rational' beliefs constructed from ordinary sensory perception.[171] Proudfoot argues that the analogy that James draws between mystical experience and sense perception is inaccurate and therefore his argument does not validate the mystic's claim to the authority of the experience. He asserts that James makes two errors in his theory by pointing out that "mystical experience is not a simple feeling that is independent of concepts and beliefs, and sense perception is not authoritative simply by virtue of direct acquaintance with an object".[172] Proudfoot makes some valid points here. With regard to sense perception, it is clearly not always self-evidently reliable when we consider, for example, that any beliefs formed as a result of seeing a hallucination or a mirage would certainly be mistaken. Some external criteria must necessarily be fulfilled for the subject of the experience to verify what has been perceived. It is the same for mystical experience. Proudfoot notes that just to designate an experience as mystical requires reference to specifically religious concepts and criteria from which the mystic constructs the best explanation of the experience.[173] With regard to Buddhist experience, this is especially important as without an appropriate educational background, it is possible for a practitioner to become deluded by religious experiences and even misidentify them. This is emphasized by Mumon Yamada who argues that *sūtra* studies provide an essential foundation for Zen experience, not only for the cultivation of the *satori* experience, but also for overcoming epistemic pitfalls during the process, as he states that "if you cannot

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[171] James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 422-24.
[172] Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*, 153.
[173] Ibid., 153-54.

recognize the difference between correct and incorrect, you will not be able to distinguish

true from false".[174]

D.T. Suzuki and the Characteristics of *Satori*

> All religion is built upon the foundation of mystical experience,
> without which all its metaphysical or theological superstructure
> collapses. This is where religion differs from philosophy. All
> the philosophical systems may some day be found in ruins, but
> the religious life will for ever go on experiencing its deep mysteries.[175]

From Suzuki's words here, it is clear that his assumptions about the relationship

between experience and religion follow the same logic as James in asserting the pre-

eminence of a personal, psychological interpretation of religion over a social, historical

model. In addition, Suzuki's list of the characteristics of *satori*— *irrationality, intuitive*

insight, authoritativeness, affirmation, sense of the beyond, impersonal tone, feeling of

exaltation and *momentariness*—certainly appear to be partially derived from James' own

list of the features of mystical experience. Already I have demonstrated that James'

categories are problematic when applied to Buddhist experience, especially with regard to

his interpretation of the peculiar status of language and knowledge in mystic states. So

now we will turn our attention to Suzuki's treatment of *satori* in light of James' work and

the various arguments regarding mystical experience that we have explored throughout

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[174] Mumon Yamada, *Lectures on the Ten Oxherding Pictures*, trans. G. Victor Sogen Hori (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), 31-2.
[175] Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism: Second Series*, 191.

this thesis. Then we can assess if Suzuki's stone bridge truly carries over to a genuine understanding of the Zen experience.

The first necessary characteristic of *satori* identified by Suzuki and somewhat akin to James' *ineffability* is the mark of *irrationality*. By this he means that the experience of *satori* is not intellectually determined or accessible to reason.[176] Therefore, Suzuki states that "the *satori* experience is thus always characterized by irrationality, inexplicability, and incommunicability".[177] Suzuki seems to be asserting the same type of absolute ineffability as James and also accepts the literal signification of the term. As noted above, this literal denial of the efficacy of language results in Suzuki labelling and discounting sections of the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* as unintelligible and therefore he does not seem to fully perceive the potentiality and functionality of language to give expression to Buddhist truth and to recognize its use as *upāya* in Buddhist discourse. In the same manner as James, Suzuki also denies the presence of the intellect in the experience, however unlike James; he does not analogize the *satori* experience to sensory perception and therefore his reasoning for the ineffability of the experience differs in an important way. In a somewhat ironic manner, Suzuki states that *satori* lacks the super-sensuality that James ascribes to it and that, while it is not entirely devoid of feeling; *satori* is "thoroughly impersonal, or rather highly intellectual".[178] Therefore, *satori* is not ineffable due to its similarity to inexpressible states of feeling, but rather owing to the

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[176] Ibid., 31.
[177] Ibid., 34.
[178] Ibid., 37.

inapplicability of the rational, dualistic logic of language to the experience. Like the constructivists, Suzuki also does not presume sensory perception to be a form of direct experience; instead he asserts that sensory experience admits some intellectual or conceptual reconstruction.[179] He also notes that the experience of *satori* is somewhat determined, not only through concentrative and bodily practices, but also by other factors:

> (1) There is a preliminary intellectual equipment for the maturing of Zen consciousness; (2) There is a strong desire to transcend oneself, by which is meant that the true student of Zen must aspire to go beyond all the limitations that are imposed upon him as an individual being; (3) A master's guiding hand is generally found there to open the way for the struggling soul; and (4) A final upheaval takes place from an unknown region, which goes under the name of 'satori'.[180]

While Suzuki acknowledges the role of intellectual preparation for *satori*, I do not think that he would accept the level of determination for the experience suggested by the constructivists. In his writings, Suzuki is seeking to universalize the Zen experience and therefore he often downplays the conceptual and theological side of Zen Buddhism and instead focuses his most of his attention on the role that the will plays as an antecedent to awakening. This is an example of an area where Suzuki attempts to explain Zen using Western terms. The notion of freedom is important for Buddhism as a religious tradition with soteriological goals and expectations. This idea is important in Western theology as well and is usually expressed through philosophical arguments regarding the human capacity for free will. In Buddhism, the issue of free will is essentially a given; while human beings are subject to causality and the vagaries of *karma* (moral law) which

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[179] Daisetz T. Suzuki, "The Philosophy of Zen," *Philosophy East and West* 1, no. 2 (1951): 11.
[180] Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism: Second Series*, 55.

condition human behaviour, human destiny is not over-determined and indeed all

Buddhist practice and striving for enlightenment would be for naught without free will.

Suzuki asserts that "the will is more fundamental than the intellect and makes up the

ultimate principle of life".[181] Therefore, the great effort required for the achievement of

the difficult goal of enlightenment must involve the will.[182] Of course, essentially what

makes this goal so difficult is that it requires the letting go of attachments, especially the

attachment to one's notion of a permanent 'self'. However, while the notion of the will

could be understood to function in the same manner as Buddhist ideas such as 'right

effort' or 'vigour', the Western idea of the will is loaded with a great deal of conceptual

and cultural baggage that could import inappropriate connotations into the Buddhist

experience. Especially considering that, in a Western context, arguments concerning the

will are often centred on how human beings can assert their own willpower in relation to

an omnipotent God and these nuances are certainly contrary to typical Buddhist ideas.

> Strictly speaking, Zen has no philosophy of its own. Its teaching is
> concentrated on an intuitive experience, and the intellectual content
> of this experience can be supplied by a system of thought not necessarily
> Buddhistic.[183]

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[181] ———, *Essays in Zen Buddhism: First Series*, 79.

[182] Ibid., 125-26.

[183] Daisetz T. Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1959), 44. At the same time as he asserts that Zen provides the aesthetic and spiritual ground of Japanese culture, Suzuki tries to divorce Zen from it cultural and theological roots and presents Zen as an ultimately rational, empirical and universal way of living. By asserting the primacy of experience over religious institutions, he makes the mistake of assuming that the experience of the Buddha was a pure experience, free of conceptual determination. While the Buddha's enlightenment experience was indeed the precursor for the Buddhist religion, it was also influenced, informed by and ultimately was a reaction to the predominant Hindu worldview at the time.

Despite Suzuki's denial that *satori* is a sensual or emotional state, he does claim

that there is a kind of 'seeing' or 'perceiving' in *satori* which is expressed as *kenshō*,

meaning 'to see essence or nature'.[184] He notes that expressing *kenshō* in this manner is

somewhat misleading as it suggests that there is a concrete or substantial object that is

'seen' in this experience.[185] However, this emphasis on perception is important as it

defines the *satori* experience as a state of knowledge. Similar to James' *noetic quality*,

Suzuki uses the term, *intuitive insight*, as a designation for the knowledge contained in

satori.[186] Despite his assertion above that this intuitive insight can be explained in non-

Buddhistic terms, Suzuki's conception of this knowledge is really very different from the

"revelations" and "illuminations" intuited in mystical experiences. Suzuki states that

"*satori* is the knowledge of an individual object and also that of Reality which is . . . at

the back of it".[187] To a certain extent, James' conception of the knowledge attained in

mystical experiences could be understood in the same manner except that the 'Reality'

behind the experience and the relation between the experiencing subject and the

encountered object differ significantly. In James' case, the Reality could be interpreted

as the 'divine', spiritual essence of the universe that one encounters as the 'divine' object

of the mystical experience. As one of his characteristics of *satori*, Suzuki includes the

impression of a *sense of the Beyond* which could be understood as standing for the

Reality that forms the background of the experience. He describes this sense in the

following manner:

> The individual shell in which my personality is so solidly

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[184] Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism: Second Series*, 34.
[185] ———, *Essays in Zen Buddhism: First Series*, 233, ff. 1.
[186] ———, *Essays in Zen Buddhism: Second Series*, 34.
[187] Ibid., 35.

encased explodes at the moment of satori. Not, necessarily, that I get unified with a being greater than myself or absorbed in it, but that my individuality, which I found rigidly held together and definitely kept separate from other individual existences, becomes loosened somehow from its tightening grip and melts away into something indescribable, something which is quite a different order than what I am accustomed to.[188]

In James' description of mystical experiences, the separation and duality of subject and object, experiencer and experienced object are retained and not fully transcended. From Suzuki's description, however, we can see that this is not the case. While the individuality of the subject is not completely subsumed by Reality, there is also a kind of identification with the object that is occurring in the experience as well. The idea of the expansion and explosion of the individual self also suggests that the experience is triggered by an internal force which is very different from James' idea of being held in "abeyance" to an external power and this seems to give some force to Suzuki's use of the concept of will for explaining the generation of this force. Many accounts of *satori* contain vivid descriptions of this experience using expressions like, "I felt as if this boundless space itself were broken up into pieces, and the great earth were all together levelled away."[189], "It was like smashing an ice-basin, or pulling down a house made of jade."[190], and "The Smile seemed to grow out of me, filling all space above and behind like a huge shadow of my own Buddha-form, which was minuscule now and without weight, borne on the upraised palm of this Buddha-Being, this eternal

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[188] Ibid., 36.
[189] ————, *Essays in Zen Buddhism: First Series*, 253.
[190] Ibid., 254.

amplification of myself."[191]   All of these expressions suggest this same sort of effect.

The Reality that forms the background to this explosive *satori* experience is a reference to the Buddhist idea of *tathāta* (suchness) which is a way of seeing the world that is accessed through the awakening of *prajñā*. Usually, *prajñā* is translated into English as wisdom or higher knowledge, but Suzuki chooses to translate this term as intuition in contrast to *vijñāna* (discursive understanding).[192] Suzuki's choice of the term intuition to stand for *prajñā* seems to accomplish two important objectives for his description of *satori*. Most obviously, it denotes a type of knowledge obtained in this experience, especially knowledge of a kind that is not merely intellectual and the result of discursive reasoning. Also, by defining *prajñā* as intuition rather than wisdom, he removes it from being viewed as an object to be grasped, but rather shifts the view of *prajñā* to that of an attribute of experience that seems more in line with the language of 'seeing' that is used to describe *satori*. In this manner, Suzuki appears to be avoiding an intentional interpretation of *satori* by focusing on the nature of the phenomenological attribute of the experience rather than the content in the same manner as in Griffiths' model of nonintentional experience. As above though, Suzuki denies that *satori* is a special faculty of the mind, like the faculty of seeing, and should be understood as the continuum of consciousness becoming conscious of itself and therefore, should not be confused with intuition.[193] Suzuki seems to betray some ambivalence here about the

[191] Peter Matthiessen, *The Snow Leopard* (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), 106.
[192] Daisetz T. Suzuki, *Studies in Zen* (New York, NY: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1955), 85.
[193] ———, *Living by Zen* (London, England: Rider and Company, 1950), 50.

nature of intuition and its appropriateness when applied to Buddhist experience. For

example, he states:

> Zen-experience, one may say, is a kind of intuition which is the
> basis of mysticism. We have to be careful, however, about the
> use of the term 'intuition'. If we make it presuppose the existence
> of an antithesis of some form, Zen is not this kind of intuition, which
> we may designate as static or contemplative.[194]

Just as with his use of the Western notion of will, the term intuition is useful for

clarifying some aspects of his description of *satori*, but also has the potential to be

misleading due to the conceptual and cultural baggage that it carries. Intuition as a term

can be especially difficult to use successfully as it tends to be very ambiguous and often

not well contextualized or defined in its usage and as such is viewed with suspicion and

scepticism by many Western scholars, as pointed out by E.A. Burtt.[195] Very often,

intuition is interpreted in the West as being a type of sensory experience, as does James,

likened to a gut feeling or a 'hunch' that seems to flash across the consciousness mind

from the depths of the unconscious. Certainly Suzuki does not want to reduce the

experience of *satori* to a fleeting and sporadic product of a 'hunch'.

We should also note, however, that Suzuki's assertion that "*satori* is the

continuum becoming conscious of it," should not be taken in the same sense of Forman's

PCE. Suzuki has been heavily criticized by scholars, such as Sharf[196] and Faure[197], for his

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[194] Suzuki, *Studies in Zen*, 82.
[195] E.A. Burtt, "Intuition in Eastern and Western Philosophy," *Philosophy East and West* 2, no. 4 (1953): 283.
[196] Sharf, "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism," 20~.
[197] Bernard Faure, *Chan Insights and Oversights: An Epistemological Critique of the Chan Tradition* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), 53~.

appropriation of the idea of 'pure experience' from James and Nishida and using it to cast

satori as an entirely unmediated, unconditioned experience of pure consciousness.

Certainly, Suzuki tends to downplay the role of the intellect in the formation of the *satori*

experience and by focusing on the nature of *prajñā,* he also avoids a transparent

discussion of the precise content of the experience and a specifically Buddhist

explanation of it. Yet, in his recounting of his own experience of *satori* as a young man

in Japan, he states quite clearly that the mindlessness of *samādhi* cannot be equated with

the mindfulness of *satori*:

> Up till then I had always been conscious that *mu* was in my mind.
> But so long as *I* was conscious of *mu* it meant that I was somehow
> separate from *mu,* and that is not a true *samadhi.* But toward the
> end of that *sesshin,* about the fifth day, I ceased to be conscious of
> *mu.* This is the real state of *samadhi.*
>
> But this *samadhi* alone is not enough. You must come out of that state,
> be awakened from it, and that awakening is *prajna.* That moment of
> coming out of the *samadhi* and seeing it for what it is—that is satori.
> When I came out of that state of *samadhi* during that *sesshin* I said,
> "I see. This is it."[198]

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[198] Daisetz T. Suzuki, "Earliest Memories," in *A Zen Life: D.T. Suzuki Remembered,* ed. Masao Abe (New York: John Weatherhill, Inc., 1986), 11.

CONCLUSION

> Another time a monk asked, "For a long time I've heard about
> the famous stone bridge of Chao-chou (Joshu), but coming here
> I saw only a common wooden bridge."
>> The master said, "You only saw the wooden bridge, you
>> have not seen the stone bridge of Chao-chou."
>> The monk said, "What is the stone bridge of Chao-chou?"
>> The master said, "Horses cross, donkeys cross."[199]

Like Joshu who used his *upāya* and adjusted his teachings to suit his students'

abilities, D.T. Suzuki attempts to use skilful means as well and build a stone bridge of his

own to carry Zen Buddhism to the West. He builds his bridge on the concept of

'experience', relying on the notion of mystical experience in the West as an analogy for

the Zen experience of *satori*. While utilizing mystical experience and Western

terminology as a comparative method for explaining Zen proves to be useful in some

respects, as we have seen, it is also fraught with difficulties. By asserting the primacy of

experience and downplaying the specific Buddhist context in which *satori* occurs, it

seems that Suzuki may have opened the door to the potential misinterpretation of Zen by

the West and may be guilty of reductionism due to his overly psychological interpretation

of religious experience in Buddhism. Sharf may not fully appreciate the epistemological

value of the category of 'experience' as applied to Buddhism, but he may be correct to be

suspicious of Suzuki's usage of this term, especially when it is conceived of as a sort of

'pure experience'. Western interpretations of experience tend to be based upon an

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[199] Chao-chou, *The Recorded Sayings of Zen Master Joshu*, verse 332.

intentional model of experience that assumes a Cartesian dualism of mind and matter that generally does not seem to accurately represent Buddhist conceptions of experience. Therefore we must be circumspect when applying this category to Buddhism as the Western model does tend to lend itself to interpreting *satori* as an experience of 'pure consciousness'. An appropriate model of Buddhist experience is better understood according to a nonintentional model that focuses on "how" one experiences something as opposed to "what" is being experienced.

While the constructivists highlight the need to contextualize and situate religious experiences in the religious and cultural background that produce them, the constructivist model still assumes intentionality in the experience as reflected by the intentional grammar used by mystics in descriptions of their experiences. Like James, their argument seems to assume a parallelism between mystical experience and sensory experience that is not entirely accurate or reliable. The issue of why mystics claim these experiences as mystical and how they can be verified needs to be explored in more depth. Furthermore, in asserting that the linguistic and conceptual conditioning of experience is absolute, the difference between mystical experiences and ordinary experiences are blurred and the soteriological expectations of mystical experiences are not accurately reflected. Constructivists note that perception and interpretation usually occur together which implies that linguistic conceptualizing occurs within the experience and cannot be separated to create an artificial dualism. In his attempt to define a 'core' experience as the base of all mystical experiences, Forman suggests a 'pure consciousness event' model to overcome the problems of intentionality, conceptuality and dualism. Like James and Suzuki, he accepts a literal interpretation of the mystic claim to the ineffability of the

experience and attempts to define a non-linguistic experience as one of sheer conscious awareness where all mental objects are dropped. However, by dropping the object of experience and ceasing all perceptual behaviour, he does not succeed in transcending the problems of Cartesian dualism and intentionality. In fact, as far as Buddhist experience goes, he is not describing or attending to *satori* or enlightenment at all, but is merely describing *samādhi* which does not have the same soteriological function as *satori*.

In order to overcome these difficulties, Buddhist scholars, Griffiths and Hori, suggest a nonintentional realizational model of experience that better describes the perceptual shift that occurs between the ordinary viewpoint of reality and the enlightened viewpoint in the Buddhist experience. Part of this shift occurs within the understanding of language. Both the constructivist model and the PCE model appear to assume a one-to-one direct correspondence of meaning between language and reality which means that experience must be absolutely linguistically determined or, in the case of the PCE, must not be admitted at all. As we have seen demonstrated in the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, the relationship between words and their meaning is not fixed in this manner as they are seen to be both different and not different. This opens up the potential for a more transformative or performative understanding of language as a pedagogical tool and not only descriptive and reflective of content. While Suzuki seems to accept the literal meaning of ineffability, Griffiths and Hori follow the pedagogical interpretation of language as a tool to loosen attachment to notions of self, challenge conceptual assumptions, et cetera. As they both highlight in their arguments, what is important in the Buddhist experience is not the content (the absence of which would constitute a

duality anyhow), but the perceptual background or attribute that constitutes the "seeing as" of the experience.

Suzuki's assertion of the primacy of experience and the notion of 'pure experience' is also problematic if we want to accept his assertion of the correspondence between conventional reality and ultimate reality. As we have seen in our brief look at the theories of reality in the Madhaymaka and Yogācāra schools of Buddhism, both ordinary experience and enlightened experience are predicated on the same reality: *pratītyasamutpāda*. By way of understanding and realizing that mutually-conditioned reality is the basis for *śūnyatā* and the reality of no-self, the shift from ordinary perception to enlightened perception can occur. There is no transcendent reality here, as implied by 'pure experience', only the transcending of limiting conceptions of self and discriminating attachments.

While on the surface, Suzuki's and James' characteristics of *satori* and mystical experience seem to parallel each other, when examined more closely, it is clear that these experiences do not seem to have much in common at all, aside from their ascribed ineffability and transformative effect. Suzuki uses Western terms, such as will and intuition, to highlight important aspects of the *satori* experience, but the conceptual baggage of these terms, unfortunately leave them easily open to misinterpretation. While overall, Suzuki's description of *satori* does not seem to differ too much from Griffiths and Hori, I think that the problem with his 'bridge' is really a matter of emphasis. By attempting to present Zen as a universal, rational, experientially-based philosophy of life, he has constructed a wooden bridge that indeed brings the West closer to a better

understanding of Zen, but unfortunately does not provide the strong foundation of the stone bridge that gives fuller meaning to the Zen Buddhist traditions anchored in its moral, ritual, literary and cultural foundations.

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