
Senior Projects Spring 2016

Bard Undergraduate Senior Projects

Spring 2016

Uninhibited: Redefining & Relocating Rudolf Otto's Dichotomous "Holy"

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Recommended Citation

Labrecque, Abigail Juliette, "Uninhibited: Redefining & Relocating Rudolf Otto's Dichotomous "Holy"" (2016). *Senior Projects Spring 2016*. 297.
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Uninhibited:
Redefining & Relocating Rudolf Otto's Dichotomous "Holy"

Senior Project submitted to
Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

by

Abigail Labrecque

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
May 2016

Preface/Acknowledgements

Rudolf Otto first made himself known to me in the religion and ritual scholar Catherine Bell's book *Rituals*. The book was part of the curriculum professor Bruce Chilton put together for Sacred Pursuits, my college's required theory and methods course for religion majors. If you have read Bell's book, you may be thinking "Bell talked about Otto?" It's only a few sentences but it was enough. What can I say, when you find your theologian, you find your theologian.

Since my love for Otto was nearly instant, when professor Bruce Chilton asked us to do a presentation about a theorist or theologian we had encountered in the class, I, of course, chose Otto. I recall my presentation as being very elaborate. I was so excited to present him to the class. I am just as excited to present him to you here.

I gave that presentation my sophomore year. Through many conversations and my unquestionable interest, Otto became a no-brainer for the topic of my senior project. In fact, when my previous advisor, Kristin Scheible, who is a South Asian Religious scholar, matched my level of excitement about Otto by telling me her dog was named after him, it was official.

I've been working with Otto for two years now and I'm convinced that my love for and excitement about him will never cease. But I would be lying if I said my relationship to Otto has been all love and excitement. I have encountered extreme difficulties and at times, utter frustration. Especially in writing this work. I have thought myself in circles, wrote brainless sentences and gone down very distracting paths. These were the times I felt extremely grateful to have the incredible people in my life that I do: I visited one of my advisor, Tehseen Thaver's office nearly every week this past fall term. She clearly and succinctly laid out what my project could and could not look like. So many times when I thought I had a great idea, she re-taught me

what being prescriptive meant. From these many lessons I was able to figure out an acceptable, concrete project approach.

Just as many times as I visited Tehseen's office, I also visited Dorothy Albertini's office. She is one of the first Bard faculty members I met freshman year and is, hands down, the most patient human being on the planet. She held me accountable to my work, handcrafted a calendar as a tool of reference, and never failed to check in to make sure everything was going okay.

Another former advisor, Wyatt Mason, has been a grounding presence. There were times when I had no belief in my writing ability and felt the project would never get done. Calmly and confidently, Wyatt reassured me of my abilities and my sanity.

I have current senior project advisor, Bruce Chilton, to thank not only for introducing me to Otto but also for steering me along the way ever since. His open-mindedness regarding my many ideas and impeccable reference recommendations gave me the freedom and resources I needed to shape this project. He will tell you, as I am now, that it took until the very end for it to really take shape. Despite that, he never had any doubt that it would come into fruition.

One of my assistant soccer coaches, James Rodewald, and good friend, Siira Rieschl, graciously extended their workdays to proof this project. There is always fear in handing someone else your writing, however, they both treated my work with respect and sincere curiosity. This project's clarity, which is the clearest writing of mine to date, I credit not only to the attention I've given to writing in my 4 years at Bard, but also to James and Siira's corrections and comments.

The girls I babysit, Isabella and Fiona Kelly, have proven to be my biggest cheerleaders. They always ask how senior project was going and are planning to celebrate with me upon

completion. Their love of life and ability to bring me to gut wrenching laughter also served as constant stress relief. Honestly, I couldn't have done this without them.

Outside of the people in my life I have established relationships with, there are a few people I have met in working on this project who have been of great help intellectually. The first is a Vassar College philosophy professor, Jennifer Church. Professor Church gave a guest lecture at Bard called "The Significance of Ambivalence." Before attending the lecture, I was stuck on how to treat an aspect of Otto's dichotomies. Although her lecture was not entirely relevant to this project, her thoughts on ambivalence helped me move past an intellectual hurdle.

Similarly, Matthew Mutter, a Bard Literature professor, presented the introduction of his book *Restless Secularism*, soon to be published, regarding secularity in modern literature. The introduction is entitled, "Modernist Secularism and Its Discontents." At a time when I had been working really closely on Otto's ideas, Professor Mutter's discussion helped me contextualize Otto's approach to religion on a bigger scale.

Lastly, while attending a conference at Vanderbilt Divinity School, I met a Ph.D. student named Leonard, who, in casual conversation, challenged the idea of an intersection with constellation. When I asked him what he meant by this, he explained that he was challenging intersection's assumption of a onetime connection with constellation's constant connection. The encounter changed my thinking in more ways than relate to this project.

To all those I have named, especially Catherine Bell for initiating my relationship with Otto, and Otto, whose work I hope to do justice, thank you so, so much. It is my hope that this project exists not only as a strong reflection of everything I have learned from everyone who has helped me along my way, but also of the invaluable education I have received in my time at Bard.

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Introduction – The “Holy”: A Brief Overview

“‘Holiness’ – ‘the holy’ – is a category of interpretation and valuation peculiar to the sphere of religion.”¹ This “peculiarity to the sphere of religion” emerges out of the German “religious philosopher”² Rudolf Otto’s most renowned book, *The Idea of the Holy*. Which is the primary source for this work as a whole.

It will be helpful to have a sense of what the holy is before diving deeper into its complexities. In Otto’s definition, the holy serves as something between a deity and the sublime. The complexity of the holy resides, in part, in its dichotomy: “the holy in the fullest sense of the word is a combined, complex category, the combining elements being its rational and non-rational components.”³ The holy is simultaneously rational and non-rational. The holy is not a deity because deity potentially implies a plurality and is also associated with idolatry. The holy is singular and the non-rational aspect of the holy does not accept a physical presence as in idolatry. The holy is also not the same as the sublime because the sublime is completely other. The rational side of the holy contradicts this. Although partly something other, the holy has intellectually graspable attributes. So, think of the holy loosely as a divine presence, but let your mind be open to new interpretations of what a divine presence can mean, and that will approach Otto’s meaning.

Alongside this open-ended idea of a divine presence, Otto’s books *The Philosophy of Religion: Based on Kant and Fries* and *Naturalism and Religion* will help guide our reading of the holy. They are not meant to distract from our focus, but, rather, to help us better inform the

¹ Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, trans. John W. Harvey (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 5.

² Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, xi.

³ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 112.

idea of the holy. These two works precede the primary source and are the basis for Otto's idea of the holy. In the forward to *The Idea of the Holy*, Otto expresses the importance of these two works to his ideas.

Before I venture upon this field of inquiry I spent many years of study upon the rational aspect of that supreme Reality we call 'God', and the results of my work are contained in my books, *Naturalistische und religiöse Weltansicht* [*Naturalism and Religion*] and *Die Kant-Friesische Religions-Philosophie* [*The Philosophy of Religion: Based on Kant and Fries*]. And I feel that no one ought to concern himself with the 'Numen ineffible' who has not already devoted assiduous and serious study to the 'Ratio aeterna' [eternal Reason].⁴

We must be familiar with both works before attempting to understand the holy. *The Philosophy of Religion* is an elaboration on how Fries's idea of the sublime heals the criticisms against Kant's idea of pure and practical reason. It is useful in our discussion of Otto's holy to look at how Otto connects with Fries and Kant because *The Idea of the Holy* parallels the Fries and Kant pairing. The only difference is that Otto's holy replaces Fries's *Ahnung*.

Ahnung is defined in the translator's notes at the beginning of *The Philosophy of Religion*:

Fries understands by *Ahnung* (*Ahnudung*) a conviction, originating in the feelings, without any definite conception, of the reality of the supra-sensual, which gives us a reflection of the real existence of things in their phenomena, and brings us to their external meaning and purposeful connection, in Nature's sublimity and beauty

This is belief based on feelings. A reality based on feelings as opposed to the rational. Otto's holy and Fries's sublime have this non-rational aspect in common. This idea of Fries's will be referred to later on in this introduction.

Naturalism and Religion, on the other hand, is a book that wrestles with the relationship between naturalism and religion. At the same time that Otto is trying to establish that the two have a relationship, he is also presenting naturalism's problematic reductionist tendency, which

⁴ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, Forward.

leaves no room for religion. It is important to understand this, and will become even more so later on, because it situates and embellishes the ego. This work is not constructive to this introduction; however, it will be of use later on.

Otto begins *The Idea of the Holy* speaking to the rational side of the holy: “An object that can thus be thought conceptually may be termed rational.”⁵ This may seem like a very broad definition of rational, but it becomes critical to the understanding of the holy. The object that can be thought of conceptually within Otto’s rational aspect of the holy is the divine presence.⁶

It is essential to every theistic conception of God, and most of all the Christian, that it distinguishes and precisely characterizes deity by the attributes spirit, reason, purpose, good will, supreme power, unity, [and] selfhood.⁷

All of these attributes can be “grasped by the intellect.”⁸ The divine presence, in this case deity, has attributes that can be conceptualized. “The nature of deity described in the attributes above mentioned is, then a rational nature; and a religion which recognizes and maintains such a view of God is in so far a ‘rational’ religion.”⁹ A religion whose divine presence encompasses these graspable attributes is considered “rational.” Otto makes it clear that every religion must meet this requirement within his approach. “Only on such terms is belief possible in contrast to mere feeling.”¹⁰ The attributes designated to the divine presence are crucial for Otto. They make a religion “rational” and therefore enable belief.

⁵ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 1.

⁶ Otto uses the term deity here, but nowhere else in his work does he use holy in the same light as deity. I will consistently use “divine presence” throughout this work no matter what term Otto uses. Otto’s relational words will continue to change throughout.

⁷ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 1.

⁸ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 1.

⁹ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 1.

¹⁰ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 1.

However, the holy is not simply the rational, for “we have to be on our guard against error which would lead to a wrong and one-sided interpretation of religion.”¹¹ A one-sided view is one where “the essence of [the] deity can be given completely and exhaustively in such ‘rational’ attributions”¹² A divine presence whose essence is mistaken as its “rational” attributes is one-sided.

This one-sided critique speaks directly to the thinkers of the 19th century. *The Idea of the Holy* was published in German in 1917 and later published in English in 1923.¹³ Otto was entering the theological conversation at a time when the rational aspect of religion was heavily privileged. Although Ivan Strenski’s entry about Otto in his book *Understanding Theories of Religion* classifies Otto as a phenomenologist, I feel that he does a very good job informing the readers about whom Otto was beyond that designation. For this reason, I will use Strenski’s situation of Otto in history:

[Otto] was deeply involved in overturning prevailing nineteenth-century liberal Protestant conceptions of religion, such as Robertson Smith’s – namely that religion was really morality. But Robertson Smith was not alone among our classic theorists in making this identification of religion and morality. Weber, Freud, and Durkheim too held this position at one time or another. Otto, however, felt this rather “domesticated” religion by making it altogether too social and rational. Put otherwise, the identification of religion with morality *reduced* religion to something other than it was.¹⁴

The same problem Otto has with the rational idea of the 19th-century is the problem I briefly mentioned in introducing *Naturalism and Religion*, namely, the problem of reducing. Reducing leads to a one-sided view of something. In this case, Otto sees 19th century thinkers to be reducing religion to rationale. Otto is not saying that these thinkers are completely wrong; after

¹¹ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 1.

¹² Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 1-2.

¹³ Bernard E. Meland, "Rudolf Otto," in *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, last modified December 19, 2014, accessed April 27, 2016, <http://www.britannica.com/biography/Rudolf-Otto>

¹⁴ Ivan Strenski, *Understanding Theories of Religion: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 86, digital file.

all, he incorporates the rational into his idea of the holy. However, the rational attributes only make up an aspect of the divine presence. He is saying that the ideas are incomplete.

Otto proposes a dichotomy as a solution to the reduction of one-sidedness. We get a better sense what this means when he says, “For so far are these ‘rational’ attributes from exhausting the idea of deity, that they in fact imply a non-rational supra-natural subject of which they are predicates.”¹⁵ For him, there is a distinction between attributes and essence. He argues that the essence of the divine presence is not rational, only the attributes, which are a distinction of the essence, are rational. Further, the “rational” attributes are so miniscule in relation to the idea of a divine presence that they cannot possibly be all the divine presence is comprised of. “Rational” attributes simply predicate the non-rational subject of the divine presence.

So, what is the non-rational aspect of the holy and how does it exist in relation to the rational in order make up the whole? “It will be our endeavor to suggest this unnamed Something to the reader as far as we may, so that he may himself feel it.”¹⁶ At the onset, the non-rational is presented as a “Something” that is felt and unnamed. This Something is “‘the holy’ minus its moral factor or ‘moment,’ and ... minus its ‘rational’ aspect altogether.”¹⁷ This non-rational Something is later explained as religious feelings that Otto names “*mysterium tremendum*” and “creature consciousness.” These feelings regard the interaction with what Otto calls the *numen*.

Otto renames the non-rational aspect of the holy *numen* in order to accurately talk about the non-rational in isolation. The word “holy,” within the Bible, is translated from “the Hebrew *qadôsh*, to which the Greek *äyios* and the Latin *sanctus*.”¹⁸ The problem Otto has with these translations is that “all three languages connote, as part of their meaning, good, absolute

¹⁵ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 2.

¹⁶ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 6.

¹⁷ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 6.

¹⁸ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 6.

goodness.”¹⁹ This is a problem because Otto sees this isolated, non-rational aspect of the “holy above and beyond the meaning of goodness.”²⁰ Otto adopts the Latin word “*numen*” to mean the divine presence and expands upon the word to make *numinous*. “This [*numinous*] mental state is perfectly *sui generis* [unique] and irreducible to any other; and therefore, like every absolutely primary and elementary datum, while it admits of being discussed, it cannot be strictly defined.”²¹ The *numen* is the divine presence and the *numinous* is the mental state evoked by the *numen*. The *numinous* is the experience of the *numen*.

Otto goes into great detail about religious feeling and the *numen* and *numinous*, however that detail will be explored in chapter 1. For now, what is useful to us is that the non-rational exists as something minus the rational element of the holy. It is this idea that establishes Otto’s lasting impact on the conversation regarding the approach to theorizing religion. Although he was not the first to speak of religious experience, he was the first to establish an approach to theorizing religion that included an experiential aspect totally outside of the rational. Where others included experience their rational ideas, Otto included the rational in his experiential idea.

Having identified the aspects of Otto’s dichotomy, rational and non-rational, we must now come to an understanding of how it functions. It is useful to first look at Otto’s book *The Philosophy of Religion: Based on Kant and Fries*. In *The Philosophy of Religion*, Otto shows “the fundamental importance of certain elements of the philosopher Fries, derived from Kant and given a new orientation, with regard to the possibility of a new Philosophy of Religion.”²² The

¹⁹ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 6.

²⁰ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 6.

²¹ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 7.

²² Rudolf Otto, *The Philosophy of Religion: Based on Kant and Fries*, trans. E. B. Dicker (London: Williams and Norgate, 1931), 9.

most relevant elements of Kant and Fries for understanding Otto's holy are Kant's idea of pure reason and his idea of critique of judgment, and Fries's *Ahnung*.

In both *The Philosophy of Religion* and *The Idea of the Holy*, the underlying question Otto is aiming to answer is: what is the ontological proof of a divine presence? Also in both, the question is answered in the exact same manner: through the idea of *a priori* knowledge. Again the difference between the two books is Fries's sublime and Otto's holy. Because Otto elaborates upon *a priori* further in *The Philosophy of Religion*, I will turn to it for clarification about *a priori*.

In regard to the holy, the rational and non-rational unite as "a purely *a priori* category."²³ The question that arises now is: What does Otto mean by *a priori*? Because Otto assumes the reader to be familiar with his previous works, he does not describe the *a priori* at length within *The Idea of the Holy*. In chapter 2, section 2, of *The Philosophy of Religion*, "Religious Truth as Necessary Truth," Otto explains the *a priori*.

This quote begins just after Otto introduces the reader to Fries's ideas in a continuous series of quotes. Otto presents two conceptions of religion and ethics, historico-empiric truth and necessary truth.

The contrast between historico-empiric truth and necessary truth is obviously in total agreement with the contrast between mere being-taught and finding-out-for-oneself (being inwardly convinced). That in religion everything depends on the latter is really self-evident to this way of thinking. – From Descartes to Spinoza, Leibnitz, Lessing, this conviction always breaks through. But, to speak generally, it is a part of that extremely consistent and coherent basis of a general conception which, in spite of the variety in its schools of thought, gives the "Aufklärung" its unity. And in fact it is the sense of the fruitless but ever-renewed efforts of that age towards an "ontological proof of God," i.e. an individual ascertainment of God without an "empiric taint," purely *a priori* and solely from the means at the disposal of the reasoning mind itself. Behind this as a driving force there is the

²³ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 112.

just sentiment that the loftiest ideas of the reasoning mind and this truth cannot and must not in the last resort be founded on anything external and “accidental.”²⁴

Otto speaks to historico-empiric truth as assuming necessary truth. This is an entry point to Fries because his “*Aufklärung*” grounds the idea of religion as a necessary truth. It is here where we come to terms with *a priori*. We come to understand *a priori* in contrast to the empirical: knowledge versus experience. The *a priori* enables one to “find-out-for-oneself,” where historical experience is taught. Although they are being contrasted, it does not mean that one is irrelevant. The argument is that religious truth, which is necessary truth, cannot be established from experience. Others cannot teach us.

Otto is able to start here because he is working off the ideas of other thinkers: “And in fact it is the sense of the fruitless but ever-renewed efforts of that age towards an ‘ontological proof of God’”²⁵ The thinkers Otto named, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibnitz, and Lessing, are ones who pushed us toward the idea that there is existing proof of God. They have pushed us there, but they assume religion as a necessary truth. Otto is arguing that they have pushed us there but not proven the proof to be true.

This is where Otto’s holy and Fries’s *Ahnung* come in. Otto uses *a priori* as the ontological proof of God. The ontological proof of God lies in the *a priori*, an accessible knowledge we can all obtain. For Fries, the intuitive knowledge we obtain is *Ahnung*, the feeling of the sublime. But for Otto, the *a priori* is the holy. We all obtain the knowledge of the rational and non-rational aspects of the holy. We know the attributes of the deity and we know the *numen* and the *numinous*.

²⁴ Otto, *The Philosophy of Religion*, 34.

²⁵ Otto, *The Philosophy of Religion*, 34.

Even though we all have *a priori* knowledge, that doesn't mean that knowledge is readily available to us. This is why Otto shies away from using the term "innate." Before elaborating upon the *numen* in *The Idea of the Holy*, Otto proclaims:

The reader is invited to direct his mind to a moment of deeply-felt religious experience, as little as possible qualified by other forms of consciousness. Whoever cannot do this, whoever knows no such moments in his experience, is requested to read no farther.²⁶

Otto is admitting that *a priori* knowledge is not readily available. That some may not have realized the *a priori* knowledge of the holy yet. Read literally, this quote seems rather harsh and is contradictory to Otto's whole idea of the holy. Otto is trying to convince us that we all have *a priori* knowledge of the holy, but read literally, he only wants to explain it to those who have already realized this knowledge. This reading makes an all-inclusive idea seemingly exclusive.

I want to challenge the literal reading of this quote. We have already established that some have yet to experience the holy. I suggest we read this quote as if it were a kind of advertising. Otto is telling those who have not yet experienced the holy to put the book down in an effort to make them more curious about what it is they are missing. After all, the majority of *The Idea of the Holy* is an elaboration and argument for the non-rational side of the holy, the side that evokes a unique mental state within us.

What do I mean by us? Who are we within Otto's idea of the holy? Are we human? As we will come to find out in chapter 1, when I elaborate upon the non-rational creature consciousness feeling, Otto refers to humans as creatures. Chapter 2 will expand on this idea and speak to what the creature is made up of: "the creature – soul and spirit."²⁷

²⁶ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 8.

²⁷ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 194.

One distinctive aspect of Otto's idea of the holy in relation to the creature is individuality. The historico-empiric truth, which Otto earlier contrasted with the *a priori* in *The Philosophy of Religion*, reveals its importance here.

There is only one way to help another to an understanding of it [the *numen*]. He must be guided and led on by consideration and discussion of the matter through the ways of his own mind, until he reaches the point at which 'the numinous' in him perforce begins to stir.²⁸

The holy is *a priori*, it is founded on the knowledge imbedded within us from the start; however, our experiences do help guide us. Ultimately, we are the only ones who can evoke the *a priori* knowledge of the holy within ourselves. Fries and Otto differ here. Fries's *Ahnung* can be shared, Otto's holy cannot. For Otto, the awakening process is subjective, dependent upon an individual creature though the holy is objective. Otto's idea of subjectivity and individuality will be addressed in chapter 2.

From what we have discussed, we know that Otto's holy is a divine presence creatures have *a priori* knowledge of. Though this knowledge is embedded within us, it is not readily available. This is where Otto's dichotomy comes into play. The non-rational aspect of the holy, the *numen/numinous*, is an awakening to the *a priori* knowledge of the holy. We come to the awakening of the non-rational in the ways of our own minds. Others simply help guide us. The feeling of the holy that arises within the mind is instantly made sense of because of its *a priori* existence. Preceding this feeling/awakening is the *a priori* knowledge of the rational. The rational attributes of the divine presence, which enable belief and deem a religion "rational," make up the rational side of the holy. Upon realizing the feeling of the holy, our mind becomes aware of the attributes of the divine presence and is able to make sense of our belief. Otto's holy

²⁸ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 7.

exists as the explanation of the ontological proof of God so many thinkers before Otto pushed toward.

While expanding on the ideas introduced here, the remaining chapters will present and problematize different dichotomies that exist within the idea of the holy. The dichotomies I am choosing to present are rational and non-rational, the main dichotomy of the holy, soul and spirit, which make up the dichotomy of the self, and lastly, body and mind, the dichotomy regarding the localization of the self. Although Otto's work is not limited to these three dichotomies, I feel that they are the most crucial to treat. The problems relating to each dichotomy will be argued through inconsistencies in Otto's ideas. More specifically, I will argue for a redefinition of *a priori* to exclude the rational, argue that the creature's individuality belongs to the spirit, and that the self be localized in the body.

Before beginning, it is important to note why I have chosen to center my work on Otto and his *Idea of the Holy*. I feel that Otto has become a footnote in modern academia. He is written about as though he is not important enough to elaborate upon, yet is important enough to mention. When he is treated as more than a footnote, the mistreatment still occurs. His ideas are picked up and proven flawed. It is as if scholars are patting him on the back saying, "This is interesting but doesn't really work."

An example is Professor of Jewish Theology Melissa Raphael's "Constructivism and Numinous Experience." Raphael's piece argues Otto's holy as "a phenomenological analysis of (male) reactions to an unconceptualized numinous object."²⁹ In arguing that Otto's approach to theorizing religion is gendered, her conclusion becomes "that the numinous experience is

²⁹ Melissa Raphael, "Feminism, Constructivism and Numinous Experience," *Religious Studies* 30, no. 4 (December 1994): 516, accessed April 17, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20000118>.

unlikely to be (and still less to remain) the comprehensive core of both men and women.”³⁰ She is leaving Otto in shambles.³¹

Scholars who take up Otto are absolutely right that his ideas are flawed. In fact, Raphael raises legitimate issues with Otto, but I believe she hasn't given Otto enough attention. My approach is different from those who mistreat him because I believe Otto's problems can be treated. I do not see Otto as the problem. I view Otto's problem, which is outside the scope of this project, as a perpetuation of what Eve Browning Cole names the gender binary.

In conclusion, I hope that by paying due attention to Otto's work that I bring an awareness and further appreciation to his idea. I hope Otto and his idea of the holy become treated more than a footnote.

³⁰ Raphael, "Feminism, Constructivism and Numinous," 526.

³¹ I am aware that Raphael went on to write a book about Otto's significance years after this piece, however, I'm speaking to this article in order to exemplify how many scholars treat him.

Chapter 1 – The Awakening: Redefining Otto’s *a priori*

Having come to an understanding of the holy in the introduction, we will now turn to the first dichotomy, rational and non-rational. The elements of the non-rational that were not fully explored last chapter will be explained. Those elements deal with religious feeling and are defined by Otto as “creature consciousness” and *mysterium tremendum*. After explaining Otto’s definition of both, I will argue that the *mysterium tremendum* represents an awakening. If we view *mysterium tremendum* as an awakening, another argument emerges: that Otto’s rational aspect of the holy should not be considered *a priori*. Arguing the rational outside of *a priori* is ultimately an argument against Otto’s definition of *a priori*.

The first religious feeling of the non-rational part of Otto’s holy I will address is creature consciousness. We will come to know it as a religious feeling of nothingness evoked by a divine presence. Because Otto uses German theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher’s “feeling of dependence,” which, until defined later, can be thought of as a dependence upon God, as a base for his definition of creature consciousness, Schleiermacher’s ideas must first be understood.

Schleiermacher appears in Otto’s *Philosophy of Religion*. Although that book is about Kant and Fries, Schleiermacher is introduced alongside Fries and continues to make appearances throughout the book. From Otto’s treatment of Schleiermacher in *The Philosophy of Religion*, we can better understand how Otto is using Schleiermacher’s idea.

On the first page of the introduction in *The Philosophy of Religion*, Otto takes up and clarifies how he views Fries and Schleiermacher’s relationship.

Historians of the philosophy of religion have pointed out a certain affinity between Fries and Schleiermacher in their treatment of the theory of religious “feeling,” but they have assumed that Schleiermacher’s was the more original and comprehensive intellect. Really, however, in the philosophy of religion, the points of contact between Fries and Schleiermacher are less important than their points

of difference; and where their views agree, Fries is quite original and closer study proves him to be superior in comprehensiveness, thoroughness and solidity.³²

Otto acknowledges that both Fries and Schleiermacher present similar philosophies of religion. Throughout *The Philosophy of Religion, Naturalism and Religion*, and *The Idea of the Holy* Otto uncovers and makes use of Fries and Schleiermacher's differences. However, the way Otto treats these differences often confuses their importance.

In *The Philosophy of Religion*, as exemplified in the block quote above, Otto claims Schleiermacher's ideas are superior to Fries's. He even goes on to call Schleiermacher's feeling of dependence "a very one-sided and inadequate description of religious feeling, which in Fries has found a much more varied and precise development."³³ Although Otto claims Fries is superior in "comprehensiveness, thoroughness and solidity" and views Schleiermacher's feeling of dependence as one sided, there is a footnote that states, "I have dealt with the relation of Fries and Schleiermacher in my *Naturalistische and religiöse Weltansicht* [*Naturalism and Religion*], but I am now compelled to withdraw my remarks as to Schleiermacher's superiority to Fries." Otto shows Schleiermacher's weaknesses but admits he has strengths. This makes it seem like Otto is choosing Fries. That Otto is withdrawing his comments because they were wrong. In reading all three works, it is clear that this is not the case.

The Philosophy of Religion and *Naturalism and Religion* talk about different things. Where *Naturalism and Religion* deals with naturalism's reductionist tendency and contributes to the idea of the holy in establishing the self. As will be addressed in chapter 2. *The Philosophy of Religion* aims to distinguish a relationship between Fries and Kant, which contributes to Otto's definition of *a priori*. Otto uses Schleiermacher's feeling of dependence to help clarify the self

³² Rudolf Otto, *The Philosophy of Religion: Based on Kant and Fries*, trans. E. B. Dicker (London: Williams and Norgate, 1931), 15.

³³ Otto, *The Philosophy of Religion*, 23.

and Fries's *Ahnung* to help explain *a priori*. Otto withdraws his remarks from *Naturalism and Religion* within *The Philosophy of Religion* because of the differing contexts.

Without reading the other texts, we can still understand that Otto isn't totally discrediting Schleiermacher in *The Philosophy of Religion*. Just after Otto highlights Schleiermacher's flaws, he tells us to "consider Fries as being outside the 'philosophy of feeling.'"³⁴ Otto is saying that Fries does not speak to religious feelings. At the same time Otto withdraws his remarks about Schleiermacher's superiority, he is also highlighting Schleiermacher's advantage. If Fries is "outside the philosophy of feeling," Otto implies Schleiermacher is within it. Otto is pointing to a difference between Schleiermacher and Fries. What is important about Schleiermacher is his feeling of dependence. Fries is superior in *The Philosophy of Religion* because the feeling of dependence is not germane to that work. Otto is using different parts of each thinker's ideas to address different parts of his own. The language of superiority is misleading and only speaks to the particular book in which it resides.

Otto using parts of Fries and Schleiermacher's ideas means, as he says, there are parts, which he does not agree with. Since Otto uses Schleiermacher's feeling of dependence to inform creature consciousness, Otto's religious feeling, we must understand what is it about Schleiermacher's thinking that Otto finds wanting. In *The Idea of the Holy*, Otto raises two main issues with Schleiermacher's feeling of dependence. The first problem is one sidedness.

In the first place, the feeling or emotion he [Schleiermacher] has in mind in this phrase [feeling of dependence] is in its specific quality not a "feeling of dependence" in the "natural" sense of the word. As such, other domains of life and other regions of experience than the religious occasion the feeling, as a sense

³⁴ Otto, *The Philosophy of Religion*, 23.

of personal insufficiency and impotence, a consciousness of being determined by circumstances and environment.³⁵

Otto sees Schleiermacher's feeling of dependence as one sided because it is missing context. Who is the feeling happening to? When/where does it arise? What specifically is Schleiermacher talking about? It's like someone saying they are hungry and then failing to elaborate further. When someone tells someone else they are hungry the immediate question is, "What do you want?" There is a lot of frustration in not receiving an answer because we know there is often a craving, which coincides. We know there is more to their feeling. In this analogy, Otto would say the hunger is not complete. We are only speaking to an aspect of our feeling when we fail to elaborate.

Otto goes on to say, "What he [Schleiermacher] overlooks is that, in giving the feeling the name 'feeling of dependence' at all, we are really employing what is no more than a very close analogy."³⁶ If we refer back my analogy of hunger, the word hunger does not describe the feeling that takes place. Hunger manifests in ways such as stomach churning and mouth watering. Hunger is merely a word for the feeling that occurs, it is not the feeling itself. Schleiermacher's idea becomes an analogy for creature consciousness.

If Otto is saying Schleiermacher's feeling of dependence does not fit into the natural sense of the word, what is the natural sense of "feeling." Although, in colloquial language feeling assumes sensory perception, when Otto speaks to feelings, he isn't talking about the senses. Otto is referring to feelings that arise in the mind: "these feelings [religious feelings] can only arise in the mind as accompanying emotions when the category of 'the numinous' is called into play."³⁷

³⁵ Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, trans. John W. Harvey (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 9.

³⁶ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 9.

³⁷ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 11.

The *numinous* is the divine presence. Not only are feelings of the mind, they are enabled by a divine presence. Otto saying Schleiermacher's feeling of dependence is not a feeling "in the natural sense of the word" points to Otto's second critique of Schleiermacher.

Before elaborating upon the second issue of Schleiermacher's "feeling of dependence", let us introduce creature consciousness: "It is the emotion of a creature, submerged and overwhelmed by its own nothingness in contrast to that which is supreme above all creatures."³⁸ We, the creatures, experience religious feeling in the presence of "that which is supreme above all creatures," or the *numen*. As a reminder, the *numen* is the divine presence and the *numinous* is the mental state evoked by the *numen*. This definition of creature consciousness reinforces the inadequacy of Schleiermacher's "feeling of dependence." It's like saying, "the feeling of a human, painstakingly consumed by its own stomach churning bodily need for nourishment." Hunger is inadequate, so too is feeling of dependence.

This leads into the second problem Otto raises with Schleiermacher's "feeling of dependence," the issue of how the feeling arises.

The religious emotion, is merely a category of self-valuation, in the sense of self-deprecation. According to him [Schleiermacher] the religious emotion would be directly and primarily a sort of self-consciousness, a feeling concerning oneself in a special, determined relation, viz. one's dependence. Thus, according to Schleiermacher, I can only come upon the very fact of God as a result of an inference, that is by reasoning to a cause beyond myself to account for my "feeling of dependence."³⁹

For Schleiermacher, the feeling of dependence is a state of mind we come to on our own. We begin to question what we are missing after we realize we are dependent. The way religious feeling arises, then, is out of deductive reasoning. Once we realize we are dependent, it must be

³⁸ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 10.

³⁹ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 10.

deduced that there is a something we are dependent upon. God becomes a solution to the problem of dependence.

Otto's creature consciousness is more complex. There is a separation between religious feeling and the divine presence. God is not a solution but a presence, which evokes a feeling.

The "creature-feeling" is itself a first subjective concomitant and effect of another feeling-element, which casts it like a shadow, but which in itself indubitably has immediate and primary reference to an object outside the self. Now this object is just what we have already spoken of as "the numinous."⁴⁰

Creature consciousness exists only in the presence of the *numen*. The difference between Otto and Schleiermacher here is where the dependence arises. For Schleiermacher, the feeling of dependence arises from within us. We infer that we are dependent and, therefore, reason God exists. In Otto, the *numen* is used to enable creature consciousness. The feeling arises out of an experience with the *numen*. For Otto, the divine presence enables the feeling. It is not one we can create. The example of encountering a ghost will be used later on, however, it is also helpful here. When we encounter a ghost, or believe we encounter something otherworldly, it evokes a really strong emotion. This emotion is one that cannot be deduced by our mind alone. Even if we had an idea about what it would be like, we could not replicate the emotion by thinking about it. We must encounter an otherworldly presence for the emotion to arise. Otto is arguing that religious emotions are not deduced, but evoked and experienced.

We have addressed how Otto distinguishes his ideas from Schleiermacher's, however it is important to note that this relationship is controversial. Scholars Andrew Dole and A.D. Smith have opposing opinions about it. Where Dole sees a difference between Otto and Schleiermacher's ideas, Smith does not. Dole's "Schleiermacher and Otto on religion" argues,

⁴⁰ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 10&11.

“there are important differences between Schleiermacher's and Otto's accounts of religion.”⁴¹ Smith's piece, “Schleiermacher and Otto on Religion: a reappraisal,” which is a response to Dole's piece, argues, “that there is, in fact, nothing to distinguish between the two thinkers [Otto and Schleiermacher] on these issues [those raised by Dole].”⁴² Ultimately, Smith does not believe Otto and Dole give Schleiermacher enough credit and that Schleiermacher has been misunderstood.

For the purpose of future arguments, I am siding with Dole and Otto. Although Smith believes Otto and Dole do not give Schleiermacher enough credit, I argue that Otto isn't using Schleiermacher in order to prove the feeling of dependence wrong. Otto is expanding upon and altering the feeling of dependence to create creature consciousness. For Otto, Schleiermacher is pointing to the right feeling, but hasn't quite established it. Founding a major idea of holy upon the feeling of dependence is not undervaluing.

Smith's argument about Otto and Dole misunderstanding Schleiermacher's ideas does not work out either. Dole writes another piece in response to Smith's, which state,

My argument was that Otto himself saw Schleiermacher's understanding of religion as dangerously “naturalistic” in a sense that opened religion to the charge of being, roughly, an illusory human production rather than something grounded in the experience of the transcendent. In his “Reappraisal” Smith passes in silence over this material; he has subsequently dedicated an independent essay to discussing some of Otto's criticisms.⁴³

The illusory human production Dole speaks to is the same argument that emerged from Otto's second critique regarding how religious feeling arises. Dole pushes Otto's argument further by

⁴¹ Andrew Dole, "Schleiermacher and Otto on Religion," abstract, *Religious Studies* 40, no. 4 (December 2004): 389, accessed May 2, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20008553>.

⁴² A. D. Smith, "Otto's Criticisms of Schleiermacher," *Religious Studies* 45, no. 2 (June 2009): 295, accessed May 2, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27750007>.

⁴³ Andrew Dole, "On 'nothing to distinguish' Schleiermacher and Otto: Reply to Smith," *Religious Studies* 46, no. 4 (December 2010): 450, accessed May 2, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40927259>.

deeming Schleiermacher's understanding "naturalistic." Otto makes an argument about naturalism in his book *Naturalism and Religion*. Although this idea will be addressed in the coming chapters, one of the main problems Otto has with naturalism is its reductionist tendency. Dole applies this argument to Schleiermacher's feeling of dependence to say that it is reducing religious feeling. I am siding with Dole and Otto in regard to Schleiermacher because as Dole says, Smith fails to address Schleiermacher's lack of grounding in transcendental experience. I see the transcendental experience of creature consciousness as Otto's contribution to Schleiermacher's feeling of dependence.

To review, creature consciousness is the religious feeling, within the mind, of nothingness, brought on in the presence of the *numen*. There is a problem here, though. We established in the introduction that the knowledge of the holy, although *a priori*, is not readily accessible. Although we have *a priori* knowledge of the *numen*, it does not mean we automatically know what the *numen* is. There has to be a moment when we come to realize the *a priori* knowledge: as Otto would say, an awakening. The creature consciousness assumes that we have been awoken.

Otto introduces another religious feeling, *mysterium tremendum*. Although he does not call *mysterium tremendum* an awakening, I argue that it is. Not only because creature consciousness assumes an awakening, but because the language he uses to describe the feeling implies it.

Let us consider the deepest and most fundamental element in all strong and sincerely felt religious emotion. Faith unto salvation, trust, love – all these are there. But over and above these is an element which may also on occasion, quite apart from them, profoundly affect us and occupy the mind with a wellnigh bewildering strength...we are dealing with something for which there is only one appropriate expression, "*mysterium tremendum*."⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 12.

Mysterium tremendum is the most essential religious emotion that can be felt. An emotion that is greater than love, trust, and belief in deliverance from sin. We are still speaking to religious feeling, but a different feeling than creature consciousness. Where creature consciousness manifests as an overwhelming feeling of nothingness, *mysterium tremendum* is the greatest feeling of presence of the *numen*. Otto's language implying *mysterium tremendum* as the greatest feeling, "deepest," "fundamental," and "bewildering strength" is what I feel implies awakening.

Since this is such an important aspect of the holy, Otto breaks down *mysterium* and *tremendum* separately. This attention also contribute to my argument that *mysterium tremendum* is an awakening. Otto starts by explaining three different elements of *tremendum*: the element of "Awefulness," the element of "Overpoweringness," and the element of "Energy." Awefulness comes out of Otto's analysis of the root of *tremendum*, tremor.

Tremor is in itself merely the perfectly familiar and "natural" emotion of fear. But here the term is taken, aptly enough but still only by analogy, to denote a quite specific kind of emotional response, wholly distinct from that of being afraid, though it so far resembles it that the analogy of fear may be used to throw light upon its nature.⁴⁵

Tremor is an emotion associated with fear, but for Otto it is something more; because fear is familiar, it is a useful place to start. The tremor Otto tries to describe is both wholly other than fear and also accessibly understood through talking about fear.

So what is this tremor that is wholly other than fear? "Of modern languages English has the words 'awe,' 'aweful,' which in their deeper and most special sense approximate closely to our meaning."⁴⁶ Otto uses aweful instead of awesome because of the emotion associated with fear. The word "awesome" has positive connotations and does not speak to fear. Otto also deliberately uses aweful instead of awful. I see this as Otto reminding us of the context, the holy.

⁴⁵ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 13.

⁴⁶ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 14.

But what is Awe? Awe is a response to something unexpected, but also similar to admiration or astonishment. Awe and fear feel connected in the element of surprise. When we are afraid, it usually is due to a shocking event. If not shocking, unexpected. We cannot expect to feel fear or awe toward something before experiencing it. Both are responses to something outside of us, therefore outside of our control.

Another similarity between awe and fear seems to be the intrigue that surprises bring. When talking about Awefulness Otto says, “It first begins to stir in the feeling of ‘something uncanny,’ ‘eerie,’ or ‘weird.’”⁴⁷ *Mysterium tremendum* begins to stir with a feeling of unfamiliarity. Otto relates the feeling the unfamiliar stirring to the “shudder” you feel in the hearing a ghost story: “That this is so is shown by the potent attraction again and again exercised by the element of horror and ‘shudder’ in ghost stories, even among persons of high all-round education.”⁴⁸ This is universal. It doesn’t matter how educated you are, ghost stories will lead you to shudder. Everyone experiences things unfamiliar to himself or herself and everyone can be surprised.

Otto uses the example of a ghost story and the fear it creates as an analogy to get at the idea of awe he is trying to convey. In the shudder moment of a ghost story, Otto points to the moment that catches us off guard. I believe the exact moment of surprise that builds out of anticipation is what Otto is trying to point to.

Another way Otto uses this analogy is our reaction to the shudder. “The awe or ‘dread’ may indeed be so overwhelmingly great that it seems to penetrate to the very marrow, making the man’s hair bristle and his limbs quake.”⁴⁹ The moment we become afraid during the telling of

⁴⁷ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 14.

⁴⁸ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 16.

⁴⁹ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 16.

a ghost story, we have a physical reaction. We experience horripilation and may even jump out of our seats. Awe, like the shudder, is such a deep experience that we have a physical reaction. The reaction to the *numen* is what Otto has already explained as creature consciousness.

We can see how fear and awe are similar, but how is fear simply an analogy for awe? The difference becomes clear in Otto's examples from the Bible. Otto speaks about the wrath and anger of God in the Old Testament. The wrath and anger of God correspond to the fear Otto is trying to describe. God's anger and wrath strike characters dead for things like touching the arc of the covenant and also punishes nations of peoples for wrongdoings. This wrath and anger portrays a God that is harsh and punishing. As if God has chosen specific people to punish. Believing God punishes people would also assume that God rewards people. This would invalidate Otto's universality.

Otto's approach to religion is universal because we are all individuals and because we all have *a priori* knowledge of the holy. We have *a priori* knowledge of the holy because it is objective. If God were to reward and punish individuals, God would fail to be objective. For Otto, the divine presence's purpose is not to reward or punish, but to simply awaken religious emotion.

Otto suggests that we look at the anger and wrath in the Old Testament as awe-inspired opposed to fear instilling. "Wrath' here is the 'ideogram' of a unique emotional moment in religious experience."⁵⁰ God is not picking people or peoples out to punish. God is revealing the possibility of religious experience. We are not supposed to be afraid of the interactions within the Old Testament between humans and God, we are supposed to be awe-inspired about their existence. It's not about a punishment or reward, but the possibility of a direct encounter with the

⁵⁰ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 19.

divine. Such encounters are awe-filled because they awaken us to the existence of the divine. The wrath of God becomes a symbol for the awe regarding religious experience as opposed to fear.

As mentioned earlier, this feeling of *mysterium tremendum* enables creature consciousness. The awe-inspiring shock is meant for us to recognize our nothingness in the presence of the supreme.

It has become mystical awe, and sets free as its accompaniment, reflected in self-consciousness, that “creature-feeling” that has already been described as the feeling of personal nothingness and submergence before the awe-inspiring object directly experienced.⁵¹

We can only come to realize our own nothingness in our submergence in the awe-inspiring *numen* we experience. In arguing *mysterium tremendum* as an awakening, I view the submergence before the awe-inspiring object as *mysterium tremendum*. *Mysterium tremendum* enable creature consciousness. The element of awe in regards to tremor is pushing us to embrace the presence of the divine as opposed to deny its presence. The difference between awe and fear becomes how we view the experience. Fear leads us to become tentative about whatever it is that evoked the fear. Awe directs us to become curious and embracing, while still being surprised.

The Awefulness of tremor is not the only element that leads to creature consciousness. The element of Overpoweringness also plays a role. Awe simply has to do with the specific emotion. Overpoweringness is about the intensity. For this reason, Otto is able to combine both elements.

It will be felt at once that there is yet a further element which must be added, that, namely, of “might,” “power,” “absolute overpoweringness.” We will take to represent this the term *majestas*, majesty...The *tremendum* may then be rendered more adequately *tremendum majestas*, or “aweful majesty.”⁵²

⁵¹ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 17.

⁵² Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 19-20.

Overpoweringness is used in combination with Awefulness to refer to the concentration of religious feeling. The *numen* is not just aweful. The *numen* is majestically aweful. Not only are we left curious and embracing about what the *numen* is, we are left astounded by the vastness of the emotion we experience.

This Overpoweringness is pointing to the one-sidedness of Schleiermacher's feeling of dependence brought up in explaining creature consciousness: the idea that there is more to religious feeling than dependence. Here, Otto also uses mysticism as an example. For Otto, both Schleiermacher and mysticism are focused on finding the reason for dependence. Schleiermacher's answer to dependence is God. Mysticism's is an "annihilation of the self."⁵³ Where Schleiermacher says that we are dependent because our existence depends on a supreme being, mysticism says that we are dependent because the self doesn't exist. The problem Otto raises with mysticism is that "there is no thought in this of any causal relation between God, the creator, and the self, the creature."⁵⁴ Otto argues that the self exists; the presence of the *numen* is just so overwhelming, we realize that in comparison to its aweful majesty, we are nothing: "in contrast to 'the overpowering' of which we are conscious as an object over against the self, there is the feeling of one's own submergence, of being but 'dust and ashes' and nothingness."⁵⁵ We aren't actually dust and ashes; we are washed over by the feeling of nothingness. The awe lets us in on the amazement of the *numen*, and the majesty is the degree of the awe. If we do not exist, we cannot have a relationship with God.

Mysterium tremendum is all about the relationship. Otto explains:

The point from which speculation starts is not a "consciousness of absolute dependence"... it starts from a consciousness of the absolute superiority or

⁵³ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 21.

⁵⁴ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 21.

⁵⁵ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 20.

supremacy of a power other than myself, and it is only as it falls back upon ontological terms to achieve its end... that that element of *tremendum*, originally apprehended as “plentitude of power”, becomes transmuted into “plentitude of being.”⁵⁶

Otto is distinguishing his religious feeling from feelings of dependence. We do not come to find a divine presence through an absence of something within ourselves. We come to figure out the presence of the divine through experiencing a presence outside of ourselves. The idea of a presence is reinforced in the last aspect of the quote “plentitude of being.” Overpoweringness suggests an intense power felt outside of us, but Otto is talking about the intense Overpowering presence of the *numen*. The power is inherent within the presence. And because it is a presence we are experiencing, the experience is relational.

What Otto is trying to establish in his idea of religious feeling is almost the inverse of what others have described. Where others start with recognition of something lacking in the self and come to find a divine presence as a solution for the absence, Otto starts with the divine presence awakening the idea that we are nothing in comparison to the divine presence. A comparison is possible because there is a relationship between the divine and creature. In Otto, the idea that the self is less than the divine follows an experience of a divine presence. We cannot know that we are less than or nothing until we are certain of what the divine presence is. The divine presence is not an answer, but an experience; and I argue, an awakening.

There is one last element of tremor and that is Energy or Urgency. Otto goes back to the example of God’s wrath in the Old Testament:

It [Energy] is particularly vividly perceptible in the *ópyn* or “wrath”; and it everywhere clothes itself in symbolic expressions – vitality, passion, emotional temper, will, force, movement, excitement, activity, impetus. These features are typical and recur again and again.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 21.

⁵⁷ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 23.

What is being brought out about the *numen* here is that it is lively. Something that contains passion, emotional temper, and excitement, among other things, cannot simply be a power. The *numen* is a living presence. Since it is alive and free to move of its own will, we can experience it over and over and over again. Yes, one can only be awakened once, however, that doesn't mean we can't experience the feeling we have been awakened to again and again. It just means we will be familiar with it whenever we happen to encounter it again.

Because Energy reinforces a presence, Otto uses it to directly challenge the idea of a rational God in philosophy. Otto recognizes that some philosophers are challenging an anthropomorphic God, but also argues against their idea that God is rational. Otto says that those philosophers are right to shut down the idea of an anthropomorphic God, but that they are wrong in failing to recognize the non-rational aspect of the divine.⁵⁸ The element of Energy becomes a crucial part of the non-rational aspect of the holy. It is the living feature of the *numen* outside of the anthropomorphic ideal.

The last three elements we have covered, Awefulness, Overpoweringness and Energy only cover *tremendum*, half of *mysterium tremendum*. The living, majestically awful *numen* is what has been presented thus far. *Mysterium* and the element of fascination are left. *Mysterium* has one element: the "Wholly Other." The element of fascination serves as an element of the whole numinous experience.

Before beginning to elaborate upon *mysterium*, Otto clarifies that although elements of *tremendum* may seem similar to *mysterium*, they are in fact different:

The elements of meaning implied in "awefulness" and "mysteriousness" are in themselves definitely different. The latter may so far preponderate in the religious

⁵⁸ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 23.

in religious consciousness, may stand out so vividly, that in comparison with it the former almost sinks out of sight.⁵⁹

It becomes clear that *mysterium* is a much deeper feeling than *tremendum*, or at least the Awefulness of *tremendum*. To further the distinction between *mysterium* and *tremendum*, Otto introduces the word “stupor” in juxtaposition to tremor. “Stupor is plainly a different thing from tremor; it signifies blank wonder, an astonishment that strikes us dumb, amazement absolute.”⁶⁰ Where tremor was analogous to fear, stupor is simply a dumbfounded feeling.

The idea of feeling dumbfounded begs the question, what are we dumbfounded about? What aspect of the *numen* leaves us with a blank wonder? This is where the “Wholly Other” element of *mysterium* is explained: “that which is ‘mysterious’ is ... the ‘wholly other’, that which is quite beyond the sphere of the usual, the intelligible, and the familiar.”⁶¹ We already know that the *numen* exists outside of ourselves. This outside existence leads to a feeling that is alien or Wholly Other. This element of the *numen* is outside the sphere of our own imagination.

The truly “mysterious” object is beyond our apprehension and comprehension, not only because our knowledge has certain irremovable limits, but because in it we come upon something inherently “wholly other,” whose kind and character are incomprehensible with our own, and before which we therefore recoil in a wonder that strikes a chill and numb.⁶²

Our knowledge and experience are limited. We can only comprehend knowledge and experience in relation to our form and intellect. Because the *numen* exists outside of both of these things, there is an element that is Wholly Other.

The example Otto uses to contextualize this is a step further than a ghost story; it’s an actual ghost. This example helps us clarify the difference between tremor and stupor. If someone is telling a ghost story, there is only so much emotion one can evoke. Feeling like you are

⁵⁹ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 25.

⁶⁰ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 26.

⁶¹ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 26.

⁶² Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 28.

encountering a ghost gives rise to a much different emotion than a story about a ghost. *Mysterium* makes sense as a more powerful feeling than tremor in this comparison.

When Otto says that the Wholly Other raises a wonder that strikes a “chill and numb,” he is pointing at the ghost-likeness. More elaborately:

The ghost’s real attraction rather consists in this, that of itself and in an uncommon degree it entices the imagination, awakening strong interest and curiosity; it is the weird thing itself that allures the fancy. But it does this, not because it is “something long and white” (as someone once defined a ghost), nor yet through any of the positive and conceptual attributes which fancies about ghosts have invented, but because it is a thing that “doesn’t really exist at all,” the “wholly other,” something which has no place in our scheme of reality but belongs to an absolutely different one, and which at the same time arouses an irrepressible interest in the mind.⁶³

Ghosts evoke strong reactions. When we think we see a ghost, our imaginations soar. Something outside of reality momentarily becomes real. The emotion and imagination that arise are out of the curiosities about whether what we have just seen was real. As Otto says, the ghost itself does exist, just not in our reality. The experience of “seeing” a ghost raises so many questions and sets our imaginations ablaze. Our minds struggle between reality and fantasy. The ghost becomes intriguing and leaves us wondering.

In this analogy, the ghost is the Wholly Other. All at once the thing that doesn’t seemingly exist appears to exist. The *numen* we experience outside of ourselves is so alien that we react as if we had seen a ghost. Just the same as the ghost, the *numen* exists, but it exists in a different reality.

It cannot be ignored that, like ghost stories, ghosts arouse fear. Otto addresses this with the element of fascination. Before expanding upon the element of fascination, we should gain an understanding of where this element fits into the *numinous* experience. By *numinous* experience,

⁶³ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 28-29.

I am taking Otto to mean our encounter with the *numen*, so just *mysterium tremendum*. He is not speaking to the reaction of the experience, creature consciousness, but solely the experience.

Otto dedicates an entire chapter to the element of fascination. At the start of the chapter, he situates the element:

The qualitative content of the numinous experience, to which “the mysterious” stands as form, is in one of its aspects the element of daunting “awefulness” and “majesty,” which has already been dealt with in detail; but it is clear that it has at the same time another aspect, in which it shows itself as something uniquely attractive and fascinating.⁶⁴

The form of the numinous experience lies in the *mysterium*. The numinous is Wholly Other. The content and quality of that form is brought to life by two things, the *tremendum*'s elements of Awefulness and Overpoweringness and the element of fascination. Now we know that the element of fascination couples with *tremendum* to make up the quality of the numinous experience.

In order to come to an understanding of the element of fascination Otto talks about this pairing that makes up the numinous experience's content:

These two qualities, the daunting and the fascinating, now combine in a strange harmony of contrasts, and the resultant dual character of the numinous consciousness, to which the entire religious development bears witness, at any rate from the level of “daemonic dread” onwards, is at once the strangest and most noteworthy phenomenon in the whole history of religion.⁶⁵

The elements from *tremendum* make up the daunting Otto speaks of. In talking about the daunting and the fascinating together, Otto is recognizing their differences. On the one hand, daunting is made up of feelings of Awefulness and Overpoweringness. The Aweful-Majesty evokes unexpected, overwhelming feelings. On the other hand, the fascination draws upon our curiosity. In one sense we cannot comprehend what it is we have experienced and on the other

⁶⁴ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 31.

⁶⁵ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 31.

we are totally intrigued by the feeling. This seems less like one/other and more like a both/and. Together, Otto names this “dual character of the numinous” a “form of ‘daemoniac dread. It seems as though it is this specific aspect of *mysterium tremendum* that allows Otto to claim it as the “the deepest and most fundamental element in all strong and sincerely felt religious emotion.”⁶⁶

“Daemoniac dread” is the combining of the daunting and the fascinating, but what is it really? Here, the fear that was set aside in regard to the ghostliness of Wholly Other arises.

The daemoniac-divine object may appear to the mind as an object of horror and dread, but at the same time it is no less something that allures with a potent charm, and the creature, who trembles before it, utterly cowed and cast down, has always at the same time the impulse to turn to it, nay even to make it somehow his own. The “mystery” is for him not merely something to be wondered at but something that entrances him.⁶⁷

The fear of ghosts, or, in this case, the horror and dread of the daemoniac-divine/*numen*, appear in the mind. We have already discussed at length earlier that the Awefulness of *tremendum* is only analogous to fear. So fear is to ghosts as Awefulness is to the *numen*. However, we are not just afraid of ghosts or the numinous. We, the creatures who tremble before the *numen*, simultaneously turn towards the *numen*. The very thing that evokes a “fear” is the thing is the same thing that “entrances” us. Therefore, the “daemoniac dread” exists as a seemingly contradictory feeling. However, what I think Otto is trying to get at is that we wouldn’t be fascinated if we weren’t also daunted. The strong feelings we experience also ignite a fascination.

Otto calls the element of fascination “the Dionysiac-element in the *numen*.”⁶⁸ There is more to fascination than the word implies. In referring to the Greek goddess Dionysus, Otto is

⁶⁶ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 14.

⁶⁷ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 31.

⁶⁸ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 31.

pointing to an aspect of pleasure. There is something about the numinous that leaves us wanting more. Can we pinpoint what it is about the experience that leaves us both satisfied and dissatisfied at the same time?

Part of the reason the numinous experience is both satisfying and dissatisfying is that the feelings that arise can only occur through experience: “it can only be firmly grasped, thoroughly understood, and profoundly appreciated, purely in, with, and from the feeling itself.”⁶⁹ After encountering the *numen*, we feel the greatest emotion known to religion. But it’s not only feelings that we gain, it’s an understanding of the *numen* that is clear within the experience. The feelings and understanding of the *numen* are ephemeral. This is what makes experiencing the *numen* both satisfying and dissatisfying. In one second it is incredibly stimulating and in the next, it’s gone. Like any type of pleasure, I’m sure there is a rising and falling of feeling and understanding. The problem is that the only way to access the emotion and understanding in its purest and strongest form is by experiencing it, *mysterium tremendum*, again. This points to the subjectiveness and the self of the holy that will be addressed later on.

One last thing Otto points out about fascination is that it becomes an initiator of an endless cycle. “Possession of and by the *numen* becomes an end in itself; it begins to be sought for its own sake.”⁷⁰ Once we experience the *numen*, the experience becomes desired again and again. The experience is the end that is continually sought. But what begins the cycle? What Otto doesn’t talk about is how it all begins. Here I embellish my argument that *mysterium tremendum* is an awakening.

We can only begin to desire the *numen* if we have had the numinous experience, because the numinous experience awakens our *a priori* knowledge of the holy. We know that the *a priori*

⁶⁹ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 34.

⁷⁰ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 33.

knowledge of the holy must be awoken from Otto's statement, "as everything that comes 'of the spirit' must be awakened."⁷¹

One could argue that an *a priori* knowledge is innate and cannot require an awakening because it is just there. But just because something is innate does not mean we know what exactly it is. Think of it as if we were all inherently colorblind with the *a priori* knowledge of all color.⁷² If we were colorblind, what would color be? Being colorblind doesn't limit us from seeing color altogether, but limits the range. Being unaware of our limited definition of color leads us to lack the pure experience and understanding of color. This is the same with the *a priori* knowledge of the holy. We have the ability to perceive numinous feelings, but it doesn't necessarily mean we know the holy. The *mysterium tremendum* in the color analogy would be an experience of briefly experiencing all color. Until we see color, we will not ever know what color truly is. Until we experience *mysterium tremendum*, we cannot truly know what the holy is.

Being awoken to the full experience of the holy also means that creature consciousness is not accessible until after we have experienced *mysterium tremendum*. We cannot truly know what we are missing until we have experienced the fullness of what exists. Just as we do not truly know what color is until we have seen it, the opposite is also true. We do not fully understand our colorblindness until we have seen color. So, we cannot fully comprehend our nothingness until we have experienced the *numen's* awful majesty. This point also clarifies what is meant by nothingness. We aren't literally nothing. We just exist as something so much less than the holy. As colorblind people, we don't see in black and white, we just don't experience color in its fullness.

⁷¹ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 7.

⁷² In using this analogy, I am assuming everyone is inherently able to see.

Just as it has been shown that creature consciousness precedes *mysterium tremendum*, I want to now speak to the rational aspect of the holy preceding *mysterium tremendum*. Otto says the rational is predicated upon the non-rational. “For so far are these ‘rational’ attributes from exhausting the idea of deity, that they in fact imply a non-rational supra-natural subject of which they are predicates.”⁷³ Otto says the rational succeeds the non-rational, but classifies them both as *a priori*. If the rational succeeds the non-rational, can the rational be *a priori*? If creature consciousness is a reaction to *mysterium tremendum*, can it even be considered *a priori*? If we awaken to the feeling of the *numen*, what is it that is *a priori*?

In Otto’s line of thinking, *a priori* incorporates reaction. Otto declares that creature consciousness and the rational follow *mysterium tremendum*. To clarify, *mysterium tremendum* is simply all the feelings that arise in the presence of the *numen*. Creature consciousness, the awareness of our nothingness, and the rational, the knowledge of the deity’s attributes, follow. This means that not only is the feeling of the *numen* instinctual, but the reactions to those feelings are also imbedded within us. We know this to be true because Otto’s holy is classified as *a priori*. That applies the rational and non-rational equally.

In arguing *mysterium tremendum* as an awakening, I am simultaneously challenging Otto’s definition of *a priori*. If *a priori* is an inherent knowledge, how can a reaction be considered *a priori*? Something that is inherent cannot also be reactive. It would mean that what is *a priori* is simultaneously *a posteriori*, especially because we are strictly speaking about knowledge. The knowledge gained from *mysterium tremendum* enables the knowledge of creature consciousness.

⁷³ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 2.

Setting aside the problems that may arise from a dichotomy, we can see that Otto's idea of *a priori* contradicts his idea of subjectivity. Otto's idea of subjectivity is not spoken to as a big idea by Otto, but is an important idea within his work. Otto's idea of subjectivity is that we all come to know the *numen* in the ways of our own mind: "He must be guided and led on by consideration and discussion of the matter through the ways of his own mind."⁷⁴ What is subjective are the ways we come to know the *numen*.⁷⁵ We must all come to find the *numen* in individual ways. Coming to find the *numen* in individual ways assumes we are individuals.

Although we are individuals and come to find the *numen* subjectively, the *numen* itself is objective. We all end up at the same thing, the *numen*. The ways in which we get there are all completely different. This idea will be elaborated upon in Chapter 2, but I'm bringing it up now to say that this idea contradicts his definition of *a priori*. Otto's idea of *a priori* includes objective reaction to the *numen*. If we come to find the *numen* and ultimately the holy subjectively, it means that we all have a different relationship to the holy. The holy in and of itself exists as one thing, but we each relate to that one thing in our own way. This is true of human relations. We are one person, but have many different relationships with many different people. I see Otto assuming we all have the same relationship with the holy by incorporating reactive knowledge in his idea of *a priori*.

Assuming we are all going to react and come to the same conclusions about the holy after encountering *mysterium tremendum* is assuming that we all have the same relationship with the holy. Otto knows that this isn't true. In fact, his idea of the holy is fundamentally rooted in his idea of subjectiveness. It seems crucial to distinguish between the holy and our relationship to

⁷⁴ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 7.

⁷⁵ The ways in which we come to the *numen* do not have to be "religious." One example Otto eventually gives is music. This will be elaborated upon in Chapter 3.

the holy. The holy is objective. It is an objective thing we come to understand subjectively. This subjective way of understanding does not allow for the existence of a model relationship with the holy. Just because the holy is objective does not mean its relationships are also objective.

I have argued that Otto's definition of *a priori*, incorporating reactive knowledge, contradicts his own idea of subjectiveness. If I have been successful, it means that the argument contingent upon it can be made: that *mysterium tremendum* is the awakening of *a priori* knowledge and that creature consciousness and the rational aspect of the holy are not *a priori*.

Chapter 2- The Passive Soul: Relocating Individuality

We have examined the *a priori* view of the holy and the rational and non-rational aspects, but there are still a few facets of Otto's approach to theorizing religion that have yet to be elaborated. Many of the ideas set aside for further discussion in chapter 1 involve Otto's idea of self and will be explored here. The goal of this chapter is to establish and problematize Otto's dichotomy of the self, spirit and soul. I will argue against the necessity of the soul through an inconsistency between Otto's definition of individuality and Otto's definition of soul. This chapter also aims to connect spirit and soul with rational and non-rational.

From what we have already discussed, we know that Otto's self is a creature and has a mind. In chapter 1, I clarified that Otto isn't talking about the senses when he uses the word feelings: "these feelings can only arise in the mind as accompanying emotions when the category of 'the numinous' is called into play."⁷⁶ The feelings, such as "creature consciousness" and *mysterium tremendum*, which inform us of the *numinous's* presence, arise in the mind. By "us," I mean creatures. In Otto's approach to theorizing religion, we are creatures. This was established in his definition of "creature consciousness": "It is the emotion of a creature, submerged and overwhelmed by its own nothingness in contrast to that which is supreme above all creatures."⁷⁷ Feelings such as "creature consciousness" that arise in the mind arise in the mind of creatures.

All of this is very vague. The creature could exist as the mind. The creature could exist as something else and have a mind. We are urged away from thinking about the self as a body, although we have not really been given an alternative. From what I have explained thus far, the

⁷⁶ Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, trans. John W. Harvey (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 11.

⁷⁷ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 10.

self is a creature that is able to perceive feelings through a mind. What that mind is to the creature has yet to be disclosed, not to mention what the creature consists of.

In appendix IV of *The Idea of the Holy*, Otto gives a brief explanation of the self: “Now what is true of our apprehension of the divine is true also of its counterpart in the creature – soul and spirit.”⁷⁸ By “apprehension of the divine,” Otto means the rational and non-rational aspects of the holy. He has just gotten done summarizing all we have already discussed, that the rational and non-rational exist together as the holy. He is pushing this further to explain that we, the creatures, are microcosms of the holy. More specifically, we are interested in regarding the microcosm as what the rational and non-rational are within the creature. The rational and non-rational features of the holy become spirit and soul for the creature. The self as a microcosm of the holy will be elaborated on toward the conclusion of this chapter and further in chapter 3.

In order to make sense of what the mind is in relation to the self, we must address what spirit and soul are. Otto does not elaborate upon what he means by spirit and soul in appendix IV. In the whole of *The Idea of the Holy*, the only other time Otto mentions spirit and soul in this context is in appendix V. Spirit is mentioned in the last page before the appendix, however. It is capitalized and I take it to refer to the Holy Spirit. Outside of the creature context, Otto reveals a different meaning of spirit and soul when he speaks to the ghost-like creatures we refer to when trying to explain phenomena. Now, I look to *Naturalism and Religion* for an explanation of the intricacies of self. For it is there where Otto has clarified its definition and distinction.

Before elaborating upon soul and spirit, it is important to note that Otto comes to define and expand upon them near the end of *Naturalism and Religion*. Otto spends the majority of the book presenting different theories of naturalism and arguing their failure to incorporate religion.

⁷⁸ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 194.

Soul and spirit come out of the relationship between naturalism and religion Otto established many pages earlier. Because of this, the established relationship between naturalism and religion will be used to help guide our understanding of soul and spirit, and, therefore, also mind and body.

Otto defines soul and spirit in chapter XI, “Freedom of Spirit.” Soul is explained first within the section “Individuality.”

It is true that the ‘soul’ does not spring up ready-made in the developing body, lying dormant in it, and only requiring to waken up gradually. It really becomes. But the becoming is a self-realisation. It is not true that it is put together and built up bit by bit by experience, so that a different being might develop if the experiences were different...A man may turn out very different according to circumstances, education, influences. But he would nevertheless recognise ‘himself’ under any circumstances. He will never become anything of which he had not the possibility within him from the very beginning, any more than the rose will become a violet if it is nurtured with a different kind of manure.⁷⁹

The soul is something that is established through our experiences. We can never become something other than our soul. The analogy of the rose is very helpful. No matter how you care for a rose, it will never turn into a different flower. A rose may get different amounts of sunlight and water, but at no point will it fail to be a rose. The rose’s experience does not alter the fact that it is a rose. Even if it doesn’t fully bloom, it is still a rose.

If we alter the rose analogy, we can use it to make sense of how Otto views the body. In creating a second slightly different analogy than Otto’s, I am not only introducing Otto’s view of the body, but also trying to steer us away from thinking of the soul in a tangible way. Otto uses the analogy to help us think about what the soul is, but I feel that it is important to distinguish the difference between body and soul. Otto’s view on the body will be expanded upon later.

⁷⁹ Rudolf Otto, *Naturalism and Religion*, trans. J. Arthur Thomson and Margaret R. Thomson, ed. Rev. W.D. Morrison, LL.D. (Williams & Norgate, 1907), 144, Kindle edition.

Otto has many problems with the body, one of which involves individuality. This is exposed in chapter V, “Religion and Theory of Descent,” of *Naturalism and Religion* when Otto is addressing the issue with descent.

The most oppressive corollary of the doctrine of descent is undoubtedly that through it the human race seems to become lost in the infra-human, from which it cannot be separated by any hard and fast boundaries, or absolute lines of demarcation.⁸⁰

Otto’s argument against bodies is the unity of the human race. Because we are all human, we are not individuals. We are lesser than human because we are a collective group. In Otto’s rose analogy, all of our souls are different flowers. The essence of the soul is not its embodiment; it is our predetermined individuality.

For the sake of explaining Otto’s view of the body, consider a rosebush instead of a single rose. Also, instead of the roses being soul, think of them now as bodies. If we are seeing the roses as bodies, their individuality escapes the tangible essence of the rose. If our bodies are roses, our souls are not our rose nature, but an internal predetermined individuality.

If we go back to the first chapter’s discussion about subjectivity, this idea of individuality is wound up in that idea. Otto’s idea of subjectivity in relation to the holy is that we, individual creatures, awaken to the holy “in the ways of his [our] own mind.”⁸¹ Individuality is important to Otto’s self in relation to the holy because it is a creature’s individuality that enables it to establish a relationship with the holy. We are only able to be subjective, have ways of our own mind, because we are all different. Otto’s idea of the holy doesn’t make sense unless the creature is an individual.

If Otto does not see the body within the scope of individuality, what is a creature’s essence? Is it the mind? Isn’t the mind part of the body? In the quote earlier defining soul, Otto

⁸⁰ Otto, *Naturalism and Religion*, 59-60.

⁸¹ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 7.

said that a soul “really becomes.” “Become” is a key verb for Otto. It is contrasted with being. Being and becoming are distinguished in the second chapter of *Naturalism and Religion* entitled “Naturalism.”

Being and Becoming include two great realms: that of “Nature” and that of “Mind,” i.e. consciousness and the processes of consciousness. And two apparently fundamentally different branches of knowledge relate to these: the natural sciences, and the mental sciences.⁸²

Being is connected to nature and consciousness and becoming connected to the mind and the process of consciousness. In the original quote given to define soul, Otto says, “the ‘soul’ does not spring up ready-made in the developing body,”⁸³ so we know that the body is not the soul’s essence because of its lack of individuality.

In order to come to an understanding about what Otto’s view of the essence of the self is in relation to being and becoming and the mind, we must understand how Otto defines naturalism and religion. Naturalism is most simply defined by Otto when he describes its main goals: “Naturalism is proud of the fact that it desires nothing more than to search after truth.”⁸⁴ From this we can comprehend that naturalism aims to explain things and classify them as truths. But what are the “things” naturalism is trying to explain and classify as truth? “The fundamental convictions of naturalism, its general tendencies, and the points of view which determine its outlook, are primarily related to that order of facts which forms the subject of the natural sciences, to ‘Nature.’”⁸⁵ The “things” naturalism seeks to claim invoke nature and natural science, plants, animals, astrology, etc, just as the name suggests.

In turning to Otto’s definition of religion, we can see its opposition to naturalism: “For this is the most real characteristic of religion; it seeks depth in things, reaches out towards what

⁸² Otto, *Naturalism and Religion*, 15.

⁸³ Otto, *Naturalism and Religion*, 144.

⁸⁴ Otto, *Naturalism and Religion*, 140.

⁸⁵ Otto, *Naturalism and Religion*, 17.

is concealed, uncomprehended, and mysterious. It is more than humility; it is piety. And piety is experience of mystery.”⁸⁶ Religion seeks depth and relishes mystery. Otto goes as far as saying that religion is piety and then defines piety as the “experience of mystery.” Religion becomes defined, indirectly, as the experience of mystery. There is a question that arises in religions opposing definition to naturalism: what is truth in the context of mystery? I am noting naturalism and religion’s opposing definition, but will address it in chapter 3.

Since we understand what Otto means by naturalism and religion, we can use his distinction between religious creatures and natural animals to localize the mind and introduce the spirit.

We get the distinction between human and animal in the section in chapter XI of *Naturalism and Religion* entitled “Mind and Spirit. The Human and the Animal Soul.”

What is the relation between the human and the animal mind? This has always been a vital question in the conflict between naturalism and the religious outlook. And as in the whole problem of the psychical so here the interest on both sides has been mainly concentrated on the question of “mortality” or “immortality.” Man is immortal because he has a soul. Animals “have no souls.” “Animals also have souls, differing only in degree but not in substantial nature from the soul of man: as they are mortal, man must be so too.” “Animals have minds: the merely psychical passes away with the body. But man has spirit in addition. It is imperishable.” These and many other assertions were made on one side or the other. And both sides made precisely the same mistake: they made the belief in the immortality of our true nature dependent upon a proof that the soul has a physical “substantial nature,” which is to be regarded as an indestructible substance, a kind of spiritual atom. And on the other hand they overlooked the gist of the whole matter, the true starting-point, which cannot be overlooked if the religious outlook is not to be brought into discredit.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Otto, *Naturalism and Religion*, 19.

⁸⁷ Otto, *Naturalism and Religion*, 145.

Otto quotes a “conversation” between naturalism and religion about the difference between animals and humans.⁸⁸ The conversation points to the difficulty in distinguishing the difference between the two. What religion is arguing for the human, naturalism is also arguing about the animal. The argument is seemingly impossible, however Otto approaches it through a flaw both contain. Their flaw: “they made the belief in the immortality of our true nature dependent upon a proof that the soul has a physical ‘substantial nature,’ which is to be regarded as an indestructible substance.”⁸⁹ Their flaw lies within the belief that the soul has a physical essence.

This flaw advances Otto’s argument about the body we discussed earlier regarding descent. We previously arrived at how humans can’t be embodied because the human race leaves no room for individuality. Here, not only are bodies universal within the human race, animals also share embodiment, even if in a different form. For Otto, embodiment is part of nature.

After establishing Otto views bodies as part of nature, the question of essence and localization emerge. What are creatures if not embodied? Although he doesn’t address the localization, Otto proposes an alternative essence.

It is undoubtedly a fundamental postulate, and one which the religious outlook cannot give up, that the human spirit is more than all creatures, and is in quite a different order from stars, plants, and animals. But absolutely the first necessity from the point of view of the religious outlook is to establish the incomparable value of the human spirit; the question of its “substantial nature” is in itself a matter of entire indifference. The religious outlook observes that man can will good and can pray, and no other creature can do this. And it sees that this makes the difference between two worlds. Whether the bodily and mental physics in both these worlds is the same or different, is to it a matter rather of curiosity than of importance.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ The terms “spirit” and “soul” are thrown around within that conversation, but we mustn’t look too far into their meaning there because Otto deconstructs the conversation to say that both sides have been assuming both animals and humans are embodied creatures.

⁸⁹ Otto, *Naturalism and Religion*, 145.

⁹⁰ Otto, *Naturalism and Religion*, 145.

He claims that we are spirit.⁹¹ Because humans/creatures have a spirit, they are above all other embodied creatures. It is not our body, but our spirit that make us religious beings. “It is undoubtedly a fundamental postulate, and one which the religious outlook cannot give up, that the human spirit is more than all creatures, and is in quite a different order from stars, plants, and animals.”⁹² What sets humans apart as religious is their spirit.

Otto also establishes that the spirit is an unquestionable element of religion: “But absolutely the first necessity from the point of view of the religious outlook is to establish the incomparable value of the human spirit”⁹³ What makes everything else not religious and therefore part of nature, is their lack of a spirit. Without a spirit, everything else is incomparable.

What exactly does that make the human spirit? “The religious outlook observes that man can will good and can pray, and no other creature can do this.”⁹⁴ What makes humans religious, obtainers of spirit is an ability no other embodied being has. Humans can “pray and will good.” More than that, Otto later goes on to distinguish the difference between training and educating. He says, “I can train a young ape or an elephant, can teach it to open wine-bottles and perform tricks. But I can educate the child of the savage.”⁹⁵ Animals can be taught how to perform repeated actions. Humans, on the other hand, can be taught, educated and apply what they have learned elsewhere. Humans are able to perform tasks from their individual knowledge. The spirit becomes defined as ability.

⁹¹ In the quote regarding human and animal distinction, Otto uses the term “creature,” however; we must remember that this quote is from *Naturalism and Religion*. The meaning of creature within the context “that the human spirit is more than all creatures,” is not the same creature from Otto’s *Idea of the Holy*. What creature means here is all other embodied beings, animals, plants and even stars. The human spirit here is the same as the creature’s spirit in regards to the idea of the holy. Otto’s human in *Naturalism and Religion* is his creature in *The Idea of the Holy*.

⁹² Otto, *Naturalism and Religion*, 145.

⁹³ Otto, *Naturalism and Religion*, 145.

⁹⁴ Otto, *Naturalism and Religion*, 145.

⁹⁵ Otto, *Naturalism and Religion*, 146.

The only thing enabling our ability seems to be the divine. “Whether the bodily and mental physics in both these worlds is the same or different, is to it a matter rather of curiosity than of importance”⁹⁶ The two worlds are the animal and the human. Otto is saying here that it doesn’t matter what the body or mind is, all that matters is that a spirit exists. Otto is failing to localize the spirit here, however, we will come to understand how he localizes the spirit in chapter 3.

In coming to understand what Otto means when he says nature through body and spirit, we can apply it to the discussion of being and becoming, which is ultimately the discussion of the soul. Looking back, being and becoming were connected with nature and mind. Since we now know that Otto views the body as part of nature we can view being and becoming as mind and body.

Knowing this, we can make sense of the soul’s definition: “It [the soul] really becomes.”⁹⁷ Looking back at the quote about being and becoming, we can locate the soul.

Being and Becoming include two great realms: that of ‘Nature’ and that of ‘Mind,’ i.e. consciousness and the processes of consciousness. And two apparently fundamentally different branches of knowledge relate to these: the natural sciences, and the mental sciences.⁹⁸

If the soul becomes, it is within the realm of the mind, which also connects it with the process of consciousness and mental sciences. It is clear that the soul is associated with the mind. Whether the soul is within or of the mind makes no difference. If the soul is associated with the mind, we can say that it is localized there because we know we will find the soul where we find the mind.

We already clarified that the soul is a predetermined individuality and that spirit is a sort of ability. Here, Otto distinguishes spirit and soul:

⁹⁶ Otto, *Naturalism and Religion*, 145.

⁹⁷ Otto, *Naturalism and Religion*, 144.

⁹⁸ Otto, *Naturalism and Religion*, 15.

And in the development of the mental content the “soul” itself is merely the stage upon which all that is acquired through the senses crowds, and jostles, and unites to form images, perceptions, and precepts. But it is itself purely passive, and it becomes what happens to it. Therefore it is not really spirit at all, for spirit implies spontaneity, activity, and autonomy.⁹⁹

This established separation brings me back to how the self is a microcosm of the holy in that soul and spirit translate to rational and non-rational. In the quote above, Otto says the soul is passive, “it [the soul] is itself purely passive.” The soul’s passivity leads it to “become what happens to it.” We know that the soul is connected to the mind, so Otto is also saying the mind is passive. This passivity of soul and mind mean they are dependent upon action. How do mind and soul experience anything if they are passive? They cannot exist alone. Otto answers this in regard to soul in saying the spirit implies activity. However, Otto fails to address what this means in relation to the mind because he has not clearly localized the spirit.

Just as I redefined the *a priori* last chapter to exclude the rational, here I want to redefine the self to exclude soul. Specifically, I want to argue that the soul is not what makes creatures individuals. Otto defined the soul as both individual and as passive. If the soul is passive, always receiving action, how can it be consistent as an individual? Something that depends on another thing in order to exist cannot be an individual. The soul is dependent upon the independent spirit. It passively awaits the ability of the spirit.

Since I have already argued that individuality is crucial to Otto’s idea of subjectivity, I’m not arguing that the self is not an individual. What I am arguing is that the spirit is what makes the self an individual. Something that is dependent relies on the individuality of the thing it is dependent upon in order to become. Think of it in relation to clothes trends. Say the latest trend

⁹⁹ Otto, *Naturalism and Religion*, 127.

is to wear Doc Martens shoes.¹⁰⁰ Buying Doc Martens because they are trendy is very different from buying Doc Martens because you really love how they look and wear. Buying Doc Martens because they are trendy is an action dependent upon someone else's opinion and/or action. I am arguing that we fail to be individuals when we act in this manner. We literally buy into a collective image when we buy name-brand clothes.

Conversely, if we buy Doc Martens because we love how they look, feel they are really comfortable, and fit into our overall image, we are acting individually. This becomes an act of self-investment. I'm not saying everyone who wears Doc Martens or name-brand clothing fails to be an individual. The name brands had to have started from an individual or many individuals' love of the popular item. The point is the question, what drives us to act? That passive waiting for something outside of ourselves makes us dependent and therefore less of an individual. That taking action from a place of relating to and really enjoying something is direct and individual.

Through this analogy I am trying to say that the soul is wearing Doc Martens because the spirit started a trend. Something that is independent does not need anything to make a decision. The spirit does not need the soul. The spirit is the trendsetter, the one who is wearing Doc Martens because they fit into who/what the spirit is. The spirit consistently acts individually, while the soul waits in order to buy into exactly what the spirit has deemed worth buying into.

Where does religion play into this analogy? In order to answer this, I want to point back to and elaborate on the discussion about individuality's connection to subjectivity. We said earlier that creatures must be individuals in order to move subjectively. We know this because the creature's ability to be subjective enables it to come to the *numen*. Arguing the spirit as individual further connects individuality and subjectivity. Otto said, "The first necessity from the

¹⁰⁰ If you are unfamiliar with Doc Martens, know it is a name-brand shoe. The example goes for anything name brand that is trendy, i.e. Ugg, The North Face, Apple, Ray Bans, Nike etc.

point of view of the religious outlook is to establish the incomparable value of the human spirit.”¹⁰¹ Otto is saying that it is a necessity for religion to establish the human spirit. Not only was this not claimed about the soul, but also with spirit now inclusive to individuality, it aligns with his view of the significance of subjectivity. If we restrict the creature self to an individual spirit, we are not restricting it at all. We, creatures, are still able to come to the *numen* in subjective ways.

The existence of the soul is yet another flaw of a dichotomy, which I will come to explain as stressing the rational in chapter 3. For now, I will leave my argument alone as simply a deconstruction of why the soul does not belong in the religious realm. chapter 3’s discussion addresses the cause of these rational stresses, which keep emerging.

¹⁰¹ Otto, *Naturalism and Religion*, 145.

Chapter 3 – The Mechanized Body: Establishing Naturalism

We discussed in chapter 2 how soul and spirit connect to rational and non-rational in *The Idea of the Holy* and that in both, there is an unnecessary stress on one side of the dichotomy. Also in both, we saw how the stress was problematic. In this chapter, after showing that Otto localizes the self in the mind, I will argue that Otto's inconsistent use of naturalism raises issue with the localization of the mind. This argument becomes one for the localization of the body.

Since the dichotomy body and mind is the localization of the dichotomy soul and spirit, much of the body and mind dichotomy has already been introduced. Likewise, soul and spirit will be used to inform body and mind. In order to explain Otto's body and mind dichotomy, we must work within his parameters. For the time being, when I refer to the self, although I treated it in chapter 2, I am speaking to Otto's untreated self.

It was established in chapter 2 that the soul, defined by Otto as predetermined individuality, is localized in the mind. We established this through its connection to becoming. Although ambiguous, spirit was addressed in Otto's distinction between humans and animals. The spirit's localization is inconclusive because Otto defines it outside of localization. I cannot claim Otto is localizing the self in the body or mind from what we have already discussed because the two aspects of the self don't align. Otto's localized self will be clearer after we address the inconclusive localization of the spirit.

The block quote defining spirit, which also distinguished animals and humans, concerns Otto's ambiguous location of the spirit.

The religious outlook observes that man can will good and can pray, and no other creature can do this. And it sees that this makes the difference between two worlds. Whether the bodily and mental physics in both these worlds is the same or different, is to it a matter rather of curiosity than of importance.¹⁰²

¹⁰² Otto, *Naturalism and Religion*, 145.

Again, Otto is saying here that it doesn't matter what the body or mind is, all that matters is that a spirit exists. As we discussed, Otto views the spirit as ability. If the spirit is ability, what is it that is able? Is the spirit both ability and the thing that is able? If the spirit is separate from the mind, does the self exist as two separate things? If this were the case we would fail to be a self. We would consist of selves.

Ultimately, we are speaking to the *Idea of the Holy*. We are trying to figure out how the self, within the idea of holy, is localized through *Naturalism and Religion*. Otto wrote *Naturalism and Religion* before *The Idea of the Holy*. This means that the self in the *Idea of the Holy*, although scarcely addressed, is more developed. For all of these reasons, I turn to *The Idea of the Holy* to answer the ambiguity of spirit's localization.

In *The Idea of the Holy* Otto consistently refers to the mind as it relates to self. In fact, it is one of the only, if not the only, other words Otto uses besides creature to refer to the self. The consistent language of the mind in *The Idea of the Holy* coupled with Otto's indistinct location of spirit leads us to assume Otto localizes the self, spirit and soul, in the mind. Above all, we know that Otto's spirit is not of the body and nothing outside of the mind has been proposed, so the mind is a safe assumption. Even if we were to leave Otto's self ambiguously localized, it would not distract from my argument.

If Otto localizes the self in the mind, or if it remains ambiguous, what does he think about the body? Why doesn't he include the body? Chapter 2 addressed one reason Otto has with the body and that is individuality. The collective human race, the idea that we all have the same body, does not bode well with Otto's idea of individuality. This is not the only problem Otto has with bodies. The other problem Otto has with bodies relates to naturalism. In order to understand it, we must understand how Otto relates naturalism and religion.

It was established that Otto defines naturalism as the explaining of nature and religion as the experience of mystery; and that these definitions oppose each other. Before we concentrate on how Otto establishes naturalism and religion's relationship, his specific issues with naturalism must be addressed.

For Otto, naturalism does not incorporate religion because it reduces nature. "Religion comes into contact with naturalism and demands to be reconciled with it, not merely at its periphery, but at its very core, namely, with its characteristic ideal of a mathematical-mechanical interpretation of the whole world."¹⁰³ The problem with naturalism is that it leaves no room for questions, mystery, and phenomenon. It leaves no room for religion. Everything about the world, from the point of view of naturalism, is mechanized. Everything that is unknown in religion has an explanation in naturalism. A question that then arises is: what is truth in the context of mystery? The only thing that can be true in religion is the mystery.

Outside of naturalism's exclusion of mystery, Otto argues that naturalism's reduction of nature makes it independent. This is an issue because "The 'dependence' of all things is the second requirement of religion."¹⁰⁴ Otto is referring to Schleiermacher's feeling of dependence when he says "dependence." As we discussed last chapter, it is the feeling of dependence upon God.¹⁰⁵ Religion is contingent upon a divine other. Naturalism's independence leads Otto to question it. If naturalism had answers, it should be able to address his questions. Otto questions and questions naturalism until he reaches the eschatological question: "How, from

¹⁰³ Otto, *Naturalism and Religion*, 17.

¹⁰⁴ Otto, *Naturalism and Religion*, 25.

¹⁰⁵ Schleiermacher's feeling of dependence translates to Otto's creature consciousness: the creature feeling nothing in the presence of the numen. Although Otto's critique of naturalism does not deal with the issues of Schleiermacher's feeling of dependence, the differences do not affect the argument. The argument is that religion depends on the divine. Both the feeling of dependence and creature consciousness depend on the divine, just in different respects.

all this homogeneity and unity of the ultimate particles and forces, can we account for the beginnings of the diversity which is so marked a characteristic of this world?"¹⁰⁶ Otto is questioning how nature created itself. Even if naturalism has an answer, Otto poses other questions about the creation of space and time, arguing that religion challenges them as concepts. His point is, that by reducing nature to cause and effect explanations, big questions are getting postponed and, therefore, never truly get addressed.

The reductionist tendencies of naturalism leave no room for religion, so how does Otto incorporate it into religion? In order to incorporate naturalism into religion, Otto has to redefine naturalism. "Even the world, which has been brought under the reign of scientific laws, is a mystery; it has been formulated, but not explained."¹⁰⁷ Otto chooses to view naturalism's truths as laws. The difference between law and truth is a difference between formulating and explaining. Explaining is stating a cause. Formulating is proposing an idea. It is also clear if we say explaining is to solution as formulating is to strategy. Strategy and formula leave room for religion because they do not reduce nature to cause and effects. We have already established that explaining, which is reducing, does not coincide with religion.

In turning naturalism's truth into laws, Otto is simultaneously making room for mystery and disposing of reductionism. Otto is able to make the claim, "If religion is true, nature must be of God, and it must bear tokens which allow us to interpret it as of God."¹⁰⁸ The relationship of naturalism and religion becomes one of God.

If we turn back to Otto's view of the body, we can see his problem with it, in relation to naturalism, in a counter argument.

¹⁰⁶ Otto, *Naturalism and Religion*, 23.

¹⁰⁷ Otto, *Naturalism and Religion*, 17.

¹⁰⁸ Otto, *Naturalism and Religion*, 17.

Even if we admit that it [religious experience] can only become actual and develop as an accompaniment of processes within bodies, and only within those bodies we call “living,” and that wherever bodies exist psychical phenomena occur; even if we were able, as we never shall be able, to produce living beings artificially in a retort, and even if psychical phenomena occurred in these also, we should still have made no progress towards explaining what the psychical really is.¹⁰⁹

Otto poses the idea of replicating bodies. If something can be replicated, we know exactly how it came about and know exactly what we need to recreate it. I am envisioning an assembly like workers putting together robots. Concisely, something that can be replicated is something that can be explained. Lest we forget, in chapter 2, we established that bodies are included in the realm of the natural. So, something that can be explained is something that is naturalistic. Otto’s second opposition to the body is a naturalistic opposition. That it is outside of mystery.

Otto’s arguments against the body are that the human race deprives us of individuality and that the body is naturalistic. I am going to argue that Otto’s self is really meant to be localized in the body. I will start with the argument against the naturalistic approach.

The problem with Otto stating the body is naturalistic is that he is assuming we know everything about the body. Otto addresses this argument himself in the relationship we described between religion and naturalism, but he is failing to apply it to the localization of the self. Viewing naturalism as laws opposed to truths allows nature to exist as religious. Seeing the body as not completely known would make it within the religious. I see Otto pointing to this but not being able to express it. He gets at this when he claims bodies cannot be replicated just after he claims that they can. The body is being mechanized and naturalism is being pushed back to its previous definition of reduction that Otto has already treated.

Otto’s problem with individuality, that the human race does not allow us to be individuals, relates back to Otto’s idea in chapter 2 that creatures are microcosms of the holy. We

¹⁰⁹ Otto, *Naturalism and Religion*, 130.

have already established that creatures are microcosms because soul and spirit mirror rational and non-rational. The terms microcosm and macrocosm imply both difference and similarity. If, for Otto, creatures are the mind, I mean his non-physical mind, the question arises: what is the difference between the microcosm and the macrocosm? How could we delineate between microcosm and macrocosm if their essence was not established? We must be embodied being in order to distinguish ourselves as other.

If I argue this, the question becomes, how do you distinguish individuality between creatures? Otto has already dealt with this through his idea of subjectivity. Creatures are subjective in the ways they come to find the *numen*, in the “ways of their own mind.” In the treated version, “in the ways of our own bodies.” Because we have changed the self to be body instead of mind, the subjectivity is not on how we perceive feelings emotionally, but bodily. Otto defines this in the *Idea of the Holy* through what he says about music. “Musical feeling is rather (like numinous feeling) something ‘wholly other,’ which, while it affords analogies and here and there will run parallel to the ordinary emotions of life, cannot be made to coincide with them by detailed point-to-point correspondence.”¹¹⁰ Music is more than just a feeling. Music that really speaks to someone evokes an emotion that is Wholly Other.

As we discussed in chapter 1, the Wholly Other is one of the deepest religious emotions one can feel. What helps us understand the subjectiveness of bodies through the Wholly Other feeling evoked by music is its ability to correspond to memories. The specific example I’m thinking of is dementia patients who have trouble connecting with the world. It has been shown that if you find the right music to play, a song that may have correlated with a certain memory or

¹¹⁰ Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, trans. John W. Harvey (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 49.

emotion, their demeanor immediately changes. Bodies that remember feelings from other feelings, vibrations of music, how can we ever come to understand that?

Conclusion

In this project, we have looked at Otto's rational and non-rational, soul and spirit and body and mind dichotomies. The mind proved problematic from Otto's inconsistent use of naturalism, the soul was an issue regarding individuality, and the rational didn't seem to match up with *a priori*. Otto's treated idea of the holy then consists of an *a priori* non-rational, the individual spirit and divine filled body.

If the *numen* is non-rational and manifests as a divine presence, which evokes feeling, and the creature is an embodied spirit, which perceives feeling, what does that make the holy? I guess that makes the holy a relationship between creature and *numen*, but we've already proven the mystery cannot be defined. That's what is so amazing about Otto, that every embodied creature has the ability to experience something divine and we have absolutely no idea what exactly that means.

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