

Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis

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Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism

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I should like to start by raising several standard elements in the discussion of mysticism and mystical experience in order to dispose of them at the outset. This will leave us free to concentrate on our main epistemological concerns. The first such feature is actually not one issue but a set of related issues having to do with the nature and referent of claimed mystical states. The easiest way to introduce these concerns is by referring to the terms 'interpretation' and 'verification' and all that these notions suggest to the philosophically perceptive reader. Let us first deal with the issue of verification. There are major, perhaps insuperable, problems involved in the issue of trying to verify mystical claims, if by verification we mean the strong thesis that independent grounds for the claimed event/experience can be publicly demonstrated. Indeed, it seems to me, though I will not try to justify this position here, that it is not possible to provide 'verification' of this sort. As a corollary of this view it also seems correct to argue that no veridical propositions can be generated on the basis of mystical experience. As a consequence it appears certain that mystical experience is not and logically cannot be the grounds for any final assertions about the nature or truth of any religious or philosophical position nor, more particularly, for any specific dogmatic or theological belief. Whatever validity mystical experience has, it does not translate itself into 'reasons' which can be taken as evidence for a given religious proposition. Thus, in the final analysis, mystical or more generally religious experience is irrelevant in establishing the truth or falsity of religion in general or any specific religion in particular.¹

Despite the strict limitation being placed on the justificatory value of mystical experience, it is not being argued either that mystical experiences do not happen, or that what they claim may not be true, only that there can be no grounds for deciding this question, i.e. of showing that they are true even if they are, in fact, true. Moreover, even this disclaimer requires the further declaration that, though no philosophical argument is capable of proving the veracity of mystical experience, one would be both dogmatic and

imprudent to decide *a priori* that mystical claims are mumbo-jumbo, especially given the wide variety of such claims by men of genius and/or intense religious sensitivity over the centuries as well as across all cultural divisions. Nor does it seem reasonable to reduce these multiple and variegated claims to mere projected 'psychological states' which are solely the product of interior states of consciousness.

The related topic of 'interpretation' also needs brief mention both because the ordinary sense in which this notion is taken in relation to our subject is *not* our direct concern, and also because the work done here seems to me, despite the beginnings of some valuable investigations in this area, to be still preliminary in terms of its methodology as well as its results. When I speak of 'interpretation' here I mean to refer to the standard accounts of the subject which attempt to investigate what the mystic had to say *about* his experience. This interpretative enterprise is, of course, carried on at several different removes and in several different ways. Among these are: (a) the first-person report of the mystic; (b) the mystic's 'interpretation' of his own experience at some later, more reflective, and mediated, stage; (c) the 'interpretation' of third persons within the same tradition (Christians on Christian mysticism); (d) the process of interpretation by third persons in other traditions (Buddhists on Christianity); and so on. In addition, all these forms of interpretation can be highly ramified or not as the case may be.² Though all these stages in the 'interpretation' of mystical experience are of importance, and in the later parts of this paper we shall have occasions to return to certain aspects of them they are, for the most part, only tangential to our essential, still more basic, 'preinterpretive' concern.

The issue of 'interpretation', however, raises another standard feature of the analysis of mystical states which does move us directly to where we want to concentrate our epistemological attentions. Here I have in mind the almost universally accepted schema of the relation which is claimed to exist between one mystic's experience (and his report of the experience) and the experience of other mystics. This schema takes three forms, one less sophisticated, the other two, in differing degrees, often highly sophisticated. The less sophisticated form can be presented as follows:

(1) All mystical experiences are the same; even their descriptions reflect an underlying similarity which transcends cultural or religious diversity.

The second, more sophisticated, form can be presented as arguing:

(II) All mystical experiences are the same but the mystics' *reports about their experiences are culturally bound. Thus they use the available symbols of their cultural-religious milieu to describe their experience.*

The third and most sophisticated form can be presented as arguing:

(III) All mystical experience can be divided into a small class of 'types' which cut across cultural boundaries. Though the language used by mystics to describe their experience is culturally bound, their experience is not.

A word has to be said about each of these. Thesis I is more commonly found in the early literature on the study of mysticism, much of it having been generated by missionary and related activity which sought to find some common denominator among people of widely diverse religious backgrounds. This ecumenical desire coloured much of the early investigation of the subject as well as being responsible for making it a popular subject of study. Again, a second less ecumenical feature, also at least in part tied to the early missionary enterprise, which often prompts this sort of argument is the dogmatic consideration, i.e. all religions, even if appearing different, really teach x – the definition of x being variously supplied on the basis of the particular dogmatic beliefs the given interpreter happens to hold, e.g. the Christian finds the x to be the Christian God.³ Among the results of this paper one will be to show that Thesis I is mistaken. There is no *philosophia perennis*, Huxley⁴ and many others notwithstanding.

Thesis II, though more sophisticated than I, can also be made for the same ecumenical and dogmatic reasons as I, as it also supports such enterprises. The ecumenist or dogmatist is still able to argue on the basis of II that underneath or above all differences there is one common Truth, and this is what he is after in any case. That this sort of essentialist reductionism, i.e. reducing all reports of x to one claimed essence y , is usually not open to falsification, nor to any clear hermeneutical, methodological, or metaphysical procedure is of little account to well-meaning ecumenicists or dyed-in-the-wool dogmatists. If one differs with the essentialist over the meaning of a specific mystical report or mystical reports in general, for example, by pointing to variations between them, one is dismissed as not understanding them, and all disagreement is accounted as the result of such 'misunderstanding'. There is, however, something more to say about Thesis II for it has also come into prominence for at least one good reason, i.e. the more, if still

not completely, dispassionate study of the relevant mystical data. To serious academic students of the subject who owed some allegiance to the academy as well as to a given tradition it became unavoidably obvious that not all mystical experience was *reported* in ways that easily suggest that they are all reports of the same experience. Despite this last virtue Thesis II is also to be rejected as inadequate for dealing with all the relevant evidence.⁵

Thesis III is more sophisticated still, recognizing a disparity both of content and of form in mystical reports. The best recent studies of mysticism belong under this rubric, as, for example, the work of R. C. Zaehner,⁶ W. T. Stace,⁷ and N. Smart.⁸ It is to their credit to have recognized the deep problems involved in trying to classify various mystical experiences as the same. Yet even the positions of Zaehner,⁹ Stace,¹⁰ and Smart¹¹ are unsatisfactory because they try to provide various cross-cultural phenomenological accounts of mystical experience which are phenomenologically as well as philosophically suspect. The positive position argued later in the present paper will materially bear on this topic of cross-cultural phenomenological categorization for it will try to demonstrate that even these comparatively sophisticated accounts have remained too close to Thesis II which will be shown, as noted, to be unacceptable, even if a marked improvement over Thesis I. By way of anticipation and as an interim conclusion, it will suffice here to suggest that, for example, the phenomenological typologies of Stace and Zaehner are too reductive and inflexible, forcing multifarious and extremely variegated forms of mystical experience into improper interpretative categories which lose sight of the fundamentally important differences between the data studied. In this sense it might even be said that this entire paper is a 'plea for the recognition of differences'.

II

Our interest, however, is only incidentally concerned with the adequacy of framing a typology for the study of mystical experience for this, despite its occupying the centre stage of almost all the important research on mysticism from William James's classic *Varieties of Religious Experience*, through the work of Underhill, Inge, Jones, Otto, Zaehner, and Stace, is a second-order inductive procedural concern. It is a second-order concern to the more basic inquiry into why the various mystical experiences are the experiences they are.¹²

To get a clearer conception of what this paper is after when it

speaks of the issue of 'Why mystical experiences are the experiences they are', let me state the single epistemological assumption that has exercised my thinking and which has forced me to undertake the present investigation: *There are NO pure (i.e. unmediated) experiences.* Neither mystical experience nor more ordinary forms of experience give any indication, or any grounds for believing, that they are unmediated. That is to say, *all* experience is processed through, organized by, and makes itself available to us in extremely complex epistemological ways. The notion of unmediated experience seems, if not self-contradictory, at best empty. This epistemological fact seems to me to be true, because of the sorts of beings we are, even with regard to the experiences of those ultimate objects of concern with which mystics have intercourse, e.g. God, Being, nirvāna, etc. This 'mediated' aspect of all our experience seems an inescapable feature of any epistemological inquiry, including the inquiry into mysticism, which has to be properly acknowledged if our investigation of experience, including mystical experience, is to get very far. Yet this feature of experience has somehow been overlooked or underplayed by every major investigator of mystical experience whose work is known to me.¹³ A proper evaluation of this fact leads to the recognition that in order to understand mysticism it is *not* just a question of studying the reports of the mystic after the experiential event but of acknowledging that the experience itself as well as the form in which it is reported is shaped by concepts which the mystic brings to, and which shape, his experience. To flesh this out, straightforwardly, what is being argued is that, for example, the Hindu mystic does not have an experience of *x* which he then describes in the, to him, familiar language and symbols of Hinduism, but rather he has a Hindu experience, i.e. his experience is not an unmediated experience of *x* but is itself the, at least partially, pre-formed anticipated Hindu experience of Brahman. Again, the Christian mystic does not experience some unidentified reality, which he then conveniently labels God, but rather has the at least partially prefigured Christian experiences of God, or Jesus, or the like. Moreover, as one might have anticipated, it is my view based on what evidence there is, that the Hindu experience of Brahman and the Christian experience of God are not the same. We shall support this contention below. The significance of these considerations is that the forms of consciousness which the mystic brings to experience set structured and limiting parameters on what the experience will be, i.e. on what will be experienced, and rule out in advance what is 'inexperienceable' in the particular given, con-

crete, context. Thus, for example, the nature of the Christian mystic's pre-mystical consciousness informs the mystical consciousness such that he experiences the mystic reality in terms of Jesus, the Trinity, or a personal God, etc., rather than in terms of the non-personal, non-everything, to be precise, Buddhist doctrine of nirvāna.¹⁴ Care must also be taken to note that even the plurality of experience found in Hindu, Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist mystical traditions, etc., have to be broken down into smaller units. Thus we find, for example, in Hinduism¹⁵ monistic, pantheistic, and theistic trends, while Christianity knows both absorptive and non-absorptive forms of mysticism. And again close attention has to be paid to the organic changes in ideology and historical development which specific traditions undergo internally, and how these changes affect the mystical experiences of mystics respectively in each tradition. For example, absorptive mysticism is not found in the earliest strata of Christian mysticism, while again the Jewish mystical experience of Talmudic times known as *mer-kabah* mysticism based on the chariot vision of Ezekiel is different from the Zoharic (late thirteenth century) and Lurianic (sixteenth century on) mysticism of the later Middle Ages more thoroughly suffused as it is by gnostic elements. And, I repeat, the remainder of this paper will attempt to provide the full supporting evidence and argumentation that this process of differentiation of mystical experience into the patterns and symbols of established religious communities is experiential and does not only take place in the post-experiential process of reporting and interpreting the experience itself: it is at work before, during, and after the experience.

We can see the significance, as well as the failure to recognize the significance, of the issue being raised if we look at W. T. Stace's¹⁶ extremely influential discussion of mysticism and philosophy. Stace begins with an opening chapter entitled 'Presuppositions of the Inquiry' as part of which he takes up the familiar distinction between experience and interpretation and argues that this is a distinction which must be respected, though he holds that it generally is not, even by the best investigators into the subject. In the course of this discussion he gives the following opening example which seems most promising.

It is probably impossible . . . to isolate 'pure' experience. Yet, although we may never be able to find sense experience completely free of any interpretation, it can hardly be doubted that a sensation is one thing and its conceptual interpretation is another

thing. That is to say, they are distinguishable though not completely separable. There is a doubtless apocryphal but well-known anecdote about the American visitor in London who tried to shake hands with a waxwork policeman in the entrance of Madame Tussaud's. If such an incident ever occurred, it must have been because the visitor had a sense experience which he first wrongly interpreted as a live policeman and later interpreted correctly as a wax figure. If the sentence which I have just written is intelligible, it proves that an interpretation is distinguishable from an experience; for there could not otherwise be two interpretations of one experience.¹⁷

Stace goes on to add the further correct observation regarding the event at Madame Tussaud's.

There were two successive interpretations, although it may be true that at no time was the experience free of interpretation and even that such a pure experience is psychologically impossible. No doubt the original something seen at the entrance was immediately recognized as a material object, as having some sort of colour, and as having the general shape of a human being. And since this involved the application of classificatory concepts to the sensations, there was from the first some degree of interpretation. It seems a safe position to say that there is an intelligible distinction between experience and interpretation, even if it be true that we can never come upon a quite uninterpreted experience.¹⁸

Yet after this most auspicious beginning to his inquiry, indeed in the very argument which Stace generates from it, it is clear that Stace fails to grasp clearly the force of this concern about the impossibility of 'pure' experience and what this entails. For Stace turns this discussion into a discussion of the post-experience interpretation placed on the experience rather than pursuing *in any sense at all* the primary epistemological issues which the original recognition requires. He immediately turns to 'the difficulty of deciding what part of a mystic's descriptive account of his experience ought to be regarded as actually experienced and what part should be taken as his interpretation'. Then he again simple-mindedly turns to the issue of whether all mystical experiences are the same or not based on the discussion of their post-experiential reports.

Now the first question – how far the mystical experiences reported by Christians, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, and Buddhists,

and also by mystics who have not been adherents of any specific religious creed, are similar or different – is one of extreme difficulty. We shall have to struggle with it, but we cannot hope to get anywhere near a true answer unless we make the distinction between experience and interpretation and endeavour to apply it to our material. The reason for this may be made clear by the following example.

The Christian mystic *usually says* that what he experiences is 'union with God'. The Hindu mystic *says* that his experience is one in which his individual self is identical with Brahman or the Universal Self. The Christian *says* that his experience supports theism and is not an experience of actual identity with God, and *he understands* 'union' as not involving identity but some other relation such as resemblance. The Hindu insists on identity, and *says* that his experience establishes what writers on mysticism usually call 'pantheism' – though Hindus usually do not use that western word. The Buddhist mystic – at least according to some versions of Buddhism – does not speak of God or Brahman or a Universal Self, but interprets his experience in terms which do not include the concept of a Supreme Being at all.

There are thus great differences of belief here, although the beliefs are all equally said to be founded on mystical experiences.¹⁹

Stace's failure to appreciate the complexity of the nature of 'experience' with its linguistic, social, historical, and conceptual contextuality, and the severe limitations of his concentration on a naively conceived distinction between experience and interpretation become clear when he takes up what he considers to be Zaehner's position as argued in *Mysticism Sacred and Profane*. Zaehner argues that the original mystical reports reveal different experiences, not only different reports of the same experience; that is, it is not just a case of recognizing the distinction of experience and interpretation and then simply comparing alternative interpretations of the same given. Stace tries to reply to Zaehner's thesis by suggesting that:

Professor Zaehner, who is a Roman Catholic, insists that their experiences [of Christian and Hindu mystics] must have been different because Eckhart and Ruysbroeck built their accounts of the experience into the orthodox Trinitarian theology which they accepted from the Church, whereas the Hindus understood it pantheistically – pantheism being, according to Catholic theologians,

a serious 'heresy' . . . the point is that Professor Zaehner's conclusion simply does not follow from the mere fact that the *beliefs* which Christian mystics *based upon their experiences* are different from the *beliefs* which the Indians *based on theirs*. And the difference of beliefs is really the only evidence which he offers for his view. A genuine grasp of the distinction between experience and interpretation, and especially of the difficulties involved in applying it, might have resulted in a fuller, fairer, and more impartial examination and treatment of the two possible hypotheses.²⁰

It is highly instructive to note that Stace tries to reject Zaehner's charge on the basis of the distinction between experience and interpretation without at all recognizing the need to ask the fundamental question: what does the Christian bring to his experience and how does it affect that experience, and what does the Hindu bring to his experience and how does it affect that experience? The focus of Stace's remarks is on the relation between the mystics' experience and 'the beliefs which the mystics based upon their experiences'. Here the symmetry is always one-directional: from 'experience' to 'beliefs'. There is no recognition that this relationship contains a two-directional symmetry: beliefs shape experience, just as experience shapes belief. To take, for the moment, a non-controversial example of this, consider Manet's paintings of Notre Dame: Manet 'knew' Notre Dame was a Gothic cathedral, and so 'saw' it as a Gothic cathedral as testified to by his paintings which present Notre Dame with Gothic archways. Yet close examination will reveal that certain of the archways of Notre Dame which Manet painted as Gothic are in fact Romanesque.²¹ As Coleridge reminded us: 'the mind half-sees and half-creates'. Reflection now also reminds us that Stace failed in a similar fashion to appreciate the need to investigate the deep issues involved in what the American visitor at Madame Tussaud's brought to his experience. In order to treat adequately the rich evidence presented by mystics, concentration solely on post-experiential reports and the use of a naive distinction – almost universally held by scholars – between claimed 'raw experience' and interpretation, will not do.

As Stace has mentioned Zaehner, the other leading modern investigator of the subject, let us briefly look at his account. Zaehner, in contradistinction to Stace, is aware both by virtue of training, being a most eminent Orientalist and holder of the Spalding Chair in Eastern Religions at Oxford University from 1953 to 1967, as well as in respect of personal experience,²² that it is not so easy to

draw all mystical experience together in one basically undifferentiated category.²³ Indeed, in his Gifford lectures he writes with especial regard to Hinduism, but in order to make a more general point, that Hinduism 'gives the lie . . . to the facile assumption that "mysticism is essentially one and the same whatever may be the religion professed by the individual mystic"'.²⁴ Zaehner, in addition, goes on to note correctly that the view that mysticism is 'a constant and unwavering phenomenon of the universal longing of the human spirit for personal communion with God'²⁵ while true of western mysticism and thus pardonable as a description of western mysticism, is inappropriate, nay even inaccurate when applied to 'the kind of mysticism with which we became acquainted in the Upanishads, let alone with the experience of nirvāna as described in early Buddhist texts'.²⁶ Yet, despite Zaehner's insight into the need to acknowledge the diversity of the mystical evidences, there are severe weaknesses in his position which prevent it from making the contribution to the subject it promised. These weaknesses are of three kinds: first, there is the correct objection that Zaehner's evidence is made up exclusively of post-experiential testimony which, on the one hand, neither respects the experience-interpretation distinction in a fashion which is sufficiently rigorous to satisfy Stace, nor on the other – and this is the crucial point for our concern of which Stace is oblivious – makes the necessary inquiry into the logical and social-contextual conditions of mystical experience which would justify rejecting Stace's simplistic distinction. Secondly, Zaehner's own strong Catholic biases colour his entire investigation and make much of his work appear to be special pleading for Catholic Christianity, or at least for western monotheism over against eastern monism. For example, in his *Hindu and Muslim Mysticism* Zaehner injudiciously, not to say dogmatically, writes: 'Both Najm al-Dīn Rāzī, defending Islamic orthodoxy, and Ibn Tufayl, defending sanity, expose the monist's pretension to be God as the "misgrounded conceit" it so manifestly is.'²⁷ While again in his *Mysticism Sacred and Profane* he attempts to relate the different types of mysticism, especially that between what he calls monistic and theistic mysticism to his own christological understanding of Adam's fall.²⁸

Lastly, Zaehner's phenomenology is not adequate. It is more sophisticated than Stace's and that of almost all earlier investigators, and its real achievements should be acknowledged. Yet Zaehner's views will not do as a final statement of the problem, or indeed even of an interim one, because it stops too short in its

search for the full and diverse meaning(s), leading to a recognition of the relevant diversity, of the nature of mystical experience, especially in terms of its contexts, conditions, and relation to language, beliefs, and cultural configurations. As a consequence his threefold typological distinction for handling cross-cultural mystical experiences – the theistic, the monistic, and the naturalistic ('panenhenic' in Zaehner's vocabulary) – turns out to be an advance over most alternative accounts, as we have said, though overly simplistic and reductionistic. For example, both Jewish and Christian mystics are for the most part theistic in the broad sense; yet the experience of Jewish mystics is radically different from that met in Christian circles. And again the 'theism' of the Bhagavad Gita or of Ramanuja is markedly different from the theism of Teresa of Avila, Isaac Luria, or Al Hallaj. Alternatively, the monism of Shankara is not the monism of Spinoza or Eckhart. And again Buddhism, for example, though classified according to Zaehner's phenomenology as monistic, is really not to be so pigeon-holed.²⁹ Zaehner achieves this 'monistic' identification of Buddhism only by misusing the texts, and attributing to Buddhism doctrines it does not hold, especially surprising in this respect being his attribution of the doctrine of *Ātman*, the doctrine of a substantial self, to the Buddha. Zaehner notwithstanding, the Buddha seems to have made the denial of the *ātman* doctrine which was central to Hinduism, a central, if not *the* central basis for his own revolutionary position. Thus, the supposed 'monism' of the Buddhists who deny the existence of a substantial self or soul can hardly be equated, except by manipulation of evidence and ignoring of facts, with, say the Advaitan monistic experience which claims that there is one universal Self, Brahman, which is the ground of all-being and in which each particular individual participates and finds his ultimate salvation. Zaehner's well-known investigations flounder because his methodological, hermeneutical, and especially epistemological resources are weak. Indeed, his researches reinforce the felt pressing need to pursue such inquiries in more sophisticated conceptual terms.

This failure to investigate or to consider in one's investigation of mystical experience the *conditions of experience* in general and the specific conditions of religious/mystical experience in particular is a deficiency which skews the entire discussion in ways which distort any and all conclusions or suggestions made. Let us return, therefore, to this topic. We recall, at the outset, the wisdom of the remark, 'the child is father to the man'. This holds for epistemic

inquiry also, in regard both to the logical-conceptual aspect of the inquiry and to the cultural-social aspect, though, of course, the logical-conceptual aspect involves ideas and conditions which are, on another level, to be strictly divorced from this sort of approach, as we shall see. Let us investigate the methodological significance of this phrase as it applies in the case of a Jewish mystic, as an opening gambit.

In the cultural-social sphere the Jewish mystic will have learnt and been conditioned in all kinds of ways from childhood up that: (1) there is more to reality than this physical world; (2) that this 'more' than physical reality is an ultimate Reality which is a personal God; (3) that this God created the world and men; (4) that men have spiritual souls that commune with God; (5) that God enters into covenants with men; (6) that even in covenants He remains distinct; (7) that God's Being and man's being are ontologically distinct; (8) that God entered into special covenants with Abraham and his heirs, Israel; (9) that these covenants are expressed in the acts of circumcision and the giving of the Torah; (10) that the Torah and its commandments (*mitzvot*) are the most perfect expression of God's Will as well as the most perfect means of relation between man and God; and so on. Moreover, the Jewish mystic will have learnt to fit all these items into a special 'mystical theology' known by the broad term of Kabbalah, in which the visible and perceivable is the unreal and the unperceived and non-sensual is the real. One could extend this comparatively small list at great length. All these cultural-social beliefs and their attendant practices, especially in the myriad practice of the *mitzvot*, clearly affect the way in which the Jewish mystic views the world, the God who created it, the way to approach this God, and what to expect when one does finally come to approach this God. That is to say, the entire life of the Jewish mystic is permeated from childhood up by images, concepts, symbols, ideological values, and ritual behaviour which there is no reason to believe he leaves behind in his experience. Rather, these images, beliefs, symbols, and rituals define, *in advance*, what the experience he wants to have, and which he then does have, will be like. Without making the discussion too complex in its detail of Jewish mystical theory and practice (traditionally called theoretical Kabbalah and practical Kabbalah, though there is much overlap and the latter is predicated on the theology of the former), let us consider the most essential feature of Jewish mystical thinking and its related behaviour, unique to Jewish mystics, namely, the centrality of the performance of the

mitzvot (commandments) for reaching the mystic goal and how this interpenetration of ritual and ethical actions (*mitzvot*) with the goal of relation to God affects the kind of experience one *anticipates* having and then, *in fact*, does have.³⁰

The Jewish mystic performs the *mitzvot* as a necessity on the mystic's way because he conceives of himself, the world (or cosmos), and God in a very special light. Foremost, perhaps, among the elements of his self-consciousness is his conception of God as the sort of Being who is in some sense personal and, even more, who is ethically and evaluatively personal, i.e. a God who is affected by good deeds and acts of obedience, and the relation to Whom is affected by the proper performance of prescribed actions. Thus, the Jewish mystic's experience is a preconditioned experience of a (moral-personal) God. We see this pre-experiential configurative element, for example, in the details of the central Kabbalistic doctrine of the relation of human action and the *Sefiroth* (Divine Emanations which comprise the highest levels of the upper worlds) in which every *Sefirah* is related to a human ethical counterpart, so that the perfect performance of ethical behaviour becomes, above all, the way towards relation with these Divine Emanations. More generally the level of one's experience with the different rungs of the *Sefiroth* (of which there are ten) is dependent on one's ethical and ritual behaviour (*mitzvot*), and especially on prayer done with the right commitment and concentration (known as *kavvanah*). The Jewish mystics believe that such mystical prayer leads the soul on its upward ascent because mystical prayer leads to a recognition of, and contact with, the true meaning of God's 'Names' which are the real ontological structure of the upper worlds.³¹

That this complex pre-experiential pattern affects the actual experience of the Jewish mystic is an unavoidable conclusion. It can be ascertained clearly in the Jewish mystic's experience or perhaps a better way to describe it might be to refer to the Jewish mystic's 'non-experience'. That is to say, the Jewish conditioning pattern so strongly impresses that tradition's mystics (as all Jews) with the fact that one does *not* have mystical experiences of God in which one loses one's identity in ecstatic moments of unity, that the Jewish mystic rarely, if ever, has such experiences. What the Jewish mystic experiences is, perhaps, the Divine Throne, or the angel Metatron, or aspects of the *Sefiroth*, or the heavenly court and palaces, or the Hidden Torah, or God's secret Names, but *not loss of self in unity with God*. The absence of the kinds of experience of unity one often, but mistakenly, associates with mysticism, even as the 'es-

sence of mysticism', in the Jewish mystical context, is *very strong evidence that pre-experiential conditioning affects the nature of the experience one actually has*. Because the Jew is taught that such experiences of unity do not happen for reasons flowing out of the Jewish theological tradition, he does not, in fact, have such experiences.^{31A} This is a formative pre-experiential element rather than only a post-experiential fact necessitated by Jewish orthodox requirements, as Stace might suggest, being of the essential character of the experience itself. The logic of experience requires the adoption of this account and the evidence supports it.³²

There is no evidence but *a priori* theorizing in the face of the actual evidence to the contrary, that this non-unitive characterization of the experience of the Jewish mystic is *merely* the product of the post-experiential report, whose form is necessitated by social or religious orthodoxies and imposed on what, in fact, was basically an experience of an altogether different (unitive) sort. Rather, these orthodox concerns, which are indeed very real, are much more deeply rooted and much more powerful, shaping the imaginative and experiential capacities of the Jewish mystic from childhood up and pre-forming his organizing perceptual schema. However, Stace, for example, only sees this constructive aspect of the external factors as they work on one's internal consciousness in terms of the post-experiential report rather than in terms of both their before and after character – a curious blindness in support of a passionately held theory.

Let us stay with this example a little longer and develop its deepest implication. In the Jewish mystical tradition the ultimate state of mystical experience is called *devekuth*, which literally means 'adhesion to' or 'clinging to' God. That is to say, in the Jewish tradition the strong monotheistic emphasis on God's uniqueness is understood to entail not only his numerical unity and perfection but also his qualitative, ontological, distinction from his creations. And even though this distinction is blurred somewhat in the Zoharic and later Lurianic Kabbalah, with their theories of emanation rather than creation, even there God's transcendental majesty and distinctiveness is essential and is retained by the reference to God in himself as *Eyn Sof*, literally 'without end', but used more broadly to refer to God's ultimate and radical Otherness and unknowability, both epistemologically and ontologically. As a consequence, Jewish mystics envisioned the ultimate goal of mystical relation, *devekuth*, not as absorption into God, or as unity with the divine but rather as a loving intimacy, a 'clinging to' God, a rela-

tion which all the time is aware of the duality of God and mystic, i.e. which *experiences* God as Other rather than Self. All Jewish mystical literature reflects this teaching of *devekuth* as the goal to be sought and, even more importantly, all Jewish mystical testimonies conform to this pattern. Now one could say: 'but this is because of social pressure' – but what evidence is there for saying this? Moreover, is it not more reasonable to relate the formative milieu to the experience itself and then read the available evidences as confirmation of the milieu-affecting character of the totality of the experience, rather than accounting for the material in more artificial ways?

To bring our point into still sharper focus let us shift our concern and compare the Jewish experience of *devekuth* to a radically different mystical experience found in a mystical tradition near the other end of the mystical spectrum, that of the Buddhist. The preconditioning of the Buddhist consciousness is very different from that of the Jewish and this difference generates the radically different mystical experience which the Buddhist aims at and reaches. Consider, for example, the following concrete elements which the Buddhist *learns* from his tradition starting with the 'four noble truths' which are the foundation of his tradition. These Truths are:

- (a) 'Birth is suffering, old age is suffering, disease is suffering, death is suffering, association is suffering, separation from what is pleasant is suffering, not obtaining what one desires is suffering ...';
- (b) The cause of suffering is 'craving' or 'desire', 'craving for sensual desires, and craving for becoming, and craving for non-existence';
- (c) Suffering can be overcome by the proper discipline and understanding;
- (d) There is an eightfold path which leads to the cessation of suffering (i.e. *nirvāna*).

These eight ways are: (1) Right understanding, i.e. understanding the four noble truths; (2) Right thought, i.e. thought free from desire and craving and cruelty. It is referred to as *samkalpa*, the proper 'shaping together' of one's consciousness; (3) Right speech, i.e. refraining from lying, slander, malicious gossip, frivolous speech; (4) Right action, i.e. the avoidance especially of killing, stealing, and general misconduct; (5) Right livelihood, i.e. not earning a living by inappropriate means, for example, as an astrologer; (6) Right effort, i.e. striving to purify oneself of evil thoughts;

(7) Right mindfulness, i.e. being properly mindful of the nature of one's body and mind; (8) Right concentration, i.e. practising the proper meditation patterns especially the four *dhyānas* or trance states. Thus we see that the Buddhist is conditioned to reach *nirvāna* by *sīla* or moral behaviour, *samādhi* or concentration and *prajña* or wisdom.³³

These elements of the four noble truths were then further elaborated upon in the Buddha's second great sermon, the 'Discourse on the Marks of Not-Self' in which he taught the essential doctrines of 'no-self', i.e. that there is no simple, pure substance which is permanent and which has its own independent substantial existence analogous to the doctrine of the soul in the western traditions or to *atman* in Hinduism. Indeed, the no-self *anātman* doctrine is a reaction to the Hindu emphasis. Related to this no-self doctrine is also the important doctrine of *pratītyasamutpāda*, 'dependent origination'. We are also taught the doctrine of the impermanence of all things. The only 'something' – or is it a nothing? – which avoids *anitya* (impermanence) and which we have as our goal is *nirvāna* wherein we avoid the wheel of suffering which is the condition of all existing realities. The stages of sanctification that carry a man upwards towards *nirvāna* have been summarized as follows:

In passing from existence as a common person (*prthagjana*) to experiencing *nirvāna*, several stages can be delineated. The first task is to become a member of the family of spiritually elect noble personages (*ārya pudgalas*). To do this one must first make himself fit to commence the practices that will make him an *ārya pudgala*. Even to begin this quest is significant, resulting in the stage of *gotrabhū* or member of the family (of *āryas*). From here, depending on temperament and capability, one of two courses is open: either the follower in faith (*skaddhān-usārin*) for those with mild faculties, or the follower of Dharma (*Dharmānusārin*), for those of keen intellect. By progressively gaining insight into each of the four noble truths, one becomes, at the culmination of the process, a *srotāpanna* or 'streamwinner', the first class of the *ārya pudgalas*. Having abandoned totally belief in the self, doubts about the Three Jewels (i.e. Buddha, Dharma, Samgha), and belief in the efficacy of rituals, the streamwinner is assured of enlightenment within one more lifetime. Progressing further still, the adept becomes an *anāgāmin* or 'non-returner', assured of enlightenment during his current lifetime. When all negative qualities have been eradicated and the adept is pure in all

respects, he is able experientially to realize *nirvāna*, thus becoming an *arhant*, and establishing himself as a true saint in Buddhism.³⁴

This brings us directly to *nirvāna*, the goal of the entire Buddhist enterprise in all its elaborate detail. While it is a subject of fiercely debated divergent opinion among Buddhologists, for our purposes it seems fair to say that *nirvāna*: (1) is the recognition that belief in the phenomenal 'self' of mundane existence is an illusion; (2) is most especially characterized by the extinction of 'suffering' which is the predominant feature of ordinary reality; (3) is not a conditional or conditioned reality; (4) is in some positive way the attainment of unique wisdom or insight into the impermanence (*anitya*) of all existing things; (5) is not a Being; (6) is a state or condition, i.e. in the sense of being 'Nirvanaized'; (7) is not a relational state of being.³⁵

From this complex structure let us concentrate especially on two cardinal features of the Buddhist account. First, the basis of the entire system is the awareness of suffering in the world and the goal of the system is the extinction of suffering; secondly, the goal, *nirvāna*, is not a relational state in which the finite self encounters a saving or loving transcendental Being – God – but rather is a new ontological (if this term is not inappropriate) state of being (if these terms are not inappropriate). That there is no encounter of any sort results from the fact that there is no real self and no transcendental other self. Again, it should also be noted that in the Buddhist doctrine there is no divine will which plays any role as there is no divinity. Rather one has in place of the divine will the strict law of ethical causality, *Karma*, which is at the root of the causal chain of existence, re-existence or reincarnation, and release.³⁶

Just setting this Buddhist understanding of the nature of things over against the Jewish should, in itself, already be strong evidence for the thesis that what the Buddhist experiences as *nirvāna* is different from what the Jew experiences as *devekuth*. However, let us draw this out more clearly. To begin, when the Jewish mystic performs his special mystical devotions and meditations, *kavvanot*, he does so in order to *purify his soul*, i.e. to remove the soul from its entrapment in the material world in order to liberate it for its upward spiritual ascent culminating in *devekuth*, adhesion to God's emanations, the *Sefiroth*. The Buddhist mystic, on the other hand, performs his meditative practices as an integral part of the Buddhist mystical quest, not in order to free the soul from the body

and purify it, but rather in order to annihilate suffering by overcoming any notion of 'self', holding that the very notion of a substantial 'self' or 'soul' is the essential illusion which generates the entire process of suffering. Buddhist literature specifically represents the Buddha as criticizing the belief in a permanent or substantial self (the Hindu doctrine of *ātman*) as a false, even pernicious, doctrine which, paradoxically, in so far as it encourages egoism in one's pursuit of one's own eternal happiness, makes the fulfilment of one's happiness an impossibility.

In addition to its insistence on the extinction of suffering through the elimination of the 'self' *nirvāna* is also not a relational state, i.e. it is *not* the meeting of two distinct selves or realities who come together in loving embrace. *Nirvāna* is the absence of all relation, all personality, all love, all feeling, all individuality, all identity. *Nirvāna* is the achievement (if we can use this term, but we have no better one) of calm, of peace, of tranquillity. While it is the banishment of care or anxiety, of concern or striving, it is not the creation of a new condition of meeting. *Nirvāna* is no 'something', nor does it contain or permit the continued existence of either individual beings or one grand Being. Its ontology can not even be easily classed as theistic, monistic, or naturalistic. In the world of religious ideas it comes the closest to reminding one of Wittgenstein's remark made in another connection about 'not being a something nor a nothing either'.³⁷ Moreover, and this cannot be emphasized too strongly, it is this theoretical structure of the impermanence of all existence, the resultant suffering of all beings, and the doctrines of no-self, meditation, etc., upon which the whole of Buddhist life and its goal, *nirvāna* is built. The Buddhist understanding of reality generates the entire elaborate regimen of Buddhist practice, and it is this understanding of reality which defines in advance what the Buddhist mystic is seeking and what we can tell, from the evidence, he finds. To think that his pre-conditioned consciousness of how things are and how to find release from suffering in *nirvāna* is extraneous to the actual Buddhist mystical experience is bizarre.

Whatever *nirvāna* is, and indeed whatever *devekuth* is, in so far as words mean anything and philosophical inquiry has any significance, there is no way one can describe, let alone equate, the experience of *nirvāna* and *devekuth* on the basis of the evidence. There is no intelligible way that anyone can legitimately argue that a 'no-self' experience of 'empty' calm is the same experience as the experience of intense, loving, intimate relationship between two substan-

tial selves, one of whom is conceived of as the personal God of western religion and all that this entails. The losing of self is not equivalent to the finding of another, especially when this other is conceived of as the God of Jewish tradition. To emphasize one key issue: one is especially struck in Jewish mysticism by the imagery of love, even including very pronounced sexual imagery, which is used to express all sorts of 'relations' relevant to the kabbalistic mind. This aspect is totally absent from early Indian Buddhism which equates sexuality with desire and sees desire as the basic element which causes suffering and which is to be overcome in *nirvāṇa*. Now, this is not to evaluate either the truth-claims of the sought and reported experiences in Judaism and Buddhism, etc, or to presume to rank them in terms of better or worse as Otto and Zaehner, for example, quite arbitrarily do, or again, as D. T. Suzuki does, but now reversing the dogmatism and opting for the superiority of Zen Buddhism. What I wish to show is only that there is a clear causal connection between the religious and social structure one brings to experience and the nature of one's actual religious experience.

A further logical point needs to be made. This deals with my opening remark in the previous paragraph that if words mean anything my position seems to be the only reasonable one to adopt. Many students of mysticism might see this remark as their 'escape hatch' for avoiding my conclusion. After all, they might argue, all mystics are wary about using language to describe their experience, and many are absolutely opposed to its employment, arguing a form of 'I don't mean what I say and I don't say what I mean'. Also, we are sure to be reminded of the well-known mystical penchant for paradox and ineffability as relevant at this point. However, this 'escape' is no escape at all. It fails to provide the desired way out because it fails to realize that, if the mystic does not mean what he says and his words have *no* literal meaning whatsoever, then not only is it impossible to establish my pluralistic view, but it is also logically impossible to establish any view whatsoever. If none of the mystics' utterances carry any literal meaning then they cannot serve as the *data* for any position, not mine, and certainly not the view that all mystical experiences are the same, or reducible to a small class of phenomenological categories.

We can shed further light on this issue by moving only a short sideways step in the study of mysticism and introducing one further tradition, Christianity, that seems close to the Jewish but which, in fact, introduces new elements which are clearly reflective of a larger

theoretical pattern moulding the mystical consciousness of the Christian mystic. Space prevents us from spelling out the forces at work in Christian traditions in the same detail as we have for Judaism and Buddhism, but let us consider this one essential element. In Christian mysticism we have two types of mystical experience, the non-absorptive type which is reminiscent of Jewish mysticism and its doctrine of *devekuth*, though still with a difference, and the absorptive (or unitive) type in which the goal sought and experience reached is a transcendence of the distinction between self and God and the absorption of the self into God in an all-embracing unity. This absorptive type is certainly a common type of Christian mystical experience and is what students of mysticism often, though perhaps mistakenly, consider the paradigm of Christian mysticism. The great Flemish mystic, John Ruysbroeck (1293–1381), is thus able to express his experience in the fascinating expression 'To eat and to be eaten! This is union!... Since his desire is without measure, to be devoured of him does not greatly amaze me.'³⁸ That is to say, in more extreme form, what others have referred to as the loss of self in the 'ocean pacific' of God, or what Eckhart refers to when he writes: 'If I am to know God directly, I must become completely he and he I: so that this he and this I become and are one I.'³⁹ What permits, perhaps even encourages, this unitive, absorptive mysticism of the divine he and the finite I found in Christian mysticism, though absent from its Jewish counterpart, is, I believe, the formative influence of the essential incarnational theology of Christianity which is predicated upon an admixing of human and divine elements in the person of Jesus which is outside the limits of the Judaic consciousness. Thus, an essential element of the model of Christian spirituality is one of divine-human interpenetration on the ontological level which allows for a unity of divine and human which Judaism rules out. Essential here too is the Neoplatonic influence on Christian thought, especially for Christian mysticism as represented by the greatest of all Neoplatonic mystics, Plotinus.⁴⁰ Moreover, to classify this *unio mystica* of the Christian mystic, or rather of some Christian mystics, is not as easy a task as it has appeared to most investigators. The difficulty emerges because union with the divine, when the divinity is understood in christological and incarnational terms is not equatable with either (a) the dualistic experience of *devekuth*; (b) the no-self, no-God, no-relation experience of *nirvāṇa*; (c) the naturalistic mysticism of those like Richard Jefferies; (d) the non-absorptive mysticism of non-Jewish mystics whose experiences

differ from that of *devekuth*; or even (e) the absorptive mystics who superficially seem closest, such as the Advaitans.

It should also be noted that even the absorptive, non-absorptive dichotomy at work in Christian mysticism which might appear to contradict the contextual rootedness of mystical experience in fact supports it. The unitive Christian mystics are invariably those such as Eckhart, Tauler, and Suso, who have been schooled on Plotinus, Dionysius the Areopagite, and Augustine, i.e. the strong Neoplatonic current in Christian intellectual history. Book VI of Plotinus's *Enneads* provides the inspiration for this conceptualization of the final ascension of the soul into unity (*ἕνωσις*) with the Good. Plotinus describes it as a final ineffable absorption of the self back into the perfect absolute One which transcends *ψυχή* or *νοῦς*; back into the One which alone exists: *Μεταξὺ γὰρ οὐδέν, οὐδὲ ἔτι δύο, ἀλλὰ ἐν ἀμφῷ*.⁴¹ The study of Plotinus and the Neoplatonic mystical tradition shaped the mystic's 'mind's eye' so that his experience conformed to it. To think that the 'unitive' mystic merely describes his experience in this way is to distort the situation which gave rise to the experience, the experience itself, and the report of the experience. Thus, for example, seriously to credit that Augustine did not have the unitive experience described in his *Confessions* (Bk. 9) but only used this language is unwarranted for two strong reasons at least: (1) surely an Augustine would not consciously misdescribe his experience; (2) the theory of misdescription due to orthodox pressures is untenable in Augustine's case because, in fact, the unitive account he gives is more in conflict, though little did he seem to know it, with Christian orthodoxy than a relational description would have been. The evidence for this second contention is the sad fate which some of Augustine's 'absorptive' heirs met at the hands of the Church. Dogmatic reasons aside, be they philosophical dogmas or theological ones, there is no good evidence for denying that Augustine's experience was of the *unitive* character he describes it as possessing. On the contrary, his entire life was a long preparation for just such an experience: 'Thou hast made us for thyself and our hearts are restless until they rest in thee.'

If we stay with the theme of theological and social contextualism a little longer, we shall also notice one further feature of importance deserving of note, as well as of further study. In almost all mystical traditions, we find the importance of a teacher or *guru* who leads the novice along 'the way'. In the Jewish tradition, there is a strong aversion to auto-didacticism both in traditional rabbinic and

even more in mystical matters. Indeed, in the Jewish tradition, until the historic calamity of the expulsion from Spain in 1492 called for a radical new approach to mysticism, mystical wisdom was always held very close by its devotees and was only taught in small circles to a select few. The constant fear was expressed that this knowledge, if obtained by the unlettered without the guidance of a teacher, could lead to antinomianism and heresy, as indeed happened in the seventeenth-century pseudo-messianic movement known as Sabbatianism⁴² and the eighteenth-century pseudo-messianic movement known as Frankism.⁴³ As a consequence, Jewish mystics show a close conformity of ideological background, shared experience, and theological reflection. This feature is pronounced in Jewish mysticism, moreover, because of the believed ability of Jewish mystics to escape from a mystical solipsism through the 'public' language of the Torah which served as a mystical lexicon in Jewish mystical circles and which also accounts for its eventual, highly structured, systemic nature, paradigmatically represented in the Zoharic⁴⁴ and Lurianic⁴⁵ schools. Mention of the Lurianic 'school' is especially noteworthy because it demonstrably reinforces the shared, taught, communal nature of this mystical theory which emerged in the town of Safed⁴⁶ in northern Israel in the sixteenth century. The development of Lurianic mysticism into the mass mystical movement surrounding the pseudo-messiah Sabbatai Zevi in the seventeenth century is also further weighty evidence to be considered.

In the Buddhist tradition, one also finds the same emphasis on being guided along the path towards *nirvāna* by a qualified teacher. Only a Buddha reaches self-enlightenment, all others must be helped towards this end. No less an authority than the late Richard Robinson has argued: 'Every form of Buddhism has held that guides are necessary.'⁴⁷ Here too, one sees not only the importance of a qualified teacher or *bhiksu*, but also how this insistence on proper instruction grew into the widespread institution of Buddhist monasticism,⁴⁸ with all its strict discipline and ideological commitments. And these emphases, of course, are not unique to Buddhism, the institution of the *guru*-like master being found in all eastern traditions, as for example, Hinduism especially in its Trinitic variety, and Zen. The Zen tradition is highly instructive here, for though it made spontaneity the great virtue in achieving *satori*, this spontaneity was achieved through the mediating role which the Zen master played in the 'enlightenment' of his disciples. Not only were the Zen masters considered the paradigms of Zen practice to be

emulated by their disciples, but they even became the objects of Zen meditation for their disciples. Even more importantly, it is the Zen master, through the seemingly meaningless *koans* which he sets his students to meditate upon as well as in the purposeful physical and mental abuse he subjects his students to, who destroys the illusions in which the disciple is imprisoned and which prevent him from reaching *satori*. The master induces in the disciple the condition of 'Zen sickness' which allows the disciple to break the bonds of conditional experience and to encounter reality as it really is, in its 'suchness'.⁴⁹

Again, this aspect of the mystical situation is highly focused in the history of Sufism which developed a widespread, highly refined, tradition of Sufi-schools which aided the believer *salak at-tariq* ('travelling the Path'). The essence of these mystical Orders, often centred in special Sufi monasteries known as *khānaqāhs*, was the formal relation of master and disciple, of *murshid* and *murid*, based upon the ideology that, though each man, potentially, latently, possessed the ability to merge with Allah in ecstatic union (*fana*), this potency could be actualized only with the assistance of a qualified master (except in the case of a small spiritual élite or elect known as *khawāss* or *Sūfiyya* on whom Allah has bestowed special favour). The disciple followed the *tariqa* ('the way') which was a practical method for moving upward through a succession of stages (*maqāmāt*) culminating in the experience of *fana* – unity in Allah. The *tariqa* consisted of set prayers, supererogatory exercises, other varied liturgical and penitential acts, fasts, retreats, vigils and the like. This highly structured procedure prepared the disciple for his experience, i.e. it 'prepared' him in the sense of putting him in the specifically Sufi frame of consciousness both ideologically and existentially, for his ecstatic experience, the form of which was also anticipated in advance.⁵⁰ Likewise, the overwhelming preponderance of Christian mystics are found in monasteries and holy orders with their lives centred around chastity, 'good works', and an extremely rigorous regimen of prayer. Fritz Staal has also recently reminded us that the Mexican Indian teacher, Don Juan, is essential for Castaneda's remarkable experiences, whatever one thinks of Castaneda's experiences.⁵¹

In all these instances, one must ask 'what does the *guru* teach?' The answer is that he teaches a specific way and a specific goal; his students follow him along the former because they want to reach the latter. Thus, to take one example, the Buddhist 'seeker' comes to his master (and the *Sangha*) and follows his prescribed meditations

and yoga practices to reach that state in which suffering is annihilated and the erroneous notion of self, known as the doctrine of *anātmavada*, is completely overcome. Alternatively the Hindu 'seeker' loyally adheres to his *guru*'s instructions because he desires to affirm the ultimacy of his self and its relation to the universal self, known as *atmavada*. Again, the *Murid* is loyal to the rigorous discipline of his *Murshid* because he seeks to merge his soul with the personal God of Islam; while the Jewish Kabbalist practises his regimen of prayer and asceticism to find *devekuth* with God's extended-emanated being manifest in the *Sefiroth*. The Buddhist *guru* does not teach what the Hindu *guru* teaches, though superficial association of the term confuses the unwary. The *Murshid* does not teach what the Kabbalist teaches, nor again does Teresa of Avila teach St John of the Cross the same 'way' as Don Juan⁵² or the Taoist Master. Decisive proof of this is found not only in a close examination of the respective 'teachings' of the various teachers but also in the polemical spirit manifest by many, if not most, mystical masters. Shankara does not shrink from entering into heated polemics with his Buddhist opponents about the meaning of the ultimate experience, understood by him in a non-personal monistic way, or again with his more theistically-minded Hindu colleagues – and of saying that they are wrong! They do not understand! They do not have the ultimate experience! – only he and his students find the ultimate experience because only they are properly equipped to find it. Alternatively, in the Christian tradition we find, for example, Ruysbroeck prepared to criticize those mystics for whom mystic experience does not involve moral imperatives as inferior, while Zen Buddhists have tests and rules for investigating whether a person really has achieved *satori* or *nirvāna*.⁵³ For example, the great Zen master Hakuin records in his autobiography, the *Itsū-made-gusa*, that after an early experience he was convinced that he had reached the condition of enlightenment and set off to report this good news to Etan, the aged hermit of Shojuan. Upon interrogation by the Master, Hakuin was found to be still wanting and was rebuked with the epithet, 'You poor child of the devil in a dark dungeon'. After further study Hakuin reports that 'the enlightenment flashed upon my mind', and when he was tested anew by Etan 'the master now stroked my back with his fan' (i.e. a sign of approval).⁵⁴ It should also be noted that classical mystics do not talk about the abstraction 'mysticism'; they talk only about their tradition, their 'way', their 'goal': they do not recognize the legitimacy of any other. The ecumenical overtones associated with mysticism have come pri-

marily from non-mystics of recent vintage for their own purposes.

Though we have just begun the description and study of the enormous, even bewildering, variety of specific detail which the technical study of specific mystical traditions reveals, I believe that it has been sufficiently demonstrated that it will not do either to argue that the empirical evidence indicates that all mystical experiences are the same or that such experiences are contextually undetermined or under-determined. The evidence we have considered to this point, in fact, points in the opposite direction: namely, mystical experience is 'over-determined' by its socio-religious milieu: as a result of his process of intellectual acculturation in its broadest sense, the mystic brings to his experience a world of concepts, images, symbols, and values which shape as well as colour the experience he eventually and actually has.

III

Let us now turn to some of the further curious logical-philosophical problems inherent in the study of mysticism which reinforce the contextual thesis here being argued.

The initial factor that needs to be considered is the meaning or meanings of the terms used by mystics to describe or interpret their experiences, for it is this factor that misleads those like Underhill, Otto, Stace, Bucke, Arberry, and Zaehner, among others, into thinking that all mystics are referring to the same experience or to a small number of similar experiences. For example, Stace,⁵⁵ in his argumentation for the existence of a 'universal core' common to all mystical experiences compares, among others, Eckhart's Christian experience, the Jewish Kabbalist's experience of *devekuth*, and the Buddhist doctrine of *sunyata* or the Void. In each case, Stace believes that the use of apparently similar language reflects an underlying 'core' experience. For example, he holds that the 'fact' that in each of these mystical reports it is claimed that there is no empirical content in the experience,⁵⁶ and that all such mystics seem to describe their experience as being non-spatial, non-temporal, beyond language and ineffable, paradoxical, sublime, and joyful among other traits, is clear evidence for his views regarding the existence of a 'common core'. Stace, however, and the others who follow a similar procedure and arrive at similar results are here being misled by the surface grammar of the mystical reports they study. That is to say, what appear to be similar-sounding descriptions are not similar descriptions and do not indicate the same

experience. They do not because language is itself contextual and words 'mean' only in contexts. The same words – beautiful, sublime, ultimate reality, ineffable, paradoxical, joyful, transcending all empirical content, etc. – can apply and have been applied to more than one object. Their mere presence alone does not guarantee anything; neither the nature of the experience nor the nature of the referent nor the comparability of various claims is assured by this seemingly common verbal presence alone. Consider the following exercise. A Jew could use all these terms to refer to his experience of *devekuth* with the moral, personal Absolute Being he calls God. At the same time, the Buddhist could use all these phrases to refer to the absence of all being in *nirvāna*, while the Hindu could use them to refer to his experience of absorption into the Impersonal Absolute Brahman. Again, the Taoist could use these terms, as well as Plotinus or the nature mystic in referring to Nature. We can express this clearly through the following example. Consider the ambiguity of the proposition:

x transcends all empirical content, is beyond space and time, is ultimate reality, gives a sense of joy, is holy, can only be expressed in paradoxes and is actually ineffable.

Where *x* can be replaced by several, radically different, and mutually exclusive candidates, e.g. God, Brahman, *nirvāna*, Nature.

What emerges clearly from this argument is the awareness that choosing descriptions of mystic experience *out of their total context* does not provide grounds for their comparability but rather severs all grounds of their intelligibility for it empties the chosen phrases, terms, and descriptions of definite meaning. This logical-semantic problem plagues all the attempts which various scholars, from William James on, have made to provide a common phenomenological description of mystical experience. The fact is that these lists of supposedly common elements not only always reduce the actual variety of disparate experiences to fit a specific theory (in each case the context for the terms used being the specific investigator's own system which varies the lists accordingly and which demonstrates, if nothing else, that the material can be arranged in different ways according to alternative ulterior purposes), but they also turn out to be of little help in understanding mystical experience because they are so broad as to fit any one of several mutually exclusive experiences. Consider, for example, James's list in his famous *Varieties of Religious Experience*.⁵⁷ James suggests four common characteristics of mystical experience: (1) ineffability; (2) noetic

quality; (3) transiency; and (4) passivity. Without too detailed a review let us consider as models the terms 'ineffability' and 'noesis' which James himself considered the most important. 'Ineffability' James rightly defines as an experience or subject that 'defies expression, that no adequate report of its content can be given in words', and goes on to conclude as a consequence that 'it follows that its quality must be directly experienced; it cannot be imparted or transferred to others'.⁵⁸ While an accurate description of 'ineffability' James's definition is not the basis on which one can compare experiences, nor the basis on which one can conclude that different experiences have something in common in the sense that they are both instances of the same or similar situations or reflective of experience with a common 'object' or reality. Though two or more experiences are said to be 'ineffable', the term 'ineffable' can logically fit many disjunctive and incomparable experiences. That is to say, an atheist can feel a sense of dread at the absurdity of the cosmos which he labels ineffable, while the theist can experience God in a way that he also insists is ineffable. Thus in *I and Thou*, Buber describes the dialogical encounter with God, the *Absolute Thou*, as ineffable, whose 'meaning itself cannot be transferred or expressed',⁵⁹ while Kafka, whose brilliant and haunting tales also suggest the ineffability of existence intends no such encounter,⁶⁰ nor reflects any faith in the existence of an *Absolute Thou*. To argue that because both Buber and Kafka see their respective experiences as ineffable, the dialogical experience of Buber's relational *I* with the *Absolute Thou* is the same as or similar to the experience of the lost souls in Kafka's *The Castle* is absurd. Where one finds 'meaning confirmed',⁶¹ the other finds 'emptiness'. Again, 'ineffable' *nirvāna* is not the ineffable *Allah* of the Sufi, nor the 'ineffable' *Allah* of the Sufi the 'ineffable' *Tao* of Taoism. The ontology or reality of Brahman/Atman that lies 'beyond all expression' in the *Mandukya Upanishads* is not the 'ineffability' encountered in Eckhart's Christian experience. 'They were dumb because the hidden truth they saw in God, the mystery they found there, was ineffable.' Even less comparable is Eckhart's 'ineffable' God, like the reality being pointed to, yet held 'ineffable' in the following Zen tale: A Zen master was asked 'What is the Buddha?' to which he replied (in quite typical Zen fashion), 'A dried shit stick.'⁶²

Let us also briefly consider James's emphasis on the universality of 'noesis' as a distinguishing and comparable element in mystical experience. James defines this characteristic in the following way: 'Although so similar to states of feeling, mystical states seem to

those who experience them, to be also states of knowledge.'⁶³ That is, he continues, 'states of insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect'. James has caught something important in calling attention to the noetic element in mystical experience, but it is nonetheless not an element that provides the desired commonality. Consider, to begin with, the variety of different knowledge claims which could fit James's definition and which his own examples acknowledge, i.e. this characteristic has been claimed for such differing experiences as those which might be classed as aesthetic, ethical, natural, religious, and mystical. To argue, as James does, that because each such experience claims to give 'insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect' all the experiences are the same, fails to recognize both the variety of 'insights' one could have into the 'depths of truth' and the variety of 'truths' which can lurk in these depths waiting to be 'plumbed'. The varying claims made for such knowledge of the 'truth' is staggering, running from Pythagorean speculations to voodoo, animism, and totemism, to Madame Blavatsky's theosophy and Huxley's and Ramakrishna's *philosophia perennis*, to say nothing of the variety of more traditional religions.

Compare the two contemporary examples of Castaneda and Suzuki. The 'truth' Don Juan discloses to Castaneda through the use of the hallucinogenic peyote plant bears little or no resemblance to the 'truth' of *satori* extolled by the Zen master. The 'noetic' quality of these two experiences is obviously *not* ground for their comparability or equation.

To make the significance of this point in more breadth, consider also W. T. Stace's attempt to construct a list of common mystical characteristics which cut across the cultural or temporal limits of mystical experience. Stace first lists as follows the characteristics of what he considers the two basic types of mystical experience:⁶⁴

- | COMMON CHARACTERISTICS
OF EXTROVERTIVE MYSTICAL
EXPERIENCES | COMMON CHARACTERISTICS
OF INTROVERTIVE MYSTICAL
EXPERIENCES |
|---|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Unifying Vision – all things are one 2. The more concrete apprehension of the One as an inner subjectivity, or life, in all things 3. Sense of objectivity or reality 4. Blessedness, peace, etc. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Unitary Consciousness; the One, the Void; pure consciousness 2. Nonspatial, nontemporal 3. Sense of objectivity or reality 4. Blessedness, peace, etc. 5. Feeling of the holy, sacred, or divine |

**COMMON CHARACTERISTICS
OF EXTROVERTIVE MYSTICAL
EXPERIENCES – *contd.***

5. Feeling of the holy, sacred, or divine
6. Paradoxicality
7. Alleged by mystics to be ineffable.

**COMMON CHARACTERISTICS
OF INTROVERTIVE MYSTICAL
EXPERIENCES – *contd.***

6. Paradoxicality
7. Alleged by mystics to be ineffable.

He then concludes that, 'characteristics 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 are identical in the two lists and are, therefore, *universal common characteristics of mysticism in all cultures, ages, religions, and civilizations of the world*'.⁶⁵ Even more, Stace adds one final word on the matter: 'extrovertive experience, although we recognize it as a distinct type, is actually on a lower level than the introvertive type'.⁶⁶ Though this final position is clearly reflective of Stace's own monistic, introvertive bias, it gives us a straightforward claim to deal with regarding the supposed common mystical characteristics of: 'the sense of objectivity or reality'; 'Blessedness, peace, etc.'; 'feeling of the holy sacred, or divine'; 'paradoxicality' and 'ineffability'. Let us take no. 3, 'the sense of objectivity or reality' as our model for examination. While it is the case that all mystics claim that theirs is an experience of reality – actually reality with a capital R – this seemingly common claim provides no basis for Stace's extreme conclusion about the 'universal common characteristics of mysticism'. It does not because the terms 'objectivity' and 'reality' are as notoriously elusive as they are seductive. Every system and every mystic had made claims to ultimate objectivity and to discovered Reality, but the claims are more often than not mutually incompatible. For example, while objectivity or reality (Reality) in Plato and Neoplatonism is found in the 'world of Ideas', these characteristics are found in God in Jewish mysticism and again in the *Tao*, *nirvāna*, and Nature, in Taoism, Buddhism, and Richard Jefferies⁶⁷ respectively. It seems clear that these respective mystics do not experience the same Reality or objectivity, and therefore, it is not reasonable to posit that their respective experiences of Reality or objectivity are similar. As presumably few of my readers have had a mystical experience, perhaps this point can be reinforced by comparing the terms 'Reality' in, say, Marxism, where Reality is equated with the economic and material, as against Freudianism where Reality is defined in terms of the psychological or alternatively in empiricism where Reality is equivalent to the sensible or that which is derived from the sensible as compared to

the Idealist 'Reality' which is ideational and non-sensible. The presence of the term 'Reality' is no guarantee of either a common experience or again of a common language and metaphysics.

Careful inspection thus shows that while lists of supposed phenomenological characteristics seem to help in delineating what mystical experience is, and also in establishing what ties seemingly different experiences together as a class of like experience, such lists, in fact, are so general that even though they serve to *exclude* certain types of experience as, for a bizarre example, contemplating one's navel, as a mystical experience, they remain so general as not to suffice to delineate what mystical experience actually is, nor again are they sophisticated in their recognition of the contextual basis of language and thus are incapable of sorting out the actual meaning of mystical reports. Henry Suso's 'intoxication with the immeasurable abundance of the Divine House . . . entirely lost in God [of Christianity]',⁶⁸ the *Upanishads* 'sat [what is] . . . is expressed in the word *satyam*, the Real. It comprises this whole universe: Thou art this whole universe',⁶⁹ as well as the Buddhist's 'dimension of nothingness' (*ākincaññāyatana*)⁷⁰ all can be included under these broad phenomenological descriptions of 'Reality', yet for the reasons already advanced it is clear that Suso's Christian God is not equivalent to the Buddhist's 'nothingness', and that the experience of entering into the Divine House is not equivalent to losing oneself in Buddhist 'nothingness'. It becomes apparent on reflection that *different* metaphysical entities can be 'described' by the same phrases if these phrases are *indefinite* enough, as are the very general descriptive phrases used in our phenomenological lists. While appearing to delineate quite concrete phenomena these lists do not have the power to provide definite descriptions of any specific discrete phenomena: neither the claimed universal, common mystical experience nor anything else.⁷¹

The mention of different ontological realities being covered by the same term is an issue that raises severe difficulties of a logical, semantical, and metaphysical sort. Consider, for example, the use of the term 'nothingness' which has just been mentioned in the context of the Buddhist 'experience of nothingness'. When comparisons are made, based on the presence of this term without careful inquiry, insuperable problems emerge. For one has to ask at the outset about the precise use of the term. Is it being used as a subjective description of an experience or a putative objective description of an object or objective ontological state of being? This is the difference between using the term in a way analogous to the

subjective use of 'happiness', i.e. 'I experience happiness' as compared to the objective (and object) claim 'I experience God'. The problem of reification of course enters the picture too. This distinction already indicates that the utterance of the term 'nothingness' does not suffice to assure the univocal use of the term. Again, this usage encourages one to reflect on the ontological claims that lie beneath and are necessary correlates of language. Even agreeing that in two or more cases the term 'nothingness' is being used in the sense of an objective ontological reference, there is still no surety that the term is being used in synonymous ways. One has to ask whether the various experiences of 'nothingness' are similar or dissimilar experiences of the *same* phenomenon, i.e. 'nothingness', or different experiences of *different* phenomena, i.e. 'nothingness' is a term which is used to cover alternative ontic realities. In this latter instance, which seems to fit at least a substantial segment of the data of mystical experience more adequately, the difference between cases is a difference between *what* is experienced, not just *how* something is experienced. The appropriateness of this second schema, i.e. that the term is used to cover differing ontic 'states of affairs', recommends itself because to hold that it is just a case of *how* one experiences a common reality, one would have to have a sufficiently delimiting list of corresponding and agreed predicates that the experienced object possessed in both (or more) cases which are being compared. This, however, is absent in at least many, if not most, cases. Concrete cases of usage will assist us here. Stace, for example, finds the use of 'nothingness' to be a near-universal feature of mystical experience, which he takes to be another valuable support for his universalistic 'core' thesis. Thus he compares the use of the term as found in a Hasidic tale with that found elsewhere in eastern and western mystical reports. Unfortunately Stace's comparison is facile, being based on an ignorance of the Hasidic-Kabbalistic context, which gives the term its peculiarly Hasidic meaning. The term 'nothing' or 'nothingness' in this Jewish intellectual environment does *not* mean, as Stace erroneously believes, a reference to an introvertive experience of mystical unity of the monistic sort which Stace favours.⁷² Stace, working from translations rather than the original Hebrew texts, fails to appreciate that the term in this setting is a translation of the term *Ayin* which is used in Kabbalistic literature as a name of God relating to his first acts of self-revelation from his self-contained mysteriousness as *Eyn Sof* (God as He is in Himself) and yet still prior to his manifestation as the first Sefirah *Keter*. In the late-

thirteenth-century work *Masoret ha-Berit* the following understanding of the term *Ayin* is given: 'having more being than any other being in the world, but since it is simple, and all other simple things are complex when compared with its simplicity, so in comparison it is called "nothing" ["Ayin"]'.⁷³ As *Ayin*, 'nothingness', God, as the term is meant to indicate, is still beyond any and all human understanding of experience. As *Ayin*, God is still alone. No human experience ever achieves relation with this dimension of God's nature. Stace's comments on this notion, therefore, can be seen to be a case of eisegesis which is totally *out of context* and without any meaning in the original kabbalistic sources and Hasidic mystical report.

Alternatively, the term 'nothingness' also is prominent in Buddhist texts. *Mu*, the Chinese and Japanese Buddhist term for 'nothingness' and 'non-being', for example, is not a referent to God as he is in himself or in his first stages of self-revelation, but rather refers to the absolute ontological condition of emptiness or *sūnyatā* which transcends all being, all predication, all substantiality. And here, of course, the understanding of *sūnyatā* becomes the subject of fierce debate between competing schools of Buddhism, being especially important to the Mahāyānists. Again, it is often, but in my view erroneously, argued that the Christian mystical tradition of Dionysius the Areopagite⁷⁴ and his heirs which talks of 'nothingness', as *nichts* in Eckhart's language, is the same as the Buddhist *Mu*, for the Christian mystic such as Eckhart seeks the re-birth of his soul now purified through its immersion into the *Gottheit*, whereas the Buddhist seeks *sūnyatā* as the transcendence or liberation from all selfhood. We note too that the elusive concept of the 'self', obviously central to this discussion, needs close scrutiny in its eastern and western and Buddhist Christian contexts; if these comparisons are to make sense. Merely adding to the list of terms used in all traditions that of the 'self', without thorough exploration and analysis of its meaning, is to compound the confusion respective to clarifying, for example, the notion of 'nothingness'.⁷⁵

In like fashion, Stace also argues that Islamic mysticism manifests similar universal features to those found in Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, and the like. However, close attention to the ultimate Islamic mystical state of *fana fi-Allah* will reveal that, for example, it is not the same as, say, *nirvāna*, and likewise, when the Islamic mystic talks of the 'nothingness' of his experience he does not mean the same thing as does the Chinese Master when he talks of *Mu*, or the Hinayanist and Mahayananist when they talk of *sūn-*

yata. Involved in the 'nothingness' of *fana* is not only loss of identity – the similarity which Stace fastens on to make his erroneous comparison – but also *baqa* (lit. subsistence), everlasting life in *Allah*. However, in Buddhist doctrine there is no entity or state comparable to *baqa*, as there is no God or God-like being in Buddhism. It is precisely this merging into Allah in the sense of *baqa* that, for example, the Sufi Abu Ali of Sind describes when he writes of his experience of *fana*:

Creatures are subject to changing 'states' but the gnostic has no 'state', because his vestiges are effaced and his essence annihilated by the essence of another, and his traces are lost in another's traces.⁷⁶

Again, Baba Krihi of Shiraz gives precise sense to this Islamic use of 'nothingness' when he discusses his experience:

But when I looked with Allah's eyes – only Allah I saw. I passed away into nothingness, I vanished, and lo, I was the all-living – only Allah I saw.⁷⁷

Related to the linguistic-cum-ontological confusion just discussed, there is also a substantial logical issue which we briefly referred to earlier and which now calls for more sustained discussion. This issue relates to the claim that mystical language is defined by its 'ineffability' and its 'paradoxicality'. These two features are standard elements in all phenomenological descriptions of mystical experience and are taken to be grounds for their comparability; but do they actually support this position? Do these elements logically allow for the inquiry into the possible identity of mystical experiences and their attempted comparability, especially their claimed equivalence or similarity? What leads me to ask these questions is the following argument: the terms 'paradox' and 'ineffable' do not function as terms that inform us about the context of experience, or any given ontological 'state of affairs'. Rather they function to cloak experience from investigation and to hold mysterious whatever ontological commitments one has. As a consequence, the use of the terms 'paradox' and 'ineffable' do not provide *data* for comparability, rather they eliminate the logical possibility of the comparability of experience altogether. Consider the following example: (1) mystic A claims experience *x* is paradoxical and ineffable; while (2) mystic B claims experience *y* is paradoxical and ineffable. The only logically permissible conclusion one can draw in this situation is that both mystic A and mystic B claim their experience is paradoxical; *nothing* can be said about the content of

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their respective experiences *x* and *y* for there is no way to give content to experiences *x* or *y* in such a manner as to learn anything about them, apart, as we have said, from their both being paradoxical, which could then serve as the basis of a reasonable comparison. To assume, as James, Huxley, Stace, and many others do, that, because both mystics claim that their experiences are paradoxical, they are describing like experiences is a *non sequitur*.

Another way of getting at this issue is by asking the question: 'What ontological or logical reason demands that there be only one experience that is ineffable or paradoxical?' What emerges in answer to this question is that if mystical experience(s) are being accurately described when they are said to be paradoxical and ineffable, then these experiences are actually being removed from all possibility of definition, description, pointing to, and thus also, of comparability. One could express this position regarding the claims and consequences of the claims relative to the mystical experience thus: 'Every mystical experience *x* is P and I, where P = paradoxical and I = ineffable', thus 'any statement regarding the internal character of *x* will be paradoxical and ineffable'. Given this position, one has no reasonable grounds for making the assertion that any two mystical experiences *x* are the same. That is to say: in Case (i), '*x* is PI' could logically refer to an experience containing attributes or elements *a, b, c . . .*; while in Case (ii), '*x* is PI' could logically refer to an experience containing attributes or elements *d, e, f*. And the same in every additional case, i.e. Case (iii), '*x* is PI' could logically refer to an experience containing attributes or elements *g, h, k*, and so on. As there is no way to get behind the expression '*x* is PI' in each respective case, this in fact being the logical force of the expression '*x* is PI', there is no way to evaluate Cases (i), (ii), (iii) in order to ascertain whether they are the same – even if they were the same. Once one has introduced *per definitionem* the features of paradox and ineffability, no other result can follow. Moreover, not only is there now no possibility of comparing different mystical experiences, but the perplexing question about the status and intelligibility of the other elements in mystical reports also opens up. How strongly can any of the elements in a mystical report be taken as evidence for a phenomenology or typology of mysticism in so far as these statements are associated with the basic notion that mystical experience is ineffable and paradoxical? If the terms 'paradoxical' and 'ineffable' mean anything, do they not cancel out all other descriptive claims, thus undermining any and all attempts at a phenomenological typology of mystical experience based on post-

experiential reports? There is certainly something logically and linguistically odd at work here that is almost always ignored and which needs careful critical scrutiny. *A fortiori* it would appear that to take the mystic's claim seriously, i.e. that his proposition '*x* is PI' is a true description, turns out to have the damaging implication that one cannot make any reasonable or even intelligible claim for any mystical proposition. The proposition '*x* is PI' has the curious logical result that a serious interpretation of the proposition neither makes the experience *x* intelligible nor informs us in any way about *x*, but rather cancels *x* out of our language – which, of course, is what most mystics claim they want. This, however, is no foundation for a phenomenology of mysticism or a typology of comparative mystical experience, for there are a wide variety of mutually exclusive ontological 'states of affairs' which can thus be ruled out. At this juncture, it genuinely is a case of 'where you cannot speak be silent'.⁷⁸

Going one step further, it should also be noted that there is a complex issue operating in the identification of the object of mystical experience which is usually ignored. The issue to which I refer is the fact that writers on mysticism seem to take the terms 'God', *nirvāṇa*, etc., 'more as names than as descriptions, i.e. they are handled as if they were arbitrary labels of some underlying common reality. This, however, is an error, for 'God' and *nirvāṇa* or even 'Being' or *Urgrund* are not only or even primarily names but are, rather, descriptions, or at least disguised descriptions, and carry a meaning relative to some ontological structure. Thus, the term 'God' carries with it ontological characteristics, perfection characteristics, i.e. all the *omni* words we attribute necessarily to God, and 'personality' characteristics, etc. Alternatively, *Atman* carries some of the same, but also some considerably different ontic, metaphysical, and 'personality' characteristics and the same, but even more radically apposite, assertion is required when we refer to *nirvāṇa*. Substituting what seem to be more neutral terms such as 'Being' also proves less helpful than at first appears because 'Being' too is not a free-floating bit of ontological information, but part of the flotsam and jetsam of specific meaning-systems. When Plato speaks of 'Being', his meaning is different from that intended when the term finds its way into the philosophical vocabulary of Spinoza and Schelling, or Sartre and Heidegger, to say nothing of Zen or Taoism.

These remarks lead us back again to the foundations of the basic claim being advanced in this paper, namely that mystical experience

is contextual. A suggestive place to pick up the thread of the argument is in the context of the oft made and oft repeated statement that mysticism, in one sense or another, aims at assisting the self to 'transcend' his situation. Thus, in all traditions we have practices that function in the role of asceticism – yoga, meditation, and the like which are aimed at freeing the 'self' from its 'conditioned existence', whatever the given experiential, socio-historical and religious-ideological 'conditions' might happen to be. These processes of 'liberation' appear, on the face of it, as movements which lead the 'self' from states of 'conditioned' to 'unconditioned' consciousness, from 'contextual' to 'non-contextual' awareness. Moreover, this is the usual way of evaluating them, especially by those seeking some variety of the *philosophia perennis*, the universal common mystical experience. For they argue, behind or above the limitations placed upon our consciousness by our conditioned historical, socio-ideological situation there is a shared universal vision of the commonality of reality which is had by those who know how to transcend these arbitrary sociological and historical determinations, the evidence for this being the claimed similarity of mystical experience across cultures and historical epochs. Those who advocate this position, however, are misled by appearances. For it is in appearance only that such activities as yoga produce the desired state of 'pure' consciousness. Properly understood, yoga, for example, is not an unconditioning or deconditioning of consciousness, but rather it is a reconditioning of consciousness, i.e. a substituting of one form of conditioned and/or contextual consciousness for another, albeit a new, unusual, and perhaps altogether more interesting form of conditioned-contextual consciousness.

There is no substantive evidence to suggest that there is any pure consciousness *per se* achieved by these various, common mystical practices, e.g. fasting, yoga, and the like. This point is well illustrated through consideration of the widely practised art of yoga. Yoga is found in all the major oriental religions, yet the goal of yoga, and even the meaning of yoga,⁷⁹ differs from particular tradition to particular tradition. Thus, for example, in Upanishadic Hinduism yoga is practised in order to purify and unify the individual 'soul' and then to unite it with Brahman or, as later represented in the Bhagavad Gita, with Krishna. However, even within Hinduism, yoga combines with other metaphysical systems which claim to provide the 'way' and define the 'goal', *samādhi*, differently. The Sāṃkhya tradition, for example, understands the goal to be the perfection of

the soul which does not lead to any form of *unio mystica* but rather to a splendid self-identity which, like God's perfection, is self-contained and isolated.⁸⁰ Alternatively, Buddhism also inherited yoga practices as a central element but now as central to a radically different metaphysical schema which recognized neither the existence of a personal God – or even an impersonal one – nor the substantiality of individual souls (*ātman* or *perusha*). Instead Buddhism views yoga as a technique for overcoming its metaphysical *raison d'être*, suffering and the corollary liberation from all illusions of substantiality. Yoga is now put at the service of 'emptiness', remembering that emptiness is not a 'something' and that one must not reify emptiness into a thing as, for example, Heidegger does with 'nothing'.⁸¹ It must also be noted that in Buddhism, as in Hinduism, the proper metaphysics also becomes the subject of debate and schism, creating alternative Buddhist schools⁸² with their differing analyses of the nature and purpose of yoga. Without going into further detail, let it suffice to note also that yoga is also practised in Jainism and other oriental traditions which take still other views than those found in Hinduism or Buddhism regarding the nature of the soul, ultimate reality, and the purpose of life. This variety of dogmatic doctrinal belief is not something to be dismissed as merely marginal or preparatory, nor can one, recognizing the complexity of the circumstances, talk about yoga in the abstract, for yoga in that circumstance will then certainly become just an empty abstraction. Moreover, the significance of the contextual element becomes all the more pressing when one realizes that for Indian systems metaphysics is soteriology. What one believes does affect one's salvation – and 'salvation',ifferingly understood from tradition to tradition, is the respective goal(s) of each. The experience that the mystic or yoga has is the experience he seeks as a consequence of the shared beliefs he holds through his metaphysical doctrinal commitments.

Closely allied to the erroneous contention that we can achieve a state of pure consciousness is the oft used notion of the 'given' or the 'suchness' or the 'real' to describe the pure state of mystical experience which transcends all contextual epistemological colouring. But what sense do these terms have? What is the 'given' or the 'suchness' or even the 'real'?⁸³ Analysis of these terms indicates their relativity; they are applied to a variety of alternative and even mutually exclusive 'states of affairs' and 'states of no-affairs'. This variety itself should alert us to the real danger and arbitrariness involved in this gambit. Phenomenologists seem especially prone to

this fruitless naivety – all intuit the 'given' but their intuitions differ significantly. It can fairly be said that no attempt to state clearly or individuate the 'given' has succeeded. Indeed, talk of the 'given' seems to be a move made to short-circuit the very sort of epistemological inquiry here being engaged in, but such a move fails because there is no evidence that there is any 'given' which can be disclosed without the imposition of the mediating conditions of the knower. All 'givens' are also the product of the processes of 'choosing', 'shaping', and 'receiving'. That is, the 'given' is appropriated through acts which shape it into forms which we can make intelligible to ourselves given our conceptual constitution, and which structure it in order to respond to the specific contextual needs and mechanisms of consciousness of the receiver. This description of the epistemic activity, even the epistemic activity involved in mystical experience, of course requires what in the Kantian idiom, though not in Kant's own manner, would be called a 'transcendental deduction',⁸⁴ i.e. an argument which reveals both conditions of knowing in general as well as the grounds of its own operation and which is thematized according to specific possibilities – and this seems both appropriate and necessary, though its structure cannot even be outlined here. There seems no other way to get at the issue that would be philosophically satisfactory and which would satisfy our interest in the legitimization of the conditions of our knowledge, mystical knowledge included. This means that the mystic even in his state of reconditioned consciousness is also a shaper of his experience; that he is not a *tabula rasa* on which the 'ultimate' or the 'given' simply impinges itself – whatever ultimate he happens to be seeking and happens to find. This much is certain: the mystical experience must be mediated by the kind of beings we are. And the kind of beings we are require that experience be not only instantaneous and discontinuous, but that it also involve memory, apprehension, expectation, language, accumulation of prior experience, concepts, and expectations, with each experience being built on the back of all these elements and being shaped anew by each fresh experience. Thus experience of *x* – be *x* God or *nirvāṇa* – is conditioned both linguistically and cognitively by a variety of factors including the expectation of what will be experienced. Related to these expectations are also future directed activities such as meditation, fasting, ritual ablations, self-mortification, and so on, which create further expectations about what the future and future states of consciousness will be like. There is obviously a self-fulfilling prophetic aspect to this sort of activity.

The creative role of the self in his experience is not analogous to the passive role of the tape-recorder or camera. Even in mystical experience, there seems to be epistemological activity of the sort we know as discrimination and integration and, in certain cases at least, of further mental activities such as relating the present experience to past and future experience, as well as traditional theological claims and metaphysics. Take, for example, Jan van Ruysbroeck's descriptions given in his *The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage*:

When the inward and God-seeing man has thus attained to his eternal Image, and in this clearness, through the Son, has entered into the bosom of the Father: then he is enlightened by Divine truth, and he receives anew, every moment, the Eternal Birth, and he goes forth according to the way of the light in a Divine contemplation. And here there begins the fourth and last point; namely, a loving meeting, in which, above all else, our highest blessedness consists.

You should know that the heavenly Father, as a living ground, with all that lives in Him, is actively turned towards His Son, as to His own Eternal Wisdom. And that same Wisdom, with all that lives in It, is actively turned back towards the Father, that is, towards that very ground from which It comes forth. And in this meeting, there comes forth the third Person, between the Father and the Son; that is the Holy Ghost, Their mutual Love, who is one with them Both in the same nature. And he enfolds and drenches through both in action and fruition the Father and the Son, and all that lives in Both, with such great riches and such joy that as to this all creatures must eternally be silent; for the incomprehensible wonder of this love eternally transcends the understanding of all creatures. Wonder is understood and tasted without amazement, there the spirit dwells above itself, and in one with the Spirit of God; and tastes and sees without measure, even as God, the riches which are the spirit itself in the unity of the living ground, where it possesses itself according to the way of its uncreated essence.

Now this rapturous meeting is incessantly and actively renewed in us, according to the way of God; for the Father gives Himself in the Son, and the Son gives Himself in the Father, in an eternal content and a loving embrace; and this renews itself every moment within the bonds of love. For like as the Father incessantly beholds all things in the birth of His Son, so all things are loved anew by the Father and the Son in the outpouring of

the Holy Ghost. And this is the active meeting of the Father and of the Son, in which we are lovingly embraced by the Holy Ghost in eternal love.⁸⁵

Ruysbroeck then goes on to describe the 'unity' man may achieve in God which I quote *in extenso*:

And after this there follows the union without distinction. For you must apprehend the Love of God not only as an outpouring with all good, and as drawing back again into the Unity; but it is also, above all distinction, an essential fruition in the bare Essence of the Godhead. And in consequence of this enlightened men have found within themselves an essential contemplation which is above reason and without reason, and a fruitive tendency which pierces through every condition and all being, and through which they immerse themselves in a wayless abyss of fathomless beatitude, where the Trinity of the Divine Persons possess Their Nature in the essential Unity. Behold, this beatitude is so onefold and so wayless that in it every essential gazing, tendency, and creaturely distinction cease and pass away. For by this fruition, all uplifted spirits are melted and noughted in the Essence of God, Which is the superessence of all essence. There they fall from themselves into a solitude and an ignorance which are fathomless; there all light is turned to darkness; there the three Persons give place to the Essential Unity, and abide without distinction in fruition of essential blessedness. This blessedness is essential to God, and superessential to all creatures; for no created essence can become one with God's Essence and pass away from its own substance. For so the creature would become God, which is impossible; for the Divine Essence can neither wax nor wane, nor can anything be added to It or taken from It. Yet all loving spirits are one fruition and one blessedness with God without distinction; for that beatific state, which is the fruition of God and of all His beloved, is so simple and onefold that therein neither Father, nor Son, nor Holy Ghost, is distinct according to the Persons, neither is any creature. But all enlightened spirits are here lifted up above themselves into a wayless fruition, which is an abundance beyond all the fullness that any creature has ever received or shall ever receive. For there all uplifted spirits are, in their superessence, one fruition and one beatitude with God without distinction; and there this beatitude is so onefold that no distinction can enter into it. And this was prayed for by Christ when He besought His Father in heaven that all His beloved

might be made perfect in one, even as He is one with the Father through the Holy Spirit . . .⁸⁶

Though this description may appear, on first reading, epistemologically, theologically, or metaphysically neutral, closer inspection will reveal a myriad of epistemological, theological and metaphysical assumptions or doctrines which colour the account both *before* and *after* it occurs.

Moreover, in almost all cases, if not in all, mystical experience knows, as we have shown, what end it seeks from the inception of its traversal along the 'mystic's way'. Thus the Sufi *tariq*, the Taoist *Tao*, the Buddhist *dharma* and the Christian *via mystica* are all 'intentional', i.e. intend some final state of being or non-being, some goal of union or communion, some sense of release, exaltation, blessedness, or joy. And the *tariq*, the *Tao*, and the *via mystica* seek different goals because their initial, generative, problems are different. The Sufi and Christian mystic begin with the 'problems' of finitude, sin, and distance from God, while the Buddhist begins with the problem of suffering and *anitya* or impermanence and, again, the Taoist starts from a positive appreciation of the self and world and seeks to protract spiritual life by the victory of the *yang* over *yen*. The respective 'generating' problems at the heart of each tradition suggest their respective alternative answers involving, as they do, differing mental and epistemological constructs, ontological commitments, and metaphysical superstructures which order experience in differing ways. The mind can be seen to contribute both the problem and the means of its overcoming: it defines the origin, the way, and the goal, shaping experience accordingly. The Buddhist experience of *nirvāna*, the Jewish of *devekuth*, and the Christian of *unio mystica*, the Sufi of *fana*, the Taoist of *Tao* are the *result*, at least in part, of specific conceptual influences, i.e. the 'starting problems' of each doctrinal, theological system. We are each a unitary consciousness and each of us connects the 'problem' and its 'answer' through forms of connection, synthesis, and objectivity which are integral to our consciousness as conscious agents of the sort we are. Indeed, it appears that the different states of experience which go by the names *nirvāna*, *devekuth*, *fana*, etc., are not the ground but the *outcome* of the complex epistemological activity which is set in motion by the integrating character of self-consciousness employed in the specifically mystical modality. These synthetic operations of the mind are in fact the fundamental conditions under which, and under which alone, mystical experience, as

all experience, takes place. These constructive conditions of consciousness produce the grounds on which mystical experience is possible at all.

This entire area of the 'intentionality' of experience and the language of experience as it relates to mysticism is a rich area for further study. By way of only introducing the significance of this topic for our concerns, I will merely suggest that, if one looks closely at the language of mystics, as well as at mystical devotion, practices, and literature, one will find that much of it is 'intentional' in the sense suggested by Husserl and Brentano. Though I am no great admirer of either with regard to their more general metaphysical positions, their discussion of 'intentional language' *per se* is instructive, for it calls to our attention that certain terms such as 'expects', 'believes', 'hopes', 'seeks', 'searches', 'desires', 'wants', 'finds', 'looks for', involve, as Brentano said, 'an object in themselves'. We must heed the warning that linguistic intentionality does not generate or guarantee the existence of the 'intentional object', but we must also recognize the epistemologically formative character of intentional language mirroring as it does intentional acts of consciousness. Using the language modern phenomenologists favour we might say that 'intentionality' means to describe a 'datum as meant', i.e. to be aware that an action includes a reach for some specific meaning or meaningful content.

The value of recognizing the intentional quality of much mystical theory and practice can be brought out by reflecting on the intentionality involved in yoga and like mystical behaviour. Thus, we need only ask the mystic the quite proper question: 'Why are you doing such and such?' To this question the *yogi*, for example, would answer that he takes up his gruelling practice because he holds to a specific metaphysic of self and suffering (differing in Hinduism and Buddhism and even within each broad tradition) and believes that, in the words of the *Śiva Samhitā*: 'Through [yoga] practice (*abhyasa*) success is obtained, through practice one gains liberation.'⁸⁷ The Sufi mystic would answer likewise that he practises the ritual acts of *dhikr* (recollection of the divine names), the breathing exercises, the fasting, and the prayer regimens because, as Ibn Ata Allah notes: 'Recollection of God (*dhikr*) . . . is the very prop upon which the Way (*tariqa*) (to unity with God, i.e. *tawhid*) rests.'⁸⁸ The same sort of replies and intentional reasoning (though of course giving different intentions) can be found in most mystical traditions, and certainly in those of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Taoism, and Hinduism.

Though we have concentrated on the active role of the knowing self in the epistemological process for the most part in this paper as a corrective to the traditional way in which mystical experience is approached it also has to be recognized, at the same time, that this experiential situation also needs to be turned round. That is to say, lest my readers gain a misapprehension of my view, or of the complexity of the epistemological process involved in mystical experience a few words about the 'known' aspect of mystical experience are called for. To get the conditions of mystical experience properly set and in proper perspective, it is imperative to notice that in any experiential situation like that claimed by and for the mystics the full content of the concept of experience needs to be appreciated. When Smith says 'I experience *x*' he is not only involved in the sorts of epistemological procedures that we have just discussed, i.e. that the mind is active in constructing *x* as experienced, but he is also asserting that there is an *x* to be experienced. In other words, mystics and students of mysticism have to recognize that mystical experience is not (putatively) solely the product of the conditioned act of experience as constituted from the side of the experiencer, but is also constituted and conditioned by what the *object* or 'state of affairs' is that the mystic (believes he) 'encounters' or experiences. To say, 'Smith experiences *x*' is also to recognize that this experience is in part dependent on what *x* is. But here is the rub – this recognition also requires the additional awareness of the complexity of the situation in that what '*x* is' is itself, at least partly, determined by a contextual consciousness. To clarify this point, consider this example: to say, 'Smith has a mystical experience of God' means in terms of our foregoing discussion, not only to assert that Smith conditions the situation in structured ways, but also that the constitution of his experience depends on the cognizance of the putative reality of the object of his experience, i.e. God. Yet the complexity is compounded by the recognition that the existence of 'God' is itself, at least in part, contributed to experience. One might express this dialectic more clearly as follows: 'Smith experiences God' entails, given the strong sense of experience the mystics intend, both (a) 'Smith consciously constitutes "God"' as well as (b) "'God' makes himself known to Smith' – recognizing that here too, 'God' has also been, at least partially, conditioned for Smith. For Smith, as for all of us, only knows things as they 'appear' to him.

Another way of revealing these different elements in the mystical (and other) experience is to recognize what language has to teach us

through the use of the two quite different locutions: (a) 'Smith experiences God' and (b) 'God is given to Smith in experience'. Locution (a) suggests something of the recognition of the independence of the object of experience, though this too is regulated by structures of consciousness and experience, while locution (b) points towards the situational, i.e. the fact that our experience of God belongs to an experiential context which is, at least partially, regulative and determinative of the content of the experience. In this way, we can again see clearly how it is that mystical experiences differ from tradition to tradition. The Jewish mystic 'experiences God' and 'God is given to the Jew in his experience,' whereas the Buddhist mystic, in contradistinction, recognizes the 'objectivity' of *nirvāna* and both 'experiences *nirvāna*' and has '*nirvāna* given to him' (make itself present) in his experience. Moreover, to take account of the differing objects of experience is to recognize of necessity the difference of the experiences themselves – even if these differences are themselves at least partially contributed to 'reality' at an earlier or parallel stage.

IV

Our discussion, though somewhat lengthy, has only begun to touch upon some of the more fundamental issues relating to a proper philosophical and phenomenological study of mysticism. Our primary aim has been to mark out a new way of approaching the data, concentrating especially on disabusing scholars of the preconceived notion that all mystical experience is the same or similar. If mystical experience is always the same or similar in essence, as is so often claimed, then this has to be demonstrated by recourse to, and accurate handling of, the evidence, convincing logical argument, and coherent epistemological procedures. It cannot be shown to be the case merely by supported and/or unsupportable assertions to this effect, no matter how passionately these are advanced, nor again can it be demonstrated by *a priori* assumptions on the matter which 'prove' their case in what is essentially circular fashion.

Hopefully it has been made clear that we do not hold one mystical tradition to be superior or 'normative' as, for example, did Stace and Zaehner (and in opposite directions, one might add, with Stace favouring monism and Zaehner theism). Nor have we any particular dogmatic position to defend in this discussion. Our sole concern has been to try and see, recognizing the contextuality of our own understanding, what the *mystical evidence* will allow in the

way of legitimate philosophical reflection. Our investigation suggests what it suggests – a wide variety of mystical experiences which are, at least in respect of some determinative aspects, culturally and ideologically grounded. Yet having argued for this position, we are aware that two things have to continue to be done: (1) further careful, expert, study of specific mystical traditions has to be undertaken to uncover what their characteristics are and especially how they relate to the larger theological milieu out of which they emerge; and (2) further fundamental epistemological research into the conditions of mystical experience has to be undertaken in order to lay bare the skeleton of such experience in so far as this is possible. This latter enterprise is especially important and, yet, is all the more neglected.

One final word about the use of the available evidence and the construction of a theory to account for it. A strong supporting element in favour of our pluralistic account is found in the fact that our position is able to accommodate *all* the evidence which is accounted for by non-pluralistic accounts without being reductionistic, i.e. it's able to do more justice to the specificity of the evidence and its inherent distinctions and disjunctions than can the alternative approaches. That is to say, our account neither (a) overlooks any evidence, nor (b) has any need to simplify the available evidence to make it fit into comparative or comparable categories, nor (c) does it begin with *a priori* assumptions about the nature of ultimate reality – whatever particular traditional theological form this metaphysical assumption takes (such *a priori* assumptions are common to almost all the non-pluralistic accounts). As a consequence of these hermeneutical advantages, one is in a position to respect the richness of the experiential and conceptual data involved in this area of concern: 'God' can be 'God', 'Brahman' can be 'Brahman' and *nirvāṇa* can be *nirvāṇa* without any reductionist attempt to equate the concept 'God' with that of 'Brahman', or 'Brahman' with *nirvāṇa*. This respect for the relevant evidence, both experiential and conceptual, is an essential element in the study of mysticism which is disregarded only at the philosopher's peril.

NOTES

- 1 For a complete defence of this position, see my forthcoming paper on 'Mystical Experience and Theological Truth'.
- 2 See Ninian Smart's essay 'Interpretation and Mystical Experience' in *Religious Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1965).

- 3 See, for example, R. Panikkar's *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (London, 1964) and *Kultmysterium in Hinduismus und Christentum* (Munich, 1964).
- 4 See Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy* (London, 1946) and Fritjof Schuon, *The Transcendental Unity of Religions* (New York, 1953).
- 5 See, for example, A. Leonard, 'Studies on the Phenomena of Mystical Experience' in *Mystery and Mysticism* (London, 1956); R. Otto's *Mysticism East and West* (New York, 1957), and D. T. Suzuki's, *Mysticism Christian and Buddhist* (London, 1957). See also F. Heiler, *Prayer* (London, 1933); J. Maréchal, *Studies in the Psychology of the Mystics* (London, 1927); William Johnston, *The Still Point* (New York, 1970); James Pratt, *The Religious Consciousness* (New York, 1930); E. Underhill, *Mysticism* (London, 1911).
- 6 R. C. Zaehner's three major studies of mysticism are *Hindu and Muslim Mysticism* (London, 1960); *Mysticism, Sacred and Profane* (London, 1957; New York, 1961); and *Concordant Discord* (London, 1970). See also his *Our Savage God* (London, 1974).
- 7 W. T. Stace's two major contributions to the study of mysticism are *The Teachings of the Mystics* (New York, 1960); and *Mysticism and Philosophy* (Philadelphia, 1960; London, 1961).
- 8 Ninian Smart's major contributions to the study of mysticism are *Reasons and Faiths* (London, 1958); *The Philosophy of Religion* (New York, 1970); 'Interpretation and Mystical Experience' in *Religious Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1965); 'Mystical Experience' in W. H. Capitan and D. Merrill (eds.) *Art, Mind and Religion* (Pittsburgh, 1967), pp. 133–58; 'Mystical Experience' in *Sophia*, I (1962), pp. 19–25; 'History of Mysticism' in P. Edwards (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York), Vol. 5. See also the essay by Prof. Smart in the present volume.
- 9 For criticism of Zaehner see below pages 30–32.
- 10 For criticism of Stace see below pages 27–30. It is also important to recognize Stace's fundamental bias in favour of a monistic account of mysticism which sees the monistic as the most authentic form of mysticism. This bias corrupts much of his handling of evidence and the nature of his arguments and judgements. See also W. J. Wainwright, 'Stace and Mysticism', in *Journal of Religion*, 50 (1970), pp. 139–54.
- 11 Smart's studies are problematic on this crucial point and at times he even lapses into holding what we have called Thesis II. Thus, for example, in summarizing the results of his critique of Zaehner in his paper on 'Interpretation and Mystical Experience' in *Religious Studies*, vol. 1, No. 1 (1965) he writes: 'To put the possibility which I am canvassing in a simple form, it can be reduced to the following theses:

 1. Phenomenologically, mysticism is everywhere the same.
 2. Different flavours, however, accrue to the experiences of mystics

because of their different ways of life and modes of auto-interpretation.

3. The truth of interpretation depends in large measure on factors extrinsic to the mystical experience itself.'
- 12 We shall critically consider these phenomenological typologies, however, later in this paper in light of our more general thesis about the nature of mystical experience.
- 13 I have read every major study of this subject known to me and in my reading the only two students of the subject who seem *sufficiently* to recognize the full meaning and implications of this issue in a systematic way for the study of mysticism are R. C. Zaehner and Ninian Smart. Yet even they do very little with it. The point is also recognized in a narrow context by H. P. Owen in his article on 'Christian Mysticism' in *Religious Studies* 7 (1971), pp. 31–42.
- 14 For a technical discussion of the Buddhist doctrine of *nirvāna* see D. Kalupahana, *Buddhist Philosophy* (Hawaii, 1976); pp. 69–90; C. Prebish (ed.), *Buddhism: A Modern Perspective* (Pennsylvania, 1975); L. de la Vallée Poussin, *Nirvana* (Paris, 1923); I. B. Horner, *The Early Buddhist Theory of Man Perfected* (London, 1936); R. Johansson, *The Psychology of Nirvana* (New York, 1970); T. Stcherbatsky, *The Buddhist Conception of Nirvana* (Leningrad, 1927); G. R. Welbon, *The Buddhist Nirvana and Its Western Interpreters* (Chicago, 1968).
- 15 R. C. Zaehner, for example, claims to identify four distinct types of mysticism in Hinduism. See his *Concordant Discord* (London, 1970), p. 204 ff.
- 16 W. T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, pp. 31–8.
- 17 W. T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, p. 31.
- 18 W. T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, p. 31 f.
- 19 W. T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, p. 34.
- 20 W. T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, p. 36.
- 21 For more details of this sort of phenomenon in artistic perception, see E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion* (London, 1960). See also Gombrich's essay 'The Evidence of Images' in C. S. Singleton (ed.), *Interpretation* (Baltimore, 1969), pp. 35–104.
- 22 See the Introduction to Zaehner's *Mysticism, Sacred and Profane* where he refers to his own youthful, natural, mystical experience undergone at age 20 (pp. xii f.). See also his *Our Savage God* (London, 1974), pp. 209–10.
- 23 Though Stace divides mystical experience into two types, 'introvertive' and 'extrovertive', he holds that both are really forms of a more ultimate absorptive pattern of a monistic sort. Thus this division is really only heuristic and preliminary.
- 24 R. C. Zaehner, *Concordant Discord*, p. 194.

- 25 R. C. Zaehner, *Concordant Discord*, p. 194.
- 26 R. C. Zaehner, *Concordant Discord*, p. 194.
- 27 See R. C. Zaehner, *Hindu and Muslim Mysticism* (London, 1960), p. 188.
- 28 See for this quite bizarre discussion R. C. Zaehner, *Mysticism, Sacred and Profane* (London, 1957; New York, 1961), pp. 191–2. For a critical discussion of Zaehner's position see N. Smart, 'Interpretation and Mystical Experience', *Religious Studies*, vol. 1, No. 1 (1965); F. Staal, *Exploring Mysticism* (London, 1975). See also N. Pike's criticism of Smart, 'Comments', in W. H. Capitan and D. D. Merrill (eds.), *Art, Mind and Religion* (Pittsburgh, 1967), pp. 144–50.
- 29 See for an extended discussion of this point to which I am indebted, N. Smart, 'Interpretation and Mystical Experience' in *Religious Studies*, vol. 1, No. 1 (1965), pp. 81–4.
- 30 For further material on the Jewish tradition see S. Katz, *Jewish Concepts* (New York, 1977); E. Urbach, *The Sages* (Jerusalem, 1975); S. Schechter, *Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology* (New York, 1961); H. Donin, *To Be a Jew* (New York, 1972); G. F. Moore, *Judaism* (New York, 1973); M. Steinberg, *Basic Judaism* (New York, 1947).
- 31 See G. Scholem's *Kabbalah* (New York, 1974) and his *On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism* (New York, 1965).
- 31A For more on 'Devekuth' see G. Scholem's *Kabbalah* (New York, 1974); *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York, 1954); and his essay 'Devekuth' in his *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York, 1972), pp. 203–26. For additional material of importance, and a disagreement with Scholem's view see I. Tishby's *Mishnat Ha-Zohar* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1961), Vol. 2, pp. 287ff. Scholem's position, however, appears to me to be the substantially correct one.
- 32 Ninian Smart's view as stated in his article 'Interpretation and Mystical Experience', in *Religious Studies*, vol. 1, No. 1 (1965), seems to me also to be mistaken on this issue. His position is too close to that of Stace's in stressing the distinction between 'experience' and its 'interpretation' and fails, I believe, to see the essential importance of the pre-conditioning of the mystic's experience. He writes: 'This seems to me a clear indication that the monistic and theistic experiences are essentially similar; and that it is the correct interpretation of them which is at issue' (p. 85).
- 33 This account generally follows the excellent summary of the Buddhist position in C. Prebish (ed.), *Buddhism: A Modern Perspective* (Pennsylvania, 1975), pp. 29–35. See also E. Conze, *Buddhism: Its Essence and Development* (London, 1974; New York, 1965); R. Robinson, *The Buddhist Religion* (California, 1970); W. Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught* (New York, 1962); D. Rhys, *Buddhism* (London, 1914).

- 34 C. Prebish (ed.), *Buddhism: A Modern Perspective*, p. 34.
- 35 On *nirvāṇa*, see sources cited in note 14 above.
- 36 In addition to the sources cited above in note 33, see N. Smart, *Doctrine and Argument in Indian Philosophy* (London, 1964); S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy* (London, 1941); K. N. Jayatilleka, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge* (London, 1963); D. Kalupahana, *Causality: The Central Philosophy of Buddhism* (Hawaii, 1975); E. Conze, *Buddhist Thought in India* (Michigan, 1967); K. N. Jayatilleka, *Survival and Karma in Buddhist Perspective* (Kandy, 1969).
- 37 L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford, 1958), section 304.
- 38 John Ruysbroeck, 'Regnum Deum Amantium', ch. 22, cited by E. Underhill, *Mysticism* (London, 1911), p. 425.
- 39 Meister Eckhart, *Mystische Schriften* (Berlin, 1903), p. 122.
- 40 For more on Plotinus, see A. H. Armstrong, *Plotinus* (London, 1953); W. R. Inge, *The Philosophy of Plotinus*, 2 vols. (London, 1918); E. Underhill, *Mysticism* (London, 1911); A. H. Armstrong, 'Plotinus', in A. H. Armstrong (ed.), *Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1967), pp. 195–271; E. Brehier, *La Philosophie de Plotin* (Paris, 1961); J. M. Rist, *Plotinus: The Road to Reality* (Cambridge, 1967). This work also includes a full Bibliography for further research.
- 41 Plotinus, *Enneads*, VI, 7:34 in Creuzer (ed.), *Plotini Opera Omnia* (Oxford, 1835).
- 42 On the fascinating history of Sabbatianism see G. Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi* (Princeton, 1973). For a shorter résumé of Scholem's research, see ch. 8 of his *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York, 1954) and his *Kabbalah* (New York, 1974).
- 43 On the Frankist movement, see G. Scholem, *Major Trends*, ch. 8.
- 44 For more details of the Zoharic system, see G. Scholem's *Kabbalah* (includes a complete Bibliography for further research); and his *On The Kabbalah and Its Symbolism* (New York, 1965). There is also a translation of the major part of the Zohar in English by H. Sperling and M. Simon (London, 1931–4), 5 vols.
- 45 On Lurianic Kabbalah, see G. Scholem, *Major Trends*, ch. 7; see also the relevant sections of Scholem's *Kabbalah*.
- 46 On the mystical school of Safed, which included Isaac Luria, Moses Cordovero, and Joseph Karo, among others, see S. Schechter, 'Safed in the Sixteenth Century' in his *Studies in Judaism*, 2nd Series (Philadelphia, 1908), pp. 202–306. See also R. J. Z. Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo* (Oxford, 1962).
- 47 R. Robinson, *The Buddhist Religion* (California, 1970), p. 33.

- 48 On Buddhist monasticism see C. Prebish, *Buddhist Monastic Orders* (Pennsylvania, 1975). See also N. Dutt, *Early Monastic Buddhism* (Calcutta, 1960); S. Dutt, *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries of India* (London, 1962); I. B. Horner, trans., *The Book of Discipline*, 6 vols. (London, 1938–66); G. De, *Democracy in Early Buddhist Sangha* (Calcutta, 1955).
- 49 For more on Zen Buddhism, see Shoku-Watanabe, *Japanese Buddhism* (Tokyo, 1968); H. Dumoulin, *A History of Zen Buddhism* (London and New York, 1963); D. T. Suzuki, *Introduction to Zen Buddhism* (New York, 1964; London, 1969); J. Kitagawa, *Religion in Japanese History* (New York, 1966); D. T. Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism*, 3 vols. (London, 1949–53).
- 50 See on Sufi monasticism and the Sufi orders, the excellent work by J. Spencer Trimingham entitled *Sufi Orders* (Oxford, 1971). See also A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (North Carolina, 1975); R. Gramlich, *Die schutischen Derwischorden Persiens* (Wiesbaden, 1965).
- 51 See F. Staal, *Exploring Mysticism* (London, 1975).
- 52 This is the name of Carlos Castaneda's Mexican Indian teacher. See Castaneda's trilogy *Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge* (Berkeley, 1970); *A Separate Reality: Further Conversations with Don Juan* (New York, 1971); and *Journey to Ixtlan* (New York, 1972).
- 53 For Zen sources on 'testing' *nirvāṇa* or *satori* see the discussion of the Zen koan and other procedures which take place between a Zen Master and his disciples. Some discussion of this matter can be found in, for example, H. Dumoulin, *A History of Zen Buddhism* (London and New York, 1963); P. Kapleau, *The Three Pillars of Zen* (Boston, 1967); Guy Welbon, *The Buddhist Nirvana and its Western Interpreters* (Chicago, 1968); E. Lamotte, *Histoire du Buddisme indien* (Paris, 1967); D. T. Suzuki, *Introduction to Zen Buddhism* (Kyoto, 1934); *Zen Comments on the Mumonkan* (New York, 1974).
- 54 For details see Hakuin's autobiography, 'The Itsu-made-gusa' in *Hakuin Oshō Zenshū*, I, pp. 149–230 (Tokyo, 1935). See also his more extended treatment of this topic in his 'Orategama' in *Hakuin Oshō Zenshū*, V, pp. 105–246. See also the chronicle of Hakuin's life prepared by his disciple Enji Torei entitled 'Shinki – dokumyo Zenzi nempuingyokaku' (Chronicle of Hakuin) in *Hakuin Oshō Zenshū*, I, pp. 1–78. For a brief, helpful discussion of these events see H. Dumoulin, *A History of Zen Buddhism* (London and New York, 1963), pp. 247–55.
- 55 See W. T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, pp. 106–7.
- 56 See W. T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, p. 109.
- 57 William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York, 1958), Lecture XVI, pp. 292–3.

- 58 William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 293.
- 59 M. Buber, *I and Thou* (New York, 1970; London, 1971), p. 159.
- 60 On Kafka, see his *Collected Complete Stories* ed. N. Glatzer (New York, 1971). See also his classic tales, *The Castle*, *The Penal Colony*, and *The Trial*.
- 61 See M. Buber, *I and Thou*, pp. 158–9.
- 62 From R. H. Blyth, *Zen and Zen Classics*, vol. I (Japan, 1960), pp. 114–15. Cited by Ben-Ami Scharfstein, *Mystical Experience*, p. 168.
- 63 William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 293.
- 64 W. T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, pp. 131–2.
- 65 W. T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, p. 132.
- 66 W. T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, p. 132.
- 67 For more on Richard Jefferies' nature-mysticism, see his *The Story of My Heart* (London, 1912). For a brief discussion of Jefferies' life and thought, see R. C. Zaehner, *Mysticism, Sacred and Profane*, pp. 45–9.
- 68 Henry Suso, *Little Book of the Eternal* (London, 1953), p. 185.
- 69 *Brihadāraṇyka Upaniṣad*, I:4:10.
- 70 See the *Samyutta Nikāya*, IV:360.
- 71 A full critical discussion of the problems inherent in a variety of the most important phenomenological typologies of mystical experience will appear in my forthcoming paper entitled 'Phenomenology, Description, and Mystical Experience'.
- 72 W. T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, pp. 133 ff.
- 73 See David ben Abraham ha-Lavan, *Masoret ha-Berit*, cited by G. Scholem, *Kabbalah* (New York, 1974), p. 95. See Scholem's entire discussion of this term in his *Kabbalah*, pp. 94–5.
- 74 For more on Dionysius the Areopagite see J. Vanneste, *Le Mystère de Dieu* (Brussels, 1959); E. Underhill, *Mysticism* (London, 1911); H. Koch, *Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita* (Mainz, 1900); H. F. Muller, *Dionysius, Proclus, Plotinus* (Münster, 1918); I. P. Sheldon-Williams, 'The Greek Christian Platonist Tradition' in *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, ed. A. H. Armstrong (Cambridge, 1967), pp. 457–72. This work includes a Bibliography for further research.
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- 76 Cited in R. A. Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam* (London, 1914), p. 17.
- 77 Cited in R. A. Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam* (London, 1914), p. 59.
- 78 L. Wittgenstein; *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus* (London, 1961), section 7. On the subject of paradoxical language in mystical reports see

- also W. Alston, 'Ineffability' in the *Philosophical Review*, 65 (1956); Paul Henle, 'Mysticism and Semantics' in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. iii (1949), pp. 416–22; B. Russell, *Mysticism and Logic* (London, 1917); G. K. Pletcher, 'Mysticism, Contradiction and Ineffability' in *American Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. x (1973), pp. 201–11; B. Williams, 'Tertullian's Paradox' in A. Flew and A. McIntyre (eds.), *New Essays in Philosophical Theology* (New York, 1955; London, 1972); ('Mysticism and Sense Perception', *Religious Studies*, Vol. 9 (1975), pp. 257–78; Peter Moore's paper, 'Mystical Experience, Mystical Doctrine, Mystical Technique' in this volume, pp. 105–7; S. Katz, 'The Language and Logic of Mystery' in S. Sykes and J. Clayton (eds.), *Christ, Faith and History* (Cambridge, 1972), pp. 239–62; Richard Gale, 'Mysticism and Philosophy' in *The Journal of Philosophy*, 57 (1960); J. N. Horsburgh, 'The Claims of Religious Experience', *The Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 35 (1957), pp. 186–200.
- 79 On the wide variety of possible meanings of the term 'yoga', see, for example, E. W. Hopkins, 'Yoga technique in the Great Epic [Mahabharata]' in *JAOS*, vol. xxii (1901), pp. 333–79. See also the exhaustive study of yoga by Mircea Eliade, *Yoga* (London, 1958; New Jersey, 1969²); and J. H. Wood, *The Yoga-system of Pantanjali* (Cambridge, Mass., 1914).
- 80 For more on this, see R. C. Zaehner, *Hinduism* (New York, 1962; Oxford, 1966), pp. 94 ff.
- 81 See, for example, F. Streng, *Emptiness* (Nashville, 1967); see also R. Robinson, *The Buddhist Religion*, pp. 52–3. On some of the logical issues raised by this topic, see S. Katz, 'The Logic and Language of Mystery' in S. Sykes and J. Clayton (eds.), *Christ, Faith and History* (Cambridge, 1972), pp. 239–62.
- 82 See C. Prebish (ed.), *Buddhism: A Modern Perspective*; see also David Kalupahana, *Buddhist Philosophy* (Hawaii, 1976), especially ch. 12; M. Eliade, *Yoga* (London, 1958; New Jersey, 1969²); T. Nanapanika, *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation* (New York, 1962).
- 83 For an interesting discussion of several senses of the term 'real', see J. Bennett, 'Real' in K. T. Fann (ed.), *Symposium on J. L. Austin* (London, 1969), pp. 267–83.
- 84 Kant defined transcendental knowledge as follows: 'I call *transcendental* all knowledge which is occupied not so much with objects as with the mode of our knowledge of objects in general in so far as this mode of knowledge is to be possible *a priori*', *Critique of Pure Reason*, B25. See also Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, 'Introduction'. On the contemporary discussion of what is involved in trying to frame such a 'transcendental deduction', see W. van O. Quine's *Word and Object* (Cambridge, Mass., 1960) as well as his *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (New York, 1969). See also P. F. Strawson, *Individuals*

(London, 1959) and his *Bounds of Sense* (London, 1966). Of the recent journal literature see M. S. Gram, 'Transcendental Arguments', *Nous* 5 (1971), pp. 5-26; and Gram again in: 'Hintikka and Spurious Transcendentalism' in *Nous* 8 (1974); 'Categories and Transcendental Arguments', in *Man and World* 6 (1973); 'Must Transcendental Arguments be Spurious?' in *Kant-Studien* 65 (1974). See also J. Hintikka 'Transcendental Arguments' in *Nous* 6 (1972), pp. 274-81. The back issues of *Kant-Studien* have many other papers of interest and relevance on this theme too numerous to list separately here.

- 85 Jan van Ruysbroeck, *The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage* (London, 1916), pp. 176 ff.
- 86 Jan van Ruysbroeck, *The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage* (London, 1916), pp. 245 ff.
- 87 Śiva Samhitā, iv, 9-11, cited in M. Eliade, *Yoga* (London, 1958; New York, 1969), p. 40.
- 88 Ibn 'Ata' Allah, *Miftah al-Falah* cited in J. S. Trimingham, *Sufi Orders*, p. 198.

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Mystical Literature

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1. The Presuppositions of comparison between Mystical Writings of Divergent Religions

'Mysticism' is a phenomenological concept coined by western scholars. The way the term is generally used nowadays results from a rather bold assumption (which underlies the whole effort of the phenomenology of religion): that the things we find in one religion — types of experience, goals of spiritual life, practices, etc. — are found also in others, as well as outside the realm of religion.¹ There is of course some truth in this assumption, but it may nevertheless be asked whether the problems involved in comparative study of phenomena pertaining to different cultures are always taken into consideration. As far as the comparative study of 'mysticism' is concerned, this is decidedly not the case.

In the context of Christian theology, the words 'mystical', 'mystic' have a precise meaning: they designate the highest stage of Christian gnōsis or religious knowledge, conceptualized as 'union' with God and the perfection of man. Thus, for example, Niketas Stethatos of Studios, a disciple of Symeon the New Theologian (eleventh century), says in his 'Chapters about Gnōsis' (III, 41):²

There are three degrees among those who are engaged on the ascent towards perfection: purificatory, illuminatory, mystical, which is also the one making perfect; the first is of beginners, the second of those who are at half-way, the third of those who have reached the end, perfection.

'Mystical theology' is, then, the final knowledge of the mysteries of God, the highest knowledge mortal men may hope to achieve.³

It would be quite rewarding to probe the history of the concept of 'mysticism' and to show how the terms of Christian theology have come to be applied to similar experiences or aspirations in non-Christian religions. This process was based on certain philosophical and anthropological presuppositions which have undoubtedly determined to a very great extent the direction in which investigation of the matter was going to develop. Among