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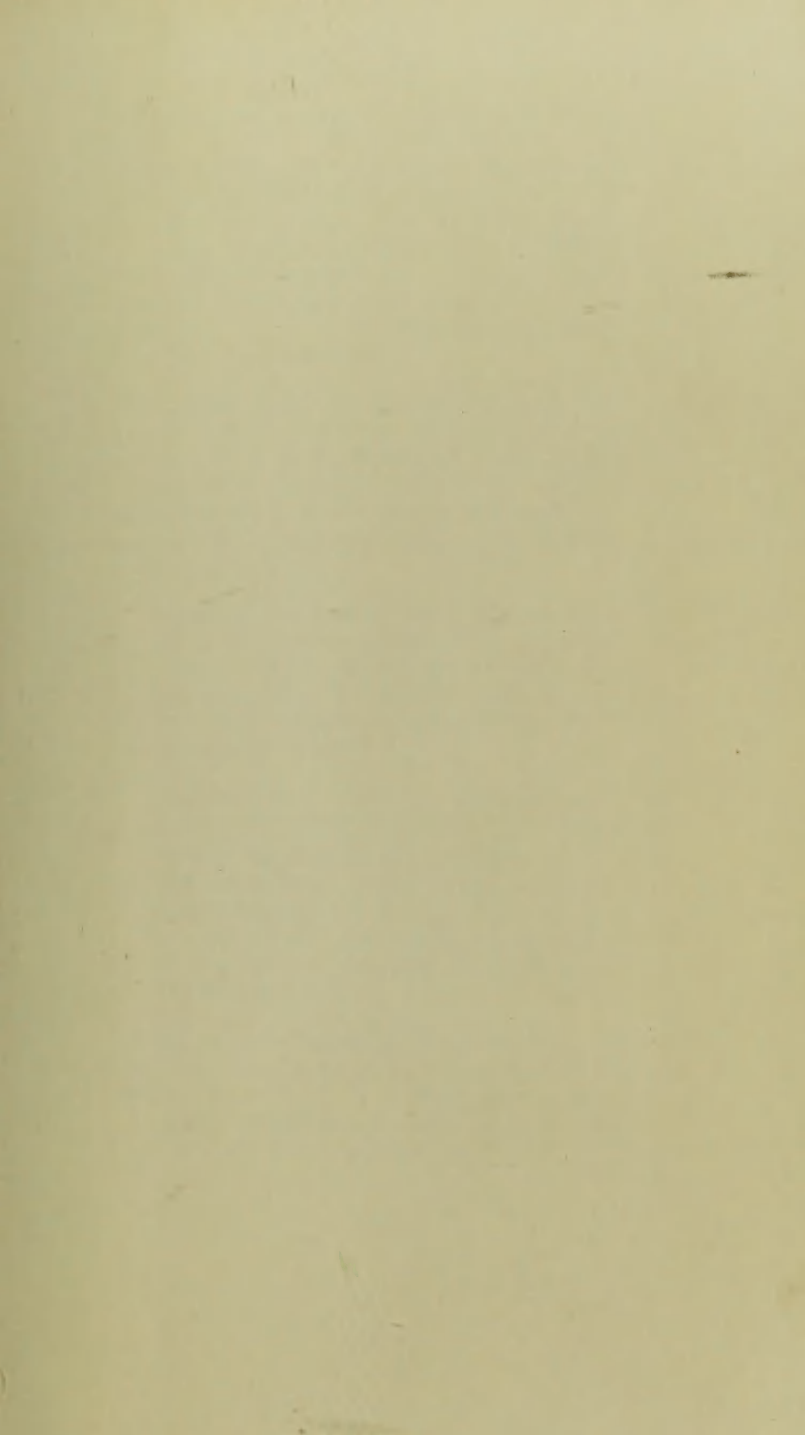


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This is a work of crowning importance by the author of *Time and Eternity*, *Religion and the Modern Mind* and other books which have made philosophical subjects accessible to the general reader. W. T. Stace, Stuart Professor of Philosophy Emeritus at Princeton, here investigates the question: What bearing, if any, does what is called "mystical experience" have upon the more important problems of philosophy?

He begins with the undeniable fact that many such experiences — among people of various cultures and religions and widely separated in time and place — are genuine and important. He then asks whether these experiences throw any light on such problems as:

"Whether there is in the universe any spiritual presence greater than man — towards which the various religions of mankind have been groping; and if so, how is it related to man and to the universe in general.

"Whether we can find in mysticism any illumination on the questions of the na-

ture of the self, the philosophy of logic, the functions of language, the truth or untruth of human claims to immortality, and finally the nature and sources of moral obligation and the problems of ethics generally."

The publishers believe it is not too much to say that *Mysticism and Philosophy* will be recognized as a work of distinction and importance comparable to *The Varieties of Religious Experience* by William James.



*Mysticism and Philosophy*

by W. T. Stace

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1934

THE BOOKS OF THE  
MYSTIC AND THE  
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*by W. T. Stace*

MYSTICISM AND PHILOSOPHY  
THE DESTINY OF WESTERN MAN  
THE PHILOSOPHY OF HEGEL  
RELIGION AND THE MODERN MIND  
TIME AND ETERNITY  
THE CONCEPT OF MORALS  
THE GATE OF SILENCE (poem)

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*Mysticism*

AND *Philosophy*

BY *W. T. Stace*

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## PREFACE

The aim of this book is to investigate the question, What bearing, if any, does what is called "mystical experience" have upon the more important problems of philosophy? We start with a psychological fact the denial of which could only proceed from ignorance. Some human beings do occasionally have unusual experiences which come to be distinguished as "mystical." These are recorded, or at least referred to, in the literatures of most advanced peoples in all ages. But since the term "mystical" is utterly vague, we must first examine the field empirically to determine what types and kinds of experience are called mystical, to specify and classify their main characteristics, to assign boundaries to the class, and to exclude irrelevant types. We then ask whether these experiences, or these states of mind, so selected and described, throw any light on such problems as the following: Whether there is in the universe any spiritual presence greater than man; and if so, how it is related to man and to the universe in general; whether we can find in mysticism any illumination on the questions of the nature of the self, the philosophy of logic, the functions of language, the truth or untruth of human claims to immortality, and finally the nature and sources of moral obligation and the problems of ethics generally.

In the last paragraph I used the phrase "spiritual presence," which I borrowed from Toynbee. Its virtue is its vagueness. A distinguished physicist, giving a popular lecture, was recently irrelevantly asked by

a member of his audience, "Do you believe in God?" He replied, "I do not use the word because it is too vague." I think this was the wrong answer. He should have said, "I do not use the word 'God' because it is too precise." This is why I speak of a "spiritual presence." Perhaps this also is too precise.

It is better to be vaguely right than to be precisely wrong.

This enquiry is in some respects parallel to the question, What bearing, if any, has our sense experience, e.g., our colour sensations, upon the problems of the nature and structure of the universe? I say, "*in some respects* parallel." How far we can take the analogy seriously is itself one of our problems. But he who has perused nothing beyond the preface of this book is not entitled forthwith to reject the comparison—unless he wishes to convict himself of prejudice.

I write as a philosopher, and not as a mystic. I do not profess to be an expert in any of the cultural areas of mysticism which this book discusses. I have selected in each area a limited number of those whom I take to be the greatest mystics in that area and have based my conclusions mainly on an intensive study of these. Moreover my approach to philosophy is that of an empiricist and an analyst. But as an empiricist I do not hold that all experience must necessarily be reducible to sense experience. And as an analyst I do not hold that analysis is the sole business of philosophy. I attach the greatest value to what was once called "speculative philosophy," but consider that analysis is an essential instrument of it. Analysis can be made an end in itself. But I prefer to use it as a preparatory step toward discovery of truth.

Most of my predecessors in the field of mysticism either were not trained philosophers at all, or they thought in terms of philosophical methods and ideas and idioms which we can no longer accept—at any rate in Anglo-Saxon lands. In these lands, the methods of philosophy were revolutionized about fifty years ago by a small band of men among whom G. E. Moore was a main leader. I hold that whatever in that revolution is likely in future history to be adjudged of lasting value can be seized and appropriated now without attaching oneself to any of the one-sided rival schools of analysts who now divide

the field—the logical positivists, the Carnapian formalists, the Oxford “ordinary language” philosophers, the Wittgensteinian true believers.

Our predecessors in the field of mysticism have done nothing to help us in many of the problems which I have had to discuss. I have had to chart a lone course without guidance from the past. Hence there are a number of ideas in this book which may seem almost wholly novel, and not a little rash. I say this not in order to boast of originality, but on the contrary, because I hope that some of the deficiencies which my readers will find in my solutions may receive a more ready pardon. I could not help raising questions which appeared to be essential to the whole enquiry but which apparently did not occur to my predecessors at all. I had to struggle with them as best I could.

It should be emphasized that in so difficult a field we cannot expect “proofs,” “disproofs,” “refutations,” “certainties.” The mystic indeed does not argue. He has his inner subjective certainty. But this only raises a new and puzzling problem for the poor philosopher. At any rate, the utmost we can expect in this area is tentative hypotheses, reasonable opinions. And of course only nonscientists believe in the supposed certainty of science. Scientists know that their solutions are hypothetical only; and ours will doubtless be much more so. ♡

The writing of this book has been generously supported by the Bollingen Foundation, which granted me a three-year fellowship, and then an extension of a fourth year. I am most grateful for their help.

W. T. S.



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# CHAPTER 1

## *Presuppositions of the Enquiry*

---

### *I. The Enquiry Is Worthwhile*

Bertrand Russell, a philosopher who cannot be suspected of sentimentality, or of softheadedness, or of a bias in favor of mysticism, wrote in a famous essay as follows: "The greatest men who have been philosophers have felt the need both of science and of mysticism." He adds that the union of the mystic and the man of science constitutes "the highest eminence, as I think, that it is possible to achieve in the world of thought." Further, "this emotion [mysticism] is the inspirer of whatever is best in man."<sup>1</sup> This, it will be seen, is a remarkably high estimate of the value of mysticism.

As examples of this union of mysticism and science in the greatest philosophers, Russell mentions Heraclitus, Parmenides, Plato, and Spinoza, but this list is obviously intended to be only exemplificatory and not exhaustive.

Two problems are thus indicated by Russell as tasks which philosophy ought to perform. First, since mysticism is so valuable as a component in philosophy, we ought to investigate what influence it is logically entitled to have on the thoughts of philosophers. Secondly, what influence has it actually exerted in their thoughts? The first is a problem of logic and systematic philosophy. The second is a prob-

<sup>1</sup> Bertrand Russell, *Mysticism and Logic and Other Essays*, London, Longmans, Green & Co., Inc., 1921, pp. 1, 4, and 12.

lem for the historian of philosophy. It is with the first of these two problems that we shall be concerned in this book.

No doubt a majority of contemporary Anglo-American philosophers think that philosophical doctrines which past philosophers derived, consciously or unconsciously, from mysticism—such as that time is unreal, that space is an appearance only, that there is an Absolute which is perfect, that the good and the real are identical—are to be rejected. But even if this is so, does it follow that no beliefs at all can be derived from mysticism, and that the whole subject should be dismissed as hocus-pocus or hallucination? Not at all. To think this would be as illogical as if, finding that all sorts of false beliefs have in primitive science been based on sense experience, we should reject sense experience as a source of any knowledge at all. If the beliefs which past philosophers have based on mysticism are unacceptable, we ought now to ask whether some better interpretations of mystical experience should replace them. This comparison of mystical experience with sense experience may be entirely misleading. But this must be a conclusion of enquiry, not an assumption used to prevent enquiry. Hence the first problem to be faced in this book is whether mystical experience, like sense experience, points to any objective reality or is a merely subjective psychological phenomenon.

We may put the problem of the book in another way. What truths, if any, about the universe does mysticism yield which the mind could not obtain from science and the logical intellect? If, however, we phrase the question in this way, Russell's reply is that mysticism yields no truths at all. Only science and logical thinking give us truths. What mysticism contributes is fine and noble emotional attitudes towards the truths which have been discovered by the logical and scientific intellect. Russell's argument for this position is a delightfully simple syllogism. The essence of mysticism, he says, is emotion. Emotions are subjective in the sense that they supply no objective truths about the extramental world. Therefore mysticism is subjective and supplies no objective truths about the extramental world. "Mysticism," he writes, "is in essence little more than a certain intensity and depth of feeling in regard to what is believed about

the universe.”<sup>2</sup> We may let the assertion that emotions are subjective pass. But no one who has the slightest knowledge of the world-wide literature of mysticism could possibly accept Russell’s description of it as only an emotion.

Mystics may be mistaken in their interpretations of their experiences. But they ought to know what the experiences themselves are like better than Russell does. And they invariably say that they are more like perceptions than emotions; though it is not denied that, like all perceptions, they have their own emotional tinge. Whoever wishes to prove mystical experience subjective will do better to attribute to it the subjectivity of an hallucination rather than the subjectivity of an emotion.

Russell might be right in his conclusion that mysticism is subjective and reveals no truth about the world—that is one of the main questions we have to discuss. But let no one be run away with by Russell’s facile syllogism, based as it is on the false and careless premiss that mystical states of mind are emotions. First of all we must try to get a little genuine knowledge of what mysticism actually is before we decide thus summarily to dismiss its claims to possess truth-value. I shall try to give some account of the actual facts about it in the next chapter. Even then we shall find that the difficulties in the way of deciding whether it has any cognitive value, and if so what, are extremely complex, elusive, and subtle. To discuss them thoroughly will be the object of our third chapter.

Meanwhile we may remark that the very word “mysticism” is an unfortunate one. It suggests mist, and therefore foggy, confused, or vague thinking. It also suggests mystery and miracle mongering, and therefore hocus-pocus. It is also associated with religion, against which many academic philosophers are prejudiced. And some of these latter persons might be surprised to learn that, although many mystics have been theists, and others pantheists, there have also been mystics who were atheists. It would be better if we could use the words “enlightenment” or “illumination,” which are commonly used in India for the same phenomenon. But it seems that for historical

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

reasons we in the West must settle for "mysticism." All that we can do is to try gradually to overcome the prejudices which it tends to arouse.

In referring to Russell's views I used the words "subjective" and "objective," which he did not use himself. Careful contemporary philosophers perhaps tend to avoid these words because of their ambiguity. They have been used in several different senses, which are apt to become confused. But they will be very convenient to us in later stages of this discussion, provided we indicate in what sense we use them. In Chapter 3 I shall endeavour to define the criteria of objectivity, in the sense meant here, as precisely as I can. But at this stage I can perhaps sufficiently elucidate the matter by giving examples in lieu of abstract definitions. We shall be using the words in this book in that sense in which veridical sense perception may be called objective while hallucinations and dreams may be called subjective. When in veridical sense perception I find presented to my consciousness something which I call a house, this presentation is objective in the sense that it reveals the existence of a real house having a place in the extramental world independently of my consciousness of it. (What exactly this means and what grounds we have for believing it are not questions which it is necessary to examine at this point.) But the presentation of a house which I have in a dream is subjective because there is no such real house in the extramental world. It is in this sense that the question is raised whether mystical experience is objective or subjective. Does it reveal the existence of anything outside the mystic's own mind and independent of his consciousness? If so, what sort of existence does it reveal?

Whatever conclusions we draw in this book about the above, or related, questions will not necessarily have the status of inductive or deductive inferences. It is better to use the word "interpretation" rather than "inference." I propose to enquire whether the types of experience called mystical give rise to any interpretations regarding the nature of the universe which, whether they are logical inferences or not, can be shown to be such that they ought to be accepted by reasonable men. The basic concepts of physics are inter-

pretations of sense experience which cannot be logically inferred from the existence of the sense experience but are nevertheless interpretations which reasonable men should accept.<sup>3</sup> Indeed the very existence of a world independent of consciousness is an interpretation of sense experience which is not capable of being logically demonstrated. And seeing that our first problem is to be whether mystical experience is objective in a way which is analogous to the objectivity of sense experience, we need not be surprised if such a conclusion would have to be assigned an analogous interpretational status. But no conclusion can be accepted unless it is capable of rational justification of some kind.<sup>4</sup>

Our enquiry, as I have remarked, is philosophical and systematic, not historical. It is not a prime question for us what beliefs such philosophers as those mentioned by Russell have derived from mysticism; but rather what beliefs, if any, we *ought* to derive as reasonable men. But we shall naturally take account of historically held beliefs, if only to consider whether they are rationally justifiable or not. For instance, the proposition that "time is unreal" has frequently been put forward on the basis of mystical experience. We shall certainly have to ask what this statement means, and whether there is any sense of the word "unreal," usual or unusual, in terms of which this proposition can be understood to have meaning; and also whether such a proposition—if we can understand it—is a reasonable interpretation of mystical experience. But we shall not be concerned with history for the sake of history. I hope to discuss the actual influence of mysticism on the great philosophers of the past, the mystical tradition in philosophy, in a later book.

These remarks about the views derived from mysticism by philosophers are also for the most part applicable to the views derived by mystics themselves from their own experiences. An enquiry of

<sup>3</sup> On this point see, for example, Einstein's remarks quoted in Philipp Frank, *Einstein: His Life and Times*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1953, pp. 217-218.

<sup>4</sup> The problem of the rational justifications of those basic principles or commitments of science, philosophy, ethics, politics, etc., which cannot be proved either deductively or inductively, has recently been investigated by Professor James Ward Smith in his book *Theme for Reason*, Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1957.

this kind ought to be as independent of the opinions of mystics as it is of the opinions of philosophers. Naturally their views are to be considered as worthy of the highest respect and attention. But we cannot be tied down to any blind acceptance of the interpretations which mystics have made of their own experience. For one thing there is reason to suppose that what are basically the same experiences have been differently interpreted by different mystics. The point is that just as sense experiences may be misinterpreted by the persons who have the sense experiences, so mystical experiences may be misinterpreted by mystics. Hence an independent critical examination and analysis of their beliefs is just as necessary as is a similar examination of the beliefs of anyone else.

## 2. *Mohammed's Donkey*

There is a story, which I have read somewhere, to the effect that Mohammed once compared a scholar or philosopher who writes about mysticism without having had any mystical experience to a donkey carrying a load of books. It is a presupposition of our enquiry that this admirably witty epigram, if taken literally and at its face value, exaggerates the foolishness of scholars, and that it is possible for the philosopher or scholar to make a worthwhile contribution to the study of mysticism.

It is perhaps natural that the mystic should distrust the prying eye of the scholar and the probing intellect of the philosopher. This attitude is well expressed by the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*. This book was written in the fourteenth century and is believed to have been composed by its author to help one of his disciples to attain the highest levels of mystical contemplation. He begins with a strong adjuration that no one should read the book who has not himself a full intention of following the mystic path to the end. It is not intended, he says, for "the idly curious, whether they be learned men or not," and he hopes that they will not "meddle with it." He objects to "the curiosity of much learning and literary cunning as in scholars . . . coveting worldly fame . . . and the flat-

tery of others.”<sup>5</sup> Yet not all the mystics have felt like this. Many have themselves been scholars and philosophers, for instance, Plotinus, Erigena, Eckhart, and many others. \*

It is plain that mysticism, like other subjects, may arouse either a practical or a theoretical interest. The practical interest is that of the man who aspires to tread the mystic path. The theoretical interest, whether in mysticism or anything else, is that of the man who simply desires to know, and who values knowledge for its own sake. The author just quoted calls the impelling motive of such a man “curiosity.” Aristotle would have called it “wonder.” But whether one uses a word with derogatory overtones or one which has pleasanter associations, the rights of the theoretical intellect to investigate any subject matter whatever can hardly at this date be disputed by educated men.

But the point of the story of Mohammed’s donkey is perhaps not so much that the scholar has no right to investigate mysticism, but rather that it is a complete impossibility for him to do so if he has no mystical experience himself. It is sometimes said that just as a man born blind cannot imagine what colour is like even though the seeing man tries to tell him about it, so a nonmystic cannot imagine what a mystical experience is like even though the mystic tries to describe it to him. It is then argued that a nonmystic, however clever, cannot contribute anything of value to the discussion of mysticism for the same reason as a man born blind, however clever, could not contribute anything of value to the understanding of light or colours.

It cannot be denied that there is much force in this contention to the extent at least that the man born blind is under a psychological disadvantage in discussing the theory of light because he cannot imagine it. And the nonmystic discussing mysticism labors under the same sort of disadvantage. But it is far from clear that it would be impossible for a blind man to contribute anything of value to the physics of light and colour, for instance, to the controversy be-

<sup>5</sup> *The Cloud of Unknowing*, trans. by Ira Progoff, New York, The Julian Press, Inc., 1957, pp. 54 and 79.

tween the corpuscular and the wave theories of light which at one time was a crucial problem. For what the physicist needs is an understanding of the structure, not an acquaintance with the experiential content, of light. This comparison cannot be pressed too far because the typical mystical experience, unlike light, is said to have no structure, being "formless." But the comparison does show that the argument from the alleged impossibility of a blind man discussing the theory of light cannot even get started because it is not clear that there is any such impossibility.

As against the view that the philosopher who does not profess to be a mystic cannot say anything of value about mysticism, it must also be pointed out that many such philosophers have in fact done so. The names of William James, J. B. Pratt, Dean Inge, and Rudolf Otto immediately spring to mind, and one could no doubt make out a long list of such cases if it were worth doing so. It may be said that what they wrote may have been thought valuable by other scholars, but would not be of any value to a mystic. Perhaps it might not be of value in the practical living of the mystic's spiritual life. But if the mystic were himself interested in the theory and philosophy of mysticism, as Plotinus and many others have been, there is no reason why his philosophical reflections on mysticism should not be helped by the analytical or speculative powers of a nonmystic.

It is worthwhile to look a little more closely at the case of William James. He wrote of himself that his own constitution shut him off almost entirely from the enjoyment of mystical states so that he could speak of them only at second hand. In consequence, he modestly expressed doubt as to his own capacity to offer anything of much value.<sup>6</sup> Yet I do not see how it can be denied that his contribution to the understanding of the subject was in fact of very great value. An important part of the reason for this was obviously that, although James may have enjoyed no mystical states of consciousness, his temperamental sympathy with mysticism was very strong. This suggests that sympathy with mysticism, even on the part of a non-

<sup>6</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, New York, Modern Library, Inc., p. 370.

mystical philosopher, may give him some measure of insight into the mystic's state of mind and therefore some capacity for discussing it. It has often been suggested that all men, or nearly all men, are in some sense or other rudimentary or unevolved mystics, although in most of us the mystical consciousness is so far buried in the unconscious that it appears in the surface levels of our minds merely in the guise of vague feelings of sympathetic response to the clearer call of the mystic. To use the common cliché, when the mystic speaks, something in his utterance "rings a bell" in the psyche of the more sympathetic and sensitive of his hearers.

It might be contended, however, that an attitude of sympathy is not appropriate in a philosophical investigation since it would interfere with impartiality and objectivity. A feeling of sympathy might produce a predisposition to admit too easily the claims of the mystic that he obtains through his experience a knowledge of the nature of reality which is not available to other men. The philosopher, the argument will proceed, should be guided by his intellect only and not by his feelings. No doubt there is something in this contention. But not much. For a human being without feelings is an impossibility. Hence no human being can have quite the impartiality of a calculating machine. If the critic says that a sympathetic attitude ought to be avoided by the philosopher, he would surely not recommend an unsympathetic or hostile attitude which would be equally prejudiced on the other side. Should one then have a completely neutral attitude? But a neutral attitude would amount simply to a lack of interest in the subject. It seems to me that Russell has said the last word on this subject. "In studying a philosopher," says he, "the right attitude is neither reverence nor contempt, but first a kind of hypothetical sympathy, until it is possible to know what it feels like to believe in his theories, and only then a revival of the critical attitude."<sup>7</sup>

There is another point which the nonmystical philosopher may urge on his own behalf, which is that mystics themselves *philosophize*.

<sup>7</sup> Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy*, New York, Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1945, p. 39.

In doing so they descend to the intellectual plane and therefore cannot expect to escape from intellectual criticism and analysis. They cannot invade the philosopher's field and at the same time refuse to the philosopher any right to discuss their philosophical assertions. If they confined themselves to descriptions of their special kind of experience, the philosopher who has no such experience could not criticize their statements, except that he would be entitled to ask how these statements are compatible with the further statement usually made by the mystic, namely, that his experience is ineffable and indescribable. But mystics usually go beyond mere descriptions. They make general philosophical inferences about the world, about the nature of reality, about the status and source of value judgments—all of which matters fall within the legitimate province of the philosopher. For instance, they may make the statement that "time is unreal," or is a "mere appearance" or an "illusion." It cannot be contended that the philosopher has no competence to examine, to analyse, and, if he sees fit, to disagree with propositions of this kind. Mystics also do not even stop short at asserting general but isolated philosophical propositions of this kind. At least in the Orient they have gone further and constructed complete philosophical systems based on their mystical experiences. It is clear that in doing so they give a right to all other philosophers to examine and evaluate their systems.

As we have already admitted, the philosopher who is without mystical experience has the psychological disadvantage that he must take at second hand the mystic's descriptions of his experiences. There are plenty of such descriptions in spite of the talk about ineffability. The philosopher must try as far as possible to overcome his disadvantage by the insights given by a sympathetic imagination.

### 3. *The Naturalistic Principle*

We assume, at least as a methodological postulate, the universality of the reign of law in nature. This means that all macroscopic existences and events occurring in the space-time world are explicable

without exception by natural causes.

We must now examine some of the things which this naturalistic principle implies, and also take note of a few things which it does not imply. It is applicable, according to our statement of it, to all macroscopic events. These are the only events with which we shall be concerned in this book. Hence we need take no account of the principle of indeterminacy in nuclear physics. Also the fact that the laws of nature in the macroscopic world are said to be statistical and not absolute need make no difference to us. The possibility that water may run up hill once in a billion years can be ignored.

The naturalistic principle has no bearing on the problem of free will. Determinism, if that is implied by the principle, is not inconsistent with free will, and indeterminism is no help to it. I have discussed this matter at length elsewhere and will not repeat the discussion here.<sup>8</sup>

The naturalistic principle forbids us to believe that there ever occur interruptions in the natural working of events or capricious interventions by a supernatural being. David Hume defined a miracle as a breach of the laws of nature. Our principle denies that miracles, as thus strictly defined, ever occur. But there may be other looser or more liberal conceptions of miracles which are not inconsistent with naturalism. For instance, Professor Broad has, for certain specific purposes connected with psychical research, defined miracles as events which are exceptions, not to natural laws, but to certain specified common-sense presumptions.<sup>9</sup>

The alleged miracles at Lourdes may very well be explicable by natural laws of which we are at present ignorant. That deep emotional disturbances—such as may be involved in many religious crises—are often accompanied by important physical changes in the organism is well known, though we cannot yet formulate the laws of such events. Similar considerations apply to the healing powers sometimes attributed to religious geniuses. But we can use

<sup>8</sup> See my *Religion and the Modern Mind*, Philadelphia, J. B. Lippincott Company, 1952, pp. 248–258.

<sup>9</sup> C. D. Broad, *Religion, Philosophy, and Psychical Research*, New York, Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1953, Chap. 1.

against miracles, if defined as actual breaches of law, an argument much stronger than the one Hume employed. No matter how astonishing, or supernatural, an event may be, we could never, till we are omniscient, have sufficient grounds for asserting that it is a breach of natural law. We could not assert this unless we were certain that we fully knew and understood every natural law in the universe, since any law of which we were ignorant might afford the needed explanation.

If prayer is understood—as perhaps no instructed theologian does now understand it—as a request to the Deity to alter the natural course of events, then we cannot believe in the efficacy of prayer so interpreted. For example, prayers to send rain in time of drought are absurd, because the weather is solely determined by meteorological conditions. Of course prayers, even if made as requests, may themselves in certain cases go a long way to bring about the changes asked for. This is likely to occur when what is sought is a change in the heart, mind, or even body of the person praying and not a change in the external world. Prayers for improvements of health, or for greater moral or spiritual strength, will tend to set in motion trains of psychological events, such as expectations and improvements of morale, which seem to come as answers to the prayer. This is what any psychologist would expect, and is of course in no way miraculous or even surprising.

But the history of mysticism provides a much deeper justification for the practice of prayer than the rather superficial considerations just mentioned. Prayers, or “orisons,” as they are called, as understood by the Christian mystics, aim primarily at communion, or union, with what they take to be a Divine Being, and are not requests for favors—except, of course, in so far as such union is itself regarded by the mystic as the supreme favor which a human being can seek. Such orisons constitute steps in the ladder of spiritual exercises which lead to the desired goal of mystical consciousness. St. Teresa of Avila, among others, is well known for the detailed accounts she gave of these steps, in their order and one by one. Everyone knows that there are breathing exercises which tend to

produce mystical states. In the same way there are many mental exercises, certain kinds of disciplined meditation and concentration, which are undertaken with the same end in view. Prayer, properly understood, is another name for these spiritual efforts to reach up to mystical experiences. Prayer considered as a petition for a favor is merely a popular corruption of genuine prayer.

It is a misunderstanding of the naturalistic principle to confuse it with materialism or to suppose that it implies materialism. Naturalism is not inconsistent with the Cartesian view that thoughts, and psychological events generally, are nonmaterial. For even if psychological events are nonphysical, they may be just as rigorously governed by psychological laws or psychophysical laws as physical events are by physical laws.

The naturalistic principle is not inconsistent with belief in an "ultimate reality," or Absolute, or God, outside of or beyond the space-time world—whatever the metaphors "outside of" and "beyond" may mean. All that the principle requires is that such a being or reality shall not interrupt the causal sequences of the natural order. For instance, it is not inconsistent with the philosophical systems of Hegel or Bradley. Such systems are very much out of favor in the present-day climate of philosophical opinion. But those who reject them do so usually on empiricist or positivistic grounds, not on the ground that they are inconsistent with naturalism. That they are not contrary to the naturalistic principle will be obvious from the definition of that principle, namely, the proposition that all things and events *in the space-time world* are explicable without exception by natural causes.

The most important question for us at this time is to understand what bearing the naturalistic principle has upon mysticism and the philosophical problems which it raises. Naturalism implies, first, that the genesis of mystical states in a human mind is itself the result of natural causes, and in no way constitutes an exception to the reign of law. It may be worthwhile to note that this view is held, not merely by the present writer, but by many mystics. For instance, R. M. Bucke wrote his book *Cosmic Consciousness* as a direct result

of a sudden mystical illumination which came to him unexpected and unsought. "Cosmic consciousness" was his name for mystical experience. He wrote: "Cosmic consciousness . . . must not be looked upon as being in any sense supernatural or supernormal—as anything more than a natural growth."<sup>10</sup> In line with this view he maintained that such consciousness is now in process of evolution—according to normal evolutionary principles—in the human species, and that it is destined someday to become the psychological condition of a majority of the human race. One may perhaps regard this latter prophecy as being unsupported by evidence, but at least it attests to Bucke's firm adherence to naturalism. In the same spirit he also suggested a natural explanation of "photisms"—the perception of a subjective but quasi-physical light which sometimes, but not always, accompanies the onset of mystical consciousness—as due to molecular rearrangements in the brain.<sup>11</sup> Edward Carpenter, who was another natural mystic and subject to periodic states of illumination, also everywhere disclaims that mystical states are supernatural, or miraculous. They are, in his view, subject to the usual laws of psychological evolution.<sup>12</sup>

No doubt these views conflict with ideas often expressed by medieval Christian mystics such as St. Teresa, St. John of the Cross, Heinrich Suso, and many others, who regarded their own experiences as supernatural gifts from God. But while admitting their outstanding greatness as mystics, and the general importance of their testimony (on which we shall often have to rely in succeeding chapters) as to the phenomenological characteristics of mystical experiences, we cannot accept without careful sifting and analysis their theological or philosophical interpretations of those experiences. In view of the prescientific ages in which they lived, and—at least in the case of St. Teresa—a lack of critical ability, it is not surprising that they did not understand or accept the principle of the universal reign of law.

✍ We may take it then that the genesis of mystical consciousness is

<sup>10</sup> R. M. Bucke, *Cosmic Consciousness*, New York, E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., p. 12.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 345.

<sup>12</sup> Edward Carpenter, *From Adam's Peak to Elephanta*, pp. 242–246, as quoted by R. M. Bucke.

explicable in terms of the psychological and physiological make-up ✓ of those who have it. It is, however, of paramount importance to understand that this has no bearing upon the problem of its alleged cognitive character, its subjectivity or objectivity, its claim to reveal truths about the nature of the universe. For determination by physiological and psychological preconditions is also characteristic of sense experience and of all human consciousness. The seeing of an object with the eyes is determined by the structure of the eye and the condition of the nervous system, as well as by psychological background, habits, and expectations. So also the reasoning processes of the geometer are presumably conditioned by prior bodily and mental processes. Yet no one doubts that sense perception and reasoning yield truths about the external universe. There is no more reason for supposing that mystical perceptions are illusory because they cannot be had without brains and nervous systems than for supposing that visual perceptions must be illusory because they cannot be had without eyes and optic nerves.

It may be said that sense perceptions are only part-caused by the structure or condition of the organism, the other essential part cause being the stimulus from the outside world; whereas in the case of mystical states of mind there is no reason to suppose that they are not wholly the results of intraorganic and intrapsychic causes; and that this difference is what may justify us in considering mystical states to be purely subjective while of course admitting that sense perceptions have objective reference because of the external stimuli which are their part causes.

But this argument will not hold. For the existence of the external stimuli in the case of sense perception is not known independently of the sense experience. Their existence is itself an interpretation of that experience. Hence in this respect sense experience and mystical experience are on the same footing. In both cases the existence of anything objective to which they refer is an interpretation of the experience, and nothing more. ✓ If the fact that we cannot perceive material objects without eyes, ears, and brains does not prevent us from interpreting sense experiences as having objective reference,

neither need the fact that we cannot have mystical experience without its appropriate physiological machinery cause us to conclude that it can be nothing but subjective illusion.

It might be argued against us that if our enquiry should uphold the belief that mystical experience is objective in the sense that it discloses the reality of some Absolute such as the One of Plotinus, or the Universal Self of the Vedanta, or the God of the theists, this would be inconsistent with the naturalistic principle. For we should then have to say that mystical experience is part-caused by intra-organic events and part-caused by the Absolute, and that this would be to admit the operation of a cause from outside nature. But the same could be said of the alleged causation of physical perceptions by electrons, waves, and the like. For natural laws are relations which hold between observable phenomena, for instance between an observable state of coldness and an observable freezing of water. But the physicist's particles and waves lie outside and behind the phenomenal surfaces of the world in the same way as the Absolute does—although no doubt the ontological status of nuclear events would be quite different from that of the Absolute. We have in both cases a sort of duplication of causal lines—if cause is the right word to use in either case. One line of causes—in both cases—runs along the dimension of the phenomenal surface of the world, and the other line comes in from behind the surface and at right angles to it (so to speak).

But even so, our critic may urge, to admit the existence of an Absolute outside the natural order is inconsistent with the naturalistic principle. But that principle as we defined it in the first paragraph of this section postulates only the universal reign of law within nature. It does not deny the possibility of any reality outside nature, although dogmatic naturalists may do so. Admittedly the One of Plotinus, or a Universal Self, or a Divine Being will be *transcendent* of nature. But it must be noted that it would not be "supernatural" in the popular sense of that word which implies the meddlesome interference of a capricious personal God, or gods, or spirits. This is what is forbidden by the naturalistic principle as we have conceived

it. That there might be a reality or realities outside nature not supernatural in the superstitious sense will be evident if we consider Plato's so-called "world of forms." These forms—as distinct from those of Aristotle—were outside the space-time world, but it would be a misuse of language to call them "supernatural" existences.

We are not, of course, here arguing that mystical experience actually does have objective reference. That is one of the main problems which we have to examine in the following chapters. The present point is only that the naturalistic principle leaves the question open and to be decided by subsequent investigation. It in no way prejudges the case against the claims of the mystic that his experience discloses to him truths about reality.

#### 4. *The Principle of Causal Indifference*

The principle of causal indifference is this: If  $X$  has an alleged mystical experience  $P_1$  and  $Y$  has an alleged mystical experience  $P_2$ , and if the phenomenological characteristics of  $P_1$  entirely resemble the phenomenological characteristics of  $P_2$  so far as can be ascertained from the descriptions given by  $X$  and  $Y$ , then the two experiences cannot be regarded as being of two different kinds—for example, it cannot be said that one is a "genuine" mystical experience while the other is not—merely because they arise from dissimilar causal conditions.

The principle seems logically self-evident. At present it is perhaps not very important and may have no wide application to established facts. But it might become important in the future. It is introduced here because it is sometimes asserted that mystical experiences can be induced by drugs, such as mescaline, lysergic acid, etc. On the other hand, those who have achieved mystical states as a result of long and arduous spiritual exercises, fasting and prayer, or great moral efforts, possibly spread over many years, are inclined to deny that a drug can induce a "genuine" mystical experience, or at least to look askance at such practices and such a claim. Our principle says that *if* the phenomenological descriptions of the two

experiences are indistinguishable, so far as can be ascertained, then it cannot be denied that if one is a genuine mystical experience the other is also. This will follow notwithstanding the lowly antecedents of one of them, and in spite of the understandable annoyance of an ascetic, a saint, or a spiritual hero, who is told that his careless and worldly neighbour, who never did anything to deserve it, has attained to mystical consciousness by swallowing a pill.

But it is still a question whether in fact any mescaline experience ever is intrinsically similar to, or descriptively indistinguishable from, the experience of the saint, in which case only would our principle find an empirical application. As to this question, my opinion is that we do not yet know enough about the effects of these drugs to answer it with any confidence. Important experiments are now in progress on such drugs, as well from the spiritual as from the medical standpoint, and we have to await results.

One guess may be hazarded. The drug-induced experience may perhaps in some cases indistinguishably resemble the extrovertive type of mystical experience, but it is most unlikely that it resembles the far more important introvertive type. This distinction will be explained later.

Meanwhile the problem has little importance in this book because in all the very numerous phenomenological descriptions which are to be quoted in support of our various conclusions there is only a single case in which the experience described followed on the taking of mescaline. The resulting experience in that one case undoubtedly resembled, and in fact seemed indistinguishable from, the extrovertive type of experience reported by the more traditional non-drug-taking mystics. I shall indicate that one case when I come to it. It could perfectly well have been omitted without serious loss to the cumulative mass of evidence on which our conclusions will be based, and its omission would not affect those conclusions.

Another application of our principle which might be quoted arises in connection with the second of the three well-known periods of mystical illumination in the life of Jakob Boehme. This second illumination is stated to have been induced by gazing at a polished

disc.<sup>13</sup> Looking at a polished surface seems just as lowly and unspiritual a causal condition of mystical experience as the taking of a drug. Yet no one, I believe, will deny that Jakob Boehme was a "genuine" mystic.

### 5. *Experience and Interpretation*

It is a presupposition of our enquiry that it is important as well as possible to make a distinction between a mystical experience itself and the conceptual interpretations which may be put upon it. This is analogous to the distinction which can be made between sense experience and its interpretation. And this analogy is valid and useful notwithstanding the often misleading character of a comparison between mystical and sense experience to which I have previously drawn attention.

It is probably impossible in both cases 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. 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 recog-

<sup>13</sup> See Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism*, paperback ed., New York, Meridian Books, Inc., 1955, p. 255.

nized 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. Moreover, the distinction, however rough, is used every day in our practical living, and we could hardly get on without it. A witness in a law court is instructed to give evidence only of what he actually observes, avoiding inferences and interpretations. This instruction is essential and works well enough, notwithstanding that if the witness says he observed the defendant at the scene of the crime, some philosopher might try to insist, like Mill, that all the witness actually saw was a coloured surface, and that to call this "the defendant" would be to indulge in an inference.

We have to make a parallel distinction between mystical experience and its interpretation. But here too we cannot expect to make a clear separation. 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 is indeed far greater than the corresponding difficulty in the case of sense experience. And yet it is of vital importance to our enquiry that the distinction should be admitted, should be grasped and held continually before our minds, and that we should make every possible attempt to apply it to our material as best we can, however difficult it may be to do so. There are two reasons why it is important.

First, as with sense experience, although the pure experience, if it could be isolated, would be indubitable, yet any interpretation, whether made by the experiencer or another, is liable to be mistaken. It is often said that the nonmystic cannot deny that the mystic has the experience which he says he has. But this is only true of the experiential component of his description. It does not imply that a philosopher who is not himself a mystic is not entitled to probe, examine, analyse, and call in question those parts of the mystic's description which seem to him clearly to involve elements of in-

terpretation. The philosopher must claim his proper rights.

The second reason for insisting on the distinction is of even greater moment. Writers on mysticism have frequently argued that mystical experiences are basically the same, or similar, all over the world, in all different ages, cultures, and in all different religious associations. Numerous writers have based upon this an argument for the objectivity of such experience. For instance, R. M. Bucke wrote as follows: "You know that the tree is real and not an hallucination because all other persons having the sense of sight . . . also see it, while if it were an hallucination it would be visible only to yourself. By the same method of reasoning do we establish the reality of the objective universe tallying cosmic consciousness. Each person who has the faculty is made aware of essentially the same facts. . . . There is no instance of a person who has been illumined denying or disputing the teachings of another who has passed through the same experience."<sup>14</sup>

The examples of persons who possessed cosmic, i.e., mystical, consciousness given by Bucke include persons as widely separated in time, space, and culture as St. Teresa and the Buddha. There is no doubt that Bucke enormously overstates his case. In the next chapter I shall quote Professor C. D. Broad's version of the argument, which is the most careful, conservative, and guarded statement of it with which I am acquainted. But in the meanwhile, the essential logic of it is evident even in the exaggerations of Bucke. The argument depends on an analogy with sense perception. It alleges that we distinguish between veridical perception and hallucination by the universal agreement of human beings in veridical perception as opposed to the private and unshared character of hallucinatory perceptions. It contends that there is an analogous agreement among mystics everywhere in the world about what they experience, and that this supports belief in the objectivity of the experience.

Two questions are here raised. First, is it a fact that mystical experiences are basically the same, or similar, all over the world, or at any rate that they all have important common characteristics?

<sup>14</sup> Bucke, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

Secondly, if this is true, does it constitute a good argument for believing in their objectivity? I maintain that the whole argument has never been properly probed, analysed, and impartially evaluated by any previous writer. And this is a task which I propose to undertake. 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. How do we explain these facts? There are two different hypotheses by which they can be explained, and we have to make a choice between them. One hypothesis is that the experiences of the Christian, the Hindu, and the Buddhist are basically different, although there may be some similarities, perhaps only superficial ones, which justify us in calling them all “mystical.” The other hypothesis is that the experiences of them all are basically the same—though perhaps there may be some differences—but that each puts upon his experiences the in-

tellectual interpretations which he has derived from the peculiarities of his own culture. The Christian interprets the experiences in terms of a pre-existent Christian orthodoxy in which he has been reared, the Hindu in terms of more characteristically Indian ideas, and the Buddhist in terms of conceptions which may have come from pre-Aryan sources or were possibly at least in part freshly minted by the Buddha himself. There are three mutually inconsistent interpretations of the same experience. Plainly we cannot even state these alternative hypotheses, much less come to a rational decision between them, without making use of the distinction between experience and interpretation.

The importance of the distinction has not commonly been grasped even by the most eminent writers on mysticism. Professor J. H. Leuba does indeed explicitly make use of it. He uses it to support his view that mystical experience is subjective. He criticizes William James for having been sympathetic to the belief in its objectivity as a result of having confused the indubitable pure experience with the highly doubtful elaborations or interpretations put upon it by the mystics.<sup>15</sup> But Leuba talks glibly about the "pure experience"—a phrase which he perhaps picked up from James himself—without apparently having any clear understanding of the extreme difficulties involved in any attempt to isolate it or to apply the idea in practice. He himself makes no use of the distinction except as a stick with which to beat James.

A much more recent writer, Professor R. C. Zaehner, in his book *Mysticism, Sacred and Profane* shows that he is in some sense conscious of there being a difference between the experience and the interpretation, but he is in my opinion gravely misled by his failure to hold the distinction clearly in mind, to grasp its implications, and to make effective use of it. For instance, in the records of introvertive mysticism one finds frequent descriptions of the experience of an absolute undifferentiated and distinctionless unity in which all multiplicity has been obliterated. This, as we shall see later, is described by Christian mystics such as Eckhart and Ruys-

<sup>15</sup> J. H. Leuba, *The Psychology of Religious Mysticism*, Chap. 12.

broeck on the one hand, and by the ancient Hindu mystics who composed the Upanishads on the other. The language of the Hindus on the one hand and the Christians on the other is so astonishingly similar that they give every appearance of describing identically the same experience. They were of course wholly unknown to, and independent of, one another. Yet Professor Zaehner, who is a Roman Catholic, insists that their experiences 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.” We may leave the question open (for the present) whether Professor Zaehner is right in thinking that the Christian and the Indian experiences are quite different from one another in spite of the almost identical words in which they are often expressed. He may be right. We have admitted, or rather asserted, that there are two alternative hypotheses for explaining the facts. Professor Zaehner chooses one of them. We have not yet ourselves investigated the question of which is right. But 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.

I shall close this section with some remarks on terminology. I use the word “mysticism” to mean the whole subject which we are discussing in this book. It therefore includes both mystical experience and its interpretations. I use the word “mystic” to mean a person who has himself been subject to mystical experience—once at least, shall we say, if it is necessary to be so specific. It does not therefore cover a thinker who studies the subject or writes about it sympathetically or has been influenced by mystical ideas and believes them.

For instance, Hegel was influenced by mystical ideas, but was not himself a mystic in my sense of the word. Nor was William James a mystic. Plato was deeply influenced by mystical ideas, and there are several passages in his writings which suggest that he was himself a mystic, but no one knows this for certain.

I use the word "interpretation" to mean anything which the conceptual intellect adds to the experience for the purpose of understanding it, whether what is added is only classificatory concepts, or a logical inference, or an explanatory hypothesis. Also the interpretation may be the work of a mystic or a nonmystic. Thus if I should conclude in this book that mystical experience is objective, or if I should conclude that it is only subjective, these would be my interpretations.

It should be noted that there are different levels of interpretation of mystical experience, just as there are of sense experience. If a man says, "I see a red colour," this is a low-level interpretation, since it involves nothing except simple classificatory concepts. But a physicist's wave theory of colours is a very high-level interpretation. Analogously, if a mystic speaks of the experience of "an undifferentiated distinctionless unity," this mere report or description using only classificatory words may be regarded as a low-level interpretation. But this is being more fussily precise than is usually necessary, since for all intents and purposes it is just a description. If a mystic says that he experiences a "mystical union with the Creator of the universe," this is a high-level interpretation since it includes far more intellectual addition than a mere descriptive report. It includes an assumption about the origin of the world and a belief in the existence of a personal God. Note that the phrase "undifferentiated unity" contains no reference to God or the Absolute. If a man says on the alleged basis of mystical experience that time is unreal, this is plainly a general philosophical theorem which is a high-level interpretation.

I occasionally use the phrase "mystical idea." This is roughly the same as an interpretation, but it generally implies that the proposition or concept which is here called an "idea" was originally an interpretation of some actual mystical experience by the person who

experienced it, but has since passed into the general history of ideas and may be accepted by people who are unaware of its mystical origin. For instance, Hegel's concept of the "identity of opposites" may be considered a mystical idea in this sense. It is a transcription of certain characteristics of mystical experience which we shall have to study. But it is spoken of and criticized by many who have no knowledge of its mystical origin. Pantheism is also a mystical idea, even if it is adopted on purely logical grounds by a thinker who considers himself a rationalist.

### 6. *Catholicity of Evidence*

It is a presupposition of our enquiry that whatever conclusions we draw ought to be based on a survey of evidence as wide as possible. This means that we should consider not only the mysticism of a single culture, for instance Christian mysticism, but rather the mysticisms of all the higher cultures—at least as many and as much as this enquirer is in a position to study, having regard to his own limitations of knowledge and scholarship. I shall therefore try to take account, so far as these limitations allow, of Christian, Islamic, Judaic, Hindu, Buddhist, and Taoist mysticisms. Zen Buddhism, which is of course highly mystical, first appeared as a special brand of Buddhism in China from whence it passed over into Japan. It is included, of course, under the head of Buddhist mysticism. The only expressions of mysticism indigenous to China with which I am acquainted are some well-known passages of Taoist writers to which we may have occasion to refer in later pages.

In addition to the sources just mentioned, we ought also to consider the mystical experiences recorded by men who have not been adherents of any particular religion—let us call them unattached mystics. It is a common popular assumption that all mysticism is as such religious. There is a sense in which this is true, since all mysticism is concerned with the highest spiritual aspirations of the self—we need not consider certain alleged demonic and evil aberrations of mysticism. But it is not true in the sense that every mystic

is a believer in some one or other of the organized religions of the world. He need not be a believer in any religious creed as that phrase is ordinarily understood. Plotinus is an obvious example among the ancients. He accepted the philosophy of Plato, but not any specifically religious creed. But apart from classical and famous examples there are many cases of recent and contemporary unattached mystics whose reports of their experiences should be of great importance to the philosophical enquirer. We shall very often find that the experiences of such men as Tennyson,<sup>16</sup> J. A. Symonds, R. M. Bucke, Edward Carpenter, and even quite unheard-of and unknown contemporary unattached mystics are of great value to us.

Thus the evidence on which we ought to rely should come from at least three kinds of sources: first, the mysticisms which have been historically associated with the great world religions; second, historically famous nonattached mystics such as Plotinus; third, contemporary mystics whether well-known or obscure, whether unattached or associated with a particular religion.

The reasons for this emphasis on catholicity of evidence should be obvious. There is, of course, no reason why a writer should not for limited purposes confine his studies exclusively to the mysticism of a single culture. But he cannot do this if his purpose is to examine the philosophical implications of mysticism as such. This requires a survey of all the main areas of mysticism. And there is also in our case a special reason. In the previous section it was mentioned that many writers have urged the similarity of mystical experiences in different cultures, religions, and ages all over the world as an argument in favor of their objectivity. Our very first duty, then, must be to examine the evidence for this view. And we plainly cannot do this unless we take into account, to the best of our ability, at least all the main areas of mysticism in time and place.

To undertake this task does not involve making any value judgment as to the relative intrinsic values of different cultures or differ-

<sup>16</sup> Tennyson was a Christian, but I call him unattached because his description of his experience—which will be quoted in its proper place—was not expressed in terms of any specifically Christian or other religious concepts. For instance, he did not call it "union with God."

ent branches of mysticism as such. Christian writers no doubt naturally believe that Christian mysticism is more valuable, true, and important than any other. Hindu writers may be pardoned if they consider that theirs is the best. Our practice of taking into account the evidence of the mystics of all cultures should not be construed as implying the opinion that all are of equal intrinsic value, any more than the practice of a law court of hearing the evidence of all relevant witnesses on any matter implies that the court regards the evidence of them all as equally truthful or valuable. And it does not appear that there is any necessity for us—at any rate at the present stage of our enquiry—to express an opinion as to whether the mysticism of one culture is in itself inferior or superior to that of any other.

## CHAPTER 2

### *The Problem of the Universal Core*

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#### I. *The Nature of the Problem*

In the previous chapter I referred to R. M. Bucke's version of the argument for the objectivity of mystical experiences which various writers have based upon the alleged fact that such experiences in all times, places, and cultures have been basically the same, or that, in spite of some differences, they possess a universal core of common characteristics. Bucke's version, we observed, overstated and exaggerated whatever degree of validity the argument may reasonably be supposed to have. Professor C. D. Broad, who states that he has no religious belief, and that he has never had anything which would be called a religious or mystical experience,<sup>1</sup> and who cannot be accused of any special sympathy for mysticism, presents another version of the argument. It is the most careful, guarded, conservative, moderate version with which I am acquainted. This makes it specially suitable as a basis for the philosophical discussion of the argument, and I shall use it as such. His statement is as follows:

Finally I come to the argument for the existence of God which is based on the occurrences of specifically mystical and religious experiences. I am prepared to admit that such experiences occur among people of different races and social traditions, and that they have occurred at all

<sup>1</sup>C. D. Broad, *Religion, Philosophy, and Psychological Research*, New York, Harcourt, Brace and Company, Inc., 1953, pp. 2 and 192.

periods of history. I am prepared to admit that, although the experiences have differed considerably at different times and places, and although the interpretations of them have differed still more, there are probably certain characteristics which are common to them all and suffice to distinguish them from all other kinds of experience. In view of this I think it more likely than not that in religious and mystical experience men come into contact with some Reality or some aspect of Reality which they do not come into contact with in any other way.

But I do not think there is any reason to suppose that this Reality . . . is personal.<sup>2</sup>

Since Broad is discussing arguments in favor of the existence of a personal God, the last sentence in the quotation is inserted by him in order to indicate that he rejects the view that there is any reason to think that the Reality which may be revealed in the experience is a personal God. With this question we are not at present concerned. It will be time enough to discuss *what* is the nature of the Reality which is supposed to be revealed when we have analysed and evaluated that part of the argument which purports to show that there is any such Reality. Our first question is whether mystical experience is objective. If we decide that it is, the question may then be raised what kind of an entity it reveals. I quote Broad's last sentence only because I am anxious not to misrepresent him by omitting reservations which he thinks ought to be made as regards the conclusions which may be drawn from the argument.

On a later page he repeats the sense of the above passage in slightly different words and says that the Reality referred to is probably "a certain *objective* aspect of reality."<sup>3</sup>

William James is plainly referring to what is essentially the same argument when he writes:

This overcoming of all the usual barriers between the individual and the Absolute is the great mystic achievement. In mystic states we become one with the Absolute and we become aware of our oneness. This

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 172-173. As will be pointed out in the proper place (see p. 136), Broad does not suppose that the agreement of experiences is by itself sufficient to prove objectivity, since such agreement is often found in experiences which are known to be illusions, e.g., mirages.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 197. The italics are mine.

is the everlasting and triumphant mystical tradition hardly altered by differences of clime or creed. In Hinduism, in Neo-Platonism, in Sufism, in Christian mysticism, in Whitmanism, we find the same recurring note, so that there is about mystical utterances an eternal unanimity which ought to make the critic stop and think.<sup>4</sup>

It is of interest to note that in his list of the many different cultures and religions in which agreement is found he omits Buddhism. This is not a case of inadvertence. It is no doubt a deliberate omission. And the reason for it must be that the Hinayana version of Buddhism with which alone it is probable that James was at all fully acquainted, is generally regarded as atheistic and also without any such concept as the Absolute. But Buddhism was founded on the enlightenment experience of the Buddha, and every Buddhist is supposed to seek that experience as his goal of aspiration. And since that experience was certainly in some sense mystical, it will be seen that Buddhism, at least at first sight, presents a difficulty for the theory that in mystical experiences in all cultures we "become one with the Absolute." This apparent exception is so important that I shall have to devote a special section of this chapter to it. But even if this exception had to be admitted, it might still be the case that the agreement among mystics might be impressive if it extended to all the cases mentioned by James, and it could still be true that the argument for objectivity which has been based upon it might be in part valid, and not wholly destroyed. For the moment I shall proceed with the examination of the argument without taking account of the difficulty raised by the case of Buddhism.

The problems which the argument—of which I shall take Broad's version as the pattern—raises are two:

1. Is there any set of characteristics which is common to all mystical experiences, and distinguishes them from other kinds of experience, and thus constitutes their universal core?
2. If there is such a universal core, is the argument for objectivity which has been based upon it a valid argument?

<sup>4</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, New York, Modern Library, Inc., p. 410.

I shall devote this chapter to the first problem, and the following chapter to the second, discussing also in that chapter any other arguments for objectivity which may present themselves, and endeavoring to reach a conclusion on that matter.

Although so many writers have asserted that there is a universal core of common characteristics, they have not as a rule made any serious attempt to justify the statement by a careful survey of the empirical evidence, nor even to give clear and complete lists of what the common characteristics are; nor are such lists as different writers have given consistent with one another. James lists four common characteristics, namely: (1) noetic quality, by which he means the immediate feeling of the revelation of objective truth which accompanies the experience and is a part of it, (2) ineffability, (3) transiency, and (4) passivity.<sup>5</sup> R. M. Bucke gives the following: (1) the subjective light, or photism, (2) moral elevation, (3) intellectual illumination, (4) sense of immortality, (5) loss of fear of death, (6) loss of sense of sin, (7) suddenness.<sup>6</sup> D. T. Suzuki gives the following list of the common characteristics of *satori*, which is the Japanese word for what non-Japanese Buddhists usually call enlightenment. He does not say that they are the common characters of all mystical experiences including those outside the sphere of Buddhism, nor does he discuss that question. But if the general theory of the existence of a common core is correct and is supposed to include the area of Buddhism, there should be a correspondence. His list is: (1) irrationality, inexplicability, incommunicability; (2) intuitive insight; (3) authoritativeness; (4) affirmation (positive character); (5) sense of the beyond; (6) impersonal tone; (7) feeling of exaltation; (8) momentariness (roughly equivalent to Bucke's "suddenness").<sup>7</sup> It is of little use to institute a detailed analysis and comparison of these lists. There are vague correspondences, several

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 371-372.

<sup>6</sup> R. M. Bucke, *Cosmic Consciousness*, New York, E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., pp. 72-73 and 79.

<sup>7</sup> D. T. Suzuki, *Zen Buddhism: Selected Writings of D. T. Suzuki*, ed. by William Barrett, New York, Anchor Books, Doubleday & Co., Inc., pp. 103-108.

cases of a total lack of correspondence, and not one characteristic which is clearly and indubitably common to all three lists. Thus we can hardly expect much light from past writers whose statements have plainly been more or less haphazard. We shall have to tackle the problem *ab initio*. There is only one way of doing this. We must quote a number of representative descriptions of their experiences which have been given by mystics, taking them from all historical times, places, and cultures, as widely separated as possible; and by an examination of these descriptions we must try to arrive inductively at their common characteristics, if there are any.

Let us begin by asking what it is reasonable for us to expect to find in the way of common characteristics. That all plane triangles have as a defining common character the fact that they are bounded by three straight lines is an analytic truth. It goes without saying that our enquiry into whether mystical states of mind have any common characteristics is an empirical enquiry in which we cannot expect any absolutely universal *a priori* situation such as we have in mathematical models.

Is it, then, reasonable for us to expect any set of common characteristics in such an inductive situation? We have an assemblage or group of psychological states which are in common language perhaps somewhat vaguely marked off from various other groups of psychological states, and which are all commonly described by one word, the word "mystical," the other groups being called "non-mystical." It has been too readily taken for granted by writers on mysticism that all "mystical" states must necessarily have common characteristics to justify the application of the one word to them. But as the Wittgensteinians have recently been insisting, the multifarious objects or phenomena which are all called by one name may be thus grouped together, not because of an identity of common qualities, but only because they bear to one another a relation of "family resemblance." *P* may resemble *Q* because both possess the common quality *a*. *Q* may resemble *R* because, although *R* does not possess quality *a*, both it and *Q* possess the common quality *b*. *R*

may resemble *S* by possessing in common with it the quality *c*, although *S* does not possess either the quality *a* or the quality *b*. Thus there is a chain of resemblances running through *P*, *Q*, *R*, and *S*, although no common quality is shared by them all. And this family resemblance traceable through *P*, *Q*, *R*, and *S* may be what causes us to call them all by the same name. Wittgenstein thought that this was the situation with the word "game," and he also noted that it is likely to be what we shall find in words standing for concepts in ethics and aesthetics.

Shall we find that mystical states are so called because they all share a set of common qualities, or because they have only a family resemblance to one another? There is no *a priori* way of deciding this question. We shall have to see after enquiry into the facts. But I will somewhat anticipate our future findings for the purpose of providing the reader with a preliminary sketch of the conclusions we shall reach. We shall find neither the situation of a pure common core shared by all mystical states nor a pure family resemblance situation. Neither the one extreme nor the other, but rather a mixture of the two which may be described as follows: there will be a central nucleus of typical cases which are typical because they all share an important set of common characteristics. But there will be borderline cases. These are usually, or often, called "mystical experiences" because, although none of them possess all the common characteristics of the nucleus, some of them possess some of these characteristics, others others. Thus they bear the relation of family resemblance both to the nucleus and to each other. This is what we mean by the phrase "borderline cases." The typical and central mystical states shade off through borderline cases into the wholly nonmystical. This may be illustrated by a diagram:

Family resem-  
blance group

ABCD

EFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTU

Family resem-  
blance group

WXYZ

True class relation of a set of  
common characteristics

The diagram is perhaps oversymmetrical in that there are probably not two distinct sets of family resemblance groups one at each end. This feature of the diagram is meant merely to emphasize the centrality, or essentiality, of the nucleus. For it will be seen that, in the situation described, the central core of mystical experiences is of far more importance to our argument than the family resemblance groups. So much is this the case that after we have given a nod of recognition to the borderline cases—out of respect to the family resemblance school of philosophers—we shall be justified in concentrating thereafter wholly on the central nucleus as being the inner essence of mysticism. We can then ignore the borderline cases. But we must first recognize the existence of the borderline cases, not only as a gesture of respect, but because it is important for our argument that we should do so. Otherwise, if we should find that the universal core in the central nucleus consists of the common characteristics *a*, *b*, *c*, *d*, and if a critic were to bring up one of the borderline cases and say, "This is what people call a mystical experience, but it does not share all these characteristics *a*, *b*, *c*, *d*," we should have no answer. But if we have taken the preliminary precaution of recognizing borderline cases, we shall have an answer to that critic.

## 2. *Visions and Voices Are Not Mystical Phenomena*

Let us begin by excluding from the class of mystical states certain experiences which popular opinion may perhaps tend to regard as mystical, but which are not genuinely so. By doing this, and giving the reasons for it, we shall be able to learn not only what are *not* mystical phenomena, but by implication we can learn some important facts about those phenomena which *are* mystical. The chief such occurrences to be excluded are visions and voices. Not only is this the opinion of most competent scholars, but it has also been the opinion which the great mystics themselves have generally held. They have often been subject to visions and voices, but have usually discounted them as of doubtful value or importance and at any rate as not to be confused with genuine mystical experiences.

A Catholic saint may have a vision of the Virgin Mary or hear a voice which he attributes to Jesus. A Hindu may have a vision of the goddess Kali. Neither these nor the voices heard by St. Joan of Arc, Socrates, or Mohammed, are to be accounted as mystical phenomena, although it is quite possible that these persons may also have been the subjects of genuine mystical experiences. St. Paul is often called a mystic. The light which he is alleged to have seen on the road to Damascus and the voice which he heard saying, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" should not *as such* be classed as mystical experiences, although there may be other grounds for classing him as a mystic. The words in which he speaks of another experience as that of a man who was "caught up into the third heaven . . . and heard unspeakable words which it is not lawful for a man to utter," have something of the true mystical ring. Even here there is some doubt because it is not clear whether the word "words" is to be taken literally or metaphorically. If literally, then this would amount to a voice which would rule it out from the class of mystical phenomena. The reference to the "third heaven" is also subject to the same doubt since it may be interpreted either metaphorically or literally as an actual vision. What however gives the sentence a genuine mystical ring is the expression "unspeakable" and the words "which it is not lawful for a man to utter." That their experiences are "unspeakable" or "ineffable" is a common statement made by mystics, although there are, as we shall see, different interpretations of this fact. The words "not lawful" may perhaps refer to a peculiarity of Jewish mystics, namely that in their tradition it is generally considered improper and indecorous for any man to give a personal account of his own mystical experiences. Such accounts, if given by a writer, were usually kept secret and not included in published versions.<sup>8</sup> St. Paul's statement "I live, yet not I but Christ liveth in me" is also sometimes quoted as evidence that he was a mystic. If so, the word "Christ" is (rightly or wrongly) taken to refer to the realization in Paul of what Eckhart calls the birth of God

<sup>8</sup> Cf. G. G. Scholem (ed.), *Major Trends of Jewish Mysticism*, New York, Schocken Books Inc., 1954.

in the apex of the soul, and what Buddhists refer to as the realization of the Buddha-nature in a man.

We may raise the question whether our exclusion of visions and voices from the class of mystical phenomena is due to an arbitrary decision, or whether any good reason can be given for it. The answer is that good reasons can be given. The main point is that the most typical as well as the most important type of mystical experiences is nonsensuous, whereas visions and voices have the character of sensuous imagery. The introvertive kind of mystical states are, according to all the accounts we have of them, entirely devoid of all imagery. Extrovertive experiences may indeed be called sensuous, since they consist in a transfiguration of actual sense perception, but even this is not imagery but is direct perception by the eyes. Extrovertive experience, there is some reason to think, is no more than a stepping stone to the higher introvertive state, and in any case is of less importance. These assertions will, of course, be fully explained and documented in the proper place. Introvertive experience is alleged by the experiencers of it to be void of content and formless. Eckhart and Ruysbroeck and many other mystics warn us that sensuous imagery must be forcibly extruded by a mind which seeks the goal of the mystic.

St. Teresa frequently saw visions. She was not an intellectual as Eckhart was, and not capable of much analytical or philosophical thinking. Yet she was aware that her visions, or at least some of them, were hallucinations. She suspected that some of them were sent by the devil to distract her from her efforts to attain union with God. She thought that others might be sent by God as a help and comfort, although even in these cases she was apparently not deceived into supposing that what she saw in the visions was objectively existent.

St. John of the Cross writes that whether visions are from God or the devil

the understanding should not be encumbered by them or feed upon them, nor should the soul desire to receive and hold them, if it wishes to remain detached, empty, pure, and simple, as is required for the state of

union. For, as God is not comprised in any image or form, nor contained in any particular kind of knowledge, the soul, in order to be united with God, must not take hold of any distinct form or any particularized knowledge.<sup>9</sup>

On the other hand, although visions and voices are clearly distinguished by mystics from the higher states which they attain, there is a certain correlation between the types of persons who have mystical experiences and those who see visions and hear voices. That is why they themselves are so careful to distinguish them.

The Upanishads are of course among the earliest known documents of Indian mysticism, or indeed of any mysticism, dating as they do from the first half of the first millennium B.C. They invariably describe the mystical experiences as being "soundless, formless, intangible,"<sup>10</sup> i.e., devoid of sensuous content. But in the mention of the practices of controlled breathing and concentration and other spiritual exercises in the Svetasvatara Upanishad we find the statement:

As you practice meditation you may see in vision forms resembling snow, crystal, wind, smoke, fire, lightning, fireflies, the sun, the moon. These are signs that you are on the way to the revelation of Brahman.<sup>11</sup>

The distinction is here clearly made between visions and the genuine, mystical state, but the correlation referred to above is also asserted. The curious difference between the kind of visions mentioned by the Indian mystic, fireflies for instance, and the pious visions of the Virgin of which Christian mystics speak, may perhaps tell a tale about the differences between the two cultures, but the point is that both are sensuous images, and as such are excluded from the class of mystical phenomena, although it is recognized that the mystic is peculiarly liable to them. On the essential point of distinguish-

<sup>9</sup> St. John of the Cross, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, trans. by Kurt F. Reinhardt, New York, Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1957, Pt. 1, Bk. 2, Chap. 16, pp. 62-63.

<sup>10</sup> *The Upanishads*, trans. by Swami Prabhavananda and Frederick Manchester, New York, Mentor Book MD 194, New American Library of World Literature, Inc., 1957, Katha Upanishad, p. 20 (Originally published by the Vedanta Press, Hollywood, Calif. Copyrighted by the Vedanta Society of Southern California.)

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

ing between visions and mystical experiences the Christian mystics and the Hindu mystics are in complete accord.

### 3. *Discounting Raptures, Trances, and Hyperemotionalism*

There are also some other phenomena which are sometimes closely associated with the mystical life but which do not constitute any necessary part, or accompaniment, of it. They occur occasionally but are not at all universal, and may therefore be discounted as not belonging to the universal core of which we are in search. These may be listed as trances, raptures, and violent emotionalism. We may give a very brief account of them here both in order to be clear as to what we are discounting and because of their intrinsic human interest.

In the characteristic phraseology of Christian mysticism "rapture" is a semitechnical term which includes not only extreme joy, as in the popular meaning of the word, but also certain violent and abnormal bodily changes. According to St. Teresa "rapture" and "trance" are two different words for the same thing.<sup>12</sup> But we cannot expect to find any very consistent or precise usage of words in these matters. She herself had frequent raptures which gave her "extreme bodily pain." She describes her raptures as follows:

During the rapture itself the body is very often as it were dead, perfectly powerless. It continues in the position it was in when the rapture came upon it—if sitting, sitting; if the hands were open, or if they were shut, they will remain open or shut. For though the senses fail but rarely, it has happened to me occasionally to lose them wholly . . . for a short time. . . . But in general there remains the power of hearing and seeing; but it is as if the things heard and seen were at a great distance, far away. . . . I do not say that the soul sees and hears when the rapture is at its highest—when the faculties are lost because profoundly united with God—for then it neither sees nor hears nor perceives. . . . This utter transformation of the soul continues only for an instant.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> *Life of St. Teresa*, trans. by D. Lewis, 5th ed., 1924, chap. 20.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

She also records that during the rapture

The natural heat of the body is perceptibly lessened; the coldness increases though accompanied with exceeding sweetness.<sup>14</sup>

In the front matter of a book which I cannot now trace, I have seen a photograph of the famous Hindu mystic Sri Ramakrishna being supported in a standing position by two disciples—apparently to prevent him from falling to the ground. The caption of the picture is "Sri Ramakrishna in samadhi." Of this extraordinary being we are told that during his period of office as a priest at a Hindu temple his habit of continually falling into trances so interfered with his duties that this became a public scandal so that the authorities of the temple seriously considered relieving him of his appointment.<sup>15</sup> Ramakrishna's biographer, Nikhilananda, tells us that on one occasion "Sri Ramakrishna remained six months in a state of absolute identity with Brahman." And Ramakrishna himself referring to this occurrence later said:

For six months I remained in that state from which ordinary men can never return; generally the body falls away after three weeks. . . . I was not conscious of day or night. Flies would enter my mouth and nostrils just as they do a dead body's but I did not feel them.<sup>16</sup>

It is to be hoped that, if we are to preserve our belief in Ramakrishna's veracity, he obtained his information about the flies from some outside observer after the event. And as to his staying alive for six months his biographer says that a kindly monk used to push food into his mouth. The whole incident, as related here, strains one's capacity for belief. But there can be no doubt that the abnormal bodily states which mystics call rapture or trance do sometimes occur. They are mentioned here as being of interest, but the point to be made is that they are accidental accompaniments of mystical consciousness, by no means universal or necessary. They occur among the more emotional and hysterical mystics and not among those of

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Vincent Sheean, *Lead Kindly Light*, New York, Random House, Inc., 1949, p. 312.

<sup>16</sup> *Ramakrishna, Prophet of New India*, abridged from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. by Swami Nikhilananda, New York, Harper & Brothers, 1942, p. 28.

the more calm, serene, and intellectual types. They cannot therefore be regarded as belonging to the universal core of mystical experiences.

The same is to be said of the frequently asserted connection between sex and the mystical life; and of the sex metaphors with which some mystics—especially in the Christian and Islamic traditions—lard their descriptions of what they interpret as union with God. It may well be true, as Leuba suggests, that a main part of the motives of St. Catherine of Genoa and Madame Guyon was the sex frustration which they underwent. But certainly nothing of this sort is universal. Nor do these facts have any bearing upon the philosophical problems which we are investigating—for instance, the problem of objectivity. It has always been known that disillusionment with the world and its glittering but fraudulent pleasures—fraudulent in the sense that they may seem to promise a happiness which they do not yield—is a powerful motive urging religious minds to seek consolation and to obtain that “true” happiness which they believe to be found only in God. There is no good reason to think that this tells either for or against the reality of the object of the religious consciousness. And it is not clear why, if the particular worldly pleasure which is measured and found wanting by the mystic happens to be that of sex, or if, being deprived of sex, he seeks consolation in God, these facts should be supposed to be in some unaccountable way damaging to his claims to the objectivity of his experience. It neither helps nor hinders that claim.

The same may be said of what may be called the hyperemotionalism of some mystics, namely, that it is neither a part of the universal core of mysticism nor has any bearing on our problems. Very roughly speaking, the mystics in all cultures may be divided into two types, the emotional on the one hand—St. Catherine of Genoa, St. Teresa, and Heinrich Suso are examples—and the intellectual or speculative type, who usually keep their emotions well under control, on the other. Eckhart and the Buddha are examples of this. Of course there is no sharp line of division between the two types. What we have is only a gradual transition between extremes. The extreme emotional types—in the Christian tradition especially—often speak of the love

they feel overpowering them in their union with God as "burning," "violent," "vehement," "intoxicating," "passionate," and the like. St. Teresa<sup>17</sup> describes herself in one passage as "beside myself, drunk with love." This excessive emotionalism of some saints and mystics is, according to this writer's taste, an unpalatable characteristic, tending to show lack of balance and of good judgment and critical ability. But it is no more objectionable than the unwashed and dirty habits notoriously indulged in by some medieval saints. It is in no sense a universal characteristic of mysticism and has no bearing whatever on our problems.

Eckhart, it seems to me, said the last word on this subject. He condemns what he calls "emotional titillation," remarking that Jesus Christ never sought "pleasurable excitement" in anything he did.<sup>18</sup> And the following fine passage—also from Eckhart—surely puts all these extreme phenomena of raptures and frenzies of emotion in their proper perspective:

Satisfaction through feeling might mean that God sends us as comfort ecstasies and delights. But the friends of God are not spoiled by these gifts. Those are only a matter of emotion, but reasonable satisfaction is a purely spiritual process in which the highest summit of the soul remains unmoved by ecstasy, is not drowned in delight, but rather towers majestically above them. Man only finds himself in a state of spiritual satisfaction when these emotional storms of our physical nature can no longer shake the summit of the soul.<sup>19</sup>

To condemn hyperemotionalism and to discount it as being no necessary part of the mystical consciousness is not of course to deny that there is always an element of emotion of some kind and degree in that consciousness, and that this is necessary and universal. Indeed this is true of all human experience, which is never entirely neutral emotionally and always carries with it an affective tone of some

<sup>17</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 163.

<sup>18</sup> *Meister Eckhart*, trans. by R. B. Blakney, New York, Harper & Brothers, 1941, p. 201.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted by Rudolf Otto, *Mysticism East and West*, New York, Meridian Books, Inc., 1957, p. 73.

kind. That mystical experience brings blessedness, bliss, joy, and peace is the common statement of those who have it, and such words obviously express the emotional side of it. But these emotions may be—and in the highest instances are—calm, serene, and unexcited. Hence, they are a source of power, whereas hysterical emotionalism is a source of weakness.

#### 4. *Towards a Solution*

Suppose that one wanted to discover the common and defining characteristics of a species of butterfly. One would have no difficulty in collecting any number of specimens of that kind of butterfly so as to see what distinguishing marks they all have in common. Should it not be equally easy to collect specimen descriptions given by mystics of their experiences so as to determine their common characteristics, if there are any? No doubt it will be at once obvious to the reader that the cases are quite different and that there are far greater difficulties in the present case. It will be well to explore some of these difficulties. The most obvious is, of course, that in the nature of the case our enquiry will have to be into the inner and private lives and experiences of mystics and not, or at least not for the most part, into any overt or publicly observable phenomena. I shall briefly discuss this later, but will refer first to certain other points.

There is the difficulty that mystics usually say that their experiences are ineffable, incommunicable, and indescribable; after which they quite commonly proceed to describe them. What are we to make of this? But this is a difficulty so special and peculiar to the case of mysticism, and one which raises such unusual problems, that we shall not be in a position to discuss it until we come to deal, at a later stage of our enquiry, with the general relations between mysticism, language, and logic.

Our task in this chapter is essentially psychological. We have to examine the psychological or phenomenological characteristics of the mystical consciousness. But most of the great mystics lived be-

fore the rise of science or of scientific habits of thought, and especially before even the beginnings of a science of psychology. They had therefore little or no sense of the importance of attempting to make their introspective descriptions as accurate and precise as possible. In this respect their descriptions may often be vastly inferior to those of quite minor mystics of our own time. Accordingly, we shall sometimes find it a useful technique to quote the descriptions which contemporary persons have given of their mystical experiences. We shall find that they often throw a flood of light upon obscure and vague descriptions given by the more famous mystics of earlier ages, that they tend to render these latter more clear and intelligible. And this will be true even though the modern cases may be those of **men** who, though they may be eminent in literature or in other pursuits, have not been primarily mystics and cannot compare in respect of the depth and greatness of their experiences with the famous mystics of prescientific ages.

To take what is no doubt a rather extreme example of the sort of difficulty we are apt to encounter with the language of the great mystics, consider the following. A famous Sufi, Abu Yazid of Bistam, who died in A.D. 875, thus describes a mystical experience of his own:

Then I became a bird, whose body was of Oneness, and whose wings were Everlastingness, and I continued to fly in the air of the Absolute until I passed into the sphere of Purification, and gazed upon the field of Eternity, and beheld there the tree of Oneness.

Certainly this is not typical. It is perhaps the worst example known to me. But we may note the irritating metaphors which neither illuminate the meaning nor possess even the merit of poetic beauty. We can see, if we have the patience to look again, that the writer is claiming to have possessed what has been called "the unitary consciousness," the consciousness of a unity which transcends all multiplicity, of which we shall later hear a great deal; and that he claims a direct experience of the One and Eternal. He goes on:

Once He raised me up and stationed me before Him, and said to me "O Abu Yazid, truly my creation desire to see thee." I said "Adorn me in

Thy Unity and clothe me in Thy Selfhood, and raise me up to Thy Oneness so that when Thy creation see me they will say, We have seen Thee: and Thou wilt be That, and I shall not be there at all.”<sup>20</sup>

This fantastic language is in fact a distorted description of an aspect of mystical experience which is well known to all students of the subject and is common in the mysticisms of all cultures. This is the experience of the apparent fading away, or breaking down, of the boundary walls of the finite self so that his personal identity is lost and he feels himself merged or dissolved in an infinite or universal ocean of being. Mystics, from those who composed the Upanishads to Eckhart, from the Zen Buddhists to some of the mystics of Hasidism, have had and described this experience, as also have such moderns as Tennyson and Arthur Koestler, whom I shall quote later. This is also what Abu Yazid means by the phrase “clothe me in thy selfhood.” And when he says further, “Thou wilt be That, *and I shall not be there at all*,” what this means is that his personal identity will have disappeared altogether, or been dissolved, in that universal self or consciousness which Yazid interprets as being God, so that not “I” but only “Thou” will be there.

Another difficulty in the way of collecting “specimen” descriptions of mystical phenomena is the fact that mystics keep their experiences to themselves more often than they expose them to the public view in the form of written accounts. A number of motives tend to produce this reticence. There are the ordinary human feelings of reserve, modesty, dignity, and the dislike of “wearing one’s heart on one’s sleeve.” There is also the fear of profaning what is felt to be sacred by exposing it to the unsympathetic and uncomprehending many. The degrees in which mystics tend thus to cloak their experiences from the public view vary with individual temperaments and also with the traditions of the particular culture, religion, or society. The most extreme secrecy was observed, as we previously mentioned, among Jewish mystics. At the other extreme we find the quite uninhibited “confessions” of St. Teresa, Suso, and

<sup>20</sup> Quoted from A. J. Arberry, *Sufism, an Account of the Mystics of Islam*, London, George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., pp. 54, 55.

others who have described their experiences in detail. Hindu and Buddhist mystics seem on the whole not to be troubled by any special reticence. There is reason to believe that many ordinary and quite obscure persons—whom you may brush against in any street or subway—have at some time in their lives obtained at least some momentary glimpse of the mystical consciousness. Normally they tend to keep silent about these experiences because they fear ridicule or at least a callous and unsympathetic reception.

Even those mystics who write freely of their experiences often express themselves in an impersonal manner and avoid the use of the first person singular. They say, "Those who have known the mystical union tell us that . . .," or, "Enlightened men say that. . . ." We notice this kind of thing very much in the writings of Eckhart and Ruysbroeck. Sri Aurobindo, the Hindu mystic who died only a few years ago, used similar modes of indirection. "Those who have thus possessed the calm within can perceive . . .," he writes in one place. Anyone who reads these authors with insight soon sees that they must be writing of their own experiences. But this has to be gathered from the "feel" of their writings. They do not themselves tell us in so many words. And these peculiarities of style do not usually constitute a serious difficulty for us.

The kind of psychology to the study of which we are committed is, of course, introspective. Introspective descriptions of mental states are no doubt liable to certain disabilities and disadvantages. But on the other hand they are very far from being worthless, as some of the more extreme behaviourists have tended to insist. No one who has read the psychological writings of William James with an unprejudiced eye can fail to be impressed with the wealth of valuable psychological material which they contain. And if the academic and professional psychologists now tend to neglect them, that is their loss and their folly.

Much has been made of the distinction between "public" and "private" about which Dewey, for example, was so emphatic without ever having asked himself, it would seem, what "public" and "private" mean, or what the epistemological basis of the distinc-

tion is, or whether it is ultimately justifiable. Its ultimate validity is certainly very doubtful, though it may be useful sometimes. It is true that I alone can experience and witness my own emotions and thoughts. But in the last analysis it would seem equally true that I alone can experience and witness the sounds and the colours which I perceive with my ears and eyes. For they are conditioned by my personal physiology so that I see, for instance, one colour, while another observer viewing what we call the "same" object sees another. Sense perceptions are in reality just as "private" as introspective perceptions. The so-called "public" world is only a construction out of the many private worlds. I can, subject to certain limitations, compare my private colour experiences with your reports of yours, but so can I compare my experiences of fear or anguish, my thought habits or associations, my reasoning processes, with the reports which other people give of theirs.

But it has to be admitted that introspective reports are in fact less reliable, more liable to error, less accurate, than reports of things perceived by the senses. And it is far easier for anyone with eyes to describe the markings on a butterfly's wing than it is for the same person to give us a clear account of his "inner" feelings. Why, it will be asked, is this so, if the distinction between public and private is not at the root of the difficulties of introspection? Our answer is that introspection is more difficult and less reliable than extrospection, not because the former is private, but because of certain intrinsic characteristics of the inner life which make it difficult to pin down, catch, and grasp with accurate concepts and words. The objects of sense perception tend to have sharp and definite outlines and boundaries which make them precise and clear. They tend to endure more or less unchanged for periods long enough to be carefully observed. These remarks are truest of solids, less true of liquids, least true of vapours and gases. But the inner life of consciousness is always dim and elusive, always rapidly changing, cannot be held steady to examine. Nor do the separate parts of it usually have sharp outlines to distinguish one from another. They merge and slide insensibly into one another. Finally there seems to be a lot of truth

in Samuel Alexander's contention that we do not "observe" our mental states—look at them from a distance, as it were—but rather "enjoy" them by *being* them and living through them. This matter is very difficult, but it would seem that in some indefinable way the difference between what Alexander calls "observation" and "enjoyment" is one of the causes of the difficulties of introspection. At any rate, we do in some way know introspectively what is going on in our minds, and there is certainly much that we cannot know except by introspection.

Mystics and their experiences can be classified in a number of ways. Of overriding importance is the distinction between the extrovertive and the introvertive types of experience. But certain minor classificatory differences may be briefly mentioned. It is certainly useful to distinguish the highly emotional and usually not very intellectual or philosophical type of mystic from the calm, serene, and philosophical type—though this is, of course, a matter of degree. Enough has already been said about this. A distinction should also be made between those mystical states which have come to men unsought, without any effort on their part, and often quite unexpectedly, and those which, on the other hand, have been preceded by deliberate exercises, disciplines, or techniques, which have sometimes involved long periods of sustained effort. The former may be called "spontaneous," the latter—for lack of a better label—"acquired."

Spontaneous experiences are usually of the extrovertive type, though not invariably. Those which are acquired are usually introvertive, because there are special techniques of introversion—which differ only slightly and superficially in different cultures. So far as I know there are no corresponding techniques of extroversion. The man to whom a brief spontaneous extrovertive experience comes may never have such an experience again. Or he may have a series of such experiences. But he can as a rule neither induce nor control them. By a single such experience of only a few moments' duration a man's life may be revolutionized. He may previously have found life meaningless and worthless, whereas now he feels that it has acquired mean-

ing, value, and direction, or his attitude to life may sometimes be radically and permanently changed.

The acquired introvertive experiences, once achieved, can as a rule be thereafter induced almost at will at least over long periods of life, but there also tend to come periods of "dryness" and "darkness" when nothing which the subject can do will induce them. Although introvertive mystical states are usually intermittent and of relatively brief duration, there are rare cases in which the mystical consciousness is believed to become permanent, running concurrently with, and in some way fused and integrated with, the normal or common consciousness. In the Christian tradition this state is technically known as "deification." It is also sometimes referred to as "spiritual marriage," or as the "unitive life." It was apparently reached by St. Teresa, Ruysbroeck, and some others. According to tradition the Buddha also reached a permanent enlightenment consciousness. This is the meaning of the Buddhist assertion that it is possible to attain *nirvana* in this life and in the body, and that the Buddha, and no doubt others, did so. For nirvana simply is the final condition of a permanent mystical consciousness. Such an achievement is rare, whether in the East or the West, but it is believed by mystics to be the supreme summit of the mystical life.

The two main types of experience, the extrovertive and the introvertive, have been distinguished by different writers under various names. The latter has been called the "inward way" or the "mysticism of introspection," which is Rudolf Otto's terminology and corresponds to what Miss Underhill calls "introversion." The other may be called "the outward way" or the the way of extrospection. The essential difference between them is that the extrovertive experience looks outward through the senses, while the introvertive looks inward into the mind. Both culminate in the perception of an ultimate Unity—what Plotinus called the One—with which the perceiver realizes his own union or even identity. But the extrovertive mystic, using his physical senses, perceives the multiplicity of external material objects—the sea, the sky, the houses, the trees—mystically transfigured so that the One, or the Unity, shines through them. The

introvertive mystic, on the contrary, seeks by deliberately shutting off the senses, by obliterating from consciousness the entire multiplicity of sensations, images, and thoughts, to plunge into the depths of his own ego. There, in that darkness and silence, he alleges that he perceives the One—and is united with it—not as a Unity seen through a multiplicity (as in the extrovertive experience), but as the wholly naked One devoid of any plurality whatever. In the next few sections we shall begin examining the detailed evidence for these remarkable assertions.

Meanwhile, the fact that there exist two such very different types of consciousness, to both of which the one adjective “mystical” is nevertheless applied, should not be considered inconsistent with the alleged existence of a universal common core of all mysticism. For (1) the two types have important characteristics which are common to both. Indeed, this is evident even from the brief remarks which have already been made, since both, as we noted, culminate in the perception of, and union with, a Unity or One, though this end is reached through different means in the two cases. Nor is this the only thing they have in common, as we shall see. And (2) there is good evidence that both types are universal in the sense that both exist and have existed alike in all times, ages, and cultures. If this were not so—if, for example, one type occurred only in the East and the other only in the West—this might tend somewhat to undermine our confidence in a universal core, though not wholly so, since even then we could point to the important set of characteristics which are common to both types.

### 5. *Extrovertive Mysticism*

Although our procedure is to be inductive so far as its logical character is concerned, there would be no point in the mere repetition of great numbers of almost identical cases. It will be better to present to the reader a smaller number of representative cases—representative, that is, of different periods and cultures and areas of the world. The extrovertive type of mystical consciousness is in any case vastly less

important that the introvertive, both as regards practical influence on human life and history and as regards philosophical implications. I shall quote seven representative cases, each of which, while exhibiting those common characteristics of the whole group of which we are in search, shows also a variety of interesting and instructive individual qualities. Of the seven cases chosen two come from Catholic Christianity, one from Protestantism, one from the paganism of classical times, one from modern Hinduism, two from among the intelligentsia of contemporary North America of whom neither is clearly associated with any particular religious creed.

Since Buddhism and Islam are not represented, it may be suggested that the spread of the examples over different cultures is not as wide as might be desired. There is truth in this. One reason is that whereas the literature of introvertive mysticism is vast and the number of recorded cases enormous, the literature of the less important and influential extrovertive type is comparatively scanty and the number of recorded cases not so numerous. There may indeed be many recorded cases of which the present writer is ignorant. But since our examples come from Catholic and Protestant Christianity, from pagan Rome, from India, and from contemporary America, this spread is surely wide enough to make us feel sure that in the cultures which are not represented there must have been many human beings who had the same kind of experience whether they left any record of it or not. Thus the case for the universality of its distribution over the world, though not perfect, seems to me to be reasonably good.

We may begin with a statement from Meister Eckhart which, in spite of its extreme brevity and compression, may be taken as a model and pattern for the understanding of the whole group. He says:

All that a man has here externally in multiplicity is intrinsically One. Here all blades of grass, wood, and stone, all things are One. This is the deepest depth.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Quoted by Rudolf Otto, *Mysticism East and West*, New York, The Macmillan Company, 1932, p. 61.

This may be supplemented by another passage from Eckhart which is as follows and which also is an example of the extrovertive, not the introvertive experience:

Say Lord, when is a man in mere understanding? I say to you "when a man sees one thing separated from another." And when is he above mere understanding? That I can tell you: "When he sees all in all, then a man stands above mere understanding."<sup>22</sup>

We notice that here, as everywhere in his writings, Eckhart does not bring himself into the matter, or speak of this as his own experience. Indeed he does not say in so many words that the oneness of all things of which he speaks is anyone's actual *experience*. He merely states that this oneness is a fact. Might it not be only a metaphysical speculation or simply a fancy? It might, so far as Eckhart's explicit sentences tell us. But no one who is familiar with his style of writing can doubt that the "depth" of which he speaks is the depth of his own experience.

What is it then that he experienced? He was looking with his physical eyes at some blades of grass, wood, stones, etc. This, and the fact that he speaks of this multiplicity as "external," prove that what he is talking about is the material world, perceived by his senses, and that the experience is of the extrovertive, not the introvertive type.

The crucial statement is that these external things, although many, were nevertheless *perceived*—seen by the eyes—as all one; that is, they were perceived as simultaneously many and one. What does this mean? It certainly does not mean that what Eckhart saw was both many and one in the trivial sense in which every unity is always a unity of many things—this page is one piece of paper but is composed of many parts. He cannot be stating merely that platitude. How then are we to understand what he says? As to understanding, Eckhart tells us in the second passage above quoted that all such experiences are "beyond mere understanding." We cannot hope for a *logical* understanding or explanation. This, as we shall see, is not

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45. This is apparently Otto's translation. He gives no source. But what is apparently the same passage may be found, in slightly different words, in Blakney (trans.), *op. cit.*, p. 173.

only Eckhart's assertion, but is universally attested by all mystics everywhere. It is in fact one of the common characteristics of all mysticism which we are seeking. But at this stage it cannot be studied any further.

To return to Eckhart's words. In saying that the grass, wood, and stone are perceived as one, he does not mean that he does not perceive the differences between them. He certainly perceives that this thing on the left is wood and this thing on the right is stone, and that stone is a different thing from wood. For he could not make a statement of the form "the wood is stone" unless he was conscious that the object before him was in fact *wood* as distinct from *stone*. Unless he perceived that wood is wood and stone is stone, he could not assert that wood is stone. Thus he means that they are both distinct and identical. Rudolf Otto has expressed the thought uncompromisingly and bluntly thus: "Black does not cease to be black, nor white white. But black is white and white is black. The opposites coincide without ceasing to be what they are in themselves."<sup>23</sup> And this is stated to be, not merely a series of words, but what someone *physically saw*.

This is shocking. But anyone who intends to read this book should know that he must get accustomed to shocks. Any writer who is honest about mysticism, as well as familiar with it, will know that it is utterly irreconcilable with all the ordinary rules of human thinking, that it blatantly breaches the laws of logic at every turn. Many writers will attempt to explain this away, to soften the shocks, to round off the angles, to make the subject palatable to what they call common sense, and thus to reduce it all to the level of the commonplace. But to do this is to falsify the whole matter, and nothing of the sort will be countenanced here. Anyone who wishes can now say: "This is enough. If mysticism is involved in logical contradictions, this is sufficient justification for me to reject it forthwith, and here and now to shut this book." Let him do so if he wishes. But my own evaluation of these matters is different and will be developed, explained, and defended gradually and in due course.

<sup>23</sup> Otto, *op. cit.*

Let us return to the crucial statement that all things are one. If the things concerned are symbolized as *A*, *B*, *C*, etc., then all are one because *A* is identical with *B*—although it at the same time remains different from it, and so with the rest. The whole multiplicity of things which comprise the universe are identical with one another and therefore constitute only one thing, a pure unity. The Unity, the One, we shall find, is the central experience and the central concept of all mysticism, of whichever type, although it may be more emphasized or less in different particular cases, and sometimes not even mentioned explicitly. The unity is perceived, or directly apprehended. That is to say, it belongs to the experience and not to the interpretation, in so far as it is possible to make this distinction.

The unity may be variously interpreted, and the interpretation will as a rule largely depend on the cultural environment and the prior beliefs of the individual mystic. Since the apprehension of it in the mystic's experience always brings a sense of spiritual exaltation, of bliss or beatitude, of nobility and supreme value, which are themselves not interpretations but part of the emotional tone of the experience, the unity is commonly interpreted by religious persons as "divine." By Christians and Muslims, and also by those more rare Judaic mystics who recorded this sort of experience, it is interpreted without more ado as the One Divine Being, God. The emotional and unphilosophical mystics such as St. Teresa and Suso jump immediately to the conclusion that what they have experienced is "union with God." They take it for granted that this is simply a statement of immediate experience and are unaware that they have imported an element of interpretation into it. The more philosophical Christian mystics, such as Eckhart and Ruysbroeck, introduce more subtle interpretations, perhaps consciously. By them the unity is interpreted as the Godhead, in distinction from God. It is the undifferentiated unity which lies behind the three Persons of the Trinity and which differentiates itself eternally into that threefold personality. It is true that these interpretations are usually put more upon the naked One of the introvertive type of experience than upon the extrovertive. And perhaps in introducing them at this point I am

somewhat getting ahead of my theme. But it does not really matter. Mystics in general do not distinguish between the introvertive One and the extrovertive One. It obviously never occurred to Eckhart, who plainly was subject to both kinds of experience, to raise any question of their identity or difference. There is no reason at all to suggest that the external One to which he refers in the passage on which we are now commenting was not thought of by him as God or the Godhead. And it is an essential and explicit part of the message of many mystics that the external and the internal unity are identical.

The experienced unity is called by Plotinus the One, and also the Good. In ancient Hindu mysticism, as expounded in the Upanishads, it is Brahman, the One without a second, or the Universal Self. By the modern Hindu mystic Ramakrishna it is sometimes conceived as Brahman, but more often as the goddess Kali. By contemporary western mystics such as Bucke and "N. M."—who will be quoted later—it is not usually given any theological interpretation.

If a religious interpretation is given, then since the formula of the extrovertive type of experience is "all things are One," this necessarily becomes "all things are God" and so gives rise to pantheism. The relations between the introvertive type of experience and the problem of theism versus pantheism will be discussed in a later chapter.

Our discussion of the passage from Eckhart has already given us a preliminary glimpse of some of the common characteristics which constitute the universal core of extrovertive mysticism. We must leave to a later page the question whether the same characteristics belong also to introvertive mysticism. Confining ourselves now to the extrovertive type, we may say that its nuclear point, around which all other common characteristics revolve, is the apprehension of a unity taken to be in some way basic to the universe. This implies a second universal characteristic, namely, that the experience is immediately interpreted by the mystic as having objective reference and not being a mere inner and subjective state of the soul. This is what James called "noetic quality." His word "quality," since it implies a characteristic of the experience itself and not a mere interpretation,

draws attention to the fact that this is how the mystic himself regards it. Objectivity is not for him an opinion but an experienced certainty. If this attitude of the mystic appears questionable to us who do not have his experience, it may be relevant to point out that normal human beings, other than philosophers, take the objectivity of sense experience to be an immediately apprehended fact, not a mere opinion.

A third universal characteristic is paradoxicality—a disregard of the commonly accepted laws of logic. This will require careful investigation later.

A fourth characteristic is bliss, beatitude, joy, a sense of supreme value, though this is not mentioned in the particular quotations from Eckhart which we have been considering. Other characteristics also not mentioned in that passage will make their appearance as we go along. Taking what we have learned from Eckhart as our guideline, we may now proceed to examine the other examples of extrovertive mysticism which were promised at the beginning of this section.

Consider the following from St. Teresa:

One day being in orison it was granted to me to perceive in one instant how all things are seen and contained in God. I did not perceive them in their proper form, and nevertheless the view I had of them was of a sovereign clearness, and has remained vividly impressed upon my soul.<sup>24</sup>

It is evident that St. Teresa, like Eckhart, was the subject of both types of experience, although her references to the extrovertive type are rare—indeed I do not remember another passage than this, though there may be some. Practically all the experiences which she records are of the introvertive type. And in this also she is like Eckhart. That the experience recorded in the above passage was extrovertive is evident. She does not perceive the naked One, but rather the multiplicity of the universe. She sees how “all things” are “contained in God.” She does not mention the nuclear apprehension of a unity at all, but jumps immediately to “God.” For her very feminine mind does not dwell on such abstract ideas as pure unity, but on the con-

<sup>24</sup> Quoted by James, *op. cit.*, p. 402.

creteness of the divine lover. Yet her experience is recognizable as in essence the same as Eckhart's. Where Eckhart says "One," St. Teresa says "God."

In the life of Jakob Boehme, Miss Underhill<sup>25</sup> tells us,

. . . there were three distinct onsets of illumination; all of the pantheistic and external type. . . . About the year 1600 occurred the second illumination, initiated by a trance-like state of consciousness, the result of gazing at a polished disc. . . . This experience brought with it that peculiar and lucid vision of the inner reality of the world in which, as he said, he looked into the deepest foundations of things. . . . He believed that it was only a fancy, and in order to banish it from his mind he went out upon the green. But here he remarked that he gazed into the very heart of things, the very herbs and grass, and that actual nature harmonized with what he had seen.

Miss Underhill tells us that of this same incident another biographer says:

Going abroad into the fields to a green . . . he there sat down, and viewing the herbs and grass of the field in his inward light, he saw into their essences, use, and properties. . . . He had a great measure of joy, yet returned home and looked after his family and lived in great peace.

The things in the external world, "the herbs and the grass of the field," are perceived with the physical eyes, but as with St. Teresa, they are not seen "in their proper form"—her phrase, presumably for their common or ordinary appearance. They are seen transfigured. This is the characteristic mark of the extrovertive type of mystical experience. But in what way they are transfigured for Boehme is not made clear in these two passages. He sees "into the very heart of things,"<sup>26</sup> but what he finds there is not set down. He sees "into their essences," but what these essences are he does not say. However, the lack is made up in yet another account of what is evidently the same experience. Mr. H. H. Brinton quotes Boehme as saying:

In this light my spirit saw through all things and into all creatures and *I recognized God in grass and plants.*<sup>26</sup> [Italics mine.]

<sup>25</sup> Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism*, paperback ed., New York, Meridian Books, Inc., 1955, p. 255.

<sup>26</sup> H. H. Brinton, *The Mystic Will*.

Thus the essence of things, their inner reality, is God. He does not use the word "unity," nor say that all these external things "are one." But in the short and scrappy accounts which the older mystics usually give of their experiences we rarely find all the characteristics of the experiences systematically set down. What we have from Boehme is sufficient to bring it into line with other accounts of extrovertive mysticism. We find in him not only the vision of God as the inner reality of external things, but also two other of the common characteristics which we have already recognized. The first is what James called the "noetic quality," the conviction that the illumination is no subjective illusion—although it is interesting to notice that Boehme at first thought that it might be, and that he tried to verify it by going out into the field and seeing whether things appeared the same there—but has objective reference. For, after going out into the field he is convinced that he is looking "into the deepest foundations of things." Secondly, the characteristic emotional tone of blessedness and peace is mentioned by him.

Before leaving Boehme we might note that what we called the principle of causal indifference finds an application in his case. The fact that his illumination came as a result of gazing at a polished surface—quite as earthly, humble, and unspiritual a cause as the taking of a drug—has no bearing upon its genuineness or validity. Those who think that a mescaline experience cannot possibly be a genuine mystical experience, however indistinguishable therefrom it may be in its phenomenology, might also reflect on the fact that the contemplation of running water caused St. Ignatius Loyola to pass into a state of extrovertive mystical consciousness in which he "came to comprehend spiritual things."<sup>27</sup> Nor need the fact that the incident of gazing at the polished disc makes us think of self-hypnotism in any way disturb us or make us doubt the value of Boehme's experience. We are concerned with what the experience in itself was, not what produced it. And the mystical state is not in the least like the hypnotic state, although they both might share similar causal backgrounds.

<sup>27</sup> Underhill, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

I will now quote an account of an experience had by a living American whom I will call N. M. It is one of those cases which, as I previously suggested, because they are recounted by a contemporary who is fully alive to the scientific and especially psychological interests of the modern mind, can be used to throw light upon statements made by great mystics of prescientific times which were in these respects woefully inadequate. N. M. is by training and occupation an intellectual. He kindly related his experience to me, and I made notes of what he said. He afterwards gave a written account of the experience which is what I shall quote in part here. It is the example to which I referred on an earlier page as the only one out of all those to be quoted in this book which was preceded by swallowing a dose of mescaline. N. M. insists however that the mescaline did not "produce" the experience but only "inhibited the inhibitions which had previously prevented him from seeing things as they really are." I think his point is that though *santonin* might be said to "produce" a yellowness, or a yellow appearance, in things, since the yellowness is not really present in them, yet what N. M. saw in his experience was really present in the things he was looking at, and might perhaps be said to be *revealed* by the mescaline but not *produced* by it. In other words, his rejection of the word "produce" was a way of insisting on the objectivity of the experience. During his conversation with me my notes show that he used what seem to me very graphic phrases to express this sense of objectivity which for some reason he does not repeat in his written account. They seem to me to be worth quoting. He said that during the experience he felt that he was, as it were, "looking through a keyhole" into the "inner reality of things" and seeing them as everyone would see them if they could be awakened from the "sleep or somnambulism" of our ordinary lives.

His written account is in part as follows:

The room in which I was standing looked out onto the back yards of a Negro tenement. The buildings were decrepit and ugly, the ground covered with boards, rags, and debris. Suddenly every object in my field of vision took on a curious and intense kind of existence of its own; that

is, everything appeared to have an "inside"—to exist as I existed, having inwardness, a kind of individual life, and every object, seen under this aspect, appeared exceedingly beautiful. There was a cat out there, with its head lifted, effortlessly watching a wasp that moved without moving just above its head. Everything was *urgent* with life [N. M.'s italics] . . . which was the same in the cat, the wasp, the broken bottles, and merely manifested itself differently in these individuals (which did not therefore cease to be individuals however). All things seemed to glow with a light that came from within them.

I will break off N. M.'s account at this point, but will resume it in a moment after making some comments. N. M. has here forgotten to include something which he said in his oral account in our conversation, namely, that not only did all those external objects seem to share one and the same life, but that that life was also identical with the life which was and is in himself. This is important because it throws light on that transcendence of the distinction between subject and object, that union with the life of all things, or with God, which other mystics often, in one set of words or another, claim to have experienced. This is not inconsistent with N. M.'s assertion that he *also* retained a sense of his own separateness. As we shall see later, the relation of subject and object is neither simple identity nor simple difference but identity in difference.

It also seems to me of importance that N. M. speaks of everything as having an "inside" which is its own subjectivity. Compare this with the statement of Boehme that he "gazed into the very heart of things, the very herbs and grass," and further that he "saw into their essences."

All-important is the experience that all the objects manifested, or possessed, *one* life, while at the same time they "did not cease to be individuals." This is the essence of the extrovertive type of experience, expressed by Eckhart in such phrases as that "all things are one."

To resume N. M.'s account:

I experienced a complete certainty that at that moment I saw things as they really were, and I was filled with grief at the realization of the real situation of human beings, living continuously in the midst of all this without being aware of it. This thought filled my mind and I wept.

But I also wept over the things themselves which we never saw and which we made ugly in our ignorance, and I saw that all ugliness was a wounding of life. . . . I became aware that whatever it was that had been happening had now ceased to happen. I began to be aware of time again, and the impression of entering into time was as marked as though I had stepped from air into water, from a rarer into a thicker element.

At this point N. M.'s account of his actual experience ends, although he goes on to make some interpretative remarks which I shall quote. Meanwhile, I find in my notes of my conversation with him that he had there said at one point, "Time and motion seemed to have disappeared so that there was a sense of the timeless and eternal." This seems to make clearer some things in his written account. There is the curious remark that the wasp to which he refers "moved without moving." The experience is timeless, and yet somehow there must be time in it, since movement is observed. Also he remembers *during the experience* that outside it and *prior* to it in time he and other human beings failed to see things "as they really are." One cannot explain this paradox, but it perhaps suggests the experiential basis of those philosophies which, like Bradley's, declare that the Absolute is timeless but yet that time is "taken up into" it and exists there not "as such" but in a transfigured state. What moves is nevertheless motionless. This is perhaps also the experiential basis of such ideas as "eternal process" and "timeless creativity" which we frequently meet in religious literature. God acts and creates without changing or moving just as the wasp "moved without moving." The trivial or very humble case of the wasp may thus illuminate the vastest and grandest cosmic conceptions.

N. M. marks the distinction between the description of the experience itself and his subsequent interpretations of it by explaining his later reflections. His interpretations are of interest and I quote some of them:

My immediate reflections on the experience at the window were as follows: I saw how absurd had been my expectations of a vision of God. I mean my notions of what such a vision would consist in. For I had no doubt that I had seen God, that is, had seen all there is to see; yet it turned out to be the world that I looked at every day. . . . I should say

that though I should regard my experience as a "religious" one I have no patience whatever with organized religion and do not regard my experience as lending support to any of its dogmas. On the contrary I regard organized religion as by its very nature hostile to the spirit of mysticism.

Intelligent people will hardly be surprised to be told that, if one of us should really behold God, that being would turn out to be utterly unlike what either the popular or the theological conceptions have led us to expect. It is doubtful whether we should continue to use the word God of that being, since that word seems to have been pre-empted to express the notions of theologians and preachers. Having seen God as he actually is, one might well come to regard those notions as fairy tales or superstitions. Thus when N. M. says he saw God, the word as he uses it is evidently not to be understood in its conventional meaning. He sees the world itself as divine and therefore speaks pantheistically of it, or of the divine element in it, as God. This is borne out by his explicit reference to pantheism in the passage which is next to be quoted.

N. M.'s contemporary outlook and the clearly marked distinction he makes between his experience and his interpretations of it help us to understand the relations between mysticism and the various traditional religions. Mystical experience is in all cultures usually interpreted by those who have it in terms of the dogmas which constitute their prior set of beliefs. The more naïve Christian mystic simply accepts quite uncritically the idea that what he has experienced is "union with God"—that is, with God as traditionally conceived in his church. Eckhart, a much more sophisticated Christian mystic, interprets the same experience as the undifferentiated unity of the Godhead before its differentiation into the three persons of the Trinity. A Hindu interprets it as union with Brahman or perhaps with the goddess Kali. A Buddhist interprets it in wholly non-theological terms which a Western mind is apt to label as "atheistic." But it is perhaps only possible for a contemporary mind, philosophically trained as is that of N. M., to realize that all these interpretations are imported into the experience, to free it from its

incrustations of traditional dogmas, and to present it to himself and to us as as near to pure uninterpreted experience as is possible. This is what we can never expect from even the greatest of the medieval mystics. And it is in this way that the evidence of our contemporaries who have experienced mystical states is peculiarly valuable to our investigation.

One other quotation from N. M.'s interpretative reflections will be in order. I had pressed him as to what he meant by saying in conversation that his life had been felt as "meaningless" before the experience but now had "meaning." In what sense was he using the word "meaning"? Was it that he now saw a *purpose* in existence which he had not seen before? Was he now, as a result of the experience, convinced of the existence of some cosmic plan in harmony with which one could try to live one's life? The following is his written reply:

I think I said to you that once my life was meaningless and that now it had meaning. That was misleading if it suggested that human life has a purpose and that I now know what that purpose is. . . . On the contrary I do not believe that it has any purpose at all. As Blake put it "all life is holy" and that is enough; even the desire for more seems to me mere spiritual greed. It is enough that things are; a man who is not content with what is simply does not know what is. That is all that pantheism really means when it is not tricked out as a philosophical theory. It would be best not to talk of meaning at all, but to say that there is a feeling of emptiness, and then one sees, and then there is fullness.

Again no one is compelled to accept N. M.'s particular interpretations, though I think one is bound to accept as a psychological fact that the experience which N. M. describes actually occurred more or less as he describes it. It is also evidently a fact that such an experience, momentary though it may be, can in some way illuminate with permanent and lasting happiness, peace, and satisfaction a life which was previously dark with despair. It seems probable also that mystical consciousness cannot be made a basis on which to erect a teleological view of the world, and that if such a view is to be maintained it must be supported on some other ground. As for

N. M.'s suggestion that one who knows what really exists will be wholly satisfied with what exists, this of course lays itself open to the age-old argument of the theologians and moralists that pantheism can make no distinction between good and evil, or else that it has to deny that evil "really" exists at all, since it regards all that exists as good and divine. But it is doubtful whether theism can make any better showing with the problem of evil than pantheism can. That question will be taken up in a later chapter. Meanwhile we have to note that to whatever difficulties of this kind a view like that of N. M.'s may expose itself, many mystics in all ages have *felt* something which perhaps can only be expressed by some such statement as that, if one knows what really is, one will see that all of it is divine and good.

We find in N. M.'s statement the same four common characteristics of extrovertive mysticism which have already been noted: the ultimate oneness of all things, the sense of objectivity, the affective tone of blessedness, joy, or happiness, and paradoxicality. But there are some modifications. The ultimate unity is now characterized, not as a mere abstract oneness, but more concretely as one *life*. The element of paradox is also somewhat different. The quotation from Eckhart spoke of an identity of different, of wood and stone for example. *A* is at once identical with *B* and distinct from it. This is an open paradox. But in N. M.'s statement that the one life manifests itself in many individuals the same paradox is, I believe, present but tends to be concealed by the use of the metaphor of manifestation. N. M. himself, when I questioned him about this, did not seem to recognize the paradox in this. But paradox breaks out openly in regard to time and motion, which both are and are not present in the experience.

My next example is from the famous nineteenth century Hindu mystic Sri Ramakrishna. He was at one time priest in charge of a temple of Kali, the Divine Mother. His extraordinary doings caused much embarrassment to the temple authorities. On one occasion he fed to a cat certain food which had been reserved as an offering to the image of the goddess. He defended himself by saying that

The Divine Mother revealed to me that . . . it was she who had become everything . . . that everything was full of consciousness. The image was consciousness, the altar was consciousness . . . the door-sills were consciousness. . . . I found everything in the room soaked as it were in bliss—the bliss of God. . . . That was why I fed a cat with the food that was to be offered to the Divine Mother. I clearly perceived that all this *was* the Divine Mother—even the cat.<sup>28</sup>

Ramakrishna's eccentricities should not blind us to the genuineness of his mystical states, from which there is much to be learned. We need not comment at any great length on the above passage. In spite of its eccentric setting and oddity of wording, the experience which it describes is of essentially the same kind as that of N. M. All material objects in sight of the experient are recognized as identical with Kali and with one another. This one inner subjectivity in all things, spoken of as "life" by N. M., now becomes "consciousness" for Ramakrishna. We need not make any point of the difference between the concepts of life and consciousness. We cannot expect any great precision of categories here, especially from so unpredictable a being as Ramakrishna.

We may turn next to the case of Plotinus. Most of the passages in which he can be recognized as describing mystical states refer to the introvertive type. But Rudolf Otto suggests that the following quotation refers to an extrovertive experience:

They see all not in process of becoming, but in being, and they see themselves in the other. Each being contains within itself the whole intelligible world. Therefore all is everywhere. Each is there all and all is each.<sup>29</sup>

This gives us the paradox of the essential identity and oneness of all things. It implies the sense of objectivity. But it does not mention the emotional element or the inner subjectivity of the oneness.

Finally I quote R. M. Bucke's description of his experience—which came to him only once and was never repeated. But it carried with it such an overwhelming conviction of its objective reality and such a high feeling of beatitude that the memory of it was sufficient to

<sup>28</sup> *Ramakrishna, Prophet of New India, op. cit.*, pp. 11 and 12.

<sup>29</sup> Otto, *op. cit.*, quoting Ennead V, sec. 8, trans. by MacKenna.

reorient his life and thought. It was this single momentary flash of cosmic consciousness which caused him to collect and study patiently all the records he could find of other people's similar experiences and to reflect on them and publish his conclusions about them in his book. This is his description:

I had spent the evening in a great city, with two friends reading and discussing poetry and philosophy. . . . I had a long drive home in a hansom cab to my lodging. My mind . . . was calm and peaceful. . . . All at once, without warning of any kind, I found myself wrapped in a flame-coloured cloud. For an instant I thought of fire . . . somewhere . . . in that great city; in the next I knew that the fire was in myself. Directly afterward there came upon me a sense of exaltation, of immense joyousness accompanied or immediately followed by an intellectual illumination impossible to describe. Among other things I did not merely come to believe but I saw that the universe is not composed of dead matter, but is, on the contrary, a living Presence. I became conscious in myself of eternal life. . . . I saw that the cosmic order is such that without any peradventure all things work together for the good of each and all; that the foundation of the world . . . is . . . love. . . . The vision lasted a few seconds and was gone, but the memory of it and the sense of reality it left has remained during the quarter of a century which has since elapsed. I knew that what the vision showed was true. . . . That conviction . . . has never been lost.<sup>30</sup>

The similarities and differences between Bucke's description and the other six will easily be perceived by the reader. The essential revelation here is that the universe is not a mass of dead things but everything is living. This was also the essence of N. M.'s experience. The central affirmation of all extrovertive experience that "all is One" is not directly emphasized by Bucke, but is involved in the assertion that the world is not a multiplicity of living beings but a single "living Presence."

We are now in a position to list the common characteristics of extrovertive mystical states of mind as evidenced in these seven typical and representative samples selected from different periods, lands, and cultures. They are:

<sup>30</sup> Bucke, *op. cit.*, p. 2; also quoted by James, *op. cit.*, p. 390.

1. The unifying vision, expressed abstractly by the formula "All is One." The One is, in extrovertive mysticism, perceived through the physical senses, in or through the multiplicity of objects.
2. The more concrete apprehension of the One as being an inner subjectivity in all things, described variously as life, or consciousness, or a living Presence. The discovery that nothing is "really" dead.
3. Sense of objectivity or reality.
4. Feeling of blessedness, joy, happiness, satisfaction, etc.
5. Feeling that what is apprehended is holy, or sacred, or divine. This is the quality which gives rise to the interpretation of the experience as being an experience of "God." It is the specifically religious element in the experience. It is closely intertwined with, but not identical with, the previously listed characteristic of blessedness and joy.
6. Paradoxicality.

Another characteristic may be mentioned with reservations, namely,

7. Alleged by mystics to be ineffable, incapable of being described in words, etc.

This has not been specifically brought out in our analysis of our sample cases. But it is universally affirmed by mystics. Bucke speaks of his illumination as "impossible to describe." Such phrases as "inexpressible," "unutterable," "beyond all expression" bespatter the writings of mystics all over the world. Nevertheless, as is evident, they do describe their experiences in words. What is meant by this alleged ineffability is not clear at present. There is some difficulty about verbalization, but what it is we do not yet know. The problem will be investigated in our chapter "Mysticism and Language." I do not therefore simply list "ineffability" as a common characteristic, as has been done by William James and others. I list only "alleged by mystics to be ineffable."

Not all of the characteristics which appear in the list are specifically mentioned in every one of our seven cases. It would be absurd to expect this. The writers did not have in mind the systematic and analytic mind of the philosopher, anxious for neat and complete lists and catalogues. They wrote from motives quite other than those which animate the intellectual and the scholar! And they set down, no doubt, what they thought necessary for the case in hand and for

the occasion. For instance, most of Eckhart's pronouncements were made in sermons to church congregations, not to professors or students in a lecture hall. Anyone who looks at the quotation from Eckhart at the beginning of this section can see that, although he does not mention the sense of objectivity, he is taking it for granted that it will be understood that he is speaking of something objective and true, and not of some subjective dream. Moreover, different individual mystics with their individual outlooks and temperaments will emphasize different aspects of the experience. Thus an intellectual like Eckhart is likely to notice the paradoxicality of his own experience and thought and to express himself in intentionally paradoxical language. But however much contradiction there might be in the uncritical mind of St. Teresa, she would be unlikely to be aware of it or to express it. Again the intensity of the feeling of objectivity obviously varies enormously with the individual. In all cases it is present, but in some it is assumed as a matter of course, just as we ordinarily assume as a matter of course that what we see with our eyes when we are awake is objective. In other cases, for instance in Bucke's, the reality and truth of the vision is felt so strongly that it is asserted with vehement conviction as an absolute and unshakable certainty.

We may end this section with a note on what is sometimes called "nature mysticism." It is a mistake to suppose that this phrase signifies another type of mysticism distinct from the two which we have already recognized. It is either the same as extrovertive mysticism, or it is a dim feeling or sense of a "presence" in nature which does not amount to a developed mystical experience but is a kind of sensitivity to the mystical which many people have who are not in the full sense mystics. Wordsworth writes such famous lines as those in which he speaks of

a sense sublime

Of something far more deeply interfused,  
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
And the round ocean and the living air,  
And the blue sky and in the mind of man;

A motion and a spirit which impels  
 All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
 And rolls through all things.

Plainly this expresses something essentially the same as what the extrovertive mystics tell us they have experienced. But it is probable that Wordsworth never had such a definite experience as those which have been quoted in this section. It is possible to explain this poem without assuming that he had. Mystical ideas have passed from the mystics into the general stream of ideas in history and literature. Sensitive people can acquire them and feel sympathy with them, and can, in the presence of nature, feel in themselves the sort of feelings which Wordsworth here expresses. There are underground connections between the mystical and the aesthetic (whether in poetry or in other forms of art) which are at present obscure and unexplained.

## 6. Borderline Cases

In the last section I have endeavored to explicate the defining characteristics of the class "extrovertive mystical experience." But there are many borderline cases, that is to say, cases in which some but not all of the defining characteristics appear, and which may even include features the *absence* of which is characteristic of typical cases. They will exhibit a family resemblance to the typical cases. We shall often feel doubtful whether to apply the word "mystical" or not. There is of course no absolute rule about this. In regard to commonly used words common usage is the rule, but "mystical" is hardly a commonly used word, and it is doubtful whether there is any established popular usage. Thus it is to some extent a matter of individual judgment how strict or how lax we are. Very likely the two borderline cases which I will quote would be popularly called mystical. But at any rate they are atypical, and I should myself prefer the stricter convention.

The first case is recorded by the British poet John Masefield. At a certain period, he explains, he was in despair about his creative

The artist always is in a way in despair  
 and we allow it to be so.

Being high

work. His inspiration seemed to have dried up. His spirit was barren, and he could produce nothing valuable. One day, on a country walk, he relates:

I said to myself: "now I will make a poem about a blackguard who becomes converted." Instantly the poem appeared to me in its complete form, with every detail distinct [On his return home from his walk he merely had to write the poem down] . . . and the opening lines poured out on the page as fast as I could write them down.<sup>31</sup>

Evidently this, or something like it, was not an isolated experience with Masfield but had happened more than once. For on a later page, discussing the nature of poetic inspiration, he states as his own experience that:

This illumination is an intense experience so wonderful that it cannot be described. While it lasts the momentary problem is merged into a dazzlingly clear perception of the entire work in all its detail. In a moment of mental ecstasy the writer . . . perceives what seems to be an unchangeable way of statement.<sup>32</sup>

He further comments that of course many writers would consider such experiences subjective, but that other poets to whom he has talked, agree with him that

it is a perception by a mortal of an undying reality . . . from which all beauty, good, wisdom, and rightness come to man. . . . Certainly to myself this last is the explanation . . . that this universe of glory and energy exists and that man may in some strange way enter into it and partake of its nature.<sup>33</sup>

The characteristics which make this *like* the typical extrovertive mystical experience are that it seems to the poet that "it cannot be described," that it comes as an immediate experience, a fusion of emotion and perception, that it is a moment of "mental ecstasy," and that it has, for Masfield, a sense of objectivity which makes him

<sup>31</sup> John Masfield, *So Long to Learn*, New York, The Macmillan Company, pp. 139-140.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 179.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 180.

feel certain that it is a revelation of an "undying" reality which is the source of all spiritual values. The features which make it *unlike* the typical mystical consciousness are that there is in it no touch of the sense of the unity of all things, the "unifying vision," which, I have maintained, is not only *a* characteristic of all mystical experience but is the nuclear and essential characteristic. And it cannot in this case be maintained that this is merely not mentioned, for he stresses that what is before his vision is a very distinct image of a multiplicity of ununified details—letters on a printed page presumably. Moreover, the experience was of the nature of a mental image or vision. We have contended that mental images (as well as voices) must be excluded from the mystical. Extrovertive experiences, it is true, contain physical sensations, but not images; while introvertive experiences include, as we shall see, neither sensations nor images. No doubt, as we have observed, aesthetic and poetic experiences have some obscure connections with mysticism. But this does not mean that they are themselves in any strict sense mystical.

The other borderline case which I will quote was reported by Margaret Prescott Montague in an essay entitled *Twenty Minutes of Reality*.<sup>34</sup> Miss Montague was convalescing in a hospital after a surgical operation, and her bed had for the first time been wheeled out onto the porch. From there she looked out on a rather dingy winter scene, the branches "bare and colorless," "the half-melted piles of snow a forlorn grey rather than white." Her account proceeds:

Entirely unexpectedly (for I had never dreamed of such a thing) my eyes were opened and for the first time in my life I caught a glimpse of the ecstatic beauty of reality . . . its unspeakable joy, beauty, and importance. . . . I saw no new thing but I saw all the usual things in a miraculous new light—in what I believe is their true light. . . . I saw . . . how wildly beautiful and joyous, beyond any words of mine to describe, is the whole of life. Every human being moving across that porch, every sparrow that flew, every branch tossing in the wind was caught

<sup>34</sup> Margaret Prescott Montague, *Twenty Minutes of Reality*. First published anonymously in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1916, later reissued in paper-covered pamphlet form in 1947 by the Macalester Park Publishing Company, St. Paul, Minnesota.

in and was part of the whole mad ecstasy of loveliness, of joy, of importance, of intoxication of life. . . . I *saw* the actual loveliness which was always there. . . . My heart melted out of me in a rapture of love and delight. . . . Once out of all the grey days of my life I have looked into the heart of reality; I have witnessed the truth.<sup>35</sup>

There is a strong sense of objectivity in the experience and a profound conviction that she has seen into "the heart of reality." The account emphasizes the beauty, value, and bliss of reality and of the writer's experience. The experience seemed to her ineffable in some sense of the word—"beyond any words of mine to describe"—although this phrase might mean merely that she personally had not the literary art to describe it, and not that it was in itself intrinsically incapable of verbalization, which is what is usually asserted by mystics. The experience differs from that of Masefield in that it did not consist of mental images, but came as a transfigured sense perception. This brings it far nearer to the typical extrovertive mystical consciousness than the experience of Masefield. Its chief differences from the typical cases are that it reveals no feeling of being a "unifying vision" in which "all is One," and there is no perception of an inner subjectivity—life or consciousness—in inorganic or "dead" objects, and no sense of the "religious" or "holy" or "divine" which we noted in the typical cases, but only of the beauty and joy of creation. In this way it is nearer to the aesthetic than to the mystical. Nevertheless, it does not include, as Masefield's experience does, features which are actually inconsistent with the mystical experience proper, for instance, the presence of sensuous images. All that prevents it from being a typical extrovertive experience is that, though it contains some of the defining features of the class, it leaves out others. Perhaps therefore it might better be classed as an incomplete, or incipient, case of extrovertive mysticism. Of course the word we use is no great matter. But what is important in this discussion is to recognize the facts which have been brought out, namely that there do exist experiences which are atypical or borderline, whatever word we elect to apply to them.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, Macalester ed., pp. 17-19.

## 7. *Introvertive Mysticism*

The basic psychological facts about the introvertive type of mystical experience, as asserted by the mystics, are in principle very easy to set forth; and there is no doubt that in essence they are the same all over the world in all cultures, religions, places, and ages. They are, however, so extraordinary and paradoxical that they are bound to strain belief when suddenly sprung upon anyone who is not prepared for them. I shall do all in my power to discuss fully and fairly the difficulties and paradoxes involved. But the first thing is to set forth the alleged facts as the mystics state them without comment and without passing judgment. The examination of criticisms will come afterwards.

Suppose that one should stop up the inlets of the physical senses so that no sensations could reach consciousness. This would be easy in the cases of the eyes, nose, ears, and tongue. But although one can shut one's eyes and stop one's ears, one cannot in this literal manner stop up the sense of touch nor the organic sensations. However, they can be excluded from explicit consciousness. Every footballer knows that it is possible to receive a heavy blow or kick or even a fairly severe wound and to be wholly unaware of the fact because of the excitement of the game and because the mind is completely absorbed in what is, for the player at the moment, far more important—the pursuit of the object of the game. Later on, the pain of the bruise or other injury will emerge into consciousness. If one wishes to say that at the moment of the hurt there is a sensation of pain in the unconscious, that is perhaps a possible manner of speech for which there is something to be said. But there was at any rate no feeling of pain in *consciousness*. Hence there seems to be no *a priori* reason why a man bent on the goal of the mystic life should not, by acquiring sufficient concentration and mental control, exclude all physical sensations from his consciousness.

Suppose that, after having got rid of all sensations, one should go on to exclude from consciousness all sensuous images, and then all

abstract thoughts, reasoning processes, volitions, and other particular mental contents; what would there then be left of consciousness? There would be no mental content whatever but rather a complete emptiness, vacuum, void. One would suppose *a priori* that consciousness would then entirely lapse and one would fall asleep or become unconscious. But the introvertive mystics—thousands of them all over the world—unanimously assert that they have attained to this complete vacuum of particular mental contents, but that what then happens is quite different from a lapse into unconsciousness. On the contrary, what emerges is a state of *pure* consciousness—"pure" in the sense that it is not the consciousness *of* any empirical content. It has no content except itself.

Since the experience has no content, it is often spoken of by the mystics as the Void or as nothingness; but also as the One, and as the Infinite. That there are in it no particular existences is the same as saying that there are no distinctions in it, or that it is an undifferentiated unity. Since there is no multiplicity in it, it is the One. And that there are no distinctions in it or outside it means that there are no boundary lines in it between anything and anything. It is therefore the boundless or the infinite.

The paradox is that there should be a positive experience which has no positive content—an experience which is both something and nothing.

Our normal everyday consciousness always has objects. They may be physical objects, or images, or even our own feelings or thoughts perceived introspectively. Suppose then that we obliterate from consciousness all objects physical or mental. When the self is not engaged in apprehending objects it becomes aware of itself. The self itself emerges. The self, however, when stripped of all psychological contents or objects, is not another thing, or substance, distinct from its contents. It is the bare unity of the manifold of consciousness from which the manifold itself has been obliterated. This seems analogous to saying that if from a whole or unity of many parts we could subtract all the parts, the empty whole or unity would be left. This is another statement of the paradox,

One may also say that the mystic gets rid of the empirical ego whereupon the pure ego, normally hidden, emerges into the light. The empirical ego is the stream of consciousness. The pure ego is the unity which holds the manifold of the stream together. *This undifferentiated unity is the essence of the introvertive mystical experience.* ✓

All this flatly contradicts a famous passage from David Hume. He wrote: "When I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception i.e. some particular mental content or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception." And Hume concludes that there is no such thing as a self or ego; but that a person is "nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions,"<sup>36</sup> i.e., nothing but the stream of consciousness. The ego which Hume was denying was of course the ego considered as a substance, whereas what the mystic is affirming is the ego in the sense of what Kant called "the transcendental unity of apperception."

How is it possible to reach this extraordinary psychological condition which the mystic thus describes? Methods and techniques for attaining it had apparently been discovered and worked out in great detail in India before the age of the Upanishads. They constitute the various practices and kinds of Yoga. Apart from certain physical disciplines—every one has heard at least of breathing exercises in this connection—there have to be great and continuous efforts at the control and discipline of the mind. Among Western mystics these methods of "stopping thought"—that is, excluding sensations, images, conceptual thinking, etc.—have also not been basically different from Oriental models. Christian mystics, of course, emphasize prayer or "orison." St. Teresa in her autobiography describes the various stages of orison in great detail. So do a number of other Christian mystics. But prayer properly understood does not consist in begging favors but in strenuous efforts to obtain a direct experience of the Divine Being in mystical ecstasy. And according to Christian interpretation, union with God normally occurs only when all the

<sup>36</sup> David Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, Bk. I, Pt. iv, sec. 6.

empirical contents of mind have been got rid of and one reaches the empty ground of the self in pure consciousness.

In the nature of the case, the introvertive type of mystical consciousness is usually acquired, often only after long years of effort, and does not come spontaneously as does the extrovertive kind of experience. Nevertheless, spontaneous and unsought introvertive experiences do occasionally occur, one of them being that of J. A. Symonds to be quoted below.

I will now begin the presentation of examples of this kind of experience selected from the literatures of as wide a spread of cultures, ages, and lands as possible with a view to discovering their common characteristics. It will be appropriate to begin with ancient India. As usual with descriptions of mystical states given by peoples who lived long before the dawn of science and the modern interest in the details of psychology, the statements which we get in the Upanishads are abrupt and very short, so that light can be thrown upon them by the more detailed description of a modern like J. A. Symonds. The following is from the Mandukya Upanishad. The composer of the Upanishad begins by mentioning three normal kinds of mental condition, waking consciousness, dreaming, and dreamless sleep, and then proceeds:

The Fourth, say the wise . . . is not the knowledge of the senses, nor is it relative knowledge, nor yet inferential knowledge. Beyond the senses, beyond the understanding, beyond all expression, is the Fourth. It is pure unitary consciousness wherein awareness of the world and of multiplicity is completely obliterated. It is ineffable peace. It is the Supreme Good. It is One without a second. It is the Self.<sup>37</sup>

The expression "say the wise" possibly indicates that whoever first reduced this Upanishad to writing made no claim that the experience described was his own. He attributes it to "the wise," which in this context certainly means the enlightened ones, those who know first-hand the fourth kind of consciousness. Even if the passage is a traditional description, this should not reduce our confidence in it; for it is in accord, not only with the whole spirit of Upanishadic mys-

<sup>37</sup> *The Upanishads, op. cit.*, p. 51.

ticism, but with descriptions of introvertive mysticism everywhere, as we shall see.

We note that the experience is said to be "beyond all expression," that is, ineffable. And further that it is "ineffable peace." Thus we have two characteristics which this experience shares with the extrovertive kind of experience, alleged ineffability and blessedness or peace. It is "not the knowledge of the senses." The word "knowledge" should not be taken in the narrow sense in which we usually take it but rather as including any awareness or consciousness. The fourth state is not one of sensation. Sensation is excluded from it. This is evident from the fact that "awareness of the world and of multiplicity is completely obliterated." Not only this, but it is "beyond understanding." No doubt we must be careful before we attribute to an ancient Indian hermit the distinctions of modern epistemology and psychology. But we find throughout all mystical literature, ancient and modern, that some such word as "understanding"—or what is here translated by that English word—or "intellect" or "intelligence" or sometimes "reason" is used to mean the faculty of thought in the sense of abstract or conceptual thought as distinct from sensation; and we find throughout that literature that thought and understanding in this sense are excluded from the mystical consciousness. And I myself have not the least doubt that this is what is meant here by the phrase "beyond understanding." What is meant is precisely that this fourth state of consciousness is to be reached only by getting rid of concepts as well as sense perceptions and sensuous images. Further, the passage says that it is not relative knowledge (i.e., knowledge of relations) nor yet inferential knowledge, thus further emphasizing that it is not the abstract consciousness of the intellect.

The first two sentences of our quotation are negative. They tell what the experience is not. But now the passage goes on to tell us, in a positive way, what the experience is. It is "the pure unitary consciousness"—"pure" because emptied of all empirical content, "unitary" because there is in it no multiplicity. It is therefore "the One," and the One has no other, no second. It is undifferentiated unity. And finally it is the Self.

The statement that it is the Self is equivalent to saying, in the metaphysical jargon of the West, that it is the pure ego, the existence of which Hume denied and which most modern empiricists also deny. The empirical ego has been stripped of all empirical content, and what is left is the bare unity of the pure ego. But the word "self" as thus used in the Upanishads—and the passage quoted is typical and not exceptional—is systematically double-meaninged. It is in the first instance the individual self. It is I who have reached my pure I-ness. But it is also the Universal or Cosmic Self, which is the absolute or ultimate reality of the world. This double meaning is not due to confusion of thought or verbal muddle. It is deliberate. The reason is that, according to the advaita (i.e., nondualistic) Vedantic interpretation of the experience, the individual self and the Universal Self are not two existences but are identical. I *am* the Universal I. This identity of my pure ego with the pure ego of the Universe, which is discovered in the mystical consciousness, is the Upanishadic equivalent of the Christian mystic's belief that he has in the mystical experience achieved "union with God." The Christian interpretation of the introvertive experience as union with God and the Hindu interpretation of it as identity with the Universal Self<sup>38</sup> are not identical interpretations. They are, however, very closely equivalent or correspondent to each other. The difference between them is that, whereas the advaita Vedanta interprets the experience as strict *identity* with the Ultimate Being, Christianity—along with the other Western theistic religions, Islam and Judaism—insists that "union" does not mean identity, but something less—a matter which we shall have to investigate later in this book.

In our treatment of extrovertive mysticism we took as our first example an extremely compressed statement of Eckhart, which gave no details but only, as it were, the bare bones of the experience. We then tried to illuminate and supplement it by the fuller psychological description of the same type of experience given by a contemporary

<sup>38</sup> Professor R. C. Zaehner in his *Mysticism, Sacred and Profane*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1957, denies that the Indian and the Christian experiences are the same. See p. 36 above, and also our later discussion on pp. 97f.

mind. We shall adopt the same procedure here. We have started with the brief undetailed passage from the Mandukya Upanishad and hope that the comparison of this with an experience of the nineteenth century man of letters J. A. Symonds will help to fill out details. The passage from Symonds is quoted by William James in his *Varieties of Religious Experience*.<sup>39</sup> It will be noted that the experience came to Symonds without any effort on his part, quite spontaneously and unsought. Also one gathers that it was not an isolated incident in his life, but occurred to him many times. He does not give his experience any specifically religious interpretation in any conventional sense. He does not, for example, use the word "God." His account is as follows:

Suddenly at church, or in company, or when I was reading . . . I felt the approach of the mood. Irresistibly it took possession of my mind and will, lasted what seemed an eternity and disappeared in a series of rapid sensations which resembled the awakening from an anaesthetic influence. One reason why I disliked this kind of trance was that I could not describe it to myself. I cannot even now find words to render it intelligible. *It consisted in a gradual but swiftly progressive obliteration of space, time, sensation, and the multifarious factors of experience* which seem to qualify what we are pleased to call our Self. *In proportion as these conditions of ordinary consciousness were subtracted, the sense of an underlying or essential consciousness acquired intensity. At last nothing remained but a pure, absolute, abstract Self. The universe became without form and void of content. But Self persisted,* formidable in its vivid keenness. . . . The return to ordinary conditions of sentient existence began by my first recovering the power of touch, and then by the gradual though rapid influx of familiar impressions and diurnal interests. . . . Though the riddle of what is meant by life remained unsolved I was thankful for this return from the abyss. . . . This trance recurred with diminishing frequency until I reached the age of twenty-eight. . . . Often I have asked myself, on waking from *that formless state of denuded, keenly sentient being*, Which is the unreality—the trance of fiery, vacant, apprehensive, skeptical Self . . . or these surrounding phenomena. [Italics mine.]

<sup>39</sup> James, *op. cit.*, p. 376. James quotes it from H. F. Brown, *J. A. Symonds*, a biography, London, 1895, pp. 29-31. A similar experience of Martin Buber given on p. 155, although it is quoted there in a different context, can also be used for throwing light on the Mandukya Upanishad.

Professor Zaehner, commenting on this statement, remarks that it has been influenced by Hindu thought. Perhaps the language may have been so influenced. But this is no reason for doubting the correctness of the description of the experience. Christian mystics are influenced by other Christian mystics in respect of the language they use. But this is no reason for doubting the correctness of their descriptions.

Symonds' experience in all important respects parallels the experience described in the Upanishad and, as we shall show, by all typical Christian and Islamic mystics, but in certain other matters is untypical and shows individual features peculiar to Symonds. To begin with the latter, the experience is unusual in that Symonds disliked it and was thankful when it passed off. Thus it apparently lacked the element of blessedness and peace and joy which is a common characteristic of all other cases known to me. A second unusual feature is the absence of a strong conviction of objective reality. He remains doubtful about this. Thirdly, it gave no sense of the meaningfulness of life.

I turn now to examine what it has in common with the statement from the Upanishad. By far the most important thing for us to note and emphasize is the fact that the essential nucleus of the introvertive experience, round which all the other factors revolve, is identical in the accounts both of Symonds and the Upanishad. In the Symonds passage it is described by the words which I have italicized. The experience is reached by the obliteration of sensation and the other "multifarious factors of experience," a phrase which covers the whole empirical content of consciousness. What is left is indeed nothing—Symonds calls it "void," "vacant," a "formless state of denuded . . . being" which is nevertheless "keenly sentient." It is in fact an "underlying or essential consciousness," a phrase which is equivalent to the "pure consciousness" of the Upanishad. And it is also "a pure, absolute, abstract Self," which persisted after the disappearance of the multiplicity of empirical contents.

The experience of Symonds is characterised by paradoxicality, the central paradox of the introvertive kind of mystical consciousness,

namely that although it is completely negative, a mere absence, yet it is also a positive experience; and that though it is a consciousness, it is a consciousness which is not a consciousness of any particular existence.

The question may be raised whether what Symonds wrote asserts or indirectly implies—what is characteristic of the major tradition of introvertive mysticism both in the East and in the West—that the abstract individual Self which emerges after the disappearance of the multiplicity is felt as being in some sense identical with, or in union with the Universal Self of the world, the One, the Absolute or God. This is not, I think, explicitly stated by Symonds. But his words seem to suggest that the “underlying or essential consciousness,” the “pure, absolute, abstract, Self,” transcends the individuality of what ordinarily “we are pleased to call our Self.” At any rate, there can be no doubt that he had the experience of what other mystics have interpreted as a Self which is identical with, or partakes in the nature of, the Universal Self.

For the rest, we see that Symonds’ experience is said to be ineffable and incapable of being intellectually understood. “I could not describe it to myself,” he says, and, “cannot even now find words to render it intelligible.”

We are not at the present time, it must be remembered, raising any question whether such experiences as those of Symonds and the composers of the Upanishads are veridical experiences of anything objective, or whether, as the sceptic may believe, they are illusions or hallucinations. We are now only concerned with describing and classifying psychological experiences which mystics assert that they have had, and asking the preliminary question whether it is true, as Broad and many others have suggested, that mystical experiences, though different, have a nucleus of common characteristics everywhere and at all times. This enquiry is a mere preliminary to discussing whether—even if there is such a set of common characteristics—this is a good argument for believing that the mystic is in contact with some objective reality with which men do not come into contact in any other way.

If there are common characteristics in the mystical experiences reported in all religions, cultures, and periods of history, it seems obvious that we cannot expect them to be everywhere described in similar sets of words. We should surely expect on the contrary a very great variety of vocabularies, styles, and modes of expression. We must therefore be able to penetrate through the mantle of words to the body of the experiences which it clothes. We must be able to recognize the same experience though described in a wide variety of types of phraseology and language. It is especially necessary to remember this when we move from the Oriental mysticism of the Upanishads to the wholly different cultural and religious atmosphere of the medieval Christian mystics. As a matter of fact, we may be surprised to find how remarkably similar is the language of the Upanishads to the language of some of the Christian mystics so long as these latter confine themselves as much as possible to uninterpreted description. But in so far as interpretation enters into and permeates their descriptions, the phraseologies used by the Indians and the Christians respectively tend to diverge radically.

I shall turn now to Christian examples of the introvertive type of mystical consciousness, and later to examples from other cultures. We may begin with a devout medieval Catholic mystic, Jan van Ruysbroeck (1293-1381), who submitted all his writings to the final judgment of the Church. He writes:

The God-seeing man . . . can always enter, naked and unencumbered with images, into the inmost part of his spirit. There he finds revealed an Eternal Light. . . . It [his spirit] is undifferentiated and without distinction, and therefore it feels nothing but the unity.<sup>40</sup>

Except that the mystical experience is interpreted theistically as a seeing of God, the rest of this quotation is about as near to uninterpreted pure experience as can be got. It is characteristic of Ruysbroeck to emphasize that the experience is without any images; and that he means by this word what most of us nowadays would

<sup>40</sup> Jan van Ruysbroeck, *The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage. The Book of the Supreme Truth. The Sparkling Stone*, trans. by C. A. Wynschenck, London, J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1916, pp. 185 and 186.

mean, namely, sensuous imagery, is made clear by numerous parallel passages. The experience, he says, is "undifferentiated and without distinction." There is therefore in it no multiplicity, none of the "multifarious factors" of our ordinary experience, which of course includes sensations and thoughts as well as images. Hence the spirit "feels nothing but the unity," which is at the same time identified with "the inmost part of his spirit," i.e., as the self or pure ego. The basic paradox of the introvertive consciousness is brought out by the statement that this empty and contentless unity is nevertheless an "Eternal Light." If we compare this with the passage quoted from the Mandukya Upanishad, we see that the two experiences recorded, one of the Hindu, the other of the Catholic Christian, are identical point by point. It should be noted also that the medieval saint was of course wholly ignorant of the very existence of any Hindu experience of the kind, so that there is no possibility of his having been influenced by it.

In another place Ruysbroeck writes:

Such enlightened men are, with a free spirit, lifted above reason into a bare and *imageless* vision, wherein lives the eternal indrawing summons of the Divine Unity.<sup>41</sup> [*Italics mine.*]

Elsewhere he speaks of the enlightened man being "without hindrance from sensible images,"<sup>42</sup> thus putting it beyond all doubt as to what he means by the word "images." And we note in the passage just quoted that the essence of the experience is that in this bare imageless vision there is found the One, the ultimate Unity, which is here identified with the Divine.

So much for Ruysbroeck's account of the experience itself. Now let us see what he makes of it when he interprets it in terms of Christian theology: ✓

There follows the union *without distinction*. Enlightened men have found within themselves an essential contemplation which is *above reason and beyond reason*, and a fruitive tendency which pierces through every condition and all being, and in which they immerse themselves in a

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, *The Book of the Supreme Truth*, Chap. 9.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, *The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage*, Bk. 2, Chap. 14.

*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 . . . creaturely distinction ceases and passes away. . . . There all light is turned to darkness; there the three Persons give place to the essential unity and abide without distinction . . . For that beatific state . . . is so simple and so onefold that neither Father, nor Son, nor Holy Ghost is distinct according to Persons.*<sup>43</sup> [Italics mine.]

A great deal of this is again almost purely descriptive of the experience. It is only after the Trinity is mentioned that the Christian interpretation begins. The bare undifferentiated distinctionless unity is identified with the oneness of the Godhead before the oneness is differentiated or manifested in the distinction of the three Persons. It is the unity behind the three Persons. It is the same as Eckhart's Godhead as distinguished from God. To revert to the relatively uninterpreted descriptive parts of this passage, there are no new elements disclosed, but there is a peculiar new vocabulary of Ruysbroeck's which needs to be explained. The undifferentiated unity is called a "wayless abyss," "Abyss" and "abysmal" are words often used by the Christian mystics to mean infinite. It is associated here with "fathomless." Compare this with Boehme's usage of the same words. "Wayless" means distinctionless, since a way is a track through a place, and a track is a line of demarcation or distinction. "Onefold" again has the same sense, emphasizing the absence of duality or division. We note that in the experience of the unity "every . . . creaturely distinction ceases and passes away." The statement that there "all light is turned to darkness" introduces a new set of metaphors common with the Christian mystics, but not any really new meaning. Darkness is a metaphor for the absence of all distinction. The metaphor presumably derives from the fact that all visual distinctions disappear in the dark. Compare this with the statement in our first quotation from Ruysbroeck where he says that the God-seeing man when he enters into the distinctionless unity "finds [there] revealed an Eternal Light." There is no contradiction (except that already involved in the basic paradox of the positive experience

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, *The Book of the Supreme Truth*, Chap. 12.

of a negative void). That God is light is the common metaphor for his goodness and blessedness. That He is darkness only refers to the absence of distinctions. In Christian mysticism the two metaphors are often forced together for the sake of paradox. Thus Suso speaks of the beatific vision as a "dazzling obscurity." Silence is another metaphor often used for distinctionlessness.<sup>44</sup>

I cannot refrain from quoting one more passage from Ruysbroeck. It does not teach us anything essentially new. I quote it chiefly for the sake of the poetic beauty of its language:

The abysmal waylessness of God is so dark and so unconditioned that it swallows up within itself every Divine way and activity, and all the attributes of the Persons within the rich compass of the essential unity. . . . This is the dark silence in which all lovers lose themselves. But if we would prepare ourselves for it . . . we should strip ourselves of all but our very bodies, and we should flee forth into the wild sea, whence no created thing can draw us back again.<sup>45</sup>

Meister Eckhart has his own remarkable phraseology. But if we by this time recognize that the essence of the introvertive mystical consciousness lies in its being beyond all mental content of sensations,

<sup>44</sup> According to Professor Zaehner (*op. cit.*, pp. 170-174), Ruysbroeck distinguished between a purely natural state of imageless emptiness, which, although it is accompanied by a sense of peace and rest, can be reached by anyone without the grace of God, and the true supernatural union with God. They are, he thinks, two quite different experiences, of which the sages of the Upanishads attained only the first and lower stage while the Christian mystics at their best attained the second. In Christian mysticism, he tells us, love is all-important, while it is not found in Vedantic monism. Professor Zaehner thus disagrees with the view, which I am maintaining, that the experience described in the Mandukya Upanishad is in all essentials the same experience as that of the Christian mystics. But even if it is a correct interpretation of Ruysbroeck that he meant to distinguish natural from a supernatural mystical experience, the fact remains that the actual description he gives of the supernatural union as being an undifferentiated unity wherein there are no distinctions and no multiplicity is, as shown in the passages quoted in the text, identical with the description given in the Mandukya Upanishad. The fact that love is emphasized by the Christian mystics but not in Vedantic monism does not alter this fact. Not only different cultures but even different individuals in the same culture show different emotional reactions to the same experience according to their individual temperaments. For instance, Ruysbroeck emphasizes love far more than does the less emotional and more coldly intellectual Eckhart, and both of them emphasize it much less than St. Teresa does.

<sup>45</sup> Ruysbroeck, *op. cit.*, *The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage*, Bk. 3, Chap. 4.

images, concepts, or other empirical material, and its being thus a unity in which all multiplicity and distinctions are obliterated, we find in him innumerable passages which confirm this. Here is such a passage:

In this way the soul enters into the unity of the Holy Trinity, but it may become even more blessed by going further, to *the barren Godhead*, of which the Trinity is a revelation. In this barren Godhead *activity has ceased* and therefore the soul will be most perfect when it is thrown into *the desert* of the Godhead, where both activity and *forms are no more*, so that it is sunk and lost in this desert where its identity is destroyed.<sup>46</sup>  
[Italics mine.]

"Barren" and "desert" are favorite metaphors with Eckhart, as also with several other thirteenth century Catholic mystics. "Barren" means empty, void, without any distinctions. "Desert" carries on the same metaphor. In this experience "forms," that is to say, distinct things with boundaries between them, especially sensuous forms, are no more. There is also no activity in this unity which Eckhart and Ruysbroeck identify with the Godhead, since activity implies distinctions, for instance time distinctions. There cannot be movement in a total void, since there is nothing to move. According to Eckhart God acts, but not the Godhead, wherein all is silence, darkness, and absence of all movement. Finally we note the assertion that when the soul enters the unity "it is sunk and lost in this desert where its identity is destroyed." Since all distinctions are annulled in the unity, the distinction between the soul of the mystic and the unity into which he has entered and which he is experiencing is also annulled. There is no division of subject and object, experiencer and experience. That is why the Christian interprets the experience as "union with God," and the Hindu as "identity" with Brahman or the Universal Self. But interpretation here involves the dispute between the pantheists and the theists, and further examination of it must wait till we are ready to discuss that issue.

The experience is to be reached, according to Eckhart, by the usual

<sup>46</sup> Blakney, *op. cit.*, pp. 200-201.

method of emptying consciousness of all particular mental contents. He expresses this in his own peculiar language:

If you are to experience this noble birth you must depart from all crowds. . . . The crowds are the agents of the soul and their activities: memory, understanding and will in all their diversifications. You must leave them all: sense-perceptions, imagination. . . . After that you may experience this birth—not otherwise.<sup>47</sup>

We need not at present concern ourselves as to why Eckhart refers to the introvertive experience as "this birth," or why he calls the different mental faculties, such as memory, sense perception, imagination, "agents of the soul," or why he refers to them as "crowds" from which one must depart. Like a twentieth century poet he has his own private language. The point to grasp is that he is in this passage simply saying that the path to the experience consists in emptying the mind of all empirical content.

Since the experience is devoid of all multiplicity, the concept of number can have no application to it. Eckhart notes this, saying:

The human spirit scales the heaven to discover the spirit by which the heavens are driven. . . . Even then . . . it presses on further into the vortex, the source in which the spirit originates. There the spirit in knowing has no use for number, for numbers are of use only in time, in this defective world. No one can strike his roots into eternity without being rid of the concept of number. . . . God leads the human spirit into the desert, into his own unity which is pure One.<sup>48</sup>

We see in this quotation a further implication of the experience ✓ of the undifferentiated unity. It must necessarily be spaceless and timeless, because space and time are the very conditions and exemplars of multiplicity. Passages in Eckhart declaring that we must get beyond time if we are to experience the mystic union with God or the Godhead are very numerous and need hardly be further quoted. This is another point of agreement between the introvertive mysticisms of all cultures and times. For instance, the Upanishads

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 192-193.

declare that Brahman, the One without a second, whose identity with the ego of the individual who experiences him is the great secret of salvation which the Upanishads seek to impart, is "beyond space, beyond time."<sup>49</sup> Eckhart does not here say that the experience is spaceless, but only timeless; but the absence of an explicit mention of space is unimportant.

It may be alleged that although Eckhart and Ruysbroeck speak of the undifferentiated unity they are exceptions. The majority of Christian mystics do not. They speak of their experience simply as "union with God." Hence if our case for believing that the Christian experience is basically the same as that which is described in the Mandukya Upanishad is made to rest solely on the cases of Eckhart and Ruysbroeck, it might be alleged that we have selected these cases because they support our argument and have ignored examples which do not support it. We have to meet this criticism.

First, it should be pointed out that there are certain metaphorical expressions used to describe their experiences which are not confined to the vocabularies of Eckhart and Ruysbroeck but are almost universal among Christian mystics. Among these are such words as "darkness," "emptiness," "nothingness," "silence," "nakedness," "nudity," etc. These metaphors stand in fact for what in more literal terms is described as undifferentiated unity. In the darkness all distinctions disappear. Silence is an emptiness of sound. Nudity is the absence of the adornment of qualities. All these words stand for the *negative* side of the experience. It has of course its positive side too. It is then described as "light" rather than as "darkness." Thus Suso speaks of his experience as a "dazzling obscurity," which paradoxically combines the positive and negative aspects in one phrase. The almost universal use of these negative metaphors among the Christian mystics points to the fact that their experience is always an undifferentiated unity although most of them prefer to use concrete metaphors rather than the literal abstract description.

I cannot of course examine here the descriptions of their experiences given by all Christian mystics. Nearly one hundred names

<sup>49</sup> *The Upanishads, op. cit.*, Svetasvatara Upanishad, p. 124.

are given in the bibliography prepared by Anne Fremantle and printed at the end of the paperback Meridian edition of Evelyn Underhill's *Mysticism*; and this bibliography of course includes only the most famous names. Perhaps the issue can be focused to a point in a manageable way if we pose the question: Was the introvertive experience of St. Teresa the same in its essentials as that of Eckhart and Ruysbroeck, or was it fundamentally different? If it was the same, how do we explain the difference of language and the fact that we do not hear about any undifferentiated unity in the writings of St. Teresa? The particular cases we have chosen to compare, namely, Eckhart and St. Teresa, pose about as good a test of the issue as any we could find. For it would be difficult to think of any other pair of Christian mystics who are so utterly different from one another—poles apart almost—in their personalities, temperaments, mental capacities, and general attitudes.

In the first place, it is not true that the descriptions of their experiences given by Eckhart and St. Teresa have nothing in common. For they both speak of "union with God," and this is common to all Christian mystics. It is part of their common tradition. It is natural to suppose that they all mean the same thing by it, unless there is positive evidence to the contrary. If one can imagine Eckhart and St. Teresa meeting across the centuries and comparing notes, it would surely be very surprising to find that in speaking of "union with God" they meant quite different experiences and were in fact talking at cross-purposes. And if there were any such radically different kinds of experience among Christian mystics which by some misunderstanding had been indiscriminately labeled "union with God," it is extraordinary that this fact was never discovered by Christian mystics themselves. Yet there is no mention of it anywhere in the literature. It is quite evident that they all suppose that there is some one supremely great experience which they refer to as "union with God," and which they all believe themselves to share with one another—although perhaps in different degrees.

Eckhart and St. Teresa were of course separated from each other by two and a half centuries of time and by the spatial and cultural

distance between Germany and Spain. Would this render it more plausible to believe that by "union with God" they meant quite different experiences? In order to test this, we will discuss the case of St. John of the Cross and use him as a kind of third term, or bridge, between the other two. The point is, of course, that St. Teresa and St. John not only were both Spanish mystics living in the same period with each other, but they were actually closely associated in their joint work of reforming the Carmelite monasteries. They were collaborators in the reform movement. Says Kurt F. Reinhardt, a recent translator of St. John, "Though twenty-seven years younger than Mother Theresa, John became her spiritual director and one of the two confessors of the one hundred and thirty nuns of the convent." <sup>50</sup>

It would be quite incredible in these circumstances to suppose that St. Teresa and St. John both had experiences which they called "union with God," but that by this phrase they meant wholly different things, and that in their communications with one another they never discovered the difference. The question then is whether what John experienced was the same as what Eckhart spoke of as undifferentiated unity. If so, then St. Teresa must also have had that experience.

So far as I know St. John does not use any phrase which precisely corresponds to that used by Eckhart. He did not have the philosophical depth and the gift for abstract thought which characterized Eckhart. But he had a far better mind than St. Teresa, more analytic and better trained. And he had a considerable gift for psychological description. He describes with great subtlety and wealth of detail how, in order to reach union, the mind has to suppress within itself all sensations, images, thoughts, and acts of will. It is the same process of emptying the mind of all empirical contents as we find with Eckhart, with the Upanishadic mystics, and indeed with all mystics who have been sufficiently intellectual to analyse their own mental processes. This ridding the mind of all particular images and thoughts is precisely that obliteration of all multiplicity of which the Mandukya Upanishad speaks. For the multiplicity referred to is nothing else

<sup>50</sup> St. John of the Cross, *op. cit.*, Introduction, page xx.

but the manifold of sensations, images, and thoughts which usually flow through consciousness. And the only result of getting rid of all mental contents (if it does not produce unconsciousness) can only be an undifferentiated unity.

We may quote a few relevant passages from St. John which bear out our view:

The soul must be emptied of all these imagined forms, figures and images, and it must remain in darkness in respect to these.<sup>51</sup>

Also the soul should

rest without engaging in any particular meditation and without positing acts and exercising the faculties of memory, understanding, and will.<sup>52</sup>

We shall then, he tells us, reach

the alienation and withdrawal of the spirit from all things, forms, and figures, and from the memory of them.<sup>53</sup>

And in another passage we read

The more the soul learns to abide in the spiritual, the more comes to a halt the operation of the faculties in particular acts, since the soul becomes more and more collected in *one undivided and pure act*.<sup>54</sup> [Italics mine.]

"One undivided and pure act" is a phrase closely related to, if not having identically the same meaning as, "undifferentiated unity." The only difference lies in the use of the word "act." But elsewhere St. John stresses, like Eckhart, the cessation of all activity.

This is some of the evidence which can be collected for believing that St. John's, and presumably therefore St. Teresa's, mystical experiences were in essence the same as Eckhart's. Why then does St. Teresa never use the kind of language which Eckhart uses and never speak of the undifferentiated unity? The answer is, I believe, that she was a woman of extremely simple Christian piety with no interest in theory, or in abstract thinking, or in philosophical distinctions and analyses, and no capacity for them. "Union with God" is not

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

an uninterpreted description of any human being's experience. It is a theistic interpretation of the undifferentiated unity. St. Teresa's uninterpreted experience is the same as Eckhart's, but she is incapable of distinguishing between experience and interpretation so that when she experiences the divisionless oneness of the mystical consciousness she jumps at once to its conventional interpretation in terms of Christian beliefs. She is after all no different in this respect from J. S. Mill's example of the plain man who senses "a coloured surface of a certain shape" and forthwith says, "I see my brother!"

I now leave the area of Christian mysticism and will endeavour to show that in other cultures besides the Hindu and the Christian already treated we find the same introvertive experience having the same essential features. And first we take Plotinus as representing the classical pagan world. Plotinus was not an adherent of any organized religious system but a believer in the metaphysics of Plato, which he sought to develop and advance. He writes:

Our self-seeing there is a communion with the self restored to its purity. It is, that is to say, a consciousness of the pure ego "restored to its purity," i.e., freed from its empirical filling. He proceeds:

No doubt we should not speak of seeing but, instead of seen and seer, speak boldly of a simple unity. For in this seeing we neither distinguish nor are there two. The man . . . is merged with the Supreme, one with it. Only in separation is there duality. This is why the vision baffles telling; for how can a man bring back tidings of the Supreme as detached when he has seen it as one with himself. . . . Beholder was one with beheld . . . he is become the unity, having no diversity either in relation to himself or anything else . . . reason is in abeyance and intellection, and even the very self, caught away, God-possessed, in perfect stillness, all the being calmed. . . .

This is the life of gods and of god-like and blessed men—liberation from the alien that besets us here, a life taking no pleasure in the things of earth—a flight of the alone to the Alone.<sup>55</sup>

This famous passage is an almost perfect specimen description of the introvertive experience explicitly mentioning all the common char-

<sup>55</sup> Plotinus, *Works*, trans. by Stephen MacKenna, New York, New York Medici Society, Enneads VI, IX, and XI.

acteristics of that experience as found in all cultures. What is mainly emphasized is transcendence of the duality of subject and object, the distinction between the individual self and the One. But the experiencer is also said to have "no diversity either in relation to himself or anything else," which clearly denies all distinctions of empirical content in the consciousness. The experience is ineffable, "baffles telling." It is interesting to note that Plotinus gives a reason for this ineffability. It is not merely that the experience is "too wonderful to talk about"—like falling in love or other such emotional experiences. The reason is a logical one. To describe something implies that it stands over against one as an object to be looked at and examined and have its characteristics noted. But this condition of description is not fulfilled in the experience of the One, since the experiencer is merged in it, one with it, and without any separation from it. I think this reasoning must be put down as Plotinus' interpretation and not as part of his actual experience, although there must be something in the experience which gives occasion to this interpretation, and which we shall have to try to discover. But it agrees with what is evidently the position of every great mystic in every land and clime, that the supposed ineffability is due to some kind of a basic and inherent logical difficulty, and not due to mere emotional intensity.

The other common elements made plain by Plotinus are that the experience is beyond the scope of intellect and reason, and that it brings blessedness to the experiencer. There is also in it the religious sense of the holy or divine.

We may take next the mysticism of the Sufis of Islam. The great Al Ghazzali, whose standing in Islam has been compared to that of Augustine in Christianity, wrote:

When the mystic enters the pure and absolute unicity of the One and Alone, mortals reach the end of their ascent. For there is no ascent beyond it since ascent involves multiplicity implying . . . an ascent from somewhere . . . to somewhere, and when multiplicity has been eliminated, Unity is established and relationship ceases.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>56</sup> Margaret Smith, *Readings from the Mystics of Islam*.

The following passage from Mahmud Shabistari (A.D. 1320) may also be quoted:

In God there is no duality. In that Presence "I" and "we" and "you" do not exist. "I" and "you" and "we" and "he" become one. . . . Since in the unity there is no distinction, the Quest and the Way and the Seeker become one.<sup>57</sup>

Both these passages are incomplete in the sense that they do not mention all the common characteristics of the introvertive experience. But they state the essential nuclear characteristic, namely that it is absolute unity from which all multiplicity has been excluded. Al Ghazzali mentions the point that in the experience there are no relations, which of course follows from the fact that there are no distinct entities to be related. Mahmud Shabistari emphasizes the merging and disappearance of all individual personalities in the One, which is an aspect of the experience to which we shall devote special attention in the next section of this chapter. If the reader cares to look back to the quotations from Abu Yazid of Bistam which were given on page 56 as an example of the uncritical language often used by mystics of prescientific times, he will now be able to recognize, through the disguise of the unfortunate style, the essentials of exactly the same experience as that to which Al Ghazzali and Mahmud Shabistari and all other introvertive mystics attest.

Jewish tradition has always frowned on the kind of mysticism in which identity, or even union, with God is claimed. Its emphasis is on the great gulf which separates God from his creation, so that a claim to a union or identity which negates that gulf generally seems objectionable to the religious Jew. Hence that tradition is rather poor in the type of mysticism which we are here expounding. Nevertheless some examples can be found among the later Hasidim, although they tend to be regarded as heretical by the more orthodox Jewry. Thus Professor G. G. Scholem quotes one of the Hasidic mystics as saying:

There are those who serve God with their human intellects and others whose gaze is fixed on Nothing. He who is granted this supreme experience

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

loses the reality of his intellect, but when he returns from such contemplation to the intellect, he finds it full of divine and inflowing splendor.<sup>58</sup>

It is true that this does not mention the unity of the One. But the key word "Nothing" means the absence of all multiplicity and therefore of all empirical content. It is unquestionably the undifferentiated void which cannot be anything else but the introvertive experience more fully described in other traditions.

The question whether Buddhism does not lie wholly outside the area in which a common core of mystical experience can be found, and whether what has been called Buddhist mysticism may not be of quite a different type from what we have been describing and perhaps has nothing in common with it, is to form the subject of a special section. This, however, really only refers to the Hinayana version of Buddhist teaching, which is said to be, in some sense or other, "atheistic" and so outside the pale of what, in the West at least, are regarded as religions as distinct from philosophies. The same doubt hardly exists as regards Mahayana Buddhism. Not that the Mahayana finds much use for the concept of God, or at least for the *word* "God." But in some respects it exhibits the character of a return to the world view of the Vedanta philosophy as it is found in the Upanishads. Buddhism had emerged from Hinduism. And the Mahayana has its metaphysical conception of ultimate reality—unlike the Hinayana which rejects all metaphysical speculations as unprofitable—although, as with the Vedanta, its conception of the ultimate tends towards an impersonality which renders the use of the word "God" not very appropriate. Thus we may fairly include here the brief and no doubt very inadequate consideration of the Mahayana which is all that can be offered in this book.

In Mahayana writings the same undifferentiated, distinctionless experience, which is the central theme of the introvertive type of mysticism everywhere, is the source of the conception of *sunyata*, or the Void, which is the main metaphysical concept of this version of Buddhism. Sunyata, the pure Void, is disclosed in *prajna*, the mystical consciousness. The following quotations are taken from the

<sup>58</sup> Scholem, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

sutra known as "The Awakening of Faith," composed about the first century and traditionally attributed to Ashvagoshā, except the last quotation which is from the Surangama Sutra.<sup>59</sup> The first, after distinguishing between the "discriminating consciousness," which is of course our normal everyday consciousness, and the "intuitive consciousness," or Mind-Essence in the attainment of which lies enlightenment, proceeds:

Mind-Essence does not belong to any individualized conception of phenomena or non-phenomena. . . . It has no particularizing consciousness, it does not belong to any kind of describable nature. Individuations and the consciousness of them come into being only as sentient beings cherish false imaginations of differences.<sup>60</sup>

We need not waste time stopping to make the rather obvious criticisms of the statement as to how normal consciousness arises as a result of "false imaginations" of differences. For we are only concerned with the account given of the mystical consciousness as lacking in individuations and differences, which brings it at once into line with the rest of the tradition of introvertive mysticism in its central character. In the same sutra we find also the statement:

In its aspect of Enlightenment, Mind-Essence is free from all manner of individuation and discriminative thinking.<sup>61</sup>

And also

If any sentient being is able to keep free from all discriminative thinking, he has attained the wisdom of a Buddha.<sup>62</sup>

And in the Surangama Sutra the Buddha is represented as saying to his favorite disciple Ananda:

Ananda, if you are now desirous of more perfectly understanding Supreme Enlightenment . . . you must learn to answer questions with no recourse to discriminative thinking. For the Tathagatas [Buddhas] . . . have been de-

<sup>59</sup> As translated in Dwight Goddard (ed.), *A Buddhist Bible*, 2d ed., Thetford, Vt., Dwight Goddard, 1938.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 364.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 365.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 366.

livered from the ever-returning cycle of deaths and rebirths by this same single way, namely by reliance upon their intuitive minds.<sup>63</sup>

These passages hardly have the feel of having been written by persons who were describing their own experiences. They may have been traditional formulations. But they must go back to experiences which human beings actually had, and they are sufficient to show that the kind of mystical experience which is the source of Mahayana Buddhism does not differ in its nature from the kind of introvertive experiences which we have found in other advanced cultures.

According to Professor D. T. Suzuki, *sunyata*, the Buddhist Void or emptiness, means:

Absolute Emptiness transcending all forms of mutual relationship. . . . In Buddhist Emptiness there is no time, no space, no becoming, no thingness. Pure experience is the mind seeing itself as reflected in itself. . . . This is possible only when the mind is *sunyata* itself, that is, when the mind is devoid of all its possible contents except itself.<sup>64</sup>

In this passage we should note those features which the Buddhist experience of the Void has in common with the introvertive experience of the Void elsewhere. The mind "is devoid of all its possible contents except itself." To be emptied of all empirical contents is the universal character of that experience. And what is left? Not unconsciousness, as would follow from Hume's passage dismissing the existence of the self. What is left is the pure ego, the self itself, seeing itself "as reflected in itself." And it is possible thus to experience *sunyata*, the Void, "only when the mind is *sunyata* itself." The meaning of this is identical with that of Ruysbroeck when he says that the spirit of the God-seeing man "is undifferentiated and without distinction, and *therefore* it feels nothing but the unity."<sup>65</sup> Further this fact that the mind, in this experience, is itself what it perceives, whether that is spoken of as the Void, or as the unity, or the One, or the Universal Self, or whether it is interpreted as God, is the source

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

<sup>64</sup> D. T. Suzuki, *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist*, New York, Harper & Brothers, 1927, p. 28.

<sup>65</sup> Quoted previously on p. 94. Italics are mine.

of all doctrines of "union with God" or "identity with Brahman," whether found in the East or the West and whether they are expressed in pantheistic, nihilistic, or theistic language. Emptiness, the Void, Nothingness, the desert, the dark night, the barren wilderness, the wild sea, the One—these are all equivalent expressions of the same experience of an absolute unity in which there are no empirical distinctions, and which is indifferently to be regarded as the pure essence of the individual soul or the pure essence of the universe.

Remembering that we are not yet enquiring into the "truth" or objectivity of any of these experiences in regard to their claim to disclose the nature of reality outside the human mind, but only into the psychological characteristics of the experience itself, we may now fairly confidently assert that there is a clear unanimity of evidence from Christian, Islamic, Jewish, Mahayana Buddhist, and Hindu sources, also supported by the witness of the pagan mystic Plotinus, and the modern Englishman J. A. Symonds, that there is a definite type of mystical experience, the same in all these cultures, religions, periods, and social conditions, which is described by them all as having the following common characteristics:

1. The Unitary Consciousness, from which all the multiplicity of sensuous or conceptual or other empirical content has been excluded, so that there remains only a void and empty unity. This is the one basic, essential, nuclear characteristic, from which most of the others inevitably follow.
2. Being nonspatial and nontemporal. This of course follows from the nuclear characteristic just listed.
3. Sense of objectivity or reality.
4. Feelings of blessedness, joy, peace, happiness, etc.
5. Feeling that what is apprehended is holy, sacred, or divine. See my remarks on this on page 79. Perhaps it should be added that this feeling seems less strong in Buddhist mystics than in others, though it is not wholly absent and appears at least in the form of deep reverence for an enlightenment which is regarded as supremely noble. No doubt this is what explains the "atheistic" character of the Hinayana. It should be noted that the feeling of the definitely "divine" is as strongly developed in the pantheistic Hindu mysticism as in the theistic mysticisms of the West and the Near East.

6. Paradoxicality.
7. Alleged by mystics to be ineffable.<sup>68</sup>

Since we are in search of the universal core, or set of common characteristics, of all mysticism, whether extrovertive or introvertive, we have to compare and integrate the list above with the corresponding list for extrovertive mysticism given on page 79, although it will be obvious at a glance that the differences between the two lists are very slight. But before we do this, it is desirable to have before us the discussions of the next three sections.

### 8. *Introvertive Mysticism—The Dissolution of Individuality*

In the introvertive mystical experience there is no multiplicity and no distinction. It should follow that just as there are in it no distinctions between one object and another there can likewise be no distinction between subject and object. And if that which is here experienced is perceived or interpreted to be the One, the Universal Self, the Absolute, or God, then it should follow that the individual self which has the experience must lose its individuality, cease to be a separate individual, and lose its identity because lost or merged in the One, or Absolute, or God. This, however, in the form in which I have just stated it, is a mere logical deduction or interpretation. We must now ask whether it is directly supported by experience. Is there a direct experience of the dissolution of the separate individuality in something which transcends it and is directly perceived as, so to speak, swallowing it up? The answer is emphatically, Yes. This is not to be thought of, however, as a new and third type of experience over and above the two types, the extrovertive and the introvertive, already discussed. It is an aspect of the introvertive experience which is presumably present in all introvertive experiences, but is only specifically emphasized in some of them. In those specimens which were given in the last section this disappearance of separate individuality was specifically mentioned and stressed in the quotation

<sup>68</sup> See my remark on p. 79.

from Plotinus—"the man . . . is merged with the Supreme, one with it."<sup>67</sup> It seems to be implied and intended, though not very clearly brought out, in the experience of J. A. Symonds.<sup>68</sup> It is stated in an earlier quotation from Eckhart<sup>69</sup>—"it [the soul] is sunk and lost in this desert where its identity is destroyed." It is also what is meant by Ruysbroeck's poetical statement about the divine unity, namely, that "This is the dark silence in which all lovers *lose* themselves."<sup>70</sup> In the rest of the cases we quoted it is not mentioned. As this aspect of mysticism is of the greatest importance, both theoretical and practical, I shall devote this section to a number of cases of introvertive experience in which it is specially emphasized and shall give two contemporary examples which throw light on the psychology of it.

Our first example is again from Plotinus:

You ask how can we know the Infinite? I answer, not by reason. It is the office of reason to distinguish and define. The Infinite therefore cannot be ranked among its objects. You can only apprehend the Infinite . . . by entering into *a state in which you are your finite self no longer*. This is . . . the liberation of your mind from finite consciousness. *When you thus cease to be finite you become one with the Infinite*. . . . You realize this union, this identity.<sup>71</sup> [Italics mine.]

The first half of this passage can be classified as philosophical interpretation. But the second half, beginning with the first words which I have italicized, is a firsthand description of a state of mind which Plotinus had experienced. For it is in this same letter to Flaccus that he proceeds:

It is only now and then that we can enjoy this elevation. . . . I myself have realized it but three times as yet.

If we now turn from the secular or nontheological mysticism of Plotinus to the utterances of the mystics of the three so-called

<sup>67</sup> P. 104.

<sup>68</sup> P. 91.

<sup>69</sup> P. 98.

<sup>70</sup> P. 97.

<sup>71</sup> This passage is from a letter from Plotinus to Flaccus, quoted in Bucke, *op. cit.*, p. 123. Bucke gives as reference R. A. Vaughan, *Hours with the Mystics*, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903, Vol. I, pp. 78-81.

"theistic" religions, Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, we shall find plenty of evidence that they experienced the same loss of individuality. For instance, Henry Suso writes:

When the spirit by the loss of its self-consciousness has in very truth established its abode in this glorious and dazzling obscurity, it is set free from every obstacle to union, and from its individual properties . . . when it passes away into God. . . . In this merging of itself in God the spirit passes away.<sup>72</sup>

We shall find that such phrases as "passing away" and "fading away" are of constant occurrence among the mystics both of Christianity and Islam to express the actual feeling or experience which they have. In the passage just quoted from Suso he speaks quite unqualifiedly of this loss of personal identity. It is true, however, that he immediately adds a qualification. The spirit, he adds, passes away "not wholly; for . . . it does not become God by nature. . . . It is still a something which has been created." This refers to a famous and furious dispute which has raged in all three of the theistic religions as to the proper interpretation to be given to the experience of "passing away" into the Infinite. The orthodox theologians of all three religions vehemently condemn what they call "pantheism," and keep a watchful and threatening eye upon the mystics because of their undoubted tendency to pantheism. Pantheism generally is supposed to mean the identity of God and the world. In the dispute of the theologians and the mystics it usually means the identity of God and that part of the world which is the individual self. The mystics are allowed by the orthodox to claim "union with God," but this union must not be interpreted as "identity," but as something short of actual and absolute identity.

In A.D. 922 an Islamic mystic named Mansur al-Hallaj was crucified in Bagdad for having, after attaining union with God, used language which seemed to claim identity with God.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>72</sup> Henry Suso, *Life of Henry Suso*, trans. by T. F. Knox, Chap. 54.

<sup>73</sup> Somewhat differing accounts of this incident, and of Mansur's character and motives, are given by different writers. See *Jalalu—Din Selections*, trans. by F. Hadland Davis, London, 1907, pp. 17-18; R. A. Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam*, London, 1914, pp. 149-150; the same author's *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, Chap. 2, p. 80.

Even when in a state of union with God, the mystic's individuality must, according to the theologians, remain separate and distinct from God, so that union has to be understood in some other way. This raises problems which we shall discuss in our chapter on pantheism. Meanwhile it must be remarked that the medieval Catholic mystics—who usually avow their complete submission to the judgment of the Church—when they describe the experience of union are usually careful to disclaim pantheism and to explain that the individual soul does not *wholly* pass away into God, but remains a distinct entity. Thus Suso's statement to this effect should be regarded not as his own spontaneous description of what he actually experienced, but as an interpretation more or less put into his mouth by the force of ecclesiastical authority. This is not to say that this interpretation is necessarily either insincere or mistaken. This is a problem we have to discuss when we treat of pantheism. But it is impossible not to note—perhaps with a certain measure of amusement—that the Catholic mystics frequently make what seem to be unguarded statements which imply complete pantheistic identity, and then hastily add a qualifying clause, as if they had suddenly remembered their ecclesiastical superiors. In the passage from Eckhart quoted on page 98 where he says that the soul is “sunk and lost in this desert where its identity is destroyed” there is no qualification. But the following passage by Eckhart disavows the pantheistic interpretation:

In this exalted state she [the soul] has lost her proper self and is flowing full-flood into the unity of the divine nature. But what, you may ask, is the fate of this lost soul? Does she find herself or not? . . . It seems to me that . . . though she sink all in the oneness of divinity she never touches bottom. God has left her one little point from which to get back to herself . . . and know herself as creature.<sup>74</sup>

Being a “creature” in Christian terminology is what marks off the individual self from being the Creator. The use of this language gives notice that the writer recognizes the gulf between God and man on which the theistic religions insist. The “little point” is that in the individual self which is *not* merged in the Infinite but re-

<sup>74</sup> F. Ffeifer, *Meister Eckhart*, trans. by C. de B. Evans.

mains obdurately individual, finite, and creaturely. But there are many passages in Eckhart in which he omits making such an admission, passages which if taken at their face value imply the complete identity of God and the soul in the mystical experience. The words quoted on page 98 constitute an example of this. Some of these "pantheistic" passages were seized on by the church as a basis for the charge of heresy.

In Islamic mysticism, or Sufism, the experience of the loss of individuality, its "melting away" into the Infinite Being, is so well known that there is a special technical term for it. It is called *fana*, which literally means "passing away."<sup>75</sup> Correlative to *fana* is *baqa*, which means the survival in God of the soul which has experienced *fana*—in other words Eckhart's "little point." Professor Nicholson observes that "the Sufi mystic rises to contemplation of the divine attributes and ultimately when his consciousness is wholly melted away he becomes transsubstantiated in the radiance of the divine essence."<sup>76</sup> This sentence, which is of course Nicholson's scholarly paraphrase, does not possess the authority which is carried by a firsthand description given by one of the mystics themselves. But there are plenty of such descriptions in Sufi literature which support the general sense of Nicholson's remark, though not perhaps his metaphysical phrases. We may quote, for example, the words of Al-Junayd (A.D. 910):

the saint . . . is submerged in the ocean by unity, by passing away from himself. . . . He leaves behind him his own feelings and actions as he passes into the life with God.<sup>77</sup>

And the passage already quoted from Abu Yazid<sup>78</sup> ends with the entreaty "clothe me in Thy Selfhood and raise me up to Thy Oneness" so that "I shall not be there at all"; i.e., his separate individuality will have disappeared.

Margaret Smith paraphrasing these claims sums up: "In that vision

<sup>75</sup> Nicholson, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>77</sup> Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

<sup>78</sup> P. 57.

the mystic passes away from the self into the One and attains to that state of union which is the end of the quest.”<sup>79</sup>

Nevertheless, Islamic theology is just as insistent as is Christian theology on the great gulf between God and man—in fact more so, since it regards the Christian doctrine of the incarnation as an heretical denial of that gulf. But in spite of this the Islamic mystics have not in general been so careful as their Christian brothers to guard themselves against the charge of pantheism. Many of them give the impression of being somewhat wild in their utterances. But Al Ghazali, with philosophic calm, condemns the interpretation of the experience of fana as implying identity with God.<sup>80</sup> He has his own theory of how fana is to be interpreted which I shall examine on a later page.<sup>81</sup>

Jewish orthodoxy has likewise always condemned pantheism as a heresy. But that pantheistic mystical tendencies have appeared from time to time in Judaism will not be denied, though they are usually veiled under a cloak of orthodoxy. The experience which the Islamic mystics call fana has undoubtedly been common enough among Jewish mystics but rarely finds explicit expression. But Professor Scholem quotes from an unpublished writing of Abulafia a passage which undoubtedly refers to it:

All the inner forces and the hidden souls in man are distributed and differentiated in the bodies. It is however in the nature of all of them that when their knots are untied they return to their origin which is one without any duality and which comprises the multiplicity.<sup>82</sup>

This passage is unintelligible unless we understand the metaphor of the untying of knots. Scholem supplies the explanation. The untying of the knots of the souls means their liberation from the fetters of finitude so that they return to their origin, which is the Infinite One. And Scholem says that the metaphor means for Abulafia that

<sup>79</sup> Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

<sup>80</sup> Al Ghazzali, *The Alchemy of Happiness*, trans. by Claud Field, 1910; see also Underhill, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

<sup>81</sup> P. 228.

<sup>82</sup> Scholem, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

"there are certain barriers which separate the personal existence of the soul from the stream of cosmic life. . . . There is a dam which keeps the soul confined . . . and protects it against the divine stream . . . which flows all around it." What shuts the soul up in its finite personality? The answer is that sensible forms and images produce finite consciousness. And these disappear in introvertive experience.

Buddhism presents some difficulties in its Hinayana form. But we have already seen that Mahayana mysticism can be ranged with the mysticisms of other cultures as regards the question of common characteristics. We can therefore without further explanation quote here a clear-cut statement of the dissolution of individuality from the writings of D. T. Suzuki, the well-known exponent of Zen Buddhism:

The individual shell in which my personality is so solidly encased explodes at the moment of satori [the Zen word for the enlightenment experience]. Not necessarily that I get united with a greater being than myself or absorbed in it, but my individuality which I found rigidly held together and definitely separate from other individual existences . . . melts away into something indescribable, something which is of a quite different order from what I am accustomed to.<sup>83</sup>

In continuation of this passage Suzuki makes the interesting remark that the feeling of exaltation which accompanies satori—what we have elsewhere spoken of as blessedness, beatitude, etc.—"is due to the fact that it [satori] is the breaking up of the restrictions imposed on one as an individual being . . . because it means an infinite expansion of the individual."

It is also noteworthy that Suzuki uses the phrase "melts away." He may possibly have derived the phrase from Christian or Sufi sources. But it is not necessary to suppose this. For the same experience everywhere tends to clothe itself in the same words. At any rate, there is clear evidence that the experience is the same in the three cultures.

The sentence in which Suzuki says that this experience does not

<sup>83</sup> D. T. Suzuki, *Zen Buddhism: Selected Writings of D. T. Suzuki*, ed. by William Barrett, New York, Anchor Books, Doubleday & Co., Inc., p. 105.

necessarily mean unification "with a being greater than myself" is a little surprising and may seem inconsistent with the thesis that the Buddhist experience is the same as that of the Christian and Islamic mystics. However, I do not think this follows. I think Suzuki must have inserted this sentence in his anxiety to differentiate his own philosophical position from the common theistic standpoint of Christianity. In other words, the difference is one of interpretation not of experience.

The Upanishads, and to a perhaps slightly less extent the Gita, are of course the great fountainheads of Hindu mysticism. If our thesis of the universal solidarity of mysticism in general, and in particular of the experience of the dissolution of individuality, is valid, we shall expect to find in those ancient Indian documents expressions of this loss of personal identity. The expectation is not disappointed. Thus in the Brihadaranayaka Upanishad one finds the following:

As a lump of salt thrown into water melts away . . . even so, O Maitreyi, the individual soul, dissolved, is the Eternal—pure consciousness, infinite, transcendent. Individuality arises by the identification of the Self, through ignorance, with the elements; and with the disappearance of consciousness of the many, in divine illumination, it disappears.<sup>84</sup>

The middle part of this passage, which gives an explanation of how individuality arises, is not descriptive of experience, but is the intrusion of a metaphysical doctrine borrowed from the Samkhya system of philosophy. It can therefore be ignored for our purposes. The rest of the passage is a more or less straightforward description of the same kind of experience of the dissolution of personal identity in the introvertive type of mystical consciousness which we have found elsewhere. We have therefore good evidence that this phase of mystical experience is common to the pagan mystic Plotinus, Christian mystics such as Ruysbroeck, Eckhart, and Suso, the mystics of Islam, Mahayana Buddhism, and Hinduism.

In our previous sections we have been able to throw light on the descriptions by ancient and medieval mystics of their experiences by quoting examples of the same kind of experience which our own contemporaries have had and which they have expressed in lan-

<sup>84</sup> *The Upanishads, op. cit.*, p. 88.

guage more intelligible to the modern mind. Can we do the same in the present case? I believe we can. I shall give two examples. One is from the English poet Tennyson and is already well known in the literature, having been publicized by William James. The other, though quite as valuable and much fuller, will be known to readers of the books of Arthur Koestler, but has probably not yet had time to get into the literature of mysticism.

Tennyson wrote in a letter:

A kind of waking trance—this for lack of a better word—I have frequently had, quite up from boyhood, when I have been quite alone. . . . All at once, as it were out of the intensity of the consciousness of individuality, individuality itself seemed to dissolve and fade away into boundless being, and this was not a confused state but the clearest, the surest of the sure, utterly beyond words—where death was an almost laughable impossibility—the loss of personality (if so it were) seeming no extinction but the only true life.<sup>85</sup>

The essence of this experience was evidently that the “I,” the individuality of the experient, faded away into “boundless being.” The boundaries of the “I,” the walls which separate it from the infinite, are broken through and disappear. Curious how the words “fade away” and “melt away” keep reappearing in the descriptions which we cull from different cultures, times, lands, all over the world, without apparently being due to any mutual influence. There is no evidence that Tennyson had ever read any of the classic examples of the dissolution of individuality brought together in this section, and it is most unlikely that he had. Can it be doubted that the constant re-appearance of this rather graphic and expressive phrase is evidence of the sameness of the experience in the widely different cases in which it occurs? It is not claimed, of course, that it is evidence of the value or objectivity of the experience, which is quite another question.

We should notice that Tennyson—although so far as I know he was a theist and, in some sense or other, a Christian—describes his experience without using any theological or conventionally religious language. “God” is not mentioned. The phrase “boundless being” is used. Boundless being is certainly the same as infinite being. And it

<sup>85</sup> Quoted by James, *op. cit.*, p. 374.

is evidently exactly this experience of infinite being which by Christian mystics is interpreted as God. And it is the fading away of the individual self into this infinite being which is interpreted as "union with God." Tennyson's statement may therefore be fairly regarded as a report of the experience itself before it has been subjected to religious interpretation.

Why does Tennyson attach to his phrase "loss of personality" the qualifying expression "if so it were" placed in parentheses? Is it because in this "clearest" and "surest of the sure" experiences Tennyson was nevertheless not quite sure of what he had experienced? Was he really vague about it or confused? I believe that is not the explanation. My interpretation is that Tennyson was puzzled by a sensing of the paradoxicality of his own words. He dimly senses the paradox but has not intellectually isolated it and pinned it down because he was not, at any rate at the moment, interested in intellectual analysis or logic. The paradox is that the "I" ceases to be "I" and yet continues to be "I." "I" find that the dissolution of "I," its disappearance, is not the extinction of "I" but on the contrary is the "I's" "only true life." For after all it was Tennyson who experienced the disappearance of Tennyson! This is also no doubt part of what Eckhart means when he asks, "what . . . is the fate of this lost soul? Does she find herself or not?" and answers his own question by saying that God "has left her one little point from which to get back to herself."

Arthur Koestler, in his book *The Invisible Writing*, devotes a chapter to a series of mystical experiences which came upon him when he was imprisoned as a spy by the followers of Franco during the Spanish Civil War. The entire chapter is in my opinion highly valuable and important for any student of mysticism. But at this point I shall pick out only what seems to me to be the kernel of the experience itself:

Then I was floating on my back in a river of peace under bridges of silence. It came from nowhere and flowed nowhere. Then there was no river and no I. The I had ceased to exist. . . . When I say "the I had ceased to exist" I refer to a concrete experience. . . . The I ceases to exist because it has, by a kind of mental osmosis, established communication with, and been

dissolved in, the universal pool. It is this process of dissolution and limitless expansion which is sensed as the "oceanic" feeling, as the draining of all tension, the absolute catharsis, the peace that passeth all understanding.<sup>86</sup>

Koestler, like Tennyson, uses no conventional religious language. It is noteworthy that although he uses the well-known phrase "the peace of God that passeth all understanding" he omits the words "of God." This is not to be taken, I think, as indicating any antireligious bias—although I do not know what his views on religion are. The omission can be explained as due to the desire, natural to any highly educated man in our psychology-conscious age, to give the experience as pure as possible without any interpretation. But what is this "universal pool" into which he feels that his individuality has been dissolved? Pool of what? Of consciousness? Of life? Of a Universal Self? He does not say. But clearly the "universal pool" is the same as what Tennyson called "boundless being." It is limitless, boundless, that is to say it is the Infinite. And to me the conclusion seems certain that this is what the classical theistic mystics *interpret* as God.

I have placed the experiences of Tennyson and Koestler for comparison alongside the classical introvertive experiences of the Christian, Hindu, and Islamic mystics. But it may be asked whether they properly belong in this classificatory pigeonhole—whether, for example, the experience of Koestler is of the same type as that of Ruysbroeck. Partly, I think, but not wholly. I should classify the experiences of Tennyson and Koestler as partial and incomplete instances of the classical introvertive type. They are certainly introvertive rather than extrovertive, since what they experience is the dissolution of the inward self, not the transfiguration of sensuously perceived external objects. They are identical with the experiences of the great classical mystics in so far as both feel the disappearance of the "I" by its fading away into infinite being. But there are differences. In the first place, the experiences of Tennyson and Koestler came to them spontaneously and unsought, whereas the classical mystics for the most part reached their experiences by rigorous disciplines involving religious exercises and the

<sup>86</sup> Arthur Koestler, *The Invisible Writing*, New York, The Macmillan Company, 1954, p. 352.

deliberate suppression of sensations, images, and thoughts. But if this were all, we should apply the principle of causal indifference and say that if the experiences themselves were the same, the question what caused or preceded them would be irrelevant. But this is not all. In the full-blown classical cases of introvertive experience, what we have is a total void, an undifferentiated unity in which, as the Mandukya Upanishad expresses it, all "awareness of the world and of multiplicity are completely obliterated." One phase of this total blotting out of all distinctions is the blotting out of the distinction between the "I" and the infinite unity in which it is sunk or merged. This phase is what Tennyson and Koestler report, but they do not report the total disappearance of *all* distinctions. For this reason their experiences would seem to be incomplete or partially developed introvertive experiences.

Mr. Koestler has been kind enough to answer some questions which I addressed to him with a view to verifying this. They were as follows:

- Q.* Am I right in supposing that during the experiences your physical senses were still in operation, so that you continued to perceive the various physical objects around you, the walls, window, objects outside the window, etc.?
- A.* Yes.
- Q.* Did they become dim or fuzzy at the edges?
- A.* No. But they were just there in the margin of attention, but unattended to.
- Q.* One of the Upanishads says: "It is pure unitary experience wherein awareness of the world and of multiplicity is completely obliterated." Have you had any experience like this? Do you think that when the Upanishad speaks of the awareness of multiplicity being "*completely* obliterated" it is perhaps exaggerating?
- A.* No, I did not experience that. That must be a higher degree. But somehow I believe that the experience exists and that its description is not exaggerated.

It will be seen that I am following Mr. Koestler in regarding his experience as not of a different type from the classical cases, but as an incomplete, or lower degree of it. Presumably, the same should be said of Tennyson's experience. I also attach importance to Mr.

Koestler's evidently intuitive feeling that there *is* an experience of the completely undifferentiated void or unity in spite of its paradoxical and indeed self-contradictory character.

### 9. *Is Hinayana Buddhist Mysticism an Exception?*

It has been suggested that Buddhism presents an obstacle to the thesis that the mysticisms found in all the great religions and cultures of the world agree in their fundamental common characteristics. We have already shown that Mahayana Buddhism does not support this view, and that, although its doctrines and theories are very different from those of the theistic religions, this is to be explained as difference of interpretation, not of experience. It remains to be considered whether any difficulty persists in the case of Hinayana Buddhism.

Let us suppose that, as the Hinayana Buddhists always maintain, theirs either is the original doctrine of the Buddha himself, of which the Mahayana is a corruption, or at least is nearer to the original doctrine. We will assume this for the sake of argument, although there is in fact much difficulty in the matter, and this assumption is at least an oversimplification. What then? Is there any evidence that the mystical experience of which the Hinayana doctrines are an interpretation was of some different type from the introvertive experience which we have been discussing? We could only conclude affirmatively if we could present as evidence actual descriptions of the enlightenment experience of the Buddha himself, or perhaps of his Hinayana followers, which show that it was an experience of a different kind. But this cannot be done. There are no such passages.

There are indeed passages of the Pali canon that recount the successive "trances" through which the Buddha is supposed to have passed when at his death he entered his final nirvana. There are also descriptions of what is called the "trance of cessation." These may no doubt be taken as descriptions of mystical states. They tend to be somewhat arid, formalized stereotypes, which strike this reader as having little of the living breath of firsthand experience in them. The stages of trance supposed to have been experienced in the pass-

ing away of the Buddha read like fictions manufactured in a later age. Even so, they are not in any way inconsistent with the descriptions given of introvertive experience in other religions. The trance of cessation is defined as "the stoppage of all mentality by a gradual cessation," which is entirely in line with descriptions of introvertive experience given elsewhere.<sup>87</sup>

Thus, even if the Hinayana doctrines were the original interpretations which the Buddha himself put upon his own enlightenment experience, there is no direct evidence that his experience differed in any basic way from that of other great mystics. The evidence, so far as it goes, is the other way.

But it may be said that the doctrine of *anatta*, or no-soul, if the account given of it in the Pali canon is accepted as being the Buddha's view, is, at least in spirit and probably in substance, inconsistent with the experiences of non-Buddhist mystics. This doctrine rejects, by means of an argument which is practically identical with the famous argument of David Hume, the whole concept of a self or soul. It urges that there is nothing in the mind except its empirical contents, and from this premiss concludes, as Hume did, that the "I" is nothing but the stream of conscious states. The Hinayanist also rejects, of course, the Hindu concept of the Universal Self, which is identical with Brahman or the Supreme Being. Thus it is not only sceptical of the soul, but is also atheistic.

Atheism is not as such, I believe, inconsistent with introvertive mystical experience. For as we have seen the concept of God is an interpretation of the experience, not part of the experience itself. A man might even have this experience and himself adopt the view that it is entirely subjective and is not evidence of anything at all transcending his own consciousness. This is in fact the view of certain Indian mystical philosophies. But the rejection of the pure ego, our critic may urge, is on a different footing and is inconsistent with the mystical experiences described outside Buddhism. For we have everywhere found that the mystic, having suppressed the empirical

<sup>87</sup> The reader will find these passages at pp. 110 and 383 in H. C. Warren, *Buddhism in Translations*, Harvard Oriental Series, Vol. 3, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1922.

factors of the stream of consciousness, arrives at a pure ego or pure consciousness, and that the emergence of this pure ego *is* the introvertive experience. Therefore to wipe out the pure ego is to wipe out the mystical experience itself as it has so far been described. Therefore the doctrine of anatta, as it is understood by the Hinayana, is inconsistent with the introvertive mystical experience of other cultures. And if the Buddha maintained it, then his enlightenment experience must have been quite different from any mystical experience which we have so far studied.

There is indeed a school of thought found in the writings of a number of Western Buddhist scholars at the present day,<sup>88</sup> which holds that the doctrine of anatta was intended by the Buddha to deny the existence of the individual self but not of the Universal Self. If this could be accepted, it would offer a ready answer to the criticism we are discussing. But I do not think it is defensible. It stands in flat contradiction to the whole Hinayanist tradition and to the specific teachings of the Pali canon. It reduces the role of the Buddha in the history of thought to little more than a popularizer of the Vedanta and fails entirely to do justice to the obviously revolutionary originality of his thought.

The solution of our problem is therefore to be sought elsewhere. The essence of the introvertive experience is an undifferentiated unity. In the mystical traditions of all the higher cultures, with the sole exception of Hinayana Buddhism, this is interpreted as being the unity of the self, the pure ego. But this, after all, is an interpretation. The subject empties himself of all empirical contents and finds that he is left with a pure unity. He concludes, justifiably I believe, that when the self is emptied of all content what is left is the empty self itself. But what is actually experienced is simply the unity. That this is the pure self is an inference which, though both natural and justifiable, is nevertheless an inference—that is to say, an interpretation.

The fact that this is an interpretation means that it is possible to have the experience but not to interpret it in this way. In some cultures (the Samkhya, Yoga, and Jaina philosophies) the interpreta-

<sup>88</sup> See the writings of Christmas Humphreys and E. Conze.

tion of the undifferentiated unity stops short when it has been declared to reveal the pure ego of the individual. Other cultures take in addition a further step. They either identify the individual self so revealed with the Universal Self (the Upanishads and the advaita Vendanta), or at least they believe that their experience is one of union with God, union being understood as something less than identity (Christian mysticism). To stop short of either interpretation, to refuse to interpret the experience at all seems to have been the unique and revolutionary characteristic of the Buddha's teaching. He insisted only that it was the saving experience which freed men from suffering and therefore from the round of rebirths. The Buddha did not profess to answer philosophical questions. His task, as he conceived it, was solely to be the spiritual physician of mankind and to show men how to cure themselves of the sufferings inherent in life. For this purpose all he had to do was to tell them how to achieve the experience which would bring about that cure.

This then is the resolution of the apparent contradiction between the doctrine of anatta and our contention that the Nirvanic experience of the Buddha was in essence identical with the introvertive experience of other mystics. Anatta simply meant that there is no soul-substance to be found amid the stream of consciousness or in the flux of changing states and existences which is known as samsara. The only solution of the riddle of existence is to be found in an escape from the world of samsara. And this escape is possible only in the mystical experience of nirvana.

In the Hinayana scriptures, nirvana is always represented as the opposite of samsara. The denial of this duality along with all other dualities is indeed to be found in certain scriptures of the Mahayana. But the Buddha of the Hinayana scriptures knows nothing of this. What he says is:

There is, monks, an unborn, not become, not made, uncompounded, and were it not, monks, for this unborn, not become, not made, uncompounded, no escape could be shown here from what is born, has become, is made, is compounded.<sup>89</sup>

<sup>89</sup> E. A. Burtt (ed.), *The Teachings of the Compassionate Buddha*, New York, Mentor Books, New American Library of World Literature, Inc., 1955, p. 113.

This renders it impossible to suppose that nirvana is merely a transient state of mind, however ecstatic or peace-bringing such a state might be. For nirvana is the one escape which exists from samsara. To suppose that nirvana is merely another subjective state of mind is to put it right back in the flux of samsara. Plainly nirvana transcends both the individual consciousness and the space-time world. It is the Buddhist version of the Eternal as distinguished from the temporal.

For this reason also the Hinayana scriptures always declare that nirvana is not produced and has no cause. The aspirant who reaches nirvana by Yoga exercises and strenuous efforts of mind control and concentration does not thereby produce nirvana but only reveals it to himself and makes himself a participant in it.

When the Buddha was asked<sup>90</sup> whether in the final nirvana after death the saint who has achieved it continues to exist or not—i.e., whether nirvana is annihilation or not—he replied that nirvana is beyond the comprehension of the understanding and that no answer intelligible to the understanding can ever be given. And he added that any question which is formulated in terms of the “either-or” category of logic—e.g., whether the saint after death is either existent or not existent—“does not fit the case.” This is what mystics everywhere else say of their experience.

All these facts lead to the conclusion that nirvana, or in other words the Buddha’s mystical experience, is to be assimilated to mystical states as found in other cultures. This means that his experience was of the introvertive type but that he did not choose to interpret it as being the unity of the self in the manner that other mystics have generally done.

## 10. *An Objection Considered*

It has been said that it is not open to the nonmystic to deny that the mystic has the experience which he claims to have, but that we can criticize the propositions about the world which the mystic seeks

<sup>90</sup> See Warren, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

to base upon his experiences. For these latter are interpretations of, or inferences from, the experiences, and they may be incorrect. But I think the question has to be raised whether we are bound thus to accept blindly and without criticism whatever report the mystic gives us of his experience. Not that we shall doubt his veracity. But there is always the psychological possibility that he may be mistaken as to what in fact he did experience. We ought to ask ourselves whether the reports of mystical experiences which we have collected in the preceding sections show any features which should make us suspect that this has happened.

There are in fact two types of characteristics exhibited by the preceding reports which may be made the ground of such objection. Objections may be either logical or empirical. An experience which is said to be paradoxical in the sense that it cannot be described without implying insoluble contradictions will be called logically impossible and such that it cannot have occurred. We should refuse to accept the evidence of a man who affirmed that he had had the visual experience of seeing a square circle. He may not be consciously telling an untruth, but he must be in some way mistaken, since no such thing as a square circle could exist even in imagination. We ought equally to reject the evidence of one who, like Eckhart, asserts that he perceives grass as being identical with stone while at the same time remaining different, or white as being identical with black while yet remaining white; and we should similarly reject as a logical impossibility the statements of all those introvertive mystics who say they have perceived an absolutely undifferentiated empty unity which has no empirical content, a whole without any parts. I shall however reserve these logical objections to be discussed in the chapter on mysticism and logic. For we have not yet seen the lengths to which the paradoxicality of the mystics can go. There is more to come. And we had better have before us the full extent of their logical iniquities before we offer our commentary.

There is however an empirical objection which I wish to consider here. Professor J. B. Pratt thought that, although the mystics may believe that in the introvertive experience all consciousness of sense ob-

jects is shut off, they may be mistaken about this. In his book *The Religious Consciousness* he quotes Professor Janet's study of a modern mystic whom he was able to keep under observation in the Salpêtrière. Madeleine, says Professor Janet, "supposes that . . . she does not breathe at all during her ecstasy, but if one measures the respiration one finds it slight indeed (twelve a minute) but sufficiently normal. These observations show us that sensation is also not suppressed . . . as the patient supposes . . . that Madeleine perceives very well the objects which I place in her hand . . . recognizes them, that she hears and sees if she consents to open her eyes."<sup>91</sup> Pratt also suggests that as the process of reducing the mind's ideational content ("stopping thought," etc.) proceeds toward mono-ideism the element of emotion increases. He doubts whether emotion can exist without attaching itself to at least some faint ideational content; and he thinks that when the single idea of mono-ideism disappears, emotion would disappear with it, and the result would be the unconsciousness of "trance." Perhaps the unconsciousness which St. Teresa admits sometimes supervenes in the state of "rapture" may be thus explained.

However, the question at issue is whether a consciousness wholly devoid of all sensations, images, and thoughts, a "pure" consciousness, which is not a consciousness *of* anything (ideational content), is possible. We disregard for the moment the *logical* objection that this involves self-contradiction, because this question of logic is to be discussed in a special chapter. We then ask whether the observations of Pratt and Janet give a good *empirical* argument against the assertions of the mystic. On examination we shall find, I think, that they do not, or at least that they are wholly indecisive. The question of breathing is not relevant because the issue is not how the mystic's body acts, but whether he is *conscious* of any sensation. The fact that Madeleine is breathing but is not aware of it tends rather to support the claim that sensation is obliterated from consciousness than to disprove it. The only relevant evidence is the statement that

<sup>91</sup> J. B. Pratt, *The Religious Consciousness*, New York, The Macmillan Company, p. 423.

Madeleine recognizes objects put in her hand and that she hears and sees. But this is not at all decisive. It may be said to establish that she "perceives" objects, but the question remains whether she is conscious of this perception! The somnambulist gives evidence that he "perceives" the table corners or other obstacles in his path, since he avoids them, but is he conscious of them? In hypnosis a patient may respond to an outside stimulus and presumably in some sense or other "hears" the words in which the operator suggests to him what action he is to perform when he wakes. But at least in the case of deep hypnosis there is nothing to show that the verbal sounds appear in his consciousness as auditory sensations. There is nothing to show that they are not blacked out in the unconscious or that they ever emerge therefrom. The mystic's condition is not of course identical with hypnosis, but the two states evidently have a certain kinship. For instance, a mystical state may sometimes, like a state of self-hypnosis, be induced by staring fixedly at a bright point. Boehme's description of his second illumination, already quoted, bears no resemblance whatever to the report of a hypnotic, but was produced by gazing at a polished disc.

Thus the case of Madeleine shows nothing. If we are to go on empirical evidence, what we have is the overwhelming evidence of thousands, perhaps tens of thousands, of persons in many different countries, civilizations, and ages of the world to the effect that they have actually experienced, in many cases repeatedly over many years, a consciousness void of all ideational content.

Let us, however, suppose that Pratt is right and that the mystic's consciousness is not completely emptied of all sensation, imagery, or thought, and that there is some faint ideational content left which he does not notice. Would this really injure the mystic's case? I doubt it. He alleges that he perceives and becomes one with a pure Unity, or One, or Void, from which all multiplicity of empirical existences has been obliterated. Suppose that he is mistaken to the extent that there is on the otherwise undifferentiated glassy surface of the One some faint smudge of impurity, some wisp of gossamer imagery; or that at the centre of the Void, or perhaps by its edges, there is a little

spot of something or other which we will call nonvoid. What then? Shall we say to the mystic that he does not perceive the One or the Void at all, but only the faint smudge or the little spot, and that that is his whole experience? Whatever we may think of what is supposed to be the mystical vision, it surely cannot be reasonably maintained that it is *nothing but* a very faint visual image, a tiny sound, a spot of dim and almost invisible light? Could it be this which the Christian mystic mistakes for God, the Buddhist mystic for nirvana, the nonreligious mystic for the peace which passeth understanding, Plotinus for "the life of gods and of god-like and blessed men"? It seems to me that, even if Pratt and Janet are right, this fact makes no real dent on the claims of the mystic.

## II. *Conclusions*

If there are two types of mystical consciousness, the extrovertive and the introvertive, how are they related to one another? They appear to be two species of one genus. But if so, we have to ask what are the common characteristics of the genus. What characteristics are common to all mystical states, extrovertive and introvertive alike? To see this, let us place side by side the conclusions we reached as regards each separately.

### *Common Characteristics of Extrovertive Mystical Experiences*

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.
5. Feeling of the holy, sacred, or divine
6. Paradoxicality

### *Common Characteristics of Introvertive Mystical Experiences*

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
6. Paradoxicality

*Common Characteristics  
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7. Alleged by mystics to be ineffable

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In these lists we are, of course, ignoring those borderline and atypical cases which we discussed earlier; we are concentrating only on the central bracket of typical cases. We see that characteristics 3, 4, 5, 6, and 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. The second characteristic of the introvertive type, viz., being nonspatial and nontemporal, is not shared by the extrovertive type. This is certain in regard to spatiality, not quite so clear in regard to temporal character, since at least in the case of N. M. timelessness is clearly asserted. These facts seem to suggest that the extrovertive experience, although we recognize it as a distinct type, is actually on a lower level than the introvertive type; that is to say, it is an incomplete kind of experience which finds its completion and fulfillment in the introvertive kind of experience. The extrovertive kind shows a partly realized tendency to unity which the introvertive kind completely realizes. In the introvertive type the multiplicity has been wholly obliterated and therefore must be spaceless and timeless, since space and time are themselves principles of multiplicity. But in the extrovertive experience the multiplicity seems to be, as it were, only half absorbed in the unity. The multiple items are still there, the "blades of grass, wood, and stone" mentioned by Eckhart, but yet are nevertheless "all one." That is the paradox. But in the same sense as the multiple items are still recognizably "there," so also must be at least the spatial relations between the items and possibly in some cases the time relations too.

By far the most significant characteristics are 1 and 2 in the extrovertive list and 1 in the introvertive. In this general experience of a unity which the mystic believes to be in some sense ultimate and basic to the world, we have the very inner essence of all mystical experience. It is, as has been said, the nucleus round which the other

and more peripheral characteristics revolve. But in regard to this central nucleus there are certain differences between the two types of experience. In the extrospective kind, the unity is described by the mystic sometimes as a universal "life," but by Ramakrishna as "consciousness"! In introspective mysticism it is a universal self or pure ego or pure consciousness. We need not make much of this. But again it looks as if the extrovertive mysticism were a sort of incomplete version of the completeness realized in the introvertive kind. Consciousness or mind is a higher category than life, the top rung of the ladder of life. The extrovertive mystic perceives the universal life of the world, while the introvertive reaches up to the realization of a universal consciousness or mind.

There remains another question which may perhaps present itself to the reader's mind here. The mystics themselves take it for granted that the One which is disclosed in the introvertive experience is identical with the One which is disclosed in the extrovertive experience. There are not two Ones, but only one, which, in the mystic's interpretation, is God or the Universal Self of the whole universe. That the outward One and inward One are identical may be a very natural assumption. But is there any philosophical justification for it? Can it be proved to be more than a gratuitous assumption?

The question cannot be settled until we have examined the problem of the status of mystical experience as regards subjectivity or objectivity. For the question assumes that the experiences are not merely subjective. If we think that the experiences are only subjective, then there exists in reality neither an outward One nor an inward One to be identified with each other. No question can in that case arise of whether the inward One and the outward One are identical or not. We shall therefore have to postpone this question.

## CHAPTER 3

### *The Problem of Objective Reference*

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#### 1. *The Argument from Unanimity*

The mystic himself does not use *arguments* to show that his experience is objective in the sense that it gives information about the nature of the world outside the human mind. He claims that an inner light assures him of this and that therefore for him no logical proof is necessary. But since the nonmystic can make no such claim, the question is for him one on which he is unable to decide what he ought to think unless arguments pro and con are presented to him. The object of this chapter is to consider such arguments. And we begin with what, for lack of a better label, we will call the argument from unanimity. This takes as its premiss the universality of the same or similar mystical experiences as reported in different advanced cultures, ages, and countries of the world. I have taken Professor Broad's statement of the argument \* as the best presentation of it on which to base our enquiry because his is the most careful, guarded, and conservative presentation which is known to me.

In the last chapter we examined the premiss of the argument, and our consideration of it in great measure vindicated the claim that there is a basic agreement of mystical experiences all over the world in spite of many and great differences of interpretation. The conclusion drawn from this premiss by Professor Broad is that there is

\* As given on pp. 41-42.

a considerable probability—"it is more likely than not," to use his phrase—that the mystic in his experience comes in contact with some reality or some aspect of reality with which men do not come in contact in any other way. We have now to consider whether this or any similar conclusion is a reasonable inference from the premiss. Later in this chapter we shall consider any other reasons for believing in the objectivity of mystical experiences which our investigation may disclose.

To what principle of logic or probability does the argument from unanimity appeal? In what way does the universal agreement of the mystics tend to support the claim to objectivity? The universal or general agreement of the witnesses, combined with the high degree of mutual independence which obtains between them, might plausibly be held to be good evidence

1. That the witnesses are telling the truth as to what they experience. But as no one is at all likely to charge them with intentional fabrication, this conclusion is not very important.

2. That in their reports of their experiences they have not unintentionally misdescribed the nature of these experiences; i.e., that they have in general and apart from possible exceptions actually experienced what they say they have experienced. A single witness, or several witnesses, may well make errors of description of what they believe themselves to introspect. But this appears unlikely when what we have is the overwhelming evidence of many thousands of persons in different countries and ages all over the world; especially when the testimony given in one area of the world or in one period of time is independent of, and unknown to, those who have given the same testimony in other areas and periods.

But when the argument which we are considering goes on to claim that the agreement of the mystics tends to show that their experiences have objective reference, there are certain rather obvious facts which seem to run counter to this. The fact that most men, viewing a certain kind of mirage, will say unanimously that what they see is water certainly shows that they are not, even unintentionally, misdescribing their visual experiences. But it has no tendency to show

that any water objectively exists in that place, since there may in fact be nothing but hot sand. The fact that all men who push one eye on one side correctly report the experience of double vision does not afford any evidence of an actual duplication of objects. The fact that all normal persons who drug themselves with *santonin* tend to see white objects tinted yellow does not prove that they are really yellow. In short, an experience may be universal and yet illusory. This was fully recognized by Professor Broad in his presentation of the argument. He gives the example of the drunkard's hallucinatory perception of rats and snakes. Such an experience is shared by innumerable drunkards. He also discusses the criteria upon which we rely in branding the experience as illusory.<sup>1</sup> How then does the agreement of all mystics in any way tend to refute the sceptic who asserts that mystical experiences, however valuable they may be for life, are nevertheless illusions?

All that the mere agreement of mystics can by itself prove—apart from showing that they are not misdescribing what they experience—is the existence of some common and universal element in the make-up of human beings which causes them all to have similar experiences. The “make-up” of human beings includes, of course, both their physical and mental structures. All men see double when their eyes are crossed because the structure of the eyes is the same, or nearly the same, in all men. All men who take *santonin* see things yellow for similar reasons. Even if all men had mystical experiences, instead of the almost infinitesimal proportion of men who now have them, and even if all these experiences were exactly alike, this would of itself show no more than that there is something in the nature of human beings, whether physical or mental, which makes them have these similar experiences.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> C. D. Broad, *Religion, Philosophy, and Psychical Research*, New York, Harcourt, Brace and Company, Inc., 1953, pp. 194–195.

<sup>2</sup> The argument from this point down to the break in p. 143 is of a somewhat technical and difficult character and may be profitably omitted by the nonphilosophical reader. He should however understand the main point of the argument which is roughly as follows: The ultimate criterion of objectivity is not unanimity or agreement of experiences, or public verifiability, although these may often be usefully appealed to as partial and preliminary tests. This has been shown by the examples

But the argument from unanimity cannot be disposed of in this summary way. For the proponent of the argument will answer the above sceptical dismissal of it somewhat in the following terms:

Suppose we raise the question what, in our daily experience, constitutes the essence of the objective, of a veridical sense perception, for example, as against a subjective experience such as a dream or an hallucination. What can we in the end say except that the former is publicly verifiable while the latter is private? To see an objectively real mountain is to have a visual experience of a mountain which any other normal human being can also have if he puts himself in the right stance and fulfills the appropriate requirements. To see a mountain in a dream or hallucination is to have a private experience which no one else can verify. And is not this simply the argument from unanimity? Where all normal people agree that their experiences are sufficiently similar we say that that experience is objective. And if unanimity is a sufficient criterion of objectivity in sense experience, why is it not a sufficient criterion in mystical experience?

If while I am writing here in my study I should look up from my desk and see a zebra standing on the hearthrug in front of me, I might suspect hallucination. There is no zoo in my neighborhood and no way that I can see how an escaped zebra could get into my study. If I then called in all the neighbors plus the police, and if nobody except myself could see anything like a zebra, the conclusion

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of mirage, double vision, etc. The ultimate criterion of objectivity is orderliness, i.e., obedience to the laws of nature. A dream is subjective because it is *disorderly*. Either we dream of events which in themselves contradict natural laws, e.g., a cat turning into a dog, or of events which though they might themselves be in accord with nature, could not consistently with natural law occur in the context of experience in which we find them. For example, I dream of events in London but wake up and find myself in my bed in the United States. The breach of law comes not within the dream itself, but in the instantaneous passage from London to the United States without passing over the intervening distance. The partial criterion of public verifiability is subsumed under the more general and ultimate criterion of orderliness. The reader may now, if he so wishes, proceed to the next part of the argument which begins after the break on p. 143. Having shown that orderliness is the test of objectivity, we go on to enquire whether mystical experience passes that test.

that it is an hallucination would be confirmed. But if the neighbors all had the same experience of seeing a zebra, the conclusion would be that it must be a real one, although how it got into my room would no doubt remain a puzzle which we should call in the local Sherlock Holmes to solve. The example seems to show once more that agreement of experiences is what constitutes objectivity. Why then does not the unanimous agreement of mystics about their experiences constitute those experiences objective?

→ No doubt between the two cases which are being compared, the sense experience and the mystical experience, there is a great difference in respect of the numbers of the witnesses. Any normal human being can verify the sense experience, whereas only a *small* number of quite abnormal persons can verify the mystical experience. This may weaken the case for the objectivity of mystical experiences by lessening the massiveness of possible corroboration, but it in no way alters the logic of the argument. The logic is exactly the same in both cases. The smaller volume of evidence reduces perhaps the probability of the conclusion, but does not alter the conclusion itself. Perhaps we might be justified in saying that it is an empirical certainty that the Tower of London exists, but that it is only "more likely than not," to repeat Professor Broad's phrase, that the mystic in his experience is in contact with an objective reality.

But perhaps to put the matter thus does less than full justice to the case for mystical objectivity. For the mystic may deny that there is any difference in regard to the number of *possible* witnesses. And the argument depends upon potential verifiability not on actual verification. The mystic claims that all normal men are possible witnesses of the mystical reality. We should believe in the existence of a newly discovered mountain in the antarctic even though only one competent and reliable explorer had seen it. This is because we think there is good reason to believe that all normal men could observe it if they took the proper steps. Not all men perceive the mountains at the South Pole or the hidden jungles of the Mato Grosso, but all men could perceive them if they would carry out certain instructions which might in most cases and for most of us

be so unendurably rigorous and time-consuming as to be practically impossible. In like manner it may be held that any normal man could verify the experience of the mystic if he would begin by leading a pure and saintly life, if he would detach himself completely from all worldly desires, and if he would subject himself to a long and rigorous course of physical and mental disciplines such as the yogis of India undergo, or to a life of "orisons" and contemplative exercises, preferably in a monastery, such as those which St. Teresa or St. Ignatius of Loyola have written about. There is reason to believe that this claim of the mystics to the universal *possibility* of mystical experience is correct. And this means that mystical experience is potentially just as "public" as sense experience, since to say that an experience is public only means that a large number of private experiences are similar, or would be similar if the appropriate steps were taken. As has already been observed, all experiences are in themselves equally private, and the public world is a construction out of private experiences.

The argument and the counterargument appear to have reached a deadlock. It is quite certain that mere agreement or unanimity as regards experiences is not enough to establish objectivity since many illusions, such as double vision or the yellow appearance of objects to one who has swallowed *santonin*, are quite universal. This was the argument by which the sceptic sought to defeat the case for mystical objectivity. And it is plainly a valid objection. But the sceptic in pointing it out seems also to have defeated himself if it is a part of his claim that universal verifiability is sufficient to prove the objectivity of a sense experience. For he has shown that there are many illusions which are universally verifiable.

But the conclusion which we ought to draw is not difficult to see. It is that unanimity, even universal agreement of experiences, though it may be a *part* of what constitutes objectivity, is not the *whole* of what constitutes it, either in the case of mystical experience or in that of sense experience. There must be some other condition, some *x*, which is required, as well as universality, to make an experience

objective. Therefore if we wish to enquire whether the claim to mystical objectivity is valid there are two steps which we must take. We must first discover what  $x$  is. And then we must enquire whether  $x$  is possessed by mystical experience. For the argument of the last few paragraphs, in which we expounded the reply which the proponent of mystical objectivity could give to the criticism of the sceptic, has shown satisfactorily, I think, that mystical experience does possess the requisite kind and degree of universality. The case for mystical objectivity therefore now wholly depends on whether  $x$  is a characteristic of it or not.

The view which I advocate is that  $x$  is *order*. An experience is objective when it is orderly both in its internal and its external relations. An experience is subjective when it is disorderly either in its internal or its external relations.<sup>3</sup> Being public is *one* of the characteristics of being orderly, whereas being private is *one* of the marks of the disorderly. Publicity is therefore *part* of the definition of objectivity. But objectivity can only be completely and satisfactorily defined in terms of the much wider concept of order.

By order I mean law, that is to say, regularity of succession, repetition of pattern, "constant conjunction" of specifiable items. Order is thus a quite general concept of which what we call nature or the natural order of our daily world is a particular instance. Strictly speaking, objectivity is to be defined in terms of the general concept of order and not in terms of our particular world order. It is possible to conceive that there is somewhere a systematic order of events of which the laws would be quite different from those with which we are familiar. There might be a universe in which universal gravitation would be replaced by universal mutual repulsion of objects, in which heat invariably produced the solidification of

<sup>3</sup> This view is also at least implicit in what Professor Broad says about the snakes and rats seen by the drunkard (see p. 136 above). For he points out that we brand these creatures as hallucinatory because they do not produce the effects which are always produced by such animals if they are real. If they were real, we should expect fox terriers or mongooses to show traces of excitement, cheese to be nibbled, corn to disappear from bins, and so on. We find that no such effects are observed in the bedrooms of persons suffering from delirium tremens. (Broad, *op. cit.*, p. 195.) In short, the rat and snake experience is disorderly in its external relations.

water and cold invariably produced boiling. This could be an instance of order. An experience in such a universe which was orderly in terms of that kind of order would be objective in that order.

But, if we confine ourselves to speaking here only of the world of our daily experience, we may observe that the objectively real world is what we call the order of nature, i.e., the system of orderly events stretching in a time series into a past to which there is no discernible beginning and which, it is presumed, will extend indefinitely into the future. Those of our experiences which are orderly in terms of this world order are called objective. Those which are disorderly in the sense that, either internally or externally, they infringe the laws of this world order are called subjective and are labeled dreams or hallucinations. (There is of course a distinction between dreams and hallucinations, but the nature of this distinction does not concern us because both are in the same sense subjective, i.e., in the sense just explained.) It must be recognized that the concept of a world order is not and could not be the product of a single mind and could not be erected on the basis of a single individual's experience. It is a product of all human experiences stretching back into a remote past. That is why publicity, the capacity to be shared by all persons, the possibility of being publicly verified, is a part, but only a part, of the criterion of objectivity. This will have to be more fully explained.

Hallucinations and dreams are always disorderly; that is, they infringe the laws of nature, in one or both of two ways. What happens in a dream may *in itself* be a breach of natural law. Thus a real, objective kettle put on the fire always boils. But a dream-kettle put on the fire might freeze. We say "anything might happen in a dream," meaning that a dream does not have to obey natural laws while an objective experience does. If someone asserted he had seen a kettle of water freeze when it was put on the fire, we might say "you must have been dreaming." This is an example of an experience which is condemned as subjective because it is disorderly in its internal relations or within its own borders.

But sometimes a dream may be perfectly orderly within itself and commit no breaches of natural law. But in that case it will be found that a breach of natural law occurs in the external relations of the dream experience with the other areas of experience which immediately surround it and in the matrix of which it is embedded. The breach occurs at the edges of the dream, so to speak, at the boundaries between dreaming and waking. For instance, I go to bed in my house in the United States. I dream that I am walking down a familiar London street and that I meet my brother and converse with him. Then I wake up and find myself once more in my bed in America. Nothing within the dream was in any way disorderly. The street, the walking, the conversation with my brother—all could have happened and were perfectly natural. But what could *not* have happened, and would if it did happen involve breaches of natural law, is that I should pass from my bed in America to a London street without crossing the intervening distance and then come back again in the same supernatural way. Of course it might be possible to explain otherwise than by the hypothesis of dream some experience—though hardly the whole dream experience just mentioned—in which I seemed to myself to pass suddenly from my bed in America to London. I might have fallen asleep in America, gone into a cataleptic trance, been transported unconscious across the Atlantic, and awakened in London, and then in another cataleptic trance have been brought back to America! But when we say that this did not happen, but that I had a dream, part of our *meaning* is that what seemed to happen was not actually explained by any such series of natural and orderly events.

To complete the theory it is necessary only to show the role which publicity, or universal agreement of experiences, plays in it and why such agreement, though it is a part of the criterion of objectivity, is not by itself sufficient to ensure it. According to our view, to say that an experience is objective means that it is orderly, and it can only be this if it is part of the systematic order of the world. Any other experience will be found to be disorderly either internally or in its external relations or both. Now the world order, since it is a series of

events extending from the indefinite past into the indefinite future, transcends the experiences of any single mind. The evidence of it is the evidence of the whole human race. There is only one world order (so far as we know), namely, that in the experiencing of which all normal human beings participate—that on which, so to speak, all windows open. There are not a multitude of orderly systems of events, one for each individual. Therefore an experience which is merely private is not objective, not because it is private, but because, being private, it will always be found to be disorderly.

What we have, however, especially to explain is why the mere fact that all men agree in their accounts of an experience is insufficient to establish its objectivity. This was the defect which we found in the argument from unanimity in its application to mystical experience. We pointed out that an experience might be universal and publicly accessible and yet subjective. And we gave the examples of mirages, *santonin* experiences, and double vision. What our theory has to show is that these experiences are subjective not because they are private—since in fact they are not private—but because they are disorderly. Let us take the case of double vision. It is not disorderly that a man whose eyes are crossed should *see* things double. But it is disorderly that the crossing of the eyes should produce the actual objective duplication of objects. For there is no law of nature under which this could be subsumed and explained. On the contrary, according to all known causal laws, the crossing of a man's eyes produces no effect on the objects which he is seeing. Therefore what he is experiencing, viz., the appearance of duplication, is in conflict with natural law, is disorderly, and is for that reason subjective.

Since orderliness is the criterion of objectivity, we have now to apply it to mystical states of consciousness to ascertain whether they are objective. Are mystical experiences orderly in the sense required? The definition of order is the constant conjunction of repeatable items of experience. The definition makes no mention of sense experience and is quite independent of it. It will apply to any kind of experience. The orderliness and objectivity of sense contents will

mean the constant conjunction of specifiable items of sense experience. The orderliness and objectivity of nonsensuous contents will mean the constant conjunction of specifiable items of nonsensuous experience. We have simply to ask therefore whether mystical experiences are orderly in this sense.

We will take first the introvertive type of mystical experience. It is nonsensuous, since all sensations and images are specifically excluded from it. Does it consist of constant conjunctions of items of nonsensuous experiences? The answer is obviously that it does not. For this would require that there should be within the introvertive experience a multiplicity of particular items of experience. But the very essence of the experience is that it is undifferentiated, distinctionless, and destitute of all multiplicity. There are no distinguishable items or events among which repeatable patterns or regular sequences could be traced. With this the claim of introvertive experience to objectivity collapses. It cannot be objective. But the sceptic should not at this point prematurely claim a victory. For we shall find that, although the experience is not objective, neither is it subjective. We have indeed a long way still to go before we can determine its status.

To see this we must now apply to the experience the criterion of subjectivity as we previously applied the criterion of objectivity. To be subjective in the sense in which an hallucination or a dream is subjective an experience must exhibit positive infringements of natural law, either internally or externally. It must be *disorderly*. It is not enough to establish the merely negative conclusion that it lacks order—which is all we have shown so far. Mystical experiences are of course parts of the natural order in the same sense in which dreams and hallucinations are so. They have their causes and effects, and it is an objective fact that this man at this time and at this place has a dream or an hallucination or a mystical experience. But to discover whether an experience of any kind is subjective in the sense in which a dream is subjective, or objective in the sense in which a veridical sense perception is objective, we have to look at the internal content of the experience to see whether, either in itself

or in its relations to what lies outside its boundaries, it is orderly or disorderly. Now if we apply this test to the introvertive mystical experience we find that it cannot be subjective for precisely the same reason which shows that it cannot be objective. It cannot be disorderly within its own boundaries as would be a dream of a kettle of water freezing when put on the fire. For there are no distinguishable items within it to constitute sequences which are contrary to the constant conjunctions in the world order. For the same reason it cannot conflict with the natural order in its external relations, for this too requires that specifiable items within the experience should conflict with items outside it—as for instance being in London in my dream conflicts with being in bed in America without traversing the intervening distance. But there are no items within the introvertive experience which could conflict with anything outside it. It follows from these considerations that it is not subjective.

There is really nothing new in the conclusion which we have reached. We shall find that the proposition that mystical experience is neither subjective nor objective is itself a mystical doctrine which is explicitly put forward by all the more philosophical mystics. They have not reached it by a process of reasoning as we have done in this section. They have simply felt intuitively that it is the natural and proper interpretation of their experience. It is true that this seems to conflict with our finding in the last chapter that a sense of objectivity is one of the common characteristics of all mystical experience. But "sense of objectivity" is in reality a very unsophisticated phrase, though it was a convenient one to use at a certain stage of thinking. The fact is that the mystic feels an intense and burning conviction that his experience is not a mere dream—a something which is shut up entirely inside his own consciousness. He feels that it transcends his own petty personality, that it is vastly greater than himself, that it in some sense passes out beyond his individuality into the infinite. This he expresses—for lack of better words—by saying that it is "real," that it is the "true and only reality," and so on. It is natural to pass on from this to saying that it "exists" outside himself, that it is objective, etc. We shall have to do our best to illuminate

all this in the sequel. Our immediate concern is only to show that there is no real contradiction between the earlier expression "sense of objectivity" and the more accurate statement that mystical experience is neither subjective nor objective.

Do the same arguments and conclusions apply to the extrovertive type of experience? At first sight it would seem that the case is quite different here because in this experience there does exist a multiplicity of distinguishable items, and these items are in space even if they do not exhibit any temporal flux. The extrovertive mystic perceives with his physical senses the blades of grass, the wood, the stone, but he perceives them as "all one." He perceives them as both distinct and identical. In so far as he perceives them as distinct, they are of course the sort of distinguishable items which exhibit orderliness. The grass, the wood, and the stone are simply objective parts of the natural order.

But it seems to me that although the grass, the wood, and the stone are thus objective, their oneness is not. The multiplicity in the experience is not as such a mystical perception. Only the oneness is. But the oneness as such has no multiplicity and no distinguishable items in it. Indeed it is, in the mystic's view, the very same oneness as is perceived in the introvertive experience. There is the unity outside and the unity inside. But these are not two unities, but one and the same. This is certainly the mystical claim. At any rate the exterior oneness, like the interior oneness, has in it no multiplicity of items or events. Hence the same arguments apply to it as to the introvertive experience, and the same conclusion must be drawn. It is neither objective nor subjective.

## 2. *Transsubjectivity*

Although the argument from unanimity does not show that the experiences of the mystic are objective—as was claimed by Bucke, William James, and a large number of other writers, including Professor C. D. Broad—yet it does yield one very important conclusion. It is strong evidence that the mystics have not in any funda-

mental way misreported their experiences. The sceptic may maintain that, although the mystic may believe that he has suppressed all sensations, images, and conceptual thoughts, this cannot in fact be so. To this it must be answered that, if we had only one report of a person who claimed that he had reached a wholly distinctionless and undifferentiated experience, we should be right to regard such a report with grave suspicion. We should suppose that he must have made some mistake. But if we have a very large number of such reports from independent sources all of which confirm the first report, our scepticism ought to abate somewhat. And if we find such independent reports coming from many diverse cultures, times, and countries of the world—from the ancient Hindus, from the medieval Christians, from Persians and Arabians, from Buddhist China, Japan, Burma, and Siam, from modern European and American intellectuals—this profoundly impressive agreement amounts to very strong evidence that the experiences were not misreported but were actually just what the mystics say they were.

If, this being accepted, we consider again the introvertive experience, we find that—at least in the major mystical traditions—the experience is reported to be a self-transcending one. The individual, having suppressed all empirical mental content, arrives at a pure unity, a pure consciousness, which is also the pure ego. It might be supposed that what he thus reaches is his own individual pure ego. But he reports the further fact that this self, which seems at first to be his own private self, experiences itself as at once becoming one with or becoming dissolved in an infinite and universal self. The boundary walls of the separate self fade away, and the individual finds himself passing beyond himself and becoming merged in a boundless and universal consciousness. This aspect of the mystical experience was emphasized in the section on the dissolution of individuality in the last chapter. The conclusion which the mystic draws—not however by way of a reasoned conclusion, but as something immediately experienced—is that what he has reached is not merely his individual pure ego but the pure ego of the universe; or, otherwise put, that his individual self and the universal self are

somehow identical. This is the conclusion explicitly drawn in the Upanishads, but it is objected to by the theologians of the theistic religions on the ground that it involves the heresy of pantheism. But for reasons which we have discussed, the universal ego cannot be regarded as objective, although since it transcends the individual it cannot be regarded as subjective either.

We all, mystics and nonmystics alike, have been conditioned to regard the distinction between subjective and objective as absolute in such a way that any third alternative is excluded. Hence the mystic, who feels that he has been in touch with what is outside and beyond himself, is likely enough to express this by using phrases which imply that the universal self is an objective reality. I am here maintaining that, although the mystic may be justified in his belief in a transcendent and universal self, yet there is a certain error in his way of speaking if he maintains that it has an objective existence. We must for the present rest content with the conclusion that its status is transsubjective. Whether anything more definite and satisfying can be said will be discussed in later sections of this chapter.

The critical reader may very well say that he cannot, as the above remarks assume, accept as convincing the mystic's statement that his experience *itself* is transsubjective. Suppose the reader has reluctantly agreed that the unanimous and independent evidence of the mystics in many diverse cultures and ages and places shows that they have not misdescribed their experiences, yet this was agreed to on the assumption that the experience was merely being thought of as a psychological fact within the subjectivity of the mystic's mind. But now the reader is being asked to agree that the experience itself goes beyond itself into nonsubjectivity. He will no doubt object that it would be much easier and better to see whether the dissolution of his own individuality which the mystic says he feels cannot be explained by some interpretational hypothesis which would not involve the enormous leap of postulating a cosmic pure ego. For instance, is it not a fact that in quite ordinary experiences we often lose all consciousness of individuality—we forget ourselves and lose ourselves momentarily because we are absorbed in some very engrossing pur-

suit? And may not the mystic's feeling of the loss of individuality be quite simply explained in a similar way?

This objection would undoubtedly carry great weight if it were not for one further consideration which I have not yet disclosed. There is a line of reasoning which, so far as I know, no mystic or anyone else has ever urged or even been conscious of, but which, on the condition that we accept its premiss, decisively supports the view of the mystic against that of the sceptic. The premiss of the argument is that the mystic has in fact eliminated all the empirical contents of his consciousness and is left with the pure consciousness which is his own individual pure ego. This premiss does not go beyond his own subjectivity. But once this is admitted, we shall find that it is logically impossible to stop there and that we are compelled to postulate that the pure individual ego is in reality not merely individual but is universal and cosmic. The reasoning is as follows:

Suppose that two persons *A* and *B* each suppresses in himself all specific mental content, and that therefore each attains the mystical consciousness of his own pure ego. Would it then be the case that *A* has reached *A*'s private pure ego, and that *B* has reached *B*'s private pure ego, so that what we have here in this situation is two distinct and separate pure egos? The natural answer to expect would of course be, Yes. But if so, then there must be something which separates *A*'s ego from *B*'s ego, some principle of division or individuation which makes them two distinct entities. What is the principle of individuation?

Let us first ask what is the principle of individuation which separates two minds in ordinary life, two minds which have not sought or attained any mystical consciousness but are operating at the level of everyday experience. What, for example, makes the mind of the writer of this book a different psychical entity from the mind of the reader? If this question were asked, not about the minds, but about the physical bodies of the writer and the reader, the answer would be very simple. The basic principle of individuation here would be space. An interval of space separates our two bodies and makes them two distinct entities. This is no doubt oversimple. Where

two persons live at different periods, time will separate them as well as space. Also different physical qualities may enter into the differentiation. The writer's hair may be white, the reader's brown. But we can ignore these complications and concentrate only on the basic principle of differentiation which in this case is space.

But we are here asking what the principle of division is as between two minds, not two bodies. Perhaps the preliminary objection will be raised that we cannot ask such a question without assuming a mind-body dualism, and that to make such an assumption is objectionable. This is a misunderstanding. The question assumes no theory at all, either dualistic or monistic, as to the relation between mind and body. It only assumes that it is possible to speak and think intelligibly in "mentalist" or introspective terms as well as in physical terms. It assumes that it is not meaningless to talk of one's inner thoughts and feelings and that statements about them are not simply statements about the body, although there is no doubt some very intimate connection between them. Our question does not involve any theory at all, or the denial of any theory. It does not move on the level of theory but on the level of experience. It is a plain statement of experienced fact that a man can talk sensibly about his ideas, feelings, intentions, wishes, etc., and that when he does so he is not talking about his stomach, legs, or brain. We may now therefore return to our question and ask what is the principle of individuation which distinguishes two minds which are both operating at the level of everyday experience.

If we thus abstract from bodily differences, it seems clear to me that there is only one circumstance which distinguishes one mind from another, namely that each has a different stream of consciousness or, what amounts to the same thing, a different stream of experiences. Over any given period of time the sensations, images, emotions, and thoughts which constitute *A*'s inner biography will be different from those which constitute *B*'s inner biography. We need not trouble ourselves about the puzzle whether, when *A* and *B* are said in common speech to be looking at the "same" material object,

they are actually having one identical sensation or two private but similar sensations. For whether there is at such a point of time an actual intersection of the two streams of consciousness or only a similarity, the fact remains that by and large *A*'s stream of mental contents is during most of its duration entirely distinct from *B*'s. And this, so far as I can see, is the *only* thing which distinguishes any one mind from any other. In other words, minds are distinguished from one another by their empirical contents and by nothing else. It follows that if *A* and *B* have suppressed within themselves all empirical contents then there is left nothing whatever which can distinguish them and make them two; and if *A* and *B* have thereby reached the mystical consciousness of their pure egos, then there is nothing to distinguish them or make them two pure egos.

If we make use of the philosopher's distinction between the pure ego and the empirical ego, then what follows from this argument is that there exists a multiplicity of empirical egos in the universe, but that there can be only one pure ego. Hence the mystic who has reached what seems at first to be his own private pure ego has in fact reached the pure ego of the universe, the pure cosmic ego.

This explains and agrees with the experience of self-transcendence which the mystic always reports. Both the experience of the mystic and the wholly independent speculative reasoning of the philosopher just outlined converge on the same conclusion and support each other. If it were not for the speculative reasoning, the sceptic might well explain away the experienced feeling of self-transcendence, the fading away of personal identity into "boundless being" reported by Tennyson, the disappearance of the "I" and its dissolution in the "universal pool" reported by Koestler, the same experiences reported by Christian mystics and Sufis in their own theological language, and by Hindus and Buddhists in terms appropriate to their special cultures and theories—the sceptic might explain all this away by an appeal to the self-forgetfulness of a person absorbed in some all-engrossing object of attention. Such an obvious commonplace of everyday psychological fact would in any case seem—at least to the

present writer—utterly insufficient to bear the weight of explaining the entirely unusual and uncommonplace and indeed extraordinary experiences of the mystics. But it is better to rely on the reasoned argument which has been discovered and set forth in this section.

There *is* therefore a universal cosmic self with which the mystic makes contact and with which he becomes identified. But the difficulty about this is the meaning of the word “is” in the last sentence. It cannot be taken to mean “exist,” since this would make it objective. But we must rest for the moment at least with the conclusion that it is transsubjective though not objective, leaving our final accounting with the difficulties which it involves to a later section.

We may at this point briefly take up the question raised on page 133 whether, as the mystics always take for granted, the extrovertive One is identical with the introvertive One. It was stated on page 133 that the mystic’s identification of the two presupposes the objectivity of his experience and could not therefore be discussed until that prior question was settled. We have now concluded that although “objectivity” was the wrong word to use, the mystic’s experience does in fact transcend his own subjectivity, and this is sufficient to make possible the identification of the outer with the inner One, if there is any good ground for doing so. Is there, apart from the mystic’s own unreasoned or intuitive assumption, any reason to identify the two? We might say that to assume that the two Ones are in reality one One is a quite natural assumption, intrinsically likely to be true. And we might leave it at that. But we may now be more definite than this. For the argument by which we have just shown that the pure ego of the individual is identical with the pure ego of the world can also be used to show that the extrovertive One is identical with the introvertive One. For, since both are empty of content, there is nothing to constitute a *principium individuationis* between them. For, as already observed on page 146, the sense objects which the extrovertive experience perceives to be “all One” are not themselves parts of the extrovertive One, which is therefore in itself undifferentiated and contentless.

### 3. *The Feeling of Objectivity*

I shall briefly consider in this section whether the subjective conviction of objectivity or reality which the mystic feels possesses any cogency for the nonmystic. Philosophers are inclined to say that the mystic's sense of certainty, however convincing it may be to the mystic, is not entitled to carry any weight with the nonmystic. People have strong and subjective feelings of certainty about all manner of things and yet may be deluded.

This treatment of the matter is too cavalier. For the mystic's feeling is quite different from a mere whim or an obstinate sticking to a personal opinion or prejudice. It is—as personal prejudices are not—universal and intersubjective in the sense that it attaches to a certain kind of experience *whoever has the experience*. (It is not denied that occasional cases occur where the experiencer has had doubts for a short time, for instance, Jakob Boehme.) Hence the mystic's certainty has at least to be explained as a psychological phenomenon.

Attempts are often made to explain it by the hypothesis of the unconscious. The mystical experience is supposed to come from the unconscious; and since the unconscious is *outside* the conscious mind, the subject feels that he is being controlled by what is external to himself. But the mystic might admit that his experience comes through the unconscious and yet insist that its ultimate source is beyond the unconscious and outside his psyche altogether. The unconscious may be merely a pipe through which some reality wholly transcending the individual reaches him.

There appears to be a much deeper and more important explanation of the feeling of reality than this. It has already been pointed out that this feeling of reality is a part of the mystical experience itself and not an intellectual interpretation of it. The self-transcendence of the experience is itself experienced, not thought. It is the experience of the dissolution of individuality, the disappearance of the "I," its passing beyond itself into what Koestler calls "the universal pool." We have to admit as usual, of course, that there is

no sharp line between experience and interpretation, but the considerations adduced in Chapter 2, Section 8, seemed to show beyond reasonable doubt that the dissolution of individuality is actually experienced. *Now the fact that self-transcendence is a part of the experience itself is the reason why the mystic is absolutely certain of its truth beyond all possibility of arguing him out of it.* An interpretation of any experience can be doubted, but the experience itself is indubitable.

This is not only the psychological explanation of the mystic's feeling of certainty, it is also a logical justification of it. And this shows that the usual curt dismissal of its evidentiary value by the philosopher is not justified. In short, the mystic's sense of certainty actually does provide the nonmystic with an additional argument in favor of transsubjectivity. We cannot doubt that the mystic experiences a nonsubjective reality for the same reason that we cannot doubt a man's experience of a certain color.

The argument is of course subject to two provisos, which in practice must introduce an element of doubt again. First, it depends on the supposition that we can clearly distinguish experience from interpretation. Secondly, it depends on the assumption that the mystic has not unconsciously and unintentionally misdescribed his experience.

These considerations will somewhat diminish, though they do not wholly destroy the cogency of the argument.

#### 4. *Mystical Monadism*

I have spoken above of the "major mystical tradition" as holding the view that in the introvertive mystical experience the individual self passes beyond itself to become one with the infinite or universal self. There is however a minority mystical tradition which, while accepting as psychological fact the introvertive experience, insists that therein the individual self is not transcended. This tradition does not necessarily deny that the experience includes a *feeling* of self-transcendancy, but it denies that self-transcendence really takes place.

It explains the feeling of self-transcendence as a delusion.

As an example of this we may quote the following remarkable passage from Martin Buber:

Now from my own unforgettable experience I know well that there is a state in which the bonds of the personal nature of life seem to have fallen away and we experience an undivided unity. But I do not know—what the soul willingly imagines and is indeed bound to imagine (mine too once did it)—that in this I had attained to a union with the primal being or the God-head. . . . In the honest and sober account of the responsible understanding this unity is nothing but the unity of this soul of mine, whose “ground” I have reached, so much so . . . that my spirit has no choice but to understand it as the groundless. But the basic unity of my own soul is certainly beyond the reach of all the multiplicity it has hitherto received from life, though not in the least beyond individuation, or the multiplicity of all the souls in the world of which it is one—existing but once, single, unique, irreducible, this creaturely one: one of the human souls and not “the soul of the All.”<sup>4</sup>

The first comment to be made on this passage is that it provides almost indisputable further evidence that the experience of an undifferentiated, distinctionless unity, which “is certainly beyond the reach of all the multiplicity it has hitherto received from life” (compare this with the phrase used in the Mandukya Upanishad “unitary consciousness wherein . . . multiplicity is completely obliterated”)<sup>5</sup> is a psychological fact, and not, as has been suggested, the misdescription of incompetent introspectionists. That the introvertive experience is an undifferentiated unity devoid of all multiplicity is the basic, central, and nuclear characteristic of it to which all other common characteristics are subordinate. In the last chapter we called a very large number of witnesses, selected from many different cultures and ages, all of whom agreed on this description. But, with the exception of J. A. Symonds, every one of these witnesses belonged to prescientific and prepsychological ages. Every one of them was, owing to the unsophistication of the times in which they lived, almost wholly unself-critical as compared with a modern thinker.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1947, pages 24–25.

<sup>5</sup> See above, p. 88.

And now comes a man of our own time, fully aware of the sceptical difficulties, as well as the pitfalls which beset the path of the introspective psychologist, who nevertheless speaks in exactly the same terms of the undifferentiated unity as having been personally experienced by himself. Of course it is a possibility that Buber too, in spite of his great and well-known gifts, is involved with all the others in the same universal introspective mistake. But it does not seem to me that this is a plausible view.

For exactly the same reasons, Buber's statement is almost indisputable evidence that the experience of the dissolution of individuality or, in his own phrase, "a state in which the bonds of the personal nature . . . seem to have fallen away" is also a psychological fact and not a misdescription.

So much for Buber's account of the experience itself. Let us pass on to consider his interpretations of it. The remarkable fact is that he has, at two different periods of his intellectual career, given two different and mutually inconsistent interpretations of the same experience.<sup>6</sup> His own earlier interpretation, made apparently immediately after undergoing the experience, was in accordance with the main mystical tradition. He believed in transsubjectivity and accepted it as truth that "he has attained to a union with the primal being." But later in his life he has changed his mind and now asserts that the undifferentiated unity which he experienced was only the unity of his own self, his private individual pure ego, one among billions of individual pure egos, and not "the soul of the All."

Interpretations of the experience, including those given by the mystic himself, never have the same almost indubitable authority as do his descriptions of the experience itself. Buber's opinions as to the correct philosophical interpretations of what he has experienced are of course entitled to profound respect. But still in the end they are no more than Buber's opinions with which we are entitled to disagree if we have strong enough reasons. Especially must this be the

<sup>6</sup> Buber thus treats the feeling of self-transcendence as interpretation which he is entitled to repudiate and not as indubitable experience. This illustrates the difficulty of distinguishing clearly between experience and interpretation.

case when he has himself offered inconsistent interpretations. And there is certainly much to be said for accepting the interpretation which he gave at the time he had the experience, while it was still fresh and alive, in preference to an interpretation which came as an afterthought, perhaps because of the pressure of the Jewish tradition against the concept of union. For there can be, I surmise, little doubt that the environmental pressure of the culture to which he belongs was basic cause of a change of mind which quite obviously went against the grain of his own more spontaneous feelings.

Judaism is perhaps the least mystical of all the great world religions; that is, if one makes, as we have done, the obliteration of all distinctions and of all multiplicity, *including the distinction between subject and object, the duality of individual self and universal self*, part of the definitive concept of mysticism. In the non-Judaic cultures mysticism is usually defined in a way which makes the concept of "union" with what Buber calls "the primal being" part of the essence of it. Yet we find the historian of Jewish mysticism, Professor G. G. Scholem saying that union is not an essential of Jewish mysticism, and that "to take an instance, the earliest Jewish mystics . . . in Talmudic times and later . . . speak of the ascent of the soul to the Celestial Throne where it obtains an ecstatic view of the majesty of God."<sup>7</sup> He thinks that "it would be absurd to deny that there is a common characteristic in all mysticism," and then refers to that common characteristic as being "direct contact between the individual and God,"<sup>8</sup> but by this he means, not union, but a direct vision of God or rather of His Throne. He gives a detailed account of "throne-mysticism" and observes that the essence of the earliest Jewish mysticism is "perception of God's appearance on the throne as described by Ezekiel." We also find among the throne-mystics "descriptions of . . . the heavenly halls or palaces through which the visionary passes and in the seventh and last of which there rises the throne." It is clear that all these, the visions and the direct contact,

<sup>7</sup> G. G. Scholem, *Major Trends of Jewish Mysticism*, New York, Schocken Books Inc., 1954, p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

do not constitute mystical experience in the sense in which we have discussed it in this book. We have seen that visions and voices are not considered to be mystical phenomena in any religious culture outside Judaism, and we remember the definite declaration of St. John of the Cross that "the soul can never attain to the height of the Divine Union . . . through the medium of any forms or figures."

It is true that in the later Hasidic mystics we find often enough the kind of mysticism which includes "union." But it is clear that this is an aberration from standard Jewish types and tends to be frowned on in Jewish culture. In the tradition of the Semitic religions generally there is considered to be a great gulf fixed between creature and Creator which is such that the individual soul can never annul it, and that indeed it is a kind of blasphemy to claim that it has been annulled. This is true of Islam as well as Judaism. And Christianity inherited it from Judaism. It is evident that there have been numerous mystics within all three religions who have experienced that sense of the dissolution of individuality, that passing beyond oneself, which we have called transsubjectivity. But all three religions are, in greater or less measure, frightened of it lest it should lead to the "heresy" of pantheism. And it is extremely interesting to see that, in spite of their common apprehensiveness in the matter, each of the three religions has its own characteristic reaction and interpretation which differs from the reactions of the other two. The strongest reaction against union is that of Judaism, which habitually interprets its own religious experience as what it calls "devekuth," which means direct contact or adhesion, in spite of the Hasidic exceptions. Islam also insists on the gulf between God and man and repudiates pantheism; nevertheless among the Sufis the claim to union and even identity with God was far commoner than among the Jewish mystics and was in fact the rule rather than the exception. Finally, among the Christian mystics "union" becomes to all intents and purposes the very essence of the mystic state, but the repugnance to the idea of pantheistic identity now expresses itself in a variety of interpretations and theories of what union is, which all exclude actual identity between the individual souls and the Creator. Union is more often

interpreted in the Christian tradition by the category of similarity than by the category of identity. We shall study these theories, together with the philosophical issues which they involve, at greater length in our chapter on pantheism. Meanwhile we see that the three religions can be ranged in a descending order according to the differing degrees of strength of their antipantheistic reactions. The Jewish reaction is the strongest and normally rejects the whole notion of union, and the Hasidic claim to it appears as an unusual exception. Islam also officially rejects it, but the Sufis nevertheless delight in it, and it is rather those who repudiate it who constitute the exception. Christianity accepts union wholeheartedly, making it the essence of mysticism, but rejects the interpretation of it as identity and contrives to interpret it so as to preserve the dualism between creature and Creator. When we pass outside the Semitic influence altogether, we find in Indian mysticism, as it appears among the Hindus, a frank acceptance of pantheistic identity.

We have thus to understand Buber's view as expressed in the passage quoted above in the light of the Jewish culture from which he springs. And it is plain that his own mystical experience powerfully impelled him—as it impels all real mystics—to believe that he had therein attained union (in some sense) with “the primal being,” but that his whole cultural heritage and tradition have since influenced him, against his own natural tendency, to adopt an interpretation which rejects that idea. The result is his mystical monadism. This combines the attainment of the same kind of introverted mystical experience as is found in other cultures, including the Hindu and Buddhist cultures, with an interpretation which is in accordance with the belief that the individual soul forever remains a spiritual monad distinct from all other spiritual monads and distinct, of course, from the Supreme Monad.

Buber asserts that the soul in the mystical experience is beyond all multiplicity and yet “not in the least beyond individuation, or the multiplicity of all the souls.” But he fails to ask, much less to answer, the question, What is the principle of individuation which distinguishes one monad from another? If he had considered that

question, he might have seen that, as we pointed out in a previous section, if an individual has eliminated all internal psychical multiplicity and reached the basic pure unity of his pure ego, there then remains nothing by which it can be distinguished from other pure egos, so that by a dialectic of inner logical necessity individuation becomes impossible, and all selves pass into the one cosmic self.

We must not leave the reader with the impression that Buber is the only historical example of mystical monadism. Of course, there may well have been many others within the fold of Judaism—men who, having had the experience of the undifferentiated unity, interpreted it monadistically—but whose experiences and interpretations have remained unrecorded. But even outside Judaism—in India of all places—we find mystical monadism as a minor tradition. The Samkhya and Yoga philosophers and also the Jains apparently belong to it. There seems every reason to believe that both the sages of the Samkhya and Yoga, and the Jain saints and saviours—the Tirthankaras or “makers of the crossing”<sup>9</sup> from the world of time to the world of eternity—were introvertive mystics in the sense that they possessed the same experience of distinctionless undifferentiated unity which is the final stage of introvertive mysticism all over the world. This same experience the sages of the Upanishads interpreted as an identity of the individual self with the Universal Self, and this became the major mystical tradition of the Vedanta; while the Samkhya and the Jain mystics interpreted it monadistically. For both the Samkhya and the Jain systems, salvation consists in the disentanglement of the purusha, i.e., the individual pure ego, from its involvement with matter and sensation and in its attainment of eternal isolation from the world and from all other life monads. The life of the purushas thereafter would be one of everlasting peace, silence, and calm, undisturbed by any distraction from the world or from other living beings. They will be pure egos, drops of pure consciousness, clear as crystal, colorless and flawless, without taint of

<sup>9</sup> “Makers of the crossing” is Heinrich Zimmer’s translation of “Tirthankaras.” See the chapter on Jainism in his *Philosophies of India*, ed. by Joseph Campbell, New York, Pantheon Books Inc., Bollingen Series 26, 1951.

the faintest empirical impurity. This is their nirvana. This is the salvation to which the Tirthankaras have themselves attained, and they have won this triumph through the Yoga practice of "the stopping of the spontaneous activities of the mind-stuff."

Immortal are they, clothed with powers,  
Not to be comforted at all;  
Lords over all the fruitless hours,  
Too great to appease, too high to appal,  
Too far to call.

### 5. *The Universal Self; and the Vacuum-Plenum*

We have concluded that the concept of the Universal Self, or Cosmic Self, in which the individuality of the mystic becomes merged at the time at least of his "union," is the correct interpretation of the introvertive mystical experience. It remains a question whether this mystical concept of the Universal Self is to be identified with the theological concept of God. And it also remains a question what the word "is" means when we make any such statement as "There *is* a Universal Self." Since it is neither subjective nor objective, it cannot mean "exist" in the sense in which we say that trees and rivers and stones exist. Nor can mystical statements about it, or indeed about anything else, be considered "true" in the ordinary sense in which statements of empirical fact are true. But neither can they be considered false in the ordinary sense. We shall call this the problem of the *status* of mystical propositions. This problem we shall reserve for treatment at the end of this chapter. What we shall discuss in this present section is the question, What further can be known about the Universal Self besides the bare fact that it is the Universal Self, pure ego, pure consciousness, the Void? For there are further important points to bring out. Whatever we say will of course be subject to the final accounting with the problem of status. In other words, if we say anything of the form "the Universal Self is  $x$ , or is  $y$ ," we leave at present undecided the question what "is" means in any such statements.

We already noted that the experience which the mystic asserts that he has—that of a completely empty unity, a pure consciousness which is not a consciousness *of* anything but is on the contrary void of any content—is in the highest degree paradoxical. This Void, this nothing, is as we have seen at the same time the Infinite; it is pure consciousness, pure ego, the One of Plotinus and the Vedanta, the Divine Unity of Eckhart and Ruysbroeck; and it is the Universal Self. It is both positive and negative, light and darkness, the “dazzling obscurity” of Suso. I shall call this the paradox of the vacuum-plenum. And the elaboration of what further can be known about the Universal Self can be nothing else than the elaboration of the detail of this paradox.

We may mention to begin with that the notion of the One is paradoxical because it is certainly not a one or a unity in the sense in which those words are generally used. For a one as we have it in our ordinary experience is always a concrete one, that is to say, a one which consists of, or comprises, a many. It is a unity or wholeness which holds a many together. For instance, any material object which we call one thing—one piece of paper, one table, one star—is one in the sense that it is one whole consisting of many parts. If the parts were annihilated, the unity would disappear with it. But the mystical One is the abstract unity from which all multiplicity of contents or parts has been obliterated. It may perhaps be compared with the Platonic conception of the mathematical number 1. “Good mathematicians,” says Socrates in *The Republic*, “reject any attempt to cut up the unit itself into parts . . . taking good care that the unit shall never lose its oneness and appear as a multitude of parts.”<sup>10</sup> But this analogy is of doubtful value, for the mystical One, unlike the Platonic conception of the numerical 1, is the self and is pure consciousness. The Platonic unit is a pure emptiness. But the mystical One is both empty and full.

We shall, of course, expect to find the paradoxes of mysticism expressed in their most extreme or even violent form in those re-

<sup>10</sup> Plato, *The Republic*, trans. by F. M. Cornford, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1941, p. 237.

ligions and philosophies in which mysticism is the major inspiring influence. And these are undoubtedly the religions and philosophies of India. Both the religion of the Upanishads and the philosophy of the Vedanta are almost wholly founded on the mystical consciousness. It is their supreme fountainhead. The same is true of Buddhism, which is founded entirely upon the enlightenment experience of the Buddha. In the Western theistic religions mysticism is, as Professor Burt has said,<sup>11</sup> a minor strain, though an important one. In these religions, therefore, one may expect the mystical paradoxes to appear, but in a milder and less obvious form. This is what we actually find. It will therefore be better to examine the vacuum-plenum paradox where it is most vivid and easy to recognize and identify, and after that to go on to trace it in its milder and dimmer appearances elsewhere. It is seen most plainly in Hinduism. And we will begin our exposition of the vacuum-plenum paradox there.

The vacuum-plenum paradox has in general three aspects which are more or less traceable in all religions and philosophies in which mysticism plays a part. These aspects are not mutually exclusive. It will be seen below that the first really includes the other two. Perhaps, therefore, we ought to call them three modes of expression and emphasis, and not three clearly distinguishable aspects. They are shown in the table below:

*Positive Aspects*  
(Plenum)

*Negative Aspects*  
(Vacuum)

- |                                     |                                         |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| 1. The Universal Self has qualities | Has no qualities                        |
| 2. Is personal                      | Is impersonal                           |
| 3. Is dynamic, creative, and active | Is totally inactive, static, motionless |

In poetic and metaphorical language the positive side is often spoken of as light or sound, the negative side as darkness or silence. Hence the expression the "dazzling obscurity" of Suso expresses both sides of the paradox, whereas Ruysbroeck's phrase "the dark silence in which all lovers lose themselves" refers only to the negative side.

<sup>11</sup> E. A. Burt (ed.), *The Teachings of the Compassionate Buddha*, New York, Mentor Books, New American Library of World Literature, Inc., 1955, p. 16.

In the case of any paradox or antinomy which presents itself to consciousness, there will always appear in the human mind—whether that of the mystic or the nonmystic—the tendency to explain away and get rid of the logical contradiction by one means or another. There may be the deliberate and sophisticated attempt of the philosophical mind to explain it away by suggesting that the predicate which is being both asserted and denied of the subject is used in one sense when it is asserted and in another sense when it is denied. The same thing may of course be  $x$  in one sense and not- $x$  in another. A more naïve method of relieving the mind of the tension of paradox consists in ignoring or forgetting about  $x$  when not- $x$  is being spoken of, and ignoring or forgetting not- $x$  when  $x$  is discussed. In Hindu literature the former method tends to be employed by a philosopher like Sankara, the latter by the more simple-minded authors of the Upanishads; in Christian literature the former method is used by the highly philosophical and intellectual mystic Eckhart, the latter in popular religious talk. I shall maintain however that all these expedients of the common-sensical mind are in vain and that in the end the undisguised and naked paradoxicality and contradiction of all manifestations of the mystical consciousness has to be met head on. But in the meanwhile we may expect often to find one side of the paradox stated without the other—the other being found somewhere else—although sometimes we shall find both boldly stated simultaneously in consciously and deliberately paradoxical phrases.

It would also seem that if we pass from the Upanishads to the Gita—between which some hundreds of years may have elapsed—we notice a gradual change of emphasis. In the Upanishads, especially the earlier ones, the negative, unqualified, impersonal, inert, nature of Brahman tends to be stressed. In the Gita, on the contrary, it is the personality and activity of God which are most prominent. Krishna appears as a God to whom prayer, worship, and love may be directed, with the consequence that, especially at the end of the book, we have occasional passages of tenderness which remind us of

the New Testament. "Hear again my supreme word . . . thou art exceedingly beloved of me . . . have thy mind on me, thy devotion toward me. . . . To me shalt thou come. I make thee a truthful promise; thou art dear to me. Surrendering all the laws, come for refuge to me alone. I will deliver thee from all sins; grieve not."<sup>12</sup>

However moving this may be, we must not be misled. There is no real change in the basic philosophy of the Vedanta from the Upanishads to the Gita. There is only a change of emphasis from one side of the paradox to the other.

In regard to the three aspects of the paradox tabulated above, it is not necessary to expound or document the positive side in detail because this is the side always emphasized in popular religion and therefore well known and understood by nearly everyone. The attributes characteristic of the qualified Brahman are basically the same attributes as are found in the God of the theistic religions. He is an infinite, eternal, all-powerful, all-wise, and all-good person. He is also the Creator of the world. The main point of the Kena Upanishad is to teach that all power comes from Brahman; that although finite things and persons in the phenomenal world appear to exert power, that power really flows into them from Brahman. In the Mundaka Upanishad Brahman is shown as the source of all good. "He is action, knowledge, goodness supreme."<sup>13</sup> In the Svetasvatara Upanishad he is said to be the first cause of the world,<sup>14</sup> the "creator of all."<sup>15</sup> The same Upanishad also has a passage in which both sides of the paradox are brought together, thus:

The one Absolute, impersonal Existence . . . appears as the Divine Lord, the personal God, endowed with manifold glories.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>12</sup> The *Bhagavadgita*, 18, 64-66, as translated in *Hindu Scriptures*, New York, Everyman's Library, E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., pp. 285-286.

<sup>13</sup> The *Upanishads*, trans. by Swami Prabhavananda and Frederick Manchester, New York, Mentor Book MD 194, New American Library of World Literature, Inc., 1957, p. 45. (Originally published by the Vedanta Press, Hollywood, Calif. Copyrighted by the Vedanta Society of Southern California.)

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

But in this passage a direct clash is avoided by the device of attributing impersonality to Reality itself while personality is attributed to its appearance or manifestation.

The positive side of the paradox is thus well understood. It remains to elaborate somewhat more fully the negative side in its three aspects. First, Brahman has no qualities. This is commonly asserted in the Upanishads by negating a catalogue of qualities:

Soundless, formless, intangible . . . tasteless, odorless . . . is the Self.<sup>17</sup>

But in a famous passage it is bluntly stated in the abstract:

The Self is to be described as *not this, not that*.<sup>18</sup>

Or as another translation has it more dramatically:

The Self is to be described by No! No! <sup>19</sup>

In the later Vedanta as systematized by Sankara, Brahman is recognized as both qualified and unqualified, but Sankara avoids open contradiction by distinguishing between two Brahman—the higher Brahman, which is unqualified, and the lower Brahman, which, being qualified, is only a manifestation of the higher Brahman and is therefore on the relative and phenomenal plane.

The second aspect of the paradox is that Brahman is both personal and impersonal. This has already been documented in the quotation from the Svetasvatara Upanishad given above. There are also numerous passages in the Upanishads where the impersonal side is asserted by affirming that Brahman is “mindless.” And the famous modern Hindu mystic Sri Ramakrishna declares:

When I think of the Supreme Being as inactive—neither creating nor preserving nor destroying—I call him Brahman . . . the Impersonal God. When I think of Him as active—creating, preserving, destroying—I call him Sakti, or Maya, or Prakriti, the Personal God. *But the distinction between them does not mean a difference. The Personal and the Impersonal are the same thing.* . . . It is impossible to conceive one without the other.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, Katha Upanishad, p. 20.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, Brihadaranayaka Upanishad, p. 89.

<sup>19</sup> *Hindu Scriptures, op. cit.*, p. 101.

<sup>20</sup> Ramakrishna, *Prophet of New India*.

In the sentences of this passage which I have underlined we see that the attempt to explain away the paradox in any of the usual ways is given up. We have the head-on clash of the two sides in the assertion that the personal and the impersonal are the same thing.

The third aspect of the paradox is that Brahman is conceived as being at the same time both dynamic and static, moving and motionless, creative energy yet wholly inert and actionless. Of course we find in the literature the usual attempts of common sense and of the logical intellect to separate the two sides of the antinomy and by one device or another to keep them apart so as to avoid open contradiction. But we also find explicit acknowledgement of the contradiction. This latter indeed appears already in the passage which we have just quoted from Ramakrishna. The main emphasis there is no doubt on the identity in difference of the personal and impersonal, yet the same identity in difference of the active Brahman—creating, preserving, destroying—with the actionless Brahman is also affirmed.

According to the Svetasvatara Upanishad God is

Without parts, without actions, tranquil . . . like a fire that has consumed its fuel.<sup>21</sup>

This passage gives only one side of the antinomy, the negative side of the static and inert. But the following passage from the Isa Upanishad asserts the whole paradox:

That One, the Self, though never stirring, is swifter than thought. . . . Though standing still, it overtakes those who are running. . . . It stirs and it stirs not.<sup>22</sup>

Here in six words, "It stirs and it stirs not," the whole paradox of the simultaneously dynamic and static, moving and motionless, nature of the One is set out. The casual reader might well take this for mere literary wordplay. There is pleasure in the mere sound of a paradoxical balance of clauses. And this interpretation of the passage might well be the whole truth about it were there not the abun-

<sup>21</sup> *Hindu Scriptures op. cit.*, *Svetasvatara Upanishad*, p. 220.

<sup>22</sup> *Hindu Scriptures, Isa Upanishad*, 4 and 5, p. 207.

dant evidence from so many different sources all over the world that this dynamic-static paradox is a real part of the mystic's experience.

The concept of the vacuum-plenum is often suggested in a generalized form—that is, without distinguishing the three aspects which we have found in Hinduism. It is interesting to find in Chinese (Taoist) mysticism the following:

The Way [Tao] is like an empty vessel  
That may yet be drawn from  
Without ever needing to be filled.  
It is bottomless: the very progenitor of all things in the world. . . .  
It is like a deep pool that never dries.  
I do not know whose child it could be.  
It looks as if it were prior to God.<sup>23</sup>

The vessel is empty and full at the same time. There is nothing in it and yet everything comes out of it. Here again the casual reader might suppose that what we have here is no more than a set of pretty words strung together with a whimsical fancy but having no particular meaning. For the mind slides easily over the surface of words like these without suspecting that their true meaning can only be understood if we have in our possession a knowledge of the profoundest depths of the mystical consciousness. We should note not only the idea of the vacuum-plenum as expressed in the first five lines. We should notice also the last two lines. The empty vessel which is also full "looks as if it were prior to God." What does this mean? Just another poetical fancy? Not so, for Lao-tzu is saying there what Eckhart says when he tells us that behind and beyond God—the three Persons—lies the unity of the "barren Godhead" which is prior to God and from which the manifestation of the threefold personality proceeds. How did Lao-tzu come to have the same surely very unconventional conception as Eckhart had unless we explain this agreement by supposing that both are drawing their ideas from the same deep well of mystical experience?

<sup>23</sup> Lao-Tzu, *The Way of Life*, trans. by R. B. Blakney, New York, Mentor Books, New American Library of World Literature, Inc., 1955, Chap. 4, p. 56. But I have used in the text above the translation given in D. T. Suzuki, *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist*, New York, Harper & Brothers, 1957, p. 18.

I turn now from Hindu versions of the paradox to the Buddhist version. We may note first that Suzuki in his own capacity as a Buddhist mystic writes of the Enlightenment experience that

It is a state of absolute Suchness, of absolute Emptiness which is absolute fullness.<sup>24</sup>

In the Tibetan Book of the Dead we are told that there is an interval of time between the death of an individual and his reincarnation in a new human body. At the moment of death the mind continues to exist unembodied, but because physical sensations can no longer reach it from its body, *it is emptied of all empirical content*. But according to all introvertive mystics, whether in the East or the West, when the mind thus becomes void and empty the light of pure consciousness emerges. Therefore the Tibetans believe, quite logically, that at that moment of death the mind has a glimpse of the Clear Light of the Void, which is nirvana. If only it could hold fast to this condition permanently it would have attained the liberation of nirvana and would never be reborn. In very rare cases this may happen. But in most cases the clear and empty mind becomes rapidly clouded over with sensuous visions and phantasms, becomes involved in sensuous cravings, and is by them dragged down the slope from its momentary exalted vision of the Clear Light to its rebirth in a new body. But since there is just a chance that the dying man may be able to grasp at the Clear Light, hold it, and so escape from the wheel of things, the lama, while the dying man is drawing his last breaths, whispers in his ear and keeps on repeating these words:

O nobly-born [so and so] listen. Now thou art experiencing the Radiance of the Clear Light of Pure Reality. Recognize it. O nobly-born, thy present intellect, in real nature void, not formed into anything as regards characteristics or colour, naturally void, is the very Reality, the All-Good. . . .

Thine own consciousness, not formed into anything, in reality void, and the intellect shining and blissful—these two—are inseparable. The union of them is the Dharma-Kaya state of Perfect Enlightenment. . . .

Recognizing the voidness of thine own intellect to be Buddhahood. . . .<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Suzuki, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

<sup>25</sup> W. Y. Evans-Wentz (ed.), *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, 3d ed., New York, Oxford University Press, 1957, pp. 95-96.

We are not, of course, concerned with any question of the truth or falsity of the beliefs of the Tibetans about reincarnation or about what happens to a man after death. What alone concerns us is the description of the mystical consciousness as the emptiness which is also fullness, the darkness which is also light. In the passage just quoted the paradox is plainly stated. The intellect which is "void" is at the same time "the very Reality, the All-Good" (first paragraph). And the consciousness which is "in reality void" (dark, empty) is at the same time "the intellect shining and blissful" (bright, full). They are "inseparable," and their union is "Perfect Enlightenment" (second paragraph). And to be thus empty and full is to attain Buddhahood.

When a few pages later we turn to examine the paradox as it appears in the West, we shall find—perhaps to our astonishment—that Eckhart and Ruysbroeck entirely agree with the Tibetan account of the paradox—though not, of course, with the Tibetan beliefs about reincarnation.

But even before we in the West became, if I may use the phrase, Zen-conscious or acquainted with *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, we could say that the ordinary accounts of Buddhism of which we knew something—whether Hinayana or Mahayana—tell the same story if we read them aright. In the Hinayana at least there is no concept of God in the Western sense. But there is a concept of the unconditioned, which is nirvana, and which is the Buddhist counterpart of the theistic concept of God. Says the Buddha in words which I have already quoted:

There is, monks, an unborn, not become, not made, uncompounded, and were it not, monks, for this unborn, not become, not made, uncompounded, no escape could be shown here what is born, has become, is made, is compounded.<sup>26</sup>

The accounts of Hinayana Buddhism which in earlier days filtered through to us in the West, via missionaries or otherwise, commonly identified nirvana with annihilation. It was supposed that when the good Buddhist dies he is believed by his coreligionists to attain nir-

<sup>26</sup> Burt (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 113.

vana, and this was thought to be the same as saying that he ceased to exist. This account is now of course known to be nothing but an ignorant error. But the error must have arisen from seizing only on one side of the vacuum-plenum paradox, namely the negative side, and ignoring the positive side. Nirvana is in fact nothing but the enlightenment consciousness conceived not as a transient flash of illumination, but as permanent or rather as altogether transcending time. As such it is the vacuum-plenum, but the early accounts of it in the West supposed it was mere vacuum. If we consider contemporary accounts of the mystical consciousness such as we have quoted from Tennyson, Koestler, Symonds, and others (which, though merely transient and doubtless far less significant and profound than the Buddha's own, were nevertheless glimpses of the same kind of consciousness), we can see that the individuality, the "I," disappears and is in a sense "annihilated." Yet this annihilation of personal identity is "not extinction" (to use Tennyson's words), but on the contrary "the only true life." The disappearance of the individuality is the negative side of nirvana. But the positive side of it is "the only true life."

We have now exhibited the paradox as it makes its appearance in the two chief Indian religions, Hinduism and Buddhism. But it is to be found also plainly enough in the theistic religions of the West. Let us consider Christianity in this respect.

Of the three aspects of the paradox, that which most frequently and strikingly comes to expression in the Christian mystics is the dynamic-static aspect. But the qualified-unqualified and the personal-impersonal aspects are always at least implicitly present and occasionally rise to the surface as explicit statements. They are implicit, of course, in the notion of God as a pure undifferentiated unity. For the presence of a number of different qualities, such as goodness, wisdom, power, knowledge, is incompatible with a total absence of differentiation and distinction. Personality also cannot belong to an undifferentiated unity. But an explicit statement that God is without qualities, corresponding to the unqualified Brahman of Sankara occurs in Eckhart:

The onefold One has neither a manner nor properties.<sup>27</sup>

And for an explicit statement of the nonpersonality of God, or rather of the Godhead, we may quote from Eckhart:

In the unborn essence He is essential essence without personality: essence self-manifest as impersonal being. . . . In the essence the Father loses His Fatherhood completely; nor is there Father at all.<sup>28</sup>

Sankara, and also Eckhart in some passages but not in all, attempt to avoid contradiction in the same way. Eckhart distinguished the Godhead from God, just as Sankara distinguished the higher from the lower Brahman. The Godhead in one and the higher Brahman in the other carry the negative side of the paradox, the vacuum; God in the one and the lower Brahman in the other carry the positive side, the plenum. The lower Brahman is qualified, personal, and active as the Creator. Exactly the same is true of God in Eckhart. So that all three aspects of the antinomy appear in both, and both use the same logical device to avoid contradiction. But that this device to rid their philosophies of contradiction is ineffective can be seen in Eckhart in the following way. According to Eckhart the undifferentiated and actionless unity differentiates itself into the three persons of the Trinity. But this concept of a self-differentiating unity, which *produces* its own differentiations, puts activity back into the actionless unity. And in his deeper passages, as we shall see, Eckhart knows this very well.

We may see the static-dynamic aspect of the paradox as it appears in Ruysbroeck very well in a passage which is quoted by Miss Underhill as follows:

Tranquility according to His essence, activity according to His nature: absolute repose, absolute fecundity. . . . The Divine Persons who form one sole God are in the fecundity of their nature ever active; and in the simplicity of their essence they form the Godhead. . . . Thus God according to the Persons is Eternal Work; but according to the essence and its perpetual stillness, He is Eternal Rest.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> *Meister Eckhart*, trans. by R. H. Blakney, New York, Harper & Brothers, 1941, Sermon 24, p. 211.

<sup>28</sup> F. Ffeifer, *Meister Eckhart*, trans. by C. de B. Evans.

<sup>29</sup> Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism*, paperback ed., New York, Meridian Books, Inc., 1955, pp. 434 and 435.

Miss Underhill herself comes near to admitting the sheer contradiction of the paradox when she writes: "the balance to be struck in this stage of introversion can only be expressed, it seems, in paradox. The true condition of quiet, according to the great mystics is at once active and passive."<sup>80</sup>

Eckhart's position is substantially the same as Ruysbroeck's, as can be seen from the following:

God acts. The Godhead does not. It has nothing to do and there is nothing going on in it. . . . The difference between God and the Godhead is the difference between action and non-action.<sup>31</sup>

It will be noticed that in these passages from Eckhart and Ruysbroeck it is especially the static-dynamic aspect of the paradox which is emphasized. And it is plainly this aspect which, welling up perhaps from the unconscious, has most deeply impressed and influenced the human mind generally—apart from its direct apprehension by acknowledged mystics. For it makes its appearance in poetry and general literature. Thus T. S. Eliot writes of

The still point of the turning world.<sup>32</sup>

There is no specific reference to any religious or mystical conception here. But the inner meaning of the metaphor of the motionless axis of the spinning planet is plain. It is that though the world of sense—to use Plato's phrase—is a perpetual flux, yet at the heart of things there is stillness and silence. In a more explicitly religious context we have the hymn:

O Strength and Stay upholding all creation  
Who ever dost thyself *unmoved abide*. [Italics mine.]

And even the common phrase that God is "unchangeable," though it is vague and can no doubt be interpreted in different ways, seems nevertheless to come out of the mystical subconsciousness of men and

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 323.

<sup>31</sup> Blakney (trans.), *op. cit.*, Sermon 27, p. 226.

<sup>32</sup> T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*, New York, Harcourt, Brace and Company, Inc., 1942. "Burnt Norton."

to affirm that God is actionless and motionless. For change implies action, and changelessness implies inaction.

Since the mystics are also beings moved by their intellectual and logical faculties, and since there is certainly a tension and conflict between the mystical and the logical halves of the human spirit—the philosophical implications of which will be discussed in a later chapter—it is not to be wondered at that the mystics themselves show a certain vacillation and tendency to oscillate between the conflicting elements in their own personalities. And this is so especially in the West. A Suzuki does not hesitate from uttering absolute paradox, sheer logical contradiction; he does not hesitate to speak of the vacuum-plenum, of “a state of absolute emptiness which is absolute fulness.” The author of the Upanishad does not shy away from saying of the Universal Self that “it stirs and it stirs not.” Buddhism, even apart from Zen, is especially insistent on absolute paradox, as we shall have occasion to point out later in more detail. And it seems to me that this difference between East and West is due to the fact that the mysticism of the East is more sure of itself, more full-grown, more profound and all-embracing, than the somewhat fumbling and immature mysticism of even the greatest Western mystics. The mysticism of Europe is an amateur affair compared with the mysticism of Asia.

The result of this state of affairs is that the personalities of the mystics of Europe are split as between their logical faculties and their mysticism. Because they are mystics, they utter paradoxes which, if not interfered with by logical elements, would be absolute and irresoluble. But because they are also moved by logic, they try to explain their own paradoxes away and to give logical solutions of them, as when Eckhart puts inaction in the Godhead and action in God. On the rare occasions when the mysticism in them is uppermost, they talk like a Suzuki. But when the rational faculty is uppermost—which is most of the time—they use logical excuses and devices to avoid contradiction.

Naturally, therefore, the evidence of the European mystics can be quoted on both sides, and can be interpreted in two opposite ways.



If now we turn once more to the East, we find the contemporary Hindu mystic Sri Aurobindo affirming that

Those who have thus possessed the calm within can perceive always welling out from its silence the perennial supply of the energies which work in the universe.<sup>36</sup>

This, as it seems to me, is as nearly an expression of a pure uninterpreted experience—evidently the experience of Aurobindo himself, although he does not use the first person singular—as one can find. For the expression used is “perceive,” not “think” or “hold the theory that.” The “calm” and the “silence,” of course, represent the negative side of the paradox and are metaphors standing for rest and inactivity. But the “energies which work” in the world are not perceived as existing in something distinct from the silence, but as existing in it and welling out from it. The meaning is the same as that of Eckhart’s “eternally resting Godhead which is *also* the wheel rolling out of itself,” and also the same as that of the Lao-tzu’s “empty vessel that may yet be drawn from.” These three images—the welling of the energies of the universe out of the silence, the wheel rolling out of itself, and the empty vessel which is nevertheless the source of an unending stream of water—these are merely three different metaphors for the same thing, namely that self-differentiation of the empty undifferentiated unity which is the creation of the world. And this is not merely a metaphysical theory but something directly experienced by these men. The undifferentiated and actionless is active in that it produces its own differentiations out of itself. And even more explicit is the following passage from Suzuki:

It is not the nature of prajna [mystical intuition] to remain in a state of sunyata [the void] absolutely motionless. It demands of itself that it differentiate itself unlimitedly, and at the same time it desires to remain in itself. This is why sunyata is said to be a reservoir of infinite possibilities and not just a state of mere emptiness. Differentiating itself and yet remaining in itself undifferentiated, and thus to go on eternally in the work of creation . . .

<sup>36</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, New York, The Greystone Press, 1949, p. 28. Aurobindo died in 1950.

we, can say of it that it is creation out of nothing. Sunyata is not to be conceived statically but dynamically, or better, as *at once static and dynamic*.<sup>37</sup> [Italics mine.]

There can be no doubt where the writer of such a passage stands, namely, on the side of absolute paradox which admits of no logical or verbal manipulations which would get rid of its inherent contradictions.

If we now leave behind us the question whether the paradox is to be interpreted as absolute and inherent or only verbal and apparent—on which question I have for the moment said all I can—we may return to our unfinished exposition of the vacuum-plenum paradox as such and to its appearance in different cultures. For we have covered Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity, but not yet Islam and Judaism. Does the same paradox appear in these? I am not able to exhibit any instances of it among the Sufis. This may be due to the severe limitations of my knowledge of Sufism. It is possible that a scholar in Islamic studies might be able to point to examples. On the other hand, it may be that my impression is correct and that the concept of the vacuum-plenum is not to be found; and this might be because the heavy emphasis on the righteousness and dynamic power and personality of God in the religion of the prophet has suppressed the mystical tendency towards the unqualified, static, and impersonal aspect even among the mystics themselves.

Since Judaism has in general the same emphasis as Islam in this respect, and since in any case the mystical element is at a minimum in Judaism, one might expect to find here also no evidence of the vacuum-plenum. And in fact there is not very much. However, the theory of the En-Sof seems to resemble in many respects the statements of Eckhart and Ruysbroeck. According to Scholem, the distinction is made between God as He is in Himself, the En-Sof, which is unknowable and impersonal, and the personal God of the Torah who is God in manifestation. The En-Sof is also called "the hidden

<sup>37</sup> Charles A. Moore (ed.), *Essays in East-West Philosophy*, Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 1951, page 45.

God," and it is this which is referred to in the kabbalistic expression "in the depths of His nothingness."<sup>38</sup> Further the En-Sof, which is the Infinite, has no qualities nor attributes. The divine attributes belong to God in manifestation. They belong to "the worlds of *light* in which the *dark* nature of the En-Sof manifests itself."<sup>39</sup> These conceptions are in fact virtually identical with the mystical theology of Eckhart and Ruysbroeck if we leave out the trinitarian framework of ideas in which the Christian mystics express themselves.

## 6. *The Word "God"*

Introvertive mystical experience inevitably leads, as we have seen, to the conception of the Universal Self, the absolute unity, the One, which is, in our view, its correct interpretation. We have now to ask the question whether the Universal Self can properly be identified with God. Theistic mystics, having reached the experience of the undifferentiated unity and the merging of their own individualities in that unity, jump without further ado to the conclusion that what they have experienced is "union with God." We do not here question the use of the word "union." But it seems important to raise the question whether the word "God" is appropriate. The question is, in a sense, a merely verbal one. Yet surely great care is required here. It is all too easy at this point, having given assent to the concept of an Infinite Cosmic Self, to allow oneself to be swept along on a tide of affirmation, possibly influenced by emotion, into a wholesale admission of conventional religious or theological conceptions.

One must distinguish between the popular sense of the word "God" and the more sophisticated meanings which have been given to it by philosophers and theologians. According to Professor Broad, God in the popular sense is a person; and to be a person, he thinks, an entity must think, feel, and will; and these states of consciousness must, in so far as they are simultaneous, possess the unity which is involved in being states of a single mind; and in so far as they are

<sup>38</sup> Scholem, *op. cit.*, Lecture I, sec. 4.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, Lecture 6, sec. 2.

successive, they must possess personal identity.<sup>40</sup> Professor Broad has, one might say, defined a person in the sense in which Tom, Dick, and Harry are persons. And no doubt this is something like what is involved in the popular conception of God. Tennyson, it is said, suggested that the popular idea of God is that of an infinite clergyman. God, in this view, is plainly a temporal being. In spite of being called unchangeable, he is angry with us today, pleased with us tomorrow. He entertains at different times different ideas. He made plans for the creation of the universe in just the same sense as a human being makes plans for the making of a house, except that God needed no material to work with and made the universe out of nothing. Most certainly the Universal Self cannot be identified with God in any such sense as this. For an individual self, separate from other selves in the way in which Tom, Dick, and Harry are separate, is precisely what the Universal Self is not. All individual selves are merged in it. It differentiates itself into individuals, but is itself undifferentiated. Also it is eternal in the sense of being timeless and cannot be conceived as having successive states of consciousness. And the One is the Infinite, whereas *a* person, in the sense of a separate person, is necessarily finite, even though the label "infinite" may be conventionally attached to him.

The main objection to identifying the Universal Self with "God" is that by doing so we might be thought to be countenancing the very crude conceptions of God just referred to. If this can be avoided the main difficulty with the use of the word will have been removed, but there will still be the question whether the word, even as used by theologians and/or philosophers, is appropriate. And it seems almost hopeless to enter on this enquiry because the views of theologians and philosophers have been so numerous and different from one another that we could not possibly discuss them all here. We shall therefore have to cut the knot. I shall enquire only whether the Universal Self, as we have discussed it in the last section, possesses the characteristics which seem to me to be the *minimum* of those which would be fairly universally recognized as necessary if the word

<sup>40</sup> Broad, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

"God" is to be appropriately used. Such a procedure may seem to involve an element of arbitrariness in the selection of such attributes. This cannot be avoided.

First, it seems necessary that God should be living and conscious, not a dead, lifeless, and unconscious thing like a block of wood. But it is not necessary that he be a *separate* person. Since the Universal Self is pure consciousness, it seems that in this respect it would not be inappropriate to call it God.

Secondly, God must be capable of serving as the goal of all spiritual aspiration, and of yielding final and complete salvation and happiness. The evidence is that mystical union with the Universal Self gives to those who attain it that ultimate blessedness, that peace which passeth all understanding, which may fairly be so described.

Thirdly, God must have the character of arousing the feelings of the holy and the sacred. This is precisely the dividing line between that which is religious and that which is secular. No one can doubt that the mystical union with the One has this character.

Fourthly, God must be thought of as the ultimate source of all values and of all goodness. We have not yet discussed the relation of mysticism with value judgments in ethics and elsewhere. We have reserved this for a later chapter. Mystics claim that all values do in fact flow out of that which they experience. And at any rate there is nothing in what we have so far learned of the Universal Self which would be inconsistent with this claim. Of course this raises the so-called problem of evil, but as that problem is raised by every theory of the nature of God, it is not a special objection to the identification of the Universal Self with God.

Fifthly, it is a necessary character of God that he be thought of as the source of the world, that out of which all things flow. This is the character of God as creator, which is perhaps the most essential of all the characteristics of Deity; and constitutes therefore for us the critical point of this enquiry. For even a being who is living and conscious, who functions as the goal of spiritual aspiration, who is sacred and holy, who is the source of all goodness, would not be called God unless he were also conceived as the creator of the world.

The question is not, of course, whether the mystics (of the East or the West) *believe* that the undifferentiated unity which they experience is the Creator. For of this there can be no doubt. The mere fact that the Christian mystics call this unity "God" attests to their belief in its creativity, since that is included in the meaning of the word. And they often use explicitly such words as "creator" of that which they experience. But it is logically possible that this is a mere intellectual theory based in some sort of reasoning process and not rooted in mystical experience at all. Hence the real question is whether the belief is a genuine description of a mystical experience. The question "whether what they experience is the creator" means "whether they experience its creativity."

The answer is to be found in passages like those which have been quoted above from Suzuki, Aurobindo, Eckhart, and Lao-tzu, to the effect that the undifferentiated unity is perceived as differentiating itself. It is true that the word "perceive," explicitly signifying direct experience as distinct from intellectual theory, is only used in the quotation from Aurobindo. But the feel of the other three passages gives the strong sense of their being records of personal experiences.

The Universal Self, then, is the creator. Its creativity consists in its self-differentiation. The undifferentiated differentiates *itself*. The One divides *itself* into the many. The potential actualizes *itself*. The differentiation, the division, the actualization, are not things which are done to it from the outside. *They are its own acts*. The activity is not temporal, but a timeless and eternal activity. As such it is not a process of *change*, since change means the temporal passage from one state into another. And if it be said that a timeless activity which is not a change is a contradiction, one can only say that paradox is to be expected here. One can perhaps help out by reminding the reader that N. M. experienced an object before his eyes as "moved without moving," which could no doubt also be described as a timeless activity.<sup>41</sup> This may reasonably be claimed as showing that the conception is not merely the product of the barren dialectic of theologians.

<sup>41</sup> Pp. 72 and 73 above.

We may say then that the Universal Self, or the One, does possess the character of being the creator of the world which is requisite if it is to be appropriately called God. And it also, as we have seen, possesses the other four requisite characters. It may accordingly be termed God without any abuse of language.

Nevertheless there is a good deal to be said for avoiding the use of the word where possible, and using rather such phrases as the One, the Universal Self, etc. By doing so one avoids the crude and superstitious associations which inevitably tend to cling to the word God. No doubt it is for this reason that modern writers who describe their own mystical experiences, such as Tennyson, Koestler, and Symonds, avoid it and use theologically neutral language. Yet it would be pedantic to refuse to use it when occasion seems to render it suitable; as is likely to be the case, for example, when one is specifically discussing the experiences or the views of the mystics of the three theistic religions. We tend naturally then to use their own vocabulary, and there are likely to be cases where it would be very artificial not to do so. I shall try to regulate my own practice by these considerations, although in the nature of the case complete consistency is hardly to be expected.

It must of course be remembered that the same questions arise concerning statements about God as we have already seen arise in connection with statements about the Universal Self. We have to ask in either case what is the status of such affirmations. As the Universal Self is neither objective nor subjective, neither is God. And if we say either, "There is a Universal Self," or, "There is a God," we have to ask what the word "is" means, since it does not mean "exist." This brings us back to the problem of status on which we briefly touched in previous sections.

### 7. *The Theory of "Being Itself"*

If our enquiries had led us to think that mystical experience is objective, we should then have had the right to say that statements about the Universal Self are "true" and that the Universal Self "exists." If we had concluded that mystical experience is subjective, we

should then have been entitled to say that statements about the Universal Self are "false" and that the Universal Self is "nonexistent." But since we concluded that mystical experience is neither objective nor subjective, we have to say that the Universal Self neither exists nor does not exist and that statements about it are neither true nor false. Unless we are prepared to accept the slick answer of the earlier orthodox positivists that such statements, being neither true nor false, must be meaningless, as well as being metaphysical, we shall have to try to find a new approach.

In this section and the next I shall discuss two solutions of the problem which have been suggested by our predecessors. They may be called respectively the theory of "Being Itself" and the theory of "Poetic Truth." Neither is in my opinion acceptable. But both are influential to the extent that they cannot be ignored. The theory of Being Itself has correctly seized the truth that the Primal Being does not exist in the sense in which a cow exists, that it is not a particular existent, one thing among others; or in other words that it is not objective. At the same time, it rightly insists that it is not to be explained away as an imagination, fairy tale, superstition, or delusion; or in other words that it is not subjective. It therefore suggests that God, though not *a* particular being, is Being Itself. Being Itself is like whiteness itself, a Platonic or Aristotelian universal or form. Just as whiteness is the common element in all white things, so Being is the common element in all beings. It may be thought of either in the Platonic manner as a universal *ante rem* or in the Aristotelian manner as a universal *in re*. So far as I can see, this does not matter, although those who maintain the theory seem usually to prefer the Aristotelian version.

In my opinion, this theory must be decisively rejected. We may waive the objection that the whole theory of universals—in any sense other than subjective concepts—is open to dispute, since the empirical facts which it seeks to explain may equally well be accounted for by the theory of resemblances.<sup>42</sup> For the purpose of our argument we may talk as if the theory of universals were accepted truth. We

<sup>42</sup> See H. H. Price, *Thinking and Experience*, London, Hutchinson & Co. (Publishers), Ltd., 1953, Chap. I.

then criticize the theory of Being Itself as follows. There are doubtless forms of whiteness, of humanity or man-ness, of triangles or triangularity. This is because there is a common element in all white things, a common element in all men, and a common element in all triangles. But there is no form of Being because there is nothing which all beings have in common. There are only particular beings, no universal Being.

This is the same as saying that being is not a predicate in the sense in which white, human, and triangular are predicates. This view is usually, and of course rightly, attributed to Kant. But David Hume put forward the same point before Kant and proved it much more clearly. We must not allow ourselves to be confused by the fact that Hume uses the word "existence" instead of the word "being," which is Kant's term. For in this context Hume means by existence exactly what Kant meant by being.<sup>43</sup> Hume puts the argument thus: "The idea of existence . . . is the very same with the idea of what we conceive to be existent. . . . That idea, when conjoined with the idea of any object, makes no addition to it. Whatever we conceive, we conceive to be existent. Any idea we please to form is the idea of a being; and the idea of a being is any idea we please to form."<sup>44</sup>

It is unfortunate that Hume has used the word "existence" here, and we will revert to Kant's word "being" and continue the argument in that terminology. Hume's point, then, is this. If I ask for information about an object of which I at present know nothing whatever, and I am told, "The object is white," I learn something about it; I get some information about it which I did not have before. In other words, it is a predicate. The same is true of triangular and human. To apply these words to an object is to give some information about them. But now if I am told, "This object is a being," this gives no information at all, since it is only saying, "This object is an object," or, "This being is a being." If we consider a square lump of sugar, we may ask what its characteristics are. We may say then,

<sup>43</sup> Hume's discussion will be found in the *Treatise of Human Nature*, Bk. I. Pt. 2, sec. 6, which is entitled "Of the Idea of Existence, and of External Existence."

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

"It is white; it is solid; it is square; it is sweet." But we cannot add that *another characteristic* which it has is being. Being is not a characteristic *distinct* from white, square, etc., which the sugar has in addition to them.

The mistake of supposing that being is a predicate—and therefore the mistake in the theory that the Primal Being is "Being Itself"—comes from confusing "being" with "existence" where existence is used in the sense in which we say that tigers exist but that centaurs do not exist. For to say of a tiger in this sense that it exists is to give information about it, namely, that it is part of the natural order, or the space-time world, and that it has objective existence, while a centaur has not. Existence and nonexistence are therefore predicates, though being is not. All existences have a common element, namely, that they have location and date in the network of things which we call the natural order.

The theory of Being Itself does not of course assert that the God is existence itself, but that he is Being itself. There is no doubt such a universal as existence itself. It is what is common to all things in the objective natural order, namely, being a member of that order, and what is not possessed by imaginary things, dream objects, hallucinations, etc. The theory under discussion does not mean to assert that God is the common element in all natural objects, which would be meaningful since existence is a predicate. The theory identifies God with being in general, but there is no such common element which all beings share. Hence the theory is false.

## 8. *The Theory of "Poetic Truth"*

This theory, like the theory of Being Itself, has correctly perceived that the Primal Being is neither objective nor subjective, or in other words that statements about it are neither true nor false in the ordinary sense of these words. But it asserts that there is another sense of "truth," namely, the truth which is possessed by poetry—and presumably other forms of art—and that religion and mysticism possess this kind of truth. Truth in the usual sense may be called scientific

or intellectual truth, and this new kind may be called poetic truth. What are its criteria, and what distinguishes it from intellectual truth?

It is sometimes said that poetry, as well as other forms of art, may express "insights" or "intuitions" about the nature of things. Is this what is meant by poetic truth? But the assertions about the existence of such intuitions draw attention to the fact that certain minds, including those of poets, often seem to possess the power of grasping truths immediately and without the laborious mediation of discursive thinking. This power is what is usually called intuition; and that it exists is undoubtedly true, not only of poets, but of great scientists, mathematicians, philosophers, and in some measure most human beings. This perhaps establishes the existence of a different way of arriving at truths (the intuitive way) from that commonly practised by scientists and others (the way of step-by-step reasoning), but it does nothing at all to establish the existence of a distinct species of truth different from the scientific kind. This therefore is nothing to the point.

Presumably, if there exists a special kind of truth, called poetic, it must at any rate exist in poetry, and that will be the place to look for it with a view to discovering its criteria, and how it differs from intellectual truth. But we must be careful about what specimens of poetry we choose with a view to discovering the poetic truth in them. It will not do, for example, to examine only religious or mystical poems. For instance Shelley's lines

The One remains, the many change and pass;  
Heaven's light for ever shines, earth's shadows fly.  
Life like a dome of many-coloured glass  
Stains the white radiance of eternity.

may be said to give poetic expression to a characteristically mystical idea. So may Wordsworth's lines already quoted on page 81 affirming the existence of

A motion and a spirit which impels  
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
And rolls through all things.

For if we say that the truth of religious and mystical ideas is poetic truth, and that poetic truth is the kind of truth which is found expressed in religious and mystical poems, we shall clearly be in danger of moving in a circle. If there is such a thing as poetic truth, it must be a truth which is possessed by poetry as such, that is to say by all poetry—or at any rate by all good, genuine, and great poetry. It will therefore be found in secular poetry, by which I mean poetry about nonreligious subjects of any kind, poems about everyday life and events. Let us take at random then a few examples of well-known passages from some of our major poets with a view to discovering wherein their poetic truth lies.

It is plain in the first place that a great many poems express scientific or philosophic truths and are intended by their authors to do so. For instance, Whitehead quotes from Tennyson's "In Memoriam" the line

"The stars" she whispers "blindly run"

and remarks: "it is the problem of mechanism which appals him [Tennyson]. The line states starkly the whole philosophical problem implicit in the poem. Each molecule blindly runs. The human body is a collection of molecules. Therefore the human body blindly runs, and therefore there can be no individual responsibility for the actions of the body."<sup>45</sup> In other words, what the line states is the mechanical view of nature. It is this which is said to appal Tennyson, and for which Whitehead is trying to provide a corrective in his philosophy of organism. But the mechanistic view of nature, which Tennyson's line expresses, is a scientific or philosophical truth—or untruth or half-truth—not a poetic truth. Where or what is the special kind of "poetic truth" which must be, according to the view we are discussing, somehow contained in the poem *in addition to* the intellectual truth—two quite different kinds of truth in the same line of poetry, it would seem. Surely it is clear that what the poetic form adds to the bare bones of the philosophical problem of mechanism is not another

<sup>45</sup> A. N. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, New York, The Macmillan Company, 1935, p. 113.

kind of truth but a depth of human feeling and a beauty of imagery and verbal expression.

But of course a poem which raises the problem of human freedom is a special case. Most poems have no particular philosophical reference. They deal with much simpler everyday matters. But still, if they are good poems, they must every one of them contain this special brand of poetic truth if there is any such thing. The exponent of the theory may therefore fairly be asked to tell us where and what is the poetic truth in the lines which Marlowe puts into the mouth of Doctor Faustus when he sees the apparition of Helen of Troy:

Was this the face that launched a thousand ships  
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?

or in Coleridge's

The moving moon went up the sky  
And nowhere did abide;  
Softly she was going up  
With a star or two beside.

or in Keats's

And they are gone: aye, ages long ago  
These lovers fled away into the storm.

or in Rossetti's

Her robe, ungirt from clasp to hem,  
No wrought flowers did adorn,  
But a white rose of Mary's gift  
For service meetly worn;  
Her hair that lay along her back  
Was yellow like ripe corn.

or in Browning's

One who never turned his back but marched breast forward,  
Never doubted clouds would break.

or in Swinburne's

Even the weariest river  
Winds somewhere safe to sea.

Every one of these passages states some sort of fact or extremely simple truth which, if we wish to ruin the poetry by disentangling it from its poetic form, could be expressed in bald, prosaic, and quite commonplace words. For instance, the lines of Swinburne tell us that even tired old men eventually die; those of Keats that two lovers ran away in a storm; those of Coleridge that the moon and stars went up the sky quietly and without stopping; Rossetti's that a girl was dressed in a certain way. These bald facts have the informational or scientific kind of truth. What the poetry adds to them is rhythmical and melodious language, concrete and vivid imagery instead of abstractions, beauty, and emotional appeal. There is no new or special kind of truth. Most poetry (in the past as distinguished from now) has been made out of the simplest and most obvious of human truths together with the emotions which they engender—the inevitableness and sadness of death, the beauty of natural scenes, the power of love and friendship, the love of parents and children, the tragic happenings of life and also its little comedies. And if we look instead at the highly obscure and difficult poetry of today, what we find is a straining after unusual and very subtle intellectual ideas, not any kind of "poetic" truth. And I defy anyone to discover in the fine poetry of John Donne anything except purely intellectual ideas accompanied by an appropriate feeling-tone and embodied in ingenious images and words.

But it may be that there is some specific version of the theory of poetic truth put forward by specific thinkers which will get us out of these difficulties and put us on the right road. I will therefore refer to the only two versions of the theory which happen to be known to me. The first is that of Professor Philip Wheelwright, expounded in his very interesting and sensitive book *The Burning Fountain*. In this it is suggested that there are two different ways of using language. One of these, he says, "may be called *expressive language* or *depth language*, and one of my aims . . . will be to distinguish its nature and potentialities from those of literal language, or as I sometimes call it for brevity's sake *steno-language*—the language of science." "Depth language," he adds, "is exemplified in religion, in

poetry and in myth," and the central thesis of his book, he affirms, is "that religious, poetic, and mythic utterances at their best mean something, make a kind of objective reference, although neither the objectivity nor the method of referring is of the same kind as the language of science."<sup>46</sup> I take it that by claiming for poetic and religious utterances a kind of "objective reference" which is different from the objective references of scientific statements, the author is espousing a version of the theory of poetic truth.

One wonders whether there is not some confusion here between the concept of two languages, or ways of using language, which both express the same truth, and the concept of two different kinds of truth. But we may pass that over. One also wonders whether it is not unfortunate that Wheelwright speaks of religious and poetic utterances as making a special kind of "objective reference." For this seems to imply the existence of an *object* and some sort of correspondence between it and the thought expressed. And such a correspondence is the special mark of informational or scientific truth. But this too would not matter if in the end the author could give a coherent and intelligible account of whatever it is which is special about the poetic or religious kind of truth. To this question he devotes a chapter near the end of the book entitled "Expressive Statement and Truth." What he there says amounts to this: that the *declarative* element in a sentence is its truth in the scientific sense of the term; but that an expressive statement, although it contains a declarative element, goes beyond that element by blending with it emotional and hortatory elements "in one fused togetherness."<sup>47</sup> This may be correct, but fails entirely to explain in what way the added emotional, hortatory, and other nondeclarative elements, constitute a nondeclarative kind of truth or a "kind of objective reference." Wheelwright has, in my opinion, no coherent or even intelligible theory of a kind of truth different from the scientific. His admission that what poetic form adds to the declarative truth of the

<sup>46</sup> Philip Wheelwright, *The Burning Fountain*, Bloomington, Ind., Indiana University Press, 1954, pp. 3 and 4.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, Chap. 13, especially p. 281.

poem is "emotional and hortatory elements" negates rather than upholds the theory of poetic truth. It agrees with my own view that what poetic form adds is emotion, beauty of imagery and language, etc., but not a new kind of truth.

Professor Arnold Toynbee puts forward a version of the theory of poetic truth in his book *An Historian's Approach to Religion*. He maintains that there is a "distinction between two facets of Truth which cannot be focused into a unity by the imperfectly united faculties of the Human Mind. In the Human Psyche there are two organs: a conscious volitional surface and a sub-conscious emotional abyss. Each of these two organs has its own way of looking at, and peering through, the dark glass that screens Reality from Man's inward eye and in screening it dimly reveals it: and therefore either mode of imperfect apprehension calls its findings 'the Truth.' But the qualities of the two different facets of a latent unitary Truth are as different as the nature of the two organs of the human psyche that receive these 'broken lights.'" <sup>48</sup> "The Truth apprehended by the Sub-conscious Psyche finds its natural expression in Poetry; the truth apprehended by the Intellect finds its natural expression in Science." <sup>49</sup>

It is very difficult to extract the essence of this theory from the mass of metaphors in which it is expressed. But the passage seems to depend on something like the distinction between appearance and reality as it is found in Kant and in philosophies which derive from him. And perhaps we may venture on the paraphrase that, according to Toynbee, there is a single Reality which, being apprehended by two different "organs," the intellect and the subconscious, presents two different appearances to the mind. In a later chapter one learns that this Reality is "a spiritual presence," and that it is in fact "the Absolute." <sup>50</sup> One would suppose that, since each of the two facets is only an appearance which is conditioned by the organ which apprehends it, what Reality is "in itself" must be unknowable. And in that case one must suppose that Toynbee, in calling it a spiritual

<sup>48</sup> Arnold Toynbee, *An Historian's Approach to Religion*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1956, p. 122.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 265.

presence, is for some reason departing from the impartial ignorance of Reality which the theory requires and showing favor to the facet which is apprehended by the subconscious. However that may be, we have at any rate the right to ask that the appearance of Reality as apprehended by the subconscious, i.e., poetic truth, be made intelligible to us, or, if it cannot be *intellectually* explained, that it at least be *shown* to us so that in the future we shall know it when we see it. To make it intelligible will be to give its criteria and definition. To ask that this be done completely and finally would be to ask for a perfection of theory which it would be unreasonable to expect. But at least an attempt might be made—corresponding to the analyses and attempted theories of the nature of truth in the scientific sense which philosophers and logicians have given. But Professor Toynbee does not even begin to make such an attempt at intelligible theory.

The reply from his point of view is perhaps that in the nature of the case an intellectual theory of a nonintellectual kind of truth cannot be given or asked for. But in that case the truth in poetry must be *shown* in particular cases. We ought to be able simply to read a poem and *see* the truth in it. This brings us back to the situation described on pages 187-188. I read the lines there quoted from Tennyson, Marlowe, Coleridge, Keats, Rossetti, Browning, and Swinburne, eager to discover the truth about the Absolute which they contain. I am perhaps as sensitive to the poetic quality of poetry as another—not wholly blind to it at any rate, not wholly a Philistine. Yet I cannot find this truth. I find indeed certain bare bones of mere factual truth—what Wheelwright calls the declarative element—and in addition to this a high and noble emotional appeal, beauty of imagery, exquisite sound quality of musical language, and the like. And that is all.

If Toynbee's version of the theory of poetic truth is true, there must be a parallelism between the two appearances of the one Reality such that to every scientific statement of truth there must be a possible corresponding poetic statement of truth, and vice versa. It does not indeed follow from the theory that the human mind must

always be able to apprehend both aspects of the truth. There may be blind spots in either of the two organs. But at least one would expect that in some cases it would be possible to observe the correspondence of a poetic to an intellectual truth, and to offer a translation of the one into the other. And sure enough Professor Toynbee offers examples of such translations. "For example," he writes, "the Intellect's dry record of the sordid behavior of barbarian war-lords has been run away with by the sub-conscious and been translated by it into heroic poetry. . . ." And "the pinning down of the Christian gospel in creeds" is, he tells us "another instance of the attempt to translate the Truth of the Sub-conscious into the terms of the Truth of the Intellect."<sup>51</sup> It is odd that the same truth should be sordid in one translation and heroic in the other. But, apart from that, it does not appear in what way the Homeric epics give either a different kind of truth, or a different facet of the same truth, as compared with what is given in the "dry records of the sordid . . .," etc. It would seem plain that, just as the lines of Keats quoted above give exactly the same truth as the "dry record," which would say boldly that two lovers ran away in a storm, and that what the poet adds is not another kind of truth, but simply vivid imagery, rhythmical language, and emotional appeal, so the Homeric poems treat the behavior of the barbarian war lords in the same way, adding to the facts no new truth but similar emotional and imaginative elements.

It is an everyday experience that the same event will be reported quite differently by observers of different temperaments. One will emphasize the humorous side of it and make it appear comic; another will see tragedy in it and will write about that. The same quite ordinary occurrence may simultaneously possess elements of beauty, ugliness, nobility, and sordidness. One mind will seize upon one, another upon another. Each reporter may be telling the truth, or some part of the truth. And we do not have to have an elaborate metaphysical theory of two kinds of truth to account for this. Is there anything more than this in the two different accounts of the Trojan war to which Professor Toynbee refers?

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 123-124.

For the matter of that, Hitler seems to have seen romantic heroism and glory in any war, while any pacifist who goes to jail for his convictions sees nothing but what is brutal and disgusting in the same war. This is quite parallel to the two accounts of the Trojan war to which Toynbee refers. But no one thinks it necessary to postulate two kinds of truth to account for the respective reactions of Hitler and the pacifist.

My conclusion is that the theory of poetic truth, whether in Wheelwright's or Toynbee's version, or any other, should be rejected.

### 9. *The Status of the Universal Self*

That Being who or which is variously described by the mystics as the One, the Universal Self, the vacuum-plenum, or God, is to be considered as Reality in three senses. It transcends and is independent of any individual subject, so that it cannot be called subjective. It has supreme value, or is the supreme good. And it is the creative source of the world. And yet it is not objective. This raises two main problems. First, since it is neither subjective nor objective, what status is to be assigned to it, and to statements about it such as "*it is*;" it is timeless, eternal, etc." Secondly, if it is not objective, and does not "exist," in what sense can it be the first cause of the objective and existent world? Its aspects as supreme value and as creativity need not be further discussed at this stage. But in this section the problem of status will be further examined.

It should be noted first of all that although we have reached the conclusion that the One is neither subjective nor objective partly by applying methods of analysis to the meanings of such terms as "existence," "objectivity," and "subjectivity," yet this same conclusion may be found occasionally in the utterances of the mystics themselves, arrived at by them no doubt intuitively rather than logically. To show this will provide an important confirmation of our conclusions.

The Mandukya Upanishad, after mentioning three normal states

of mind, namely the waking state, the dreaming state, and the state of dreamless sleep, goes on to say that there is a fourth, namely the mystical, and proceeds:

The Fourth, say the wise, is not subjective experience, nor objective experience, nor experience intermediate between these two. . . . It is pure unitary consciousness. . . . <sup>52</sup>

When one reads this, one is inclined to doubt whether there can be anything in the original Sanskrit which it can be correct and scholarly to translate "subjective" and "objective," since these are really jargon words taken from the vocabulary of European philosophy mainly of the late nineteenth century. But any doubts as regards this will be set at rest by consulting the translation given by Professor R. C. Zaehner.<sup>53</sup> The following are the relevant parts of it. "The waking state takes cognizance of what is outside. . . . The state of sleep taking cognizance of what is inside oneself. . . . The fourth state has cognizance of neither what is inside nor what is outside. . . ." The meanings of the two phrases "what is outside" and "what is inside" are uniquely determined by being applied respectively to the objects of sense perception and the objects in dreams. These are precisely the meanings of "objective" and "subjective" as we have been using these terms. Hence the translation of the statement in the *Mandukya* that "the Fourth . . . is not subjective experience, nor objective experience" is correct.

That the experience is neither objective nor subjective is also implied by Plotinus where he says that it is not really a vision, or a seeing, but that we should "instead of seen and seer speak boldly of a simple unity" and adds that the beholder "is become the unity, having no diversity either in relation to himself or anything else." If there is in the experience no multiplicity at all, there cannot be the duality of subject and object. And in general the constant reiterations in mystical literature everywhere that the division of subject and object is transcended are so common that it seems unnecessary to

<sup>52</sup> *The Upanishads, op. cit.*, p. 51.

<sup>53</sup> R. C. Zaehner, *Mysticism, Sacred and Profane*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1957, p. 154.

quote further sources. But all this is equivalent to saying that the experience is neither subjective nor objective. It also comes to the same thing when Dionysius the Areopagite, himself a mystic, says of the Supreme

Nor does it belong to the category of nonexistence or to that of existence.<sup>54</sup>

The same thing is also made clear in all those frequent statements of the mystics that the experience and the Being experienced are beyond space and time. Thus Eckhart writes:

Nothing hinders the soul's knowledge of God as much as time and space, for time and space are fragments, whereas God is one. And therefore if the soul is to know God, it must know him above time and outside space; for God is neither this nor that as are all those manifested things.<sup>55</sup>

Assertions of the mystics that God is beyond time and space are so common that the point needs no further documentation. What we have to notice is that this implies that he is neither subjective nor objective. Not subjective since the finite subject is in time; not objective because only objects in the space-time order are objective. Thus it is no mere speculative assertion of the present writer that that Being is neither subjective nor objective, neither existent nor non-existent, but is rather the standard belief of the mystic, although it is true that he may often make the intellectual or verbal mistake of confusing the transsubjective with the objective and speak of the One, or God, as "existing."

It has been made clear that the Unity, which is the unity of the pure ego, is independent of any individual ego. Since it overarches all individuals, so it overarches the times in which they live. It is not only the pure ego of "you" and "me" who happen to be alive together in this present year, but it is also the pure ego of all past and all future conscious beings. This does not mean, of course, that it endures through time and that it lasts from the time of long-dead

<sup>54</sup> Chap. 5 of *The Mystical Theology* in Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Divine Names and Mystical Theology*, trans. by C. E. Rolt, New York, The Macmillan Company, 1920.

<sup>55</sup> Blakney (trans.), *op. cit.*, p. 131.

individuals to the time of individuals still to be born in some remote future; but rather that it overarches all time, being timeless. And this is what is implied in the first and most important sense in which it is "real," namely, that it is transsubjective.

There is another consideration which it may be worthwhile to mention. It does not indeed in any way help to solve the problem of status, but it shows that exactly the same problem and the same difficulties confront many mathematical and rationalistic philosophers who cannot be suspected of being "tainted with mysticism." Consider for example the problem of universals as it has come down to us from Plato and Aristotle. Plenty of tough-minded and hardheaded mathematicians and logicians at the present day still accept what is conventionally called the theory of the objectivity of universals. They affirm that numbers are such universals. If we ask what account they can give of the status of these universals, we shall find that they cannot escape the very same problem with the very same difficulties as confront the mystic. For universals, according to the theory, are timeless and spaceless, and cannot therefore be said to "exist" or be "objective." Yet, as they are not subjective, they must be called transsubjective. What then is their status? We see that the problem for these philosophers of mathematics is parallel to the problem of the mystic.

Somewhere in the twenties or thirties of this century it was fashionable to say that universals do not "exist" but "subsist." They have "being," and "being" was supposed to be a genus which has two species namely "existence" and "subsistence." Individual objects exist, while universals subsist. This terminology, of course, does nothing to help to solve the problem of status. It is merely an admission that universals, although not subjective, are nevertheless not objective either. But the problem concerning what their status is receives no solution by the invention of a new word for it. Thus it is not merely we soft-headed philosophers of mysticism but also the hardheaded philosophers of mathematics who have this problem.

We must also point out that exactly the same difficulty involving the question of status confronts any absolutist philosophy of the neo-

Kantian tradition regardless of what particular account the philosopher gives of the Absolute. For instance, according to Schopenhauer, the Absolute is Will, not an individual will, but a cosmic Will. That it is not an individual will means that it is transsubjective. Yet it has no objective existence, since it is outside time and space, and since it is supposed to be what lies behind and explains all objective existence. What then does Schopenhauer suppose its status to be? So far as I know, he does not tell us, yet he was too able a man not to have realized that his cosmic Will has no existence in the sense in which stones and trees are said to have existence, and that there is therefore a problem of status on his hands. Bradley has, of course, the same problem, but shows that he clearly realizes it by making a distinction between "reality" which he attributes to the Absolute and "existence" which he attributes to the world of appearances. The space-time world does not have "reality," being in fact only appearance, but it does of course "exist."

In my book *Time and Eternity*, I suggested that there are two "orders" of being—the natural order, which is the order of space-time—and the Eternal order of the mystical One. This gave expression to the same problem which we are now discussing and in that respect was correct. But it is not correct to speak of the Eternal as an "order." It is of the essence of nature that it is an order, and it is precisely its orderliness which constitutes its objectivity—as we showed in the first section of this chapter. But the Eternal cannot be an order in the sense of being orderly, since only that which is a plurality and a series can constitute an order. Thus the metaphor of the two intersecting orders expressed adequately the problem of status but did not give it any solution. In the end we shall have to say that there is no solution of *an intellectual kind* and that it is part of the general mystical paradox that the mystical revelation transcends the intellect.

There is a passage in the Buddhist Pali canon<sup>56</sup> which relates how this very same problem of status which we are discussing—though

<sup>56</sup> H. C. Warren, *Buddhism in Translations*, Harvard Oriental Series, Vol. 3, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1922, pp. 123-127.

in a different form and context—was put to the Buddha. We cannot suppose that the words put into his mouth are his *ipsissima verba*, but they are in the spirit of his teaching. He was asked to explain the status of nirvana. A certain “wandering ascetic” named Vaccha demands, somewhat belligerently, to be told whether the Buddhist Saint, when he passes after death into his final nirvana, exists or does not exist. Is nirvana annihilation or not? What theory does the Buddha hold on this? The Buddha replies that he is “free from all theories,” and that he does not hold either that the saint exists in nirvana or that he does not exist. This does not mean that the Buddha is ignorant of the status of nirvana. It means that it is just as incorrect to say that it exists as to say that it does not exist. Vaccha then presses his question again in another form: “Where” is this saint after death? He gets the answer that the question thus put “does not fit the case.” Finally, the Buddha says that knowledge in this matter is “not to be reached by mere reasoning” and can be comprehended only by those who have attained the enlightenment experience.

Nirvana is the Buddhist interpretation of what Plotinus spoke of as union with the One, the Vedantist as realization of identity with the Universal Self, the Christian as union with God. Therefore the problem of the status of nirvana is identical with our problem of the status of the Universal Self. What then do we learn from the Buddha?

We learn simply that, as Eckhart and almost all mystics in all cultures have said in one set of words or another, mystical experience is “beyond the understanding,” i.e., that the problems which it poses to the discursive intellect are incapable of solution by the intellect. That is why the Buddha is “free from all theories”—because the very word theory means an intellectual construction. That is also why the comprehension of the matter is “not to be reached by mere reasoning.” Finally Vaccha’s question whether nirvana “exists or does not exist” is said “not to fit the case.” The reason is that the question assumes the law of excluded middle. The Buddha’s answer means that logical laws have no application to mystical experience. He

affirms the paradoxicality of that experience.

Thus the only solution of the problem of the status of the Universal Self, or the Absolute, or the One, or God, or nirvana, is that there is no solution, and that all attempts of the logical intellect to comprehend these mystical Ultimates lead only to insoluble paradox. He who asks for a solution is unaware of the inherent paradoxicality of all mysticism. He assumes that the Primal Being is either this or that, either subjective or objective, either existent or nonexistent. But the Primal Being, according to all mysticism, is "neither this nor that." The most famous assertion of this is of course the "*neti, neti*" of the Upanishads. But even the very words "not this, not that" are independently reiterated by Eckhart in the passage just quoted on page 196. He who is dissatisfied with these negatives and who seeks the positive solution must himself climb beyond space and time and experience that Unity. And then doubtless he will not find a "solution" if by that is meant a theoretical understanding. What will he find? That is what cannot be said, but only experienced.

Nor can anything more than this be said of that further question which we posed at the beginning of this section—if indeed it is a distinct question at all and not the same question repeated in other words—How can that which cannot be said to exist or be objective be the source or first cause of all that does exist? All we can do, I think, is to point again to those passages from Suzuki, Eckhart, Aurobindo, and Lao-tzu in which we are told that those who have the experience of the undifferentiated unity can perceive it differentiating itself while yet remaining undifferentiated (Suzuki), or can perceive the creative energies of the universe "welling out from the Silence" (Aurobindo), etc. This, as Suzuki suggests, is to perceive the eternal process of the creation of the world out of nothing, or, to put the same idea in reverse, to perceive that Unity which is neither objective nor existent nevertheless being "the first cause" of the objective and existent.

Although all mysticism and all systems of thought which are founded on mysticism give evidence of their own basic paradoxicality, yet Buddhism is pre-eminent above all systems in its clear

realization and resolute insistence on this paradoxicality. Hence the famous paradoxes of Zen. But the same paradoxicality appears just as much as in the dialogue of the Buddha just quoted (pages 198-199), which comes from the Hinayana scriptures. And in the Mahayana writings one gets the ultimate paradox of mysticism, the paradox, one might almost say, which ends all paradoxes. This is as follows. Since nirvana is the ultimate truth, and since nirvana is undifferentiated and without distinctions or dualities, therefore in the ultimate truth there is no distinction between nirvana and nonnirvana, between truth and untruth, between the teaching and the nonteaching. Hence the declaration of Nagarjuna:

The Buddha has declared  
That Being and non-Being should both be rejected.  
Neither as Being nor as a non-Being  
Nirvana therefore is conceived.

There is no difference at all  
Between Nirvana and Samsara. . . .<sup>57</sup>

Hence also in the famous Diamond Sutra the Buddha asks Subhuti:

What think you, Subhuti? Has the Tathagata given you any definite teaching in this scripture?

And Subhuti replies:

No, Blessed Lord! The Tathagata has not given us any definite teaching in this scripture.<sup>58</sup>

And in the same Sutra Buddha asks:

What think you, Subhuti? Suppose a disciple has attained the degree of Arahat [fully enlightened], could he entertain within his mind any such arbitrary conception as "I have become an Arahat"?

and receives the reply:

<sup>57</sup> Burt (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 173-174.

<sup>58</sup> Dwight Goddard (ed.), *A Buddhist Bible*, 2d ed., Thetford, Vt., Dwight Goddard, 1938, p. 107.

No, Honored of the worlds! Because truly speaking there is no such thing as a fully enlightened one.<sup>59</sup>

And the following story is told. The saints set forth in the Great Ferryboat (the Mahayana), which is to carry them from the hither shore of this world across the river of samsara to the Far Shore which is nirvana. As they proceed, the shore which they are leaving grows fainter and fainter until it disappears in the mist. The Far Shore at the same time slowly arises on their vision. The Great Ferryboat arrives and the saints disembark. But for them, now in nirvana, there are no longer any distinctions, and therefore there is no distinction between nirvana and nonnirvana, this world and the next, the hither shore and the Far Shore. There is not and there never *was* any higher shore from which they set out, there never was any Ferryboat or any passengers or any nirvana, or any saints who have entered into nirvana. Nirvana too is nothing, the Void.<sup>60</sup>

The meaning of this ultimate paradox is not that there is no nirvana, no Primal Being, no Universal Self. What it means is that they are incomprehensible to the logical understanding; and that even to call them "paradoxical" is to apply to them a logical category which misrepresents them; and that even to say "they are" or "they are not" is only to utter vain words about the Unutterable. Which applies, naturally, to all that is said in this book!

### 10. *Alternative Solution*

In favor of our view that mystical experience is transsubjective, we have put forward three arguments. None of them can be regarded as conclusive—indeed, there are no conclusive arguments for or against any opinion in the entire area of mysticism—and, therefore, we ought to consider what position we should adopt if the three arguments for transsubjectivity are rejected.

The first argument is that the experience cannot be subjective for the same reason that it cannot be objective. To be subjective, an

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>60</sup> Adapted from the material which appears on pages 484–487 of Zimmer, *op. cit.*

experience must be disorderly; to be objective, it must be orderly. But order and disorder can only exist where there is a multiplicity of distinguishable items. They cannot exist in an undifferentiated unity. Therefore, the experience must be transsubjective though not objective.

I cannot suggest the specific reasons which might be thought to undermine this argument. The argument seems to me valid. But it depends on my particular view of the criteria of subjectivity and objectivity. On this question there has been, and will no doubt continue to be, much dispute. And, therefore, my conclusion, although I am satisfied with it, cannot be regarded as certain.

The second argument is that if the undifferentiated unity is the pure unity of the individual self, then there is no *principium individuationis* on which can be based a distinction between one pure self and another. Therefore, we cannot stop at the individual ego, but are logically compelled to pass on to a *Universal Self*. I regard this as my strongest argument. I do not know exactly what can be said against it, although I could probably invent ingenious counter-arguments if I desired. Critics, however, will no doubt find plenty to say, since they can hardly admit that they have nothing to object to. Perhaps the argument will be considered "dialectical"—whatever that may mean—or "metaphysical," an excellent word with which to poison the atmosphere. At any rate, it is better to assume that the argument is likely to fall short of being universally convincing.

The third argument is that the experience itself is self-transcending, i.e., that its transsubjectivity is part of the experience, not an interpretation, and is therefore, indubitable. But the question is whether it is indubitably indubitable. If it is a part of the pure experience, then it is indubitable. But is it indubitably part of the pure experience? No, because there is no such thing as an absolutely pure experience without any interpretation at all. That there is the possibility of doubt here is shown conclusively by the example of Martin Buber, who, having had the experience and at first taken it as transsubjective, later came to regard transsubjectivity as a false interpretation.

I cannot but attach importance to my belief that, where mystics have, as the vast majority of them do, a feeling of strong conviction that the experience brings them into contact with some outside reality, this feeling is caused by the fact that they take transsubjectivity to be something actually experienced by them. This means that the great majority of those who have the experience think that its transsubjectivity is not an interpretation but is a datum directly experienced. If so, then Buber and the mystical monadists are exceptions. But it cannot be denied that the position taken up by these latter introduces into the question an element of doubt.

If, therefore, all three arguments are thought by the reader to be unacceptable, the conclusion would have to be drawn, of course, that the experience is subjective only. But the point of writing the present section is to insist that the matter does not end there. There is more to be said. It is important to realize that the sceptic, or the subjectivist philosopher, must not thereupon conclude that he has got rid of mysticism, that he has disposed of it as an empty delusion and superstition to be cast into the rubbish heap. Of course it will be admitted that, delusive or not, it has been enormously important in the history and development of human thought and therefore deserves study. But even this, which most sceptics could admit, is not the main point.

What we have to insist is that even if mystical experience is considered to be subjective it is still enormously important for human life. This refers not merely to past history, but to the future of the world. If mysticism should be treated as a mere superstition, and discouraged or exterminated—if that were possible—an immense, and indeed disastrous, disservice would be done to mankind.

I do not consider it as any part of my function to be a preacher. But it is necessary to say here that, even if mystical experience is subjective, it is nevertheless the way of salvation. That it brings blessedness, joy, and peace is the universal testimony of those who have it whether they are religious in any conventional sense or not. And though it brings "the peace which passeth all understanding," it is not, as is often charged against it, a device of escape from the hard

realities and duties of life. I shall go into this question fully in the chapter on mysticism and ethics. Here it will be sufficient to say that although mysticism can be, and sometimes has been, degraded to become a mere reveling in delirious experience for its own sake, this is not of its essence, and that the greatest mystics have in fact been great workers in the world and have recognized their duty to give to the world in service what they have received in contemplation.

One may say of the mystical consciousness what Spinoza said of the "true acquiescence" of his spirit which he hoped to attain by means of his philosophy. In his essay "On the Improvement of the Understanding" he wrote: "After experience had taught me that the usual surroundings of social life are vain and futile; seeing that none of the objects of my fears contained in themselves either good or bad except in so far as the mind is affected by them, I finally resolved to enquire whether there might be some real good having power to communicate itself, which would affect the mind singly, to the exclusion of all else; whether in fact there might be anything of which the discovery and attainment would enable me to enjoy continuous, supreme and unending happiness."<sup>61</sup> Chief among those "usual surroundings of social life" which are "vain and futile," and which have to be abandoned if that supreme good is to be reached, Spinoza listed fame and riches. My point is that these words of Spinoza are an accurate description of the supreme mystical consciousness. It is not intended to be implied that the mystical consciousness is what Spinoza himself had in mind in using this language. What in fact he seems to have had in mind was an intellectual rather than a mystical condition. But what he was looking for in an intellectual and philosophical state of mind is actually to be found in the mystical consciousness—for which perhaps he was groping.

Finally, it is possible that the direction of human evolution in future millions of years—if the human race survives—will be towards the spread of mystical experience to most men and not merely its possession by a few rare individuals as now. It is possible, in short, that the superman of the future is to be the mystic man.

<sup>61</sup> First paragraph of "On the Improvement of the Understanding."

Thus, the conclusion that mystical experience is subjective only should in no way be regarded as destroying its value. This indeed should be evident to the philosopher on another ground. He will merely remember how common are subjectivist theories of value in general. The philosopher who holds the opinion that moral and aesthetic values are subjective—as being grounded in emotions or attitudes—does not mean to say that these values are not valuable, or that morality and art ought to be left behind as superstitions! It ought to be obvious that the same is true of the values of mystical experience.

## CHAPTER 4

### *Pantheism, Dualism, and Monism*

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#### I. *Pantheism*

In the last chapter we concluded that, although the argument from unanimity fails to support the view that mystical experience is evidence of any reality transcending the individual subjectivity of the mystic's consciousness, yet there are other considerations which do support that opinion. In this sphere we cannot expect anything like proof or certainty. We can never say that any of our conclusions on the philosophical implications of mysticism are more than what seem to us, after careful and impartial sifting of the evidence, the most probable among possible rival views. In this sense, then, we have reached the conclusion that mystical experience is not merely subjective, but is in very truth what the mystics themselves claim, namely a direct experience of the One, the Universal Self, God. We adopt this as our settled opinion throughout the rest of this book, taking it for granted in our treatment of other problems. Having adopted it, a number of fresh problems immediately present themselves. The first, which will be the subject of the present chapter, concerns the relation of God to the world in respect of identity or difference. Are God and the world identical, as some have asserted? Or are they wholly distinct? Or is there some other possibility? These being the problems, the question we have to discuss is whether mystical experience throws any light on them. This is the problem

commonly referred to under the label of pantheism.

Pantheism in the widest sense is a theory about the relation of God to the world as a whole. There is a narrower usage of the word common in the literature of Christian mysticism according to which it refers to the relation between God and a particular part of the world, namely the individual self of the mystic when in a state of "union." Does mystical union with God mean identity with God at least during the period of the union? Or do God and the soul remain distinct entities? The opinion that they become, or are, identical is what Christian writers call pantheism and is the "heresy" of which Christian mystics have been from time to time accused. Since the finite self is a part of the world, it follows that pantheism in the narrower sense is merely a part or instance of pantheism in the wider sense. In this chapter we shall examine both.

I shall begin in this section by discussing only the question what the doctrine of pantheism actually is, i.e., what relation it asserts between God and the world, or between God and the finite self. What is the proper concept or definition of pantheism? And for the purpose of this discussion I shall take Spinoza and the Upanishads as the empirical examples of pantheism from which the definition of pantheism is to be derived.

Professor Abraham Wolf in an article in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* writes as follows:

In philosophy and theology pantheism is the theory that God is all and all is God. The universe is not a creation distinct from God. . . . God is the universe, and the universe is God. . . . The classical exponent of the philosophy of pantheism was Spinoza.

It will be seen that according to Professor Wolf, pantheism is the theory that the relation between God and the world is the relation of simple identity.

Although I cannot accept this definition, we can start from it as a basis of discussion, especially as it seems to be the popular view, and the one which agrees with the etymology of the word pantheism. We ask then: Is this what Spinoza meant? Is it what the Vedanta

meant? Is it an acceptable interpretation of the doctrine of pantheism?

Spinoza certainly uses language which seems to imply this. He habitually speaks of "God or Nature" as if they were synonymous terms. His distinction between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata* does not seem to alter this. They are only two ways of thinking about the same identical thing, which is either called nature or God. Moreover he seems not to admit the existence of any Being outside of nature. The universe consists of substance with its attributes, which are also spoken of as being the attributes of God. Nothing else exists.

The Upanishads—which I am taking here as the most important basic writings of the Vedanta on which later philosophies, like those of Sankara and Ramanuja were largely built—use language which, taken at its face value, also seems to attest the identity of God and the world. "All this is Brahman," says the Mandukya Upanishad. And in the Svetasvatara Upanishad we find this passage:

Thou art the fire  
 Thou art the sun  
 Thou art the air  
 Thou art the moon  
 Thou art the starry firmament  
 Thou art Brahman Supreme:  
 Thou art the waters—thou  
 The creator of all.

Thou art woman, thou art man;  
 Thou art the youth, thou art the maiden.  
 Thou art the old man tottering with his staff.  
 Thou facest everywhere.

Thou art the dark butterfly.  
 Thou art the green parrot with red eyes.  
 Thou art the thunder-cloud, the seasons, the seas.  
 Without beginning art thou,  
 Beyond time, beyond space.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Upanishads*, trans. by Swami Prabhavananda and Frederick Manchester, New York, Mentor Book MD 194, New American Library of World Literature, Inc., 1957,

The Upanishads speak the language of metaphor and poetry, avoiding philosophical abstractions. But it is obvious that this catalogue of things, the fire, the sun, the moon, the air, man, woman, the thunderclouds, and so on, simply stands for the whole universe. It is a shame to dissect this lovely and moving poetry with the knife of logic. But I have to point out that one of the phrases used of Brahman, namely, "thou the creator of all," seems on the face of it to be inconsistent with the theory of strict identity. For this would mean that the universe is the creator of the universe. And Spinoza's phrase "*sui causa*" really involves the same combination of inconsistent ideas, since cause and effect are by definition distinct. Furthermore—returning to the passage from the Upanishad—to say that Brahman is "beyond space, beyond time" is not consistent with saying that Brahman is identical with the clouds, air, sun, moon, and other objects which are in space and time. No doubt it may be thought that in making these comments, I am in danger of forgetting that we are not dealing with a systematic treatise on abstract philosophical conceptions. And it is true that the prevailing sense of the words in this passage and elsewhere in the Upanishads does undoubtedly emphasize the concept of identity. Another evidence of this same emphasis on identity is the famous identification of atman and Brahman, the individual self and the Universal Self, expressed in the oft-quoted words "That art thou."

Yet however dangerous it may be to treat poetry as if it were logic, the inconsistencies in the passage just quoted from the Svetasvatara Upanishad suggest to me that there is something amiss in the definition of Vedantic pantheism as the assertion of the simple identity between God and the world. Making all allowance for the poetical character of these writings, for the liberty of poets to be ambiguous and inconsistent, and also for the naïve though profound mentality of their authors, it yet seems to me that the inconsistencies which I have quoted are symptoms of something deeper than poetic license or poetic vagueness. I am not suggesting that the Vedanta is not

pantheistic. It certainly is. What I am suggesting is that pantheism is not rightly understood as the simple assertion of identity between God and the world.

Let us suppose that the pantheism both of Spinoza and the Vedanta means nothing more than this identity. Has it occurred to the supporters of this interpretation that they are giving as the essence of those great philosophies a view so silly that it can only be described as an empty playing with words? For if pantheism is the view that God *is* the world, we have still to enquire how the word "is" is being used. According to the interpretation we are discussing, what we have here is the "is" of identity—that same sense of "is" as appears in such locutions as "An automobile *is* a motorcar" or "Jack *is* John." But to say that an automobile is a motorcar is to say merely that "automobile" and "motorcar" are two different words for the same thing. Therefore, if pantheism means nothing but the identity of God and the world, this is the same as saying that the pantheist means that "God" is just another name which some people choose to use—for some very odd reason—for what most people call the world. Undoubtedly Spinoza can, if he so pleases, decide that in the future he will call the universe God. He can also, if he so pleases, call the universe Jack, or Henry, or Aunt Maria. He can, if he so chooses, call this table an egg. This is the kind of folly to which the philosophies of Spinoza and the Vedanta reduce if the identity interpretation of their views is correct.

No doubt philosophers, like other people, talk nonsense. Perhaps they talk more nonsense than most other people. But it must be remembered that the basic ideas of the Upanishads have constituted the spiritual food on which some billions of human beings for the last three thousand years have lived. Can it be believed that conceptions of which this is true can be empty verbalisms no more significant than the sentence "A motorcar is an automobile"? It cannot be said that many human beings have lived by the philosophy of Spinoza. But Spinoza did. And however true it may be that even in the greatest philosophers we can find nonsensical passages, it seems beyond belief that the quintessence of Spinoza's philosophy is nothing

but this silly misuse of words. No doubt philosophers have often been misled by hidden ambiguities of language, or by the failure to pay attention to the ordinary usages of words. But I do not see how any consideration of this kind can explain the case of Spinoza.

I will accordingly suggest what I believe to be a profounder understanding of pantheism. According to the definition which I propose, pantheism is the philosophy which asserts together both of the two following propositions, namely:

1. The world is identical with God.
2. The world is distinct from, that is to say, *not* identical with, God.

I am of the opinion that paradoxicality is one of the universal characteristics of all mysticism. This basic paradoxicality will of course be reflected in all philosophies which are, so to speak, high-level interpretations of mysticism. And because pantheism, however much it may wear the outward garb of logic and rationalism, as in Spinoza, always has its roots in mysticism, we shall expect it to be paradoxical. Only those critics who are deceived by Spinoza's superficial geometrical method, and are unable to penetrate below the surface to the subterranean springs of Spinoza's thought, will believe otherwise. The proposition that the world is both identical with, and different from, God, may be called the pantheistic paradox.

We may, if we like, say that what is involved here in the pantheistic paradox, and indeed in all mystical paradoxes, is the idea of what has been called "the identity of opposites" or "identity in difference." These phrases are, of course, associated with the name of Hegel, and that name nowadays generally arouses strong antipathetic reactions among philosophers in the English-speaking world. So I had better say something about this before I go on. I suppose the common view now current in Anglo-American philosophical circles might be expressed by saying that the concept of the identity of opposites was a piece of chicanery invented by Hegel, which, being happily exposed as nonsense within a short time, quietly disappeared, along with its author, into the rubbish heap. But this is a travesty of the facts. In the first place "the identity of opposites" was not in-

vented by Hegel. It is at least three thousand years old, being a part of that mysticism which has influenced Parmenides, Plato, Plotinus, Spinoza, and many other philosophers before Hegel. What Hegel did was to recognize, and state in explicit terms, what had been latent and implicit in so much of the greatest human thought before his time. And to have done this showed profound historical insight. But unfortunately Hegel, having received this idea from the past, proceeded to make a terrible mess of it. He supposed that what he had found was a *logical* principle, and tried to make it the basis of a new superlogic. This was absurd because the identity of opposites is not a logical but a definitely antilogical idea. It is the expression of a nonrational element in the human mind. In trying to make a logic of it, Hegel did actually fall into a species of chicanery. For every one of his supposed logical deductions was performed by the systematic misuse of language, by palpable fallacies, and sometimes, as Russell has pointed out, by simply punning on words. It was this chicanery which was quickly exposed and which was the chief, though not the only, cause of the downfall of the Hegelian philosophy. I will now let Hegel alone and go back to my proper subject.

That this notion of identity in difference between God and the world is actually involved in the pantheistic philosophies of the Vedanta and Spinoza is not difficult to show. To discuss the Vedanta first, we have to exhibit both the identity of Brahman and the world, and their difference. Some of the evidence of identity has already been given by quotations from the Upanishads. But it is also clear in some of the later interpretations of the commentators and philosophers such as Sankara. Here Brahman is represented as the sole reality. That Brahman is "One without a second" means that there exists no other reality. The empirical world is an illusion which disappears in the reality of Brahman. We need not comment on the obvious difficulties of any such view. The point is that on this view, *maya*, the world illusion, cannot be outside Brahman, since nothing except Brahman exists. It may be objected that according to this version of Vedantism the world does not exist at all, and therefore cannot be identical with God. But this only means that any attempt

to press these conceptions to their logical conclusions merely lands us in contradictions.

But if Brahman and the world are identical, they are also different. The differences may be tabulated as follows:

| <i>Brahman Is.</i>        | <i>The World Is:</i>    |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Reality                | Illusion, or appearance |
| 2. Pure unity             | Multiplicity            |
| 3. Relationless           | The sphere of relations |
| 4. Infinite               | The sphere of finitude  |
| 5. Outside space and time | In space and time       |
| 6. Motionless, unchanging | Perpetual flux          |

Thus the pantheistic paradox is plainly present in the Vedanta. The same paradox is also at the root of much Indian folklore, legend, and art. Heinrich Zimmer, in his book *Myths and Symbols of Indian Art and Civilization* (p. 46), interprets one of the legends—too long to reproduce here—as meaning that “the secret of Maya is the identity of opposites. Maya is a simultaneous-and-successive manifestation of . . . processes contradicting and annihilating each other: creation *and* destruction, evolution *and* dissolution. . . . This ‘and,’ uniting incompatibles, expresses the fundamental character of the Highest Being. . . . The opposites are fundamentally of the one essence, two aspects of the one Vishnu.”

Zimmer applies a similar interpretation to the famous rock-hewn image of Siva in the Elephanta caves near Bombay. This has been described as among the greatest pieces of the world’s sculpture. In this sculpture there is a central head, about 19 feet high from the chin to the crown of the head. From the two sides of this head the profiles of two other heads emerge left and right. The emerging head to the right is male, that to the left, female. The male and female principles symbolize the “dualities,” the “opposites,” which characterize the phenomenal world. On this set of facts Zimmer makes the following comment (pp. 148–151): “the middle head is a representation of the Absolute. Majestic and sublime it is the divine essence out of which the other two proceed. . . . The middle head is self-enclosed in a dreamy aloofness. . . . [It] is the face of Eternity.

... Out of its solid silence, time and the life-processes are continually flowing—or apparently are flowing. From the point of view of the middle there is nothing flowing. . . . The two profiles are happening; the universe is happening; the individual is happening. But . . . do they *really* happen? The central mask is meant to express the truth of the Eternal, in which nothing happens, nothing comes to pass, changes or dissolves again. The divine essence, the solely real, the Absolute in itself, . . . abides in itself, steeped in its own sublime Void . . . containing all and everything."

From this we see that the conception of the identity of opposites, since it is expressed in very ancient folklore, legend, and primitive myth, arises out of the feelings of the race, not out of its intellect or head; thus making it clear that it is not the invention of a modern crackpot kind of logic.

I turn now to Spinoza. That his pantheism also involves the identity in difference of God and the world is certain—unless it be believed that the essence of his philosophy consisted in the inane joke of calling the universe Henry or Jack or God according to one's whim. But it is not so easy to show where this principle is actually at work in Spinoza as it is in the Vedanta. Spinoza belonged to a later and far more sophisticated age. If he had caught himself falling into a logical paradox, he would have hastily covered up his tracks by using suitable evasions—a proceeding which would not have occurred to the simple-minded hermits who composed the Upanishads. Spinoza, being a professional rationalist, could not admit contradiction into his system in the blatant way the Vedantists did. Nevertheless, one can find in him the pantheistic paradox if one looks below the surface.

Spinoza has three categories for the explanation of reality—substance, attribute, mode. Everything that exists has to be subsumed under one or more of these heads. Our question is, What, according to Spinoza, is the relation between God and the world? But one must first ask, Under which of the three categories does God come, and under which the world? The world, I think, can be identified with the attributes and modes. God seems sometimes to mean only sub-

stance, and sometimes the totality of substance, attribute, and mode. In the former case, God is in some sense distinct from the world, in the latter case identical with it. However, this needs further elucidation.

Spinoza often tells us that the attributes *constitute* the substance (Definition of "substance," *Ethics*, Part 1 Def. IV), or that substance *consists of* the attributes. If so, then substance, or God, is identical with the totality of the attributes, and so with the world. But there are passages which are inconsistent with this. For instance, he says "substance thinking and substance extended are one and the same substance, which is now comprehended under this attribute and now under that." Spinoza denies that there is any real interaction between mind and body, and explains the apparent interaction by saying that this same substance simultaneously expresses itself in two different ways, namely, thought and bodily event. But unless one supposes that substance is a distinct existence, a substratum underlying the attributes, the explanation has no point. For in that case the two attributes merely lie side by side, and the corresponding bodily and mental events correspond by chance, without anything to explain the correspondence. It is plain that at the back of Spinoza's mind, whatever he may have said, was the thought that substance was a third something which explains the behavior of the other two.

Moreover, in spite of his explicit assertions that substance consists of the attributes, it is unlikely—in view of the fact that he took the whole concept of substance and attribute uncriticized from tradition—that he was uninfluenced by the thought of the distinct underlying substratum. It is not till Hume that we get the clean break with tradition on the empiricist ground that we cannot experience anything but the qualities. It appears likely that the incompatible interpretations of substance, now as a substratum, and now as the sum of the attributes, both operated, unreconciled with each other, in Spinoza's thinking. In the former interpretation, we have the concept of God as distinct from the world, in the latter the identity of God and the world.

If, as I believe, mystical feelings and ideas are always the psycho-

logical sources of pantheism, however much it may be rationalistic on the surface; and if, as I suggest, mystical thinking is always a series of logical paradoxes; then the view that Spinoza, possibly against his will, is involved in the pantheistic paradox will be helped if there is independent reason to think that mystical ideas and feelings have actually entered into the formation of his philosophy. That his thinking has a mystical element has sometimes been denied, sometimes asserted. To those who denied it, he appeared as "an accursed atheist." To those who asserted it, he appeared as a "God-intoxicated man." If one interprets his phrase "God or Nature" to mean that God is just another name for nature, that in short God is just a piece of verbiage, one will naturally conclude that he is nothing but an atheist. But if one interprets him mystically, so that God, as well as being identical with the world, is *also* distinct from it, then his very moving religious language acquires meaning and may well justify the phrase "God-intoxicated man." My suggestion is that he exhibited in himself the living paradox of being a God-intoxicated atheist.

Harold Höffding writes in his *History of Modern Philosophy* (pp. 294-295) that "for Spinoza the clear understanding of our passions raises us above them and unites with all the rest of our knowledge of nature," and he adds that this understanding of our passions helps to make possible "the mystical union with God. . . . This oriental and mystical tendency forms the basis of all his thought."

On the other hand, Mr. Stuart Hampshire in his book *Spinoza* in the Penguin series (pp. 43-44) writes as follows:

Critics of Spinoza, have misunderstood what he meant by God as immanent cause; if isolated from its context within his philosophy, the notion seems mystical and unscientific. . . . In fact, the implication is precisely the reverse. . . . The doctrine appears mystical or unscientific in its tendency only if one forgets that in Spinoza the use of the word "God" is interchangeable with the word "Nature." To say that God is the immanent cause of all things is another way of saying that everything must be explained as belonging to the single and all-inclusive system which is nature, and no cause (not even a First Cause) can be conceived as somehow outside or independent of the order of nature.

How do we come to have such opposite interpretations of Spinoza's basic ideas and motives? Because neither of these commentators has grasped together, in a single statement, and has understood, the two sides of the pantheistic paradox. Höffding fastens on one side, Hampshire on the other. But Höffding had at least the insight to sense and feel in Spinoza the two disparate elements, and to see that, in spite of his naturalism, mystical feeling runs strong in him, and makes an integral component of his philosophy, which becomes distorted and unintelligible if one ignores or denies it.

But that in Spinoza's philosophy "God" is just another word for "nature" in the same sense as "automobile" is just another word for "motorcar," and that therefore all the highly religious language which Spinoza uses in the *Ethics* is so much meaningless verbiage—this is the view which Mr. Hampshire asks us to accept. And I must say that it seems to me a very shallow view.

I conclude that the philosophical theory of pantheism properly means the identity in difference of God and the world, and not their bare identity. Since what I called pantheism in the narrower sense is merely a particular case of pantheism in the wider sense, it should follow that pantheism would regard the relation between God and the finite self in a state of union as also one of identity in difference, and not mere identity. But these are only preliminary anticipations, and we have to examine the relevant mystical phenomena to discover what light they throw on the subject.

## 2. *Dualism*

Pantheism is not originally a mere logical speculation of the philosophical mind. It is not a view ultimately based upon argument and reason. It is in essence a mystical idea, although afterwards it comes to be supported by argument. Hence in the long historical development of rationalistic philosophy it may come to be thought that pantheism is based on reason, its mystical roots having been forgotten. This is what has happened with Spinoza or at any rate with the expositors and commentators on Spinoza. Thus the sig-

nificant question about pantheism is not whether the arguments for it are good logic but whether it is the correct interpretation of mystical experience. This is the problem now before us.

As a matter of terminology I shall assign to dualism, monism, and pantheism the following meanings. Dualism is the view that the relation between God and the world, including the relation between God and the individual self when in a state of union, is a relation of pure otherness or difference with no identity. Monism is the view that the relation is pure identity with no difference. Pantheism is the view that it is identity in difference.

On the whole there has been a fundamental cleavage between East and West, or rather between India and the West, on the question whether mystical experience should be given a monistic or a dualistic explanation. India has, in the Samkhya, Yoga, and Jaina systems and in the Vedantism of Ramanuja, produced dualistic and pluralistic interpretations. But the predominant trend of the Vedanta philosophy—namely, that of Sankara—has been monistic. But Western mystics, in spite of their obvious tendency to drift towards monism or pantheism, have usually ended by repudiating those views in favor of dualism. Dualism is characteristic of the three chief theistic religions, Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. Although the Christian mystics themselves can generally be quoted—in their most decisive passages—on the side of dualism, it remains a question whether this would have been their view if they were not overborne and subjected to threats by the theologians and the ecclesiastical authorities of the Church. This is a question which we shall have to consider on a later page because it affects our main problem, namely, which is the true interpretation.

Extrovertive mystical experience appears to be the main source from which the pantheistic and monistic identifications of God and the world as a whole are derived. Introvertive mystical experience is the main source of the identification of God and the individual self when in a state of union.

The extrovertive mystics see the world around them, the grass, the trees, the animals, and sometimes “inanimate” objects such as rocks

and mountains, as God-impregnated, or as shining from within with the light of a life which is one and the same life flowing through all things. As R. M. Bucke expressed it, "I saw that the universe is not composed of dead matter, but is on the contrary a living Presence."\* Boehme, Eckhart, N. M., and many others have, as already shown, expressed themselves in similar language. The question for us is whether extrovertive mystical experience actually supports dualism, monism, or pantheism.

The introvertive mystic, getting rid of sensations, images, and thought content, comes at last to find within himself the pure self which becomes, or is, unified with the Universal Self, or God. This is the source of our problem in so far as it especially concerns relations of identity or difference between God and the individual self. In particular, what is most relevant here is the experience of the "melting away" or "fading away"—"fana" as the Sufis call it—of individuality into "boundless being" which Tennyson, Koestler, and others have described in more modern and nontheological language.

In this section I shall discuss the dualistic view of the theistic religions and quote the evidence of the mystics themselves in favor of it. The Christian mystics speak of their experience as "union with God." It will facilitate our discussion if we use their own language in regard to this. The question then is, What happens at the moment of mystical union? Does the soul of the mystic become simply identical with God? Or does it remain a being wholly distinct and different from God? Or is there identity in difference?

Unfortunately an appeal to the meaning of the word "union" will not help us because it is ambiguous. In ordinary language we may mean by the union of *A* with *B* that they cease in any sense to be distinct existences, as for example the union of two rivers—say the Missouri and the Mississippi—in one. It would be correct to say that below their junction there is only one river. On the other hand, the members of a trade union do not become identical with one another but only closely associated in the same organization. Moreover, if we

\* See p. 78.

say that two things *A* and *B* are "the same," this is also ambiguous. We say that the evening and the morning star are "the same," meaning that they are identical. But we say that two persons have "the same" idea when we mean only that their ideas, though numerically distinct as being psychic processes in two different minds, are nevertheless exactly similar. This particular ambiguity becomes relevant when Christian mystics say that in the state of union the will of the individual becomes the same as, or one with, the divine will.

Constantly the mystics use ambiguous language. Occasionally we shall find what seem to be clear, unambiguous, and explicit statements in their writings. We must seize on these as important, but even then we have to remember that a mystic's own interpretation, even when we are certain what it is, cannot be accepted as *ipso facto* correct. For mystics, with a few exceptions, are not analytic philosophers nor even metaphysicians. And they may well have been often bedeviled by the pitfalls of language. On the other hand, it is obvious that we have to study the statements of the mystics about their experience, since these are in the last resort the only raw material which is presented to us for analysis. And it is on these that we have to base whatever interpretation we propose to accept as the best.

I will begin with some Christian sources and then turn to the evidences of Islamic and Jewish mystics.

St. Teresa writes:

It is plain enough what union is—two distinct things becoming one.<sup>2</sup>

One might suppose that this is a clear statement of monism, but St. Teresa's language was habitually so vague and un-self-critical that one cannot build any theory at all on the statement just quoted. But one does in general know that as an obedient Catholic she would have been horrified at being understood to favor the heresies of monism or pantheism.

St. John of the Cross writes:

<sup>2</sup> St. Teresa, *Life of St. Teresa*, Chap. 18.5.

The state of divine union consists in the total transformation of the will into the will of God, in such a way that every movement of the will shall always be the movement of the will of God only.<sup>3</sup>

What is meant by "the total transformation of the will into the will of God"? Does it mean that the two wills, the human will and the will of God, become numerically identical? Or does it mean that they remain numerically two, but that the volitions of the one are exactly like the volitions of the other? St. John of the Cross, though his mind is more analytic and his language more precise than that of St. Teresa, is no first-class intellect. And unless we can find some clearer statement of his meaning than this, we cannot conclude anything for certain on the basis of these words. Fortunately, such clear passages are to be found, and I quote two of them. He speaks of the mystical union as:

That union and transformation of the soul in God which is only then accomplished when there subsists the *likeness* which love begets. For this reason shall this union be called the *union of likeness* . . . which takes effect *when two wills, the will of God and the will of the soul are conformed together, neither desiring ought repugnant to the other.*<sup>4</sup> [Italics mine]

And he adds a little later:

That soul which has reached perfect conformity and *resemblance* is perfectly united, and supernaturally transformed in, God.<sup>5</sup> [Italics mine.]

In other words God and the soul remain existentially distinct beings, their union meaning only qualitative resemblance in their wills. This may be called qualitative union as distinguished from existential or substantial union or identity.

Ruysbroeck is equally explicit:

As the air is penetrated by the brightness and heat of the sun, and iron is penetrated by fire; so that it works through fire the works of fire, since it burns and shines like fire; and so likewise it can be said of the air . . . yet each of these keeps its own nature. For the fire does not become iron, and

<sup>3</sup> St. John of the Cross, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, trans. by David Lewis, 4th impression, 1922, Bk. 1, Chap. 5.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 4.

iron does not become fire. . . . There is here a great distinction, for the creature never becomes God, nor does God ever become the creature.<sup>6</sup>

We notice that the concept of union taught by St. John of the Cross is not quite the same as Ruysbroeck's. The relation between God and the soul, according to St. John of the Cross, is that of the resemblance of two different things. The relation according to Ruysbroeck is compared to the relation between the sunlight and the air, or between heat and a hot iron. Perhaps this may be called a relation of interpenetration. It is not resemblance, for sunlight does not resemble air nor does heat resemble iron. But both St. John of the Cross and Ruysbroeck insist that God and the soul remain distinct existences, not existentially identical. They thus give us two different versions of dualism. This alone, though not in itself very important, is enough to show that the interpretations and analyses of meaning given by the mystics cannot be accepted by us at face value. For unless we take refuge in the unlikely explanation that these two men are describing two different kinds of mystical experience, they cannot both be right. But both agree in being dualists.

Henry Suso also preaches dualism, and interprets union as qualitative similarity. According to him:

In this merging of itself in God the spirit passes away and yet not wholly; for it receives indeed some attributes of Godhead, but it does not become God by nature. . . . It is still a something which has been created out of nothing, and continues to be this everlastingly.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to its plain statement of dualism, this passage is also noteworthy for the use of the words "the spirit passes away." This shows that Suso's mystical experience included what the Sufis called "fana," also experienced by Tennyson, Koestler, and others already quoted. It adds its quota to the evidence of the basic similarity of mystical experiences in all ages, religions, and cultures.

<sup>6</sup> *The Book of the Supreme Truth*, Chap. 8; in Jan van Ruysbroeck, *The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage. The Book of the Supreme Truth. The Sparkling Stone*, trans. by C. A. Wynschenk Dom, London, J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1916. Also quoted in a somewhat different rendering by Rufus Jones, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, New York, The Macmillan Company, 1937, p. 207.

<sup>7</sup> Henry Suso, *Life of Henry Suso*, trans. by T. F. Knox, Chap. 56.

If now we turn to Meister Eckhart, the most philosophical of all the medieval Christian mystics, we find a strange situation. He frequently framed sentences—chiefly in his sermons—which caused him to be accused by the Church authorities of claiming identity with God. For instance:

One should so live that he is identified with God's Son and so that he is that Son. Between the Son and the soul there is no distinction.<sup>8</sup>

And again:

St. Paul says: We are always being transformed into God (2 Corinthians 3:18). . . . Whatever is changed into something else becomes identical with it. If, therefore, I am changed into God and he makes me one with Himself, then, by the living God, there is no distinction between us.<sup>9</sup>

And again:

God and I: We are one.<sup>10</sup>

And again:

In bursting forth [by this phrase Eckhart means union] I discover that God and I are One. . . . I am the unmoved Mover that moves all things. . . . Here too God is identical with the spirit.<sup>11</sup>

And as a last example:

The eye by which I see God is the same as the eye by which God sees me. My eye and God's eye are one and the same—one in seeing, one in knowing, and one in loving.<sup>12</sup>

Many other instances could be quoted. They are scattered all over Eckhart's writings. But in the Defense which he wrote against the charges of heresy he refers to the first of the above passages and says: "If this should be taken to mean that I am God, this is false. But if

<sup>8</sup> *Meister Eckhart*, trans. by R. B. Blakney, New York, Harper & Brothers, 1941, Sermon 25, p. 213.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 181.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 182.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 232.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 206.

it should be taken to mean that I am God as being a member of him it is true." <sup>13</sup> But what does "being a member of him" mean?

Such passages may make one wonder whether Eckhart was quite frank in his Defense.

By far the most philosophically interesting statement of Eckhart's in this connection is the following:

The divine One is a negation of negations. . . . What does One mean? Something to which nothing is to be added. The soul lays hold of the God-head where it is pure, where there is nothing beside it, nothing else to consider. The One is a negation of negations. Every creature contains a negation: one denies that it is the other. An angel denies that it is any other creature, but God contains the denial of denials. He is that One who denies of every other that it is anything except himself.<sup>14</sup>

In this passage Eckhart anticipates both Spinoza and Hegel and preaches the same doctrine as is found in the Upanishads. He says, "Every creature contains a negation: one denies that it is the other." This is plainly a statement of Spinoza's principle that all determination is negation. This is the definition of the finite, or in Eckhart's phrase, of the creature as distinguished from the Creator who is infinite. That which negates negations is therefore the Infinite. Moreover, the Infinite is, in Eckhart's phrase, "something to which nothing is to be added," or that which has no other to negate it, or in the phrase of the Upanishads "the One without a second." God is thus infinite, not in the sense of being an endless series, but in the sense of having nothing outside himself to limit or negate him. This is a plain statement of either monism or pantheism since to say that there is nothing other than God is to say that God is everything which exists.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 303.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 247.

<sup>15</sup> This raises the question of whether and how much Hegel was indebted to Eckhart. Rufus Jones in *The Flowering of Mysticism*, Chap. 4, states: "Hegel, as is well known, claimed Meister Eckhart as the source of his own system." I do not myself remember any such passage in Hegel's writings—although as I have not read them for thirty years, my memory may be at fault. Also Jones's sentence seems too sweeping and careless. R. B. Blakney, in the introduction to his translation of Eckhart, quotes from Franz von

It seems evident that Eckhart's thinking tended to interpret his own experience monistically or pantheistically—no doubt without distinguishing between these two. In his defense he repudiated these "heresies," thus accepting dualism at the behest of the papal authorities. Summing up the position of the Christian mystics—we have of course only given samples of their evidence, not the full evidence—we may say the most decisive passages leave no doubt where they stand. They, in general, support dualism in accordance with the dogmas of the Church. But there is something in their own experience which causes them to gravitate towards identity theories of the relation between God and the individual soul when in a state of union.

In Islamic mysticism the experience of mystical union with God is fully developed, and we therefore look to see what interpretation the mystics place on it. Their position is on the whole similar to that of the Christian mystics—dualism with a tendency to occasional outbreaks of monism. Many of the Sufis prefer to express their experiences in extremely flowery poetry, profuse in metaphors, rather than in prose. Now poetry, especially the kind of sultry and sensuous poetry which they wrote, does not lend itself well to abstract theorizing. Nevertheless, the predominance of dualism is evident. The Mohammedan religion, like the Jewish, insists on the great gulf which separates the Creator from the creature, and this of course reflects itself in the interpretations which the mystics give to their own experiences. But it does not prevent occasional outbursts claiming identity with God, sometimes in extravagant language such as that attributed to Mansur al Hallaj. As a more moderate expression of the same claim we may instance Mahmud Shabistari (A.D. 1320) who wrote:

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Baader, "I was often with Hegel in Berlin. Once I read him a passage from Meister Eckhart *who was only a name to him*. He was so excited by it that the next day he read me a whole lecture on Eckhart which ended with 'There indeed we have what we want.'" This leaves the impression that Hegel's mind was so sympathetic to Eckhart's ideas that a few sentences from Eckhart quoted to him casually by a friend set his mind on fire to such an extent that he talked about it at length and excitedly next morning. This could happen without his having read a line of Eckhart.

In God there is no duality. In that Presence "I" and "we" and "you" do not exist. "I" and "you" and "we" and "He" become one. . . . Since in the unity there is no distinction, the Quest and the Way and the Seeker become one.<sup>16</sup>

The words "become one" are of course as ambiguous as the word "union." But "there is no distinction" is unambiguous. It means identity.

Of great interest are the views of Al Ghazzali (A.D. 1059-1111) the great philosopher-mystic of Sufism. He was, it seems to me, more philosopher than mystic. And it may even be doubted whether he actually achieved the mystical consciousness. He says of himself in his autobiography that "theory being more easy for me than practice I read until I understood all that can be learned from study and hearsay." Dissatisfied with this, he retired from the world and for some eleven or twelve years lived in solitude seeking illumination according to the methods and techniques of the Sufis. The evidence as to whether he attained it seems to be indecisive. But of his philosophical ability and eminence no one who reads his clear, penetrating, analytic prose, even in translation, can be in doubt. He also possessed great literary skill, and his writing is rendered delightful by reason of his extraordinary gift for apt and illuminating illustrations and examples.

Occasionally he speaks of "absorption in God" as being the goal which the Sufis seek and reach. But absorption is an ambiguous metaphor compatible with either dualism or monism. Al Ghazzali certainly means it dualistically. Evelyn Underhill quotes him as saying: "The end of Sufism is total absorption in God. . . . In this state some have imagined themselves to be amalgamated with God, others to be identical with him, others again to be associated with him: but all this is sin."<sup>17</sup> And Mr. Claud Field quotes him as condemning such extravagant utterances as those of Mansur al Hallaj and other Sufis who used the same sort of wild language, and adding:

<sup>16</sup> Margaret Smith, *Readings from the Mystics of Islam*, p. 110.

<sup>17</sup> Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism*, paperback ed., New York, Meridian Books, Inc., 1955, p. 171.

the matter went so far that certain persons boasted of a union with the Deity, and that they . . . beheld Him, and enjoyed familiar converse with Him.

and Ghazzali referred to such mystics as "foolish babblers."<sup>18</sup>

It would seem that he disapproved of any nondualistic interpretation of the mystic's experience. And the following passage about the meaning of "absorption" is very noteworthy:

When the worshipper thinks no longer of his worship or himself, but is altogether absorbed in Him whom he worships, that state, by gnostics, is called the passing away of mortality (*fana*), when a person so passed away from himself feels nothing of his bodily members, nor of what is passing without, not what passes within his own mind. . . . He is journeying first *to* his Lord, and then at the end, *in* his Lord. Perfect absorption means that he is unconscious not only of himself, but of his absorption. For *fana* from *fana* is the goal of *fana*. . . . Thus the state of the mystics in relation to Him whom they love is like your state in relation to what you love of position or wealth, or like a human love when you become . . . so engrossed in your beloved that you perceive nothing else. You do not hear when someone speaks, nor see who passes, though your eyes are open and you are not deaf.<sup>19</sup>

It should be noted that this is a *psychological* description of the mental state of the Sufi. Ghazzali says that it resembles the mental absorption of one who is engrossed in the contemplation of an earthly loved one. This psychological characterization does not of itself imply any logical or existential doctrine of either monism or dualism. It is consistent with either. It does not either imply or negate the view that the existence of the individual self is annihilated even momentarily by being absorbed into the divine substance, but only says that the separate existence of the self is psychologically forgotten. But that Ghazzali remained consistently dualistic is to be gathered from the other passages quoted above and numerous other similar passages.

The idea of union with God is not, according to G. G. Scholem's book *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, at all prominent in Judaism.

<sup>18</sup> Al Ghazzali, *The Alchemy of Happiness*, trans. by Claud Field, London, 1910, translator's preface.

<sup>19</sup> Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

The claim to have attained such union, and the interpretation of it as becoming identical with God, are found occasionally among the later Hasidim as also in the case of Abulafia. But, in Scholem's words previously quoted, "It is only in extremely rare cases that ecstasy signifies actual union with God in which the human individuality abandons itself to the rapture of complete submersion in the divine stream. . . . The Jewish mystic almost invariably retains a sense of distance between the Creator and the creature. The latter is joined to the former, and the point where the two meet is of the greatest interest to the mystic, but he does not regard it as constituting anything so extravagant as identity of the Creator and the creature."<sup>20</sup>

We need not pursue the purport, nor the question of the justification, of these metaphors any further. The only point of interest at the moment is that, although there are in Judaism occasional examples of the monistic interpretation of mystical experience, yet the spirit of Jewish mysticism in general is dualistic, insisting, like Islam, on the gulf which separates the Creator from the creature.

In summary, the general picture which we get of the three theistic religions of the West is that the evidence of their mystics is decidedly in favor of dualism. But very definite tendencies towards pantheism also appear in all three religions. The greatest of those who show this tendency is of course Eckhart.

### 3. *Critique of Dualism*

Dualism is the typical interpretation put upon mystical experience by the theistic religions of the West—though we saw that there were many atypical exceptions, usually condemned as heresy by the ecclesiastical authorities. Monism, which asserts the identity of God and the world, and of God and the illuminated individual self, is the interpretation put upon mystical experience by the most influential religious philosophy of India, the later Vedantism of Sankara—although there were in India many other systems of thought which interpreted it in various other ways. The fact that there have existed

<sup>20</sup> G. G. Scholem (ed.), *Major Trends of Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 122–123.

these two diametrically opposite interpretations may suggest to the reader that the differences are in the experiences themselves and that we have two different kinds of experience and not two different interpretations of the same experience. But this suggestion, though superficially plausible, will not bear examination. While we have never maintained that mystical experiences everywhere are so exactly similar that there are no differences at all between them, what we did try to show in the second chapter was that there are common elements in them all which are much more fundamental and important than whatever differences there may be. None of the differences which we outlined there<sup>21</sup> could account for the difference between dualism and monism. Moreover, we saw that there is an inner nucleus within the wider set of common characteristics which consists in the unitary consciousness of the introvertive type of experience and the unifying vision of the extrovertive type. We concluded that in this experience of an undifferentiated unity, which the mystics believe to be in some sense ultimate and basic to the world, we reach the very inner heart of all mystical experience in all the advanced cultures of both the East and the West. This also carries with it as a phase of itself that dissolution of individuality in the unity, that melting away, or fana as the Muslims call it, of which we quoted examples from all over the world. The monist and the dualist describe the undifferentiated unity in practically identical language, but the monist believes that he himself is included in it; while the dualist, for cultural and theological reasons, regards himself as still outside it. Therefore the problem which presents itself to us is whether dualism or monism is the true interpretation or whether we must accept a synthesis of both in the pantheistic paradox.

In the present section I shall argue that dualism, whether in its Christian, Islamic, or Judaic versions, is an untenable interpretation. I shall consider monism in the section which follows.

There are several arguments which show that dualism is a mistaken interpretation. The first is that dualism is a flat contradiction

<sup>21</sup> Pp. 51, 53, 54, 60, 77, 78, 79, and elsewhere.

of the nuclear common characteristic of all mystical experience, viz., that it is an ultimate unity which is "beyond all multiplicity." The mystical consciousness, in its fully developed introvertive form, is the "unitary consciousness" from which, to use the words of the Mandukya Upanishad, "awareness of the world and of multiplicity have been completely obliterated." Wherever we look in the literature of mysticism, East or West, Christian or Hindu, we find the same thing. For the Christian as for the Hindu, it is an experience of the One, of the Unity. Aurobindo, the famous contemporary Hindu mystic speaking most certainly out of the riches of his own experiences writes:

At the gates of the Transcendent stands that mere and perfect spirit described in the Upanishads, luminous, pure, sustaining the world, *without flaw of duality, without scar of division*, the transcendent Silence.<sup>22</sup> [Italics mine.]

But, it may be said, these sources quoted are Indian, and they may well support the view that the Hindu experience is different from the Christian experience. However it does not seem very likely that the Christian mystic will admit that the Indian has an experience of actual identity with God which is not vouchsafed to the Christian! It is true that these particular words of Aurobindo can be interpreted dualistically, since he does not here say that the unity without flaw of duality may not be an object to his consciousness which as subject is distinct from its object. But no one who is familiar with the context of Indian thought in which Aurobindo is embedded will believe this.

However, we have to consider the objection that quotations from Indian sources cannot be used to show that the dualistic interpretation put upon their experiences by the Christian mystics is wrong. In reply to this the first point to be made is that the basic experience of the Christian mystics is descriptively indistinguishable from that of the Vedantic mystics. The core of the experience is that it is an undifferentiated unity, which we hold to be the same in the

<sup>22</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, New York, The Greystone Press, 1949, p. 23.

East and in the West. I have done my best to show this in my second chapter, and now assume it to be true, and will not further discuss it at this stage.

The question now at issue is this, Is the self of the experient included in the undifferentiated unity? Or does it remain outside the unity and distinct from it? The latter is the dualistic interpretation. Now it is not the case that only the Vedantic mystics interpret the experience monistically, and that the Western mystics invariably interpret it dualistically. On the contrary, all the evidence shows that Western mystics, Christian, Islamic, or (in a few cases) Jewish, show a strong tendency to drift towards the monistic position. They are only prevented from adopting it by the menaces and pressure of the theologians and ecclesiastical authorities. This is highly significant. Those who have the experience, in East or West, tend to interpret it nondualistically. Those who do not have the experience decry and repress this interpretation. We must not, of course, exaggerate this argument. It is true that not *all* Christian and Muslim mystics exhibit the drift to monism. For instance, neither St. Teresa nor St. John of the Cross does so. Hence, the premiss I use in the argument is only that there is a *tendency towards monism*, not that all mystics are, secretly or overtly, monists.

The fact is that the dualistic interpretation is contrary to the whole spirit of mystical utterances wherever found. The mystical consciousness when projected down onto the logical plane of the intellect involves three things, viz.: (1) that there are no distinctions in the One, (2) that there is no distinction between object and object, e.g., between the blades of grass and the stone, and (3) that there is no distinction between subject and object. This is plainly the fully developed and completed mystical attitude, and if any of these three propositions is denied, what we shall have is a diminished, stunted, or underdeveloped mysticism. Dualism is such an undeveloped mysticism.

There is of course another side to this story, which monism overlooks. Whoever sees the error of dualism tends to go to the other extreme and to express himself in the language of monism. But both

are one-sided, and each needs to be corrected by the other. Pure monism, as we shall see in the next section, is as unacceptable as pure dualism.

To return, however, to our critique of dualism. We may again quote Plotinus's words:

No doubt we should not speak of seeing, but instead of seen and seer, speak boldly of a simple unity. For in this seeing we *neither distinguish nor are there two*. The man . . . is merged with the Supreme . . . one with it.<sup>23</sup>  
[Italics mine.]

Plotinus is pointing out that such words as "see," "seer," and "vision," though we can hardly avoid using them, imply a duality between subject and object, and are accordingly inappropriate to an experience in which there is no such duality. These words of Plotinus are decisive against dualism. The only escape from this conclusion would be to suppose that Plotinus had one kind of experience and the Christian mystics, or some of them, another. This sort of hypothesis, as we have seen, is not plausible. How then, we must ask, is it that so many of the Christian mystics interpret their experience dualistically?

The following is the explanation which I offer. It is plain from all the evidence which we have collected throughout this book that the disappearance of the division between subject and object is an essential part of the introvertive mystical experience. But the Christian mystics do not carry the conception of the unitary consciousness to its logical conclusion when they come to the intellectual interpretation of their experiences. Their own mystical experience impels them to claim the identity of subject and object, the identification of God and the individual self. It is evident that there is this very strong impulsion at work in the mystics everywhere and in all cultures and religions. Eckhart, because he is the greatest and most original and audacious *intellect* among the Christian mystics, ex-

<sup>23</sup> Plotinus, *Works*, trans. by Stephen MacKenna, New York, New York Medici Society, Enneads VI, IX, and XI.

presses this boldly and—from the point of view of worldly caution—rashly. So do several of the Sufis. But when it comes to the point, the majority of them draw back from taking the last step towards which the momentum of their combined experience and logic is carrying them. They balk at asserting what is obviously the dictate of their own consciousness. They fail to implement to the full the notion of unity. They take a step backwards into dualism. Why is this?

Partly perhaps they are troubled by a genuine philosophical difficulty. They do not understand the pantheistic paradox with its notion of identity in difference. Instinctively (and rightly) feeling that the pure identity cannot be the truth, they turn from it and embrace pure difference. But it is doubtful whether this philosophical problem exerts much influence with them. After all, they are not as a rule philosophers and hence not inclined to worry about problems of logic. We may assume that what influences them most is the impact of a strong cultural and historical pressure. There is something in the theistic religions which causes their theologians—who usually have no mystical experience and are only intellectuals—to outlaw as a heresy any tendency to monism or pantheism. The mystics have for the most part been pious men, obedient to the constituted authorities in the religion in which they have been raised. They humbly submit all their conclusions to the judgment of the Church or whatever the institutional authority in their particular religion may be. They dutifully curb their pantheistic tendencies at the behest of their superiors. There need be nothing insincere or false in this obedience, in this unaffected humility. The mystic as such is not a theorist, nor interested in theory—with a few great exceptions such as Eckhart, Plotinus, and the Buddha. The actual living of the spiritual life is his supreme interest. Why then should he not leave theory to those whose special business it is, the theologians? And why should he not believe, if their views on theory differ from those which he himself feels inclined to put forward, that they are the experts who know better than he does? The threat of possible punishment for heresy need not have been his main motive, though, since he was human, the fear of punishment may very well

have reinforced his own wish to be a law-abiding person within the framework of the ecclesiastical institution. Nor, on the other side, is there any reason to accuse the theologians and Church authorities of mere prejudice, ignorance, or obscurantism. It is surely easily understandable that they should regard as sheer blasphemy the claim of a human being to be identical with God. For they too have not understood the pantheistic paradox. To them the only choice seems to be between holding that a man and his God are simply identical or that they are simply different. As the former view seems preposterous, they embrace the latter and insist that all their flock must do the same.

I now turn to another strong argument against dualism. Dualism arose among the theistic mystics because of their almost exclusive emphasis on the introvertive kind of experience. It is a possible, although in my opinion a mistaken, interpretation of that experience. But it is wholly impossible as an interpretation of extrovertive experience, to which it cannot even be applied meaningfully. It will be remembered that, according to Eckhart's report of that type of experience, "all is one. . . . Here all blades of grass, wood and stone are one." He who has that experience looks outward through his physical eyes and *perceives* the blades of grass, wood, and stone, as one. He must, we argued, also perceive the difference between them. But leaving that aside, the question now to be asked is, How can the dualistic theory explain their oneness as a relation of *similarity* between two different existents? According to the dualistic theory the relation between God and the individual self in the moment of union is that, although they remain two distinct beings, there is between them a more or less exact resemblance which may include all psychic elements, will, emotion, and cognition, although the theory usually singles out will for special emphasis.

Now it is extremely farfetched, even fantastic, to try to apply this theory to extrovertive mysticism. The experience in question finds grass, wood, and stone, to be one *with each other*. And it does not make sense to speak of a resemblance between the volitions, emotions, and cognitions of pieces of wood and stone. Even if we at-

tribute a panpsychic philosophy to the mystics, it will hardly go the length of speaking of the volitions and cognitions of stones and wood. In any case, it is quite obvious that when Eckhart and others who have had extrovertive mystical experiences speak of perceiving the plurality of external objects as being all one, what they are talking about is an existential unity, not a moral similarity. They mean that the wood and stone are not two different things or substances but one thing or substance. The mere relation of similarity, whether of wills or of anything else, clearly has not entered into their minds at all. We have argued, of course, that although they perceive different objects as identical, they must also perceive them as different. But in any case it is existential identity and difference that they are talking about. Hence the dualistic theory of the Christian mystics cannot explain this type of experience.

We may now summarize the arguments against dualism:

1. The undifferentiated unity which is the mystical experience implies that there are no distinctions within the One, or the Universal Self, that there is no distinction between object and object, and finally that there is no distinction between subject and object. Dualism overlooks or denies the last of these three propositions. It is therefore a form of mystical theory which is stunted and undeveloped. It stops halfway and fails to carry through the concept of unity to its proper conclusion. Plotinus clearly asserts the identity of "the seer and the seen." His views are entitled to special respect, not only because of his greatness both as a philosopher and as a mystic, but because, being identified neither with the religions of East nor the West, he is an impartial judge.

2. Even if dualism could be made plausible for introvertive mysticism it does not even make sense if we try to apply it to extrovertive mysticism. Even if we attribute panpsychism to the mystics, it would be fantastic to suppose that when Eckhart speaks of perceiving the blades of grass, wood, and stone, as being "all One," what he means is that there exists between them a relation of volitional similarity. It is obvious that the unity, or oneness, which he attributes to them

is of the existential kind. And this precludes dualism. What is here said of Eckhart is of course just as true of the extrovertive experiences of St. Teresa, Ramakrishna, Boehme, or any other.

It appears to me that the criticisms which have here been developed against dualism cannot be met, and that dualism must accordingly be rejected as an incorrect interpretation of mystical experience.

#### 4. *Monism*

One might suppose that the alternative to the dualistic theory of pure difference which we have rejected would be the monistic theory of pure identity. God and the world are simply identical. Also God and the individual self in union are simply identical. From time to time such theories have been maintained.

The theory that God and the world are identical may take two forms, one of which amounts to atheism, the other to acosmism. If it means that nothing exists apart from the sum-total of finite objects—suns, stars, trees, rocks, animals, individual selves—and that God is merely another name for this collection of finite objects, then it is atheism. This is the view attributed to Spinoza by Mr. Stuart Hampshire, whether he happens to use the word atheism or not. We saw good reasons to reject it in the first section of this chapter, and it need not be further discussed here.

The acosmic form of monism will have to say that the world of finite things as separate from God does not exist at all. God alone is real, and God is an undifferentiated unity wherein there is no multiplicity of finite objects. Has anybody ever seriously maintained such a view? We find statements that nothing exists except the Void, i.e., the undifferentiated unity, in some of the texts of Mahayana Buddhism. And, stated in different words, it is the substance of Sankara's advaita Vedantism. But it is not difficult to show that the theory, in whatever form it is held, must necessarily land its holder in nonsense. The crucial question to ask is, how does the theory explain the *appearance* of the multiplicity of finite objects?

It has to explain them as due to "ignorance" or to "false imaginings" or to "illusion."<sup>24</sup> Some such term as ignorance or nescience is common in Hindu forms of the theory. "False imaginings" is a phrase freely used in the translation of the Mahayana Buddhist text "The Awakening of Faith."<sup>25</sup>

The refutation of all such views must begin by applying Descartes's principle "I think, therefore I am." We need not follow Descartes in supposing that this proposition establishes the existence of a permanently existing mental substance. But at least it proved that "I" exist, even if "I" only means a momentary consciousness or a momentary empirical ego. If, then, anyone says that my belief that the finite world exists is due to my illusion, or ignorance, or false imagining, we must ask the Cartesian question, How can I have illusions or ignorant ideas if I do not exist? Therefore at least one finite being, namely myself, exists. Or we may put it in another way. The world is an illusion. Whose illusion? Mine? Then I must exist to have the illusion. But perhaps I am an illusion in the mind of some other individual. Then that other individual must exist, unless he is an illusion in the mind of a third individual. Thus we get a vicious regress.

But there are two other alternatives, both to be found in Indian literature, which may avoid the particular absurdities just mentioned. It may be held that the finite world is an illusion or false imagination which has its seat, not in the minds of finite individuals, but in the mind of God. But this view leads to a self-contradiction, though not to the infinite regress in which the previous version of monism ended. For it introduces the multiplicity of the world into God, into the pure One which is beyond all multiplicity. If the appearances of houses and trees and stars are somehow appearances or illusions in God, they constitute a multiplicity of illusions, if not of realities. To call them illusions is apparently only to apply a derogatory word to

<sup>24</sup> The monism which we are discussing must not be confused with Western philosophies such as those of Bradley, which never maintained that the world does not exist, but only that it is not the "ultimate" reality.

<sup>25</sup> Dwight Goddard (ed.), *A Buddhist Bible*, 2d ed., Thetford, Vt., Dwight Goddard, 1938.

them. The illusions still exist as illusions. If you deny the reality of this piece of paper, and say that it is an illusion, you cannot deny that the illusion of paper really exists.

It may be objected that I have no right to complain of contradictions in a theory, since according to the view which I am myself advocating the truth lies in contradictory sets of propositions such as the pantheistic paradox. We only raise an objection to contradiction, the critic may say, when it happens to suit our purpose as it does at this moment. But the monistic philosophy which we are criticizing professes to be self-consistent. It alleges pure undifferentiated unity as the whole of reality. We refute it by pointing out that it cannot maintain itself in this position. It breaks down of itself into the view that there is a multiplicity of illusions in God, and yet no multiplicity in God, or that God is the vacuum-plenum, which is the view which we shall maintain. It breaks down, in short, into pantheism as distinguished from monism.

There is still another alternative which has been put forward by some Indian philosophers. This theory holds that the "ignorance" which is responsible for the world illusion is an impersonal cosmic principle, part of the world, and not a state of any mind, human or divine. But in the first place, this only appears meaningful as a result of a misuse of words. The words "ignorance," "illusion," and "imagination" necessarily refer to subjective states of some mind finite or infinite. To say that it is just ignorance, without being the ignorance of any conscious being, is to use words which have no meaning. Of course we might by a stretch of language say that a stone is ignorant! Certainly it knows nothing. But to call this "ignorance" is again the same misuse of words. It is no doubt because they are in some vague way aware of this fact that those philosophers who hold these views have invented the barbarous word "nescience." But even if we let this pass, we must point out that the "nescience" of a stone or of any nonconscious existence is not a state of it which can produce illusions or false imaginations.

But apart from this, suppose we are allowed to say that ignorance is a principle or characteristic of the cosmos and not of any mind,

human, or divine, or animal. This can only mean that ignorance exists in the world of rocks and rivers and trees and stars. We may put the same thing in Hindu terms. If the ignorance is not in Brahman, it must be in the finite manifestations of Brahman, i.e., the world. But in order to be ignorant, these things—the rocks, rivers, stones, and trees—must exist, which contradicts the theory which the supposition was introduced to support.

There is thus no possible version of monism which does not end in nonsense. Thus since neither dualism nor monism can be accepted, we are driven on to their synthesis in the pantheistic paradox. This so far is the negative justification of pantheism. Our further consideration of it in the next section will show that there is plenty of positive justification as well.

### 5. *Justification of Pantheism*

We take as our starting point the experience of the pure ego, the Universal Self, pure consciousness, which we saw to be what is revealed in introvertive mystical experience. This Universal or Cosmic Self is that which the theistic religions interpret as God. It is also the Brahman-Atman of the Upanishads. And since it is empty of all empirical content, it is the Void of the Buddhists, the nothingness of Eckhart, the darkness and silence which according to all mystics lies at the centre of the world. These are some of the points which have been established and from which we now start.

The next step will consist in making it clear that the Universal Self is also the absolute infinite. The Mandukya speaks of Brahman as being

beyond relation, featureless, unthinkable, in which all is still.<sup>26</sup>

This thought is not an isolated *apercu* but is constantly reiterated in different forms in the Upanishads. It must not be mistaken for the conclusion of some metaphysical chain of argument. It is a direct

<sup>26</sup> This is the wording given to verse 7 of the Upanishad by Aurobindo at the head of Chap. III of *The Life Divine*.

report of immediate experience. For the Absolute of the Vedanta is quite different in this respect from the Absolutes of Hegel or Bradley. These latter spun their Absolutes out of dialectical cobwebs. They did not profess to have immediately encountered the Absolute and to be reporting on the encounter. But the authors of the Upanishads were seers, not rationalistic philosophers. And they reported that what they had seen was "beyond relation, featureless, unthinkable, in which all is still." That it is featureless means that it is empty of all particular items; that it is beyond relation means that there is no plurality of items among which any relations could hold. But that which is totally beyond all relations is necessarily infinite. For the infinite is that which is not limited by anything else. It is therefore *that which has no other*, since any other would be a boundary to it and so limit it. Hence the Upanishads invariably speak of the Universal Self as "the One without a second."

There are only two intelligible senses in which the word "infinite" is used. One is that of the mathematicians, for whom it means the endlessness of a series of items. Now the infinity of the Universal Self cannot be of this sort because, being empty and void, it contains no items to constitute a series. Even the conventional theologians say that God is not a temporal being so that his eternity does not mean endlessness in time.

The other sense of the word "infinite" can be found most easily either in the Upanishads or in Spinoza. In the Chandogya Upanishad it is written:

Where one sees nothing else, hears nothing else, understands nothing else, that is the Infinite. Where one sees something else, hears something else, understands something else, that is the finite.<sup>27</sup>

In other words the infinite is that outside which, and other than which, there is nothing. This is the same conception of the infinite as that which is given in Spinoza's definition of Substance. "By Substance," he says, "I understand that which is in itself and is conceived

<sup>27</sup> Chandogya Upanishad 7:24. This wording is taken from the translation given in *Hindu Scriptures*, New York, Everyman's Library, E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., p. 183.

through itself; in other words, that, the conception of which does not need the conception of any other thing from which it must be formed.”<sup>28</sup> It is true that Spinoza, so far as his explicit language is concerned, is here defining Substance, not infinity. But since Substance is for him the “absolutely infinite,” which he carefully distinguishes from the kind of infinity attributed to space and time, this comes to the same thing as a definition of the infinite.

Since the infinity of God cannot be of the mathematical kind, it must be the infinite in the Upanishadic and Spinozistic sense. And since the infinite in this sense is “that outside which, and other than which, there is nothing,” it follows that there is nothing other than God. The world cannot be other than, or fall outside of, God. This is the source of the pantheism of the Upanishads as well as of Spinoza. It explains precisely the relation between mystical experience and pantheism which has been mentioned before only in vague terms. Of course it gives us only the monistic half of the pantheistic paradox, the identity of the world and God. This has to be supplemented in due course by the realization that this identity is not an empty tautological relation of words but is an identity in difference. But to see the identity of God and the world is the first step towards pantheism. It is what distinguishes pantheism from dualism and shows the latter to be an inadequate interpretation of the mystical consciousness. And the theologians were certainly right in perceiving that he who once takes this step must of necessity end in pantheism. We see therefore that pantheism is forced upon us by mysticism together with a proper understanding of the meaning of the notion of the infinite.

The theologians cannot avoid the force of this reasoning, unless they can suggest a meaning of the word “infinite” other than the two which we have given. But this they will find themselves unable to do. The only alternative left—apart from capitulating to the witless talk about a finite God—would be to admit that to call God infinite is either mere verbiage or an empty honorific. This indeed is what many writers, puzzled by the language of theologians who

<sup>28</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, Pt. I, Def. IV.

speak of God as infinite without having ever considered what they mean by the word, have come to think. For instance, Professor C. D. Broad has written: "I do not know how far the statements of theologians about the omniscience, omnipotence, and moral perfection of God are to be taken literally. It may be that this pushing of God's attributes to extremes is only intended as a compliment."<sup>29</sup>

I have been speaking so far in this section of pantheism as a theory of the relation between God and the world in general. It will be helpful at this point to turn our attention to the special aspect of pantheism which concerns the relation between God and the individual self during mystical union. We have seen that both the Christian and the Islamic mystics frequently speak of their inner experience as an experience of being identical with God. It is this which brings upon them accusations of monism or pantheism. I go on to ask whether one can find in their writings direct evidence, not merely of identity, but of identity in difference. Are there, that is to say, not merely pantheistic interpretations based upon their experiences, but actual pantheistic experiences? By a pantheistic experience I mean an experience of identity in difference between God and the world, or God and the soul. If there are such experiences, we should have powerful confirmation for our view that pantheism, not either dualism or monism, is the correct statement of mysticism.

I think we can find a good deal of such evidence. But in reading it we must bear in mind that we cannot as a rule expect from mystics a clear statement of the two sides of the pantheistic paradox, nor a statement which will give equal emphasis to both. As a rule, their supposed "heretical" utterances lean to the side of identity and make no mention of difference. This is what gets them into trouble. But it is what we ought to expect. For the difference between God and the finite self is what everybody already takes for granted as a matter of common sense which it requires neither a mystic nor a philosopher to explain. It is the identity which is the special discovery of the mystic. Hence he is apt to speak only of this, or at least to put it into

<sup>29</sup> C. D. Broad, *Religion, Philosophy, and Psychological Research*, New York, Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1953, p. 164.

the forefront of his message. With this warning we can proceed with the evidence.

I will quote again here a passage from Eckhart which I have already quoted in another context. He asks what happens to the soul which "has lost her proper self in the unity of the Divine Nature." The word "proper" here is used in the sense of "peculiar to oneself," or "individual"; so that the "proper self" means the self as a separate individual. This is "lost"—faded away in the fana experience—in the Divine Unity. What then happens to it? Eckhart writes:

Does she find herself or not? . . . God has left her one little point from which to get back to herself . . . and know herself creature.

The thought is oddly expressed. And of course we do not find the explicit language of identity in difference. But it is evident that the "one little point" is the point in which the "I" still remains its individual self even when "lost" in the Divine Unity. The word "lost" refers to the identity of God and the soul, while the "little point" is the element of difference.

Suso may also be quoted in the same sense. A passage which I have already quoted in another context may be quoted again:

In this merging of itself in God the spirit passes away and yet not wholly.

This bears surely the same meaning as Eckhart's sentences about the "little point," and may be taken therefore as evidence of identity in difference. But it is true that the very next sentence may seem to belie this. For Suso proceeds:

For it [the spirit] receives indeed some attributes of Godhead, but it does not become God by nature. . . . It is still a something which has been created out of nothing, and continues to be this everlastingly.

And certainly these latter sentences teach dualism. Yet it seems to me that a sensitive reading of the whole passage detects a difference of tone or of "feel" between the first sentence and the rest of the passage. The first sentence, it seems to me, is a direct report of Suso's

experience. He has *felt* the passing away of his spirit into the infinite, its merging, but yet "not wholly." The little point is left. But the rest of the passage reads to me as if he has in writing it left direct experience behind and is now speaking as the dutiful son of the Church interpreting his experience dualistically.

We are likely to get light on this matter, I believe, if we look at contemporary evidence of the experience of "melting away" and "merging" with the infinite, such as we find in cases like those of Tennyson and Koestler. As I have before observed they are psychology-conscious in a way in which the classical or medieval mystics were not. Their introspection is far more likely to be accurate and instructive to us even though they may lack in many respects the greatness of the old mystics. It will be remembered that according to Tennyson the loss of his individuality which was felt to "dissolve and fade away into boundless being" was for him "no extinction but the only true life." But what a paradox this is! I, Tennyson, find that when this individual Tennyson disappears, this is not the extinction of Tennyson, but is *his* only true life. The same thing is even clearer if we refer to the language which Koestler uses: The "I," he says, "ceases to exist because it has . . . been dissolved in the universal pool." But he goes on to say that when the "I" thus ceases to exist he experiences "the peace that passeth all understanding." Who experiences it? It can only be the "I," Arthur Koestler. I remain I, even when I have been absorbed and disappeared into the Infinite Being. Identity in difference is plainly expressed here. Inasmuch as I have been dissolved in the Infinite Being and have ceased to exist as myself, I have become identical with that being; but inasmuch as I still feel that I, Koestler or Tennyson, experience peace or blessedness, I still remain my individual self and am distinct from the Infinite Being. Do not these passages clearly throw light back upon the more obscure utterances of Eckhart and Suso? I do not see how it can be doubted that both they and these modern authors had the very same experiences of this fading away. But the older mystics expressed it in obscure and ambiguous language, the moderns more clearly and precisely. What has just been said of the passages from

Tennyson and Koestler may therefore be taken as applying to Eckhart and Suso. They too must have experienced this same identity in difference. If so, then pantheism is not a merely remote intellectual theory based upon experience, but a direct transcript of the experience itself. Of course even a direct description involves minimal or low-level interpretation, but not the high-level intellectual construction of a philosophical theory.

It only remains to consider why the theologians and the official hierarchies of the Western religions are so frightened of pantheism and hasten to cry heresy at the slightest sign of it, and to ask ourselves whether we cannot offer a reconciliation between the East and the West in this matter.

There seem to be three main causes for the theistic distrust of pantheism. First, theism stresses the notion of a personal God, whereas pantheism seems to Western thinkers to tend to an impersonal Absolute. It is of the essence of Christian worship—and the same, of course, is true of Judaism and Islam—that the worshiper addresses himself in prayer to God, and that he asks forgiveness, help, and grace. But can he pray to the world, or ask forgiveness and grace from the Absolute? Second, the objection is made that if, as pantheism alleges, the world with all that exists in it is divine, then the evil in it is divine too. Or, in an alternative version of the objection, if God is beyond all distinctions, then he must be beyond good and evil. In either case, moral distinctions seem to be blurred or regarded as illusory. Third, there is the feeling, strongly emphasized in all religions of Semitic origin, of the “awfulness” of God. This is brought out very clearly in Rudolf Otto’s conception of the “*Mysterium Tremendum*.” Man is as nothing before God, as dust and ashes. He is a sinful being, estranged from God, who in his natural and unredeemed state is fit only to “flee away before the face of the Lord.” This being so, it is preposterous, indeed blasphemous that he should claim union, in the sense of identity, with God. Between God and man, between God and the world, there is a great gulf fixed. I will take up these three points one by one.

First, as to the alleged opposition between the theist's conception of a personal God and the more impersonal conceptions of pantheism, we have previously shown<sup>30</sup> that just as mysticism leads to the paradox that God is both identical with, and distinct from, the world, so also it leads to the paradox that he is both personal and impersonal. The theistic religions tend to emphasize exclusively one side of the antinomy. Whether the pantheistic philosophy of the Vedanta includes an equally exclusive emphasis on the other side is not so clear. But even if it does, the reconciliation would lie in the acceptance of the paradox as a whole. God is both personal and impersonal and the personality is both identical with, and different from, the impersonality.

Next we must consider the objection that pantheism undermines moral distinctions. There is a sense in which it must be said that, if this is true of pantheism, it is just as true of dualism, or of any possible theory of the relation of God to the world; or at least that the problem which evil offers to all philosophies which include the conception of a good or righteous God is substantially the same. If you believe that a perfectly good and omnipotent being created the world, and if the world includes evil, then this perfect being must have created evil. That is the form in which the problem presents itself to the dualist. If you believe that the world is simply identical with God (monism) or identical and yet distinct (pantheism), then since there is evil in the world, there must be evil in God. These are merely two versions of the same problem.

Perhaps the theist may think that he can solve the problem, or that his theologians, Aquinas or some other, have done so; but that the pantheist cannot solve it. We must be pardoned if we suggest that this confidence is naïve. It is more probable that the problem is either insoluble by the human mind, or else that it is equally soluble whether one is a theist or a pantheist.

The problem may also take the form of pointing out that, apart from the question of God's relation to the world, if God, as he is in himself, is beyond all distinctions, as the mystics all aver, then he

<sup>30</sup> Chap. 3, sec. 5.

must be beyond good and evil, i.e., morally neutral instead of righteous as the normal religious consciousness requires. The substance of the sermon of Eckhart which is numbered 23 in Blakney's translation is summed up in the title "Distinctions are lost in God." And Ruysbroeck's view is the same. Indeed all this follows from the very conception of the introvertive mystical state as being beyond all multiplicity. And this is inconsistent with the belief in a God who is on the side of righteousness and against evil. But it must be pointed out that, if this is considered objectionable, it is an objection against mysticism as such and has nothing in particular to do with pantheism. But it helps to point up the truth that the problem of evil is universal to the religious consciousness and is no worse for pantheism than for any other religious philosophy.

There can, I think, be no doubt what Eckhart would have said, although I cannot recall any passage in which he actually said it. One has however only to apply his general principles. He would have made use of his distinction between the Godhead and God. It is in the Godhead that all distinctions are lost, and there is no doubt that this would include the distinction between good and evil. It is in this sense that God, or rather the Godhead, is "beyond good and evil." But just as in Eckhart's thinking there is no creative or other activity in the Godhead but there is in God, so also though the Godhead is neither righteous nor unrighteous, yet God is righteous, has no evil in him, and fights for righteousness. But as we have seen, Eckhart's complete separation between the Godhead and God cannot be accepted. Here again dualistic separation must give way to identity in difference, and in his deeper passages already quoted on page 175 Eckhart himself perceived this. Therefore, in the end we cannot get away from the paradox that God both contains evil and does not contain it.

However it might be well to try to explain here how—as it seems to the present writer—the mystic does in fact tend to feel about this problem as a practical matter. The majority of mystics, not being theoretical philosophers, seem simply not to have been troubled by the problem, nor by the apparent inconsistency of holding, as they

generally do, both that God is beyond all distinctions, and yet that he is righteous. Or the mystic, like other men, may take refuge in any or all of the familiar theological evasions—for instance, that evil is a privation of being and therefore does not really exist, or that the appearance of evil is due to our partial and finite vision and would disappear if we could see the universe as a whole, or that evil contributes to the good of the world in the same way that a part of a work of art which would be ugly if it were isolated contributes to the beauty of the whole picture.

But we can still ask what the mystic's practical attitude tends to be. The only hopeful suggestions that I know of have come to me, not from the published utterances of the world's famous mystics, but from a few hints dropped in conversation by one or two persons who have had mystical experiences. H. C. stated that the problem of evil finds in mystical experience no intellectual or logical solution, but the problem dissolves and ceases to exist. There *is* no intellectual solution. But a point of view is reached by the mystic in which he will achieve some sort of acceptance of evil while yet at the same time continuing to reject and fight against it. This is itself a paradox. P. D. said that his first mystical experience came to him when he was stunned with grief at the sudden death of a person whose love was at the centre of his life. In his mystical experience he found himself completely reconciled to his sorrow, all unhappiness gone, *although the sorrow did not cease to be sorrow*. Again the same paradox. N. M. said that his experience had given meaning to a life which had been meaningless for him previously. But when asked whether by finding a meaning in life he meant finding that life, or the world, has a purpose—in the usual teleological sense—he repudiated this suggestion, saying that things just *are* and have no purpose beyond themselves. Life and the world are seen to be “satisfactory” just as they are. “A man,” he added, “who is not content with what is simply does not know what is. That is all that pantheism means when it is not tricked out as a philosophical theory.” N. M. did not pretend that this was very intelligible, certainly not that it provided an intellectual solution of the problem.

But a new attitude had evidently entered his life, an attitude of complete and even joyful acceptance of whatever happens, including the evil and the pain, while at the same time not denying that evil is evil and pain is pain. Does not Job's famous cry, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him," breathe something of the same spirit? The problem has often been called a mystery. This is correct. But the word "mystery" must not be understood in its vulgar sense as something no doubt capable of rational explanation but not yet rationally explained. "Mystery" in the religious sense means that which totally transcends the possibility of intellectual understanding. In the case of evil, the only solution is the joyful acceptance of the mystery, which does not, however, include toleration of evil in the sense of failing to fight against it.

The third objection commonly charged against pantheism is that it must tend to abolish the sense of the "awfulness" of God, and of the nothingness of man in the presence of God, which is stressed in the theistic religions. A feeling for this, it is said, should prevent a man from claiming identity with God.

But on the theoretical side, it would seem that a sufficient answer to this is that it comes from that misunderstanding of pantheism which sees only one side of the paradox, viz., the identity of God and man. But pantheism also asserts the otherness of God to man and the world. If we wish to use the metaphor of a gulf between the two, we can do so, and we can make the gulf as wide as we like in our imaginations and still remain pantheists. If the theologian understands this, will he not give up his antagonism to pantheism?

And if the pantheist can thus, just as well as the dualist, believe in the gulf which separates him from God, so can he also nourish in himself the appropriate attitudes of wonder and awe, of estrangement and nothingness. It would indeed be an odd thing to suppose that a man cannot feel the wonder and terror and sublimity of the universe and its maker without admitting his allegiance to some particular kind of metaphysics or theological dogma.

## CHAPTER 5

### *Mysticism and Logic*

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#### 1. *The Mystical Paradoxes*

The entire body of the world's mystical literature warns us that there is, between mysticism and reason, some relation which is quite unique in the sense that no other body of thought or experience claims to stand in a like relation to reason. A common statement is that mysticism is above reason. In this phrase the word "above" is presumably a value word, used perhaps because the world of the mystic is thought to be divine and not merely earthly.

We shall consider the relation of mysticism to values on a later page. But in this chapter we are not concerned with this subject. We must therefore abstract from the "aboveness" of mysticism. What is above  $x$ , however, is certainly outside  $x$  in some sense. Presumably, therefore, the mystical experience is believed to be in some way outside the sphere of reason. This much certainly emerges from the world-wide literature on the subject. But this so far is very vague. And so far as I know there exists no clear theory of the actual relations between mysticism and reason. The literature on the subject is a chaos of conflicting suggestions, of which none has got beyond the status of being a suggestion. There exists no definite theory. It is the purpose of this chapter to examine these rival suggestions and to work out a theory.

First of all, we must decide in what sense the word "reason" is to

be understood. I shall understand by it the three well-known laws of logic. No doubt it may be said that this is a very narrow usage of the word. Ought not one to include inductive reasoning or even the whole sphere of conceptual thinking? The word "reason" may even be further widened to include whatever is considered "reasonable" in any sense. But the reasonable in this sense has little to do with logic and is to all intents and purposes a value term. Moderation in all things, the middle path, has often been considered more reasonable than extreme action of any kind. But moderation is not more *logical* than the extremes. It is only better in a value sense. The middle way is recommended as the *good* way.

I have to justify my narrow usage of the word "reason." In general the justification lies in the necessity of splitting things up and considering each part of the subject in turn. We shall come to these wider meanings of reason in due course. When the mystic says that his revelation is outside reason, he plainly does not mean that it is outside the sphere of the reasonable. No doubt he will urge that in the end the mystic life is the only reasonable one for a man to live. And this is better treated under the head of the relation between mysticism and ethics.

We have next to justify the further narrowing of the topic so as to exclude inductive reasoning and conceptual thinking in general. The general relation of mysticism to the intellect and its concepts will be better left to be discussed in the chapter on mysticism and language. It has been claimed that mystical experience is altogether unconceptualizable, and that it is for this reason that it is said to be "ineffable." It will be found that the discussion of this in the next chapter will bring up the whole subject of the intellect in its relation to mysticism. No doubt when the mystic says that his experience is "above" reason, he may mean *both* that it is outside the sphere of logic, and that it is beyond the reach of the understanding altogether; and no doubt the two statements are very closely connected, and may even imply each other. But we will consider them one by one and will take the narrower of the two first.

In the previous chapters of this book I have emphasized the es-

sential paradoxicality of the mystical consciousness. I need merely remind the reader of the pantheistic paradox that God and the world are both identical and nonidentical or distinct; of the positive-negative or plenum-vacuum paradox with its three aspects, that the One or the Universal Mind is both qualified and unqualified, both personal and impersonal, both static and dynamic; of the paradox of the dissolution of individuality wherein I cease to be individual and yet retain my individuality; of the paradox that he who reaches nirvana neither exists nor does not exist; and of the paradox of the extrovertive mystical experience that the objects of the senses are both many and one, both identical and distinct. These paradoxes have not been foisted upon mysticism by the present writer but have been discovered and fully documented by the study of the utterances of the mystics themselves. It may well be suggested however that, although no one who is acquainted with the subject doubts that the utterances of the mystics are *in some sense* paradoxical, the present writer has given an extreme interpretation to this fact by insisting that the paradoxes are flat logical contradictions; and that much less drastic interpretations can be given which will prove satisfactory hypotheses for the elucidation and explanation of the facts of the case. And I think it is quite true that taking mystical paradox to be the same as unvarnished contradiction is not a plain matter of indisputable fact but rather an interpretation which must be justified.

We will begin by considering what less drastic theories can be put forward and what is to be said for and against them. They are attempts to resolve, or get rid of, the contradictions. There are, I think, four such theories possible. They may be called (1) the theory of rhetorical paradox, (2) the theory of misdescription, (3) the theory of double location, and (4) the theory of double meaning, or ambiguity.

## 2. *The Theory of Rhetorical Paradox*

On this view the paradoxes are merely verbal and do not infect the thought or the experience. The same experiences could be de-

scribed and the same thoughts expressed without loss of content in nonparadoxical language. Paradox is an important rhetorical or literary device which a writer on any subject may quite legitimately use for the purposes of gaining emphasis, expressing thought content in a striking and dramatic way, forcing the reader to stop and think and to pay serious attention to thoughts which he might otherwise be inclined to slide over and leave only half understood. Literary or rhetorical paradox may also have positive esthetic value and poetic beauty. This last happens because paradox is apt to take the form of a rhythmic swing and balance of opposing clauses succeeding one another in the manner of strophe and antistrophe. Consider, for example, the following lines by T. S. Eliot:

In order to arrive at what you do not know  
You must go by a way which is the way of ignorance.  
In order to arrive at what you are not  
You must go through the way in which you are not.  
And what you do not know is the only thing you know.  
And what you own is what you do not own.  
And where you are is where you are not.<sup>1</sup>

Certainly paradox is here used by Eliot as an effective literary device. But even here one may well ask whether that is all. There are mystical overtones in the poetry of Eliot which seem to go beyond mere rhetoric.

But to return to the suggestion that the mystics use paradox either to enhance the beauty or poetry of their language or for the purpose previously mentioned of causing the reader to stop and think. There is no reason at all why the mystic should not take advantage of the resources of language to make his utterances effective. But I shall try to show that this theory is quite inadequate to account for the facts.

Let us consider a few examples.

In the Isa Upanishad we find this passage (which I have already quoted in part):

<sup>1</sup> T. S. Eliot, "East Coker," in *Four Quartets*, New York, Harcourt, Brace and Co.

That One, though never stirring, is swifter than thought . . .  
 Though standing still, it overtakes those who are running. . . .  
 It stirs and it stirs not.  
 It is far, and likewise near.  
 It is inside all this, and it is outside all this.<sup>2</sup>

There is no reason to doubt that the balance of clauses as in "it stirs, and it stirs not" was enjoyed and was intended to be enjoyed for its esthetic effect by the seer who was originally responsible for it. But was that all?

Or we might ask the same question regarding the passage from Lao-tzu which speaks of the Tao as follows:

When you look at it you cannot see it;  
 It is called formless.  
 When you listen to it you cannot hear it,  
 It is called soundless.  
 When you try to seize it, you cannot hold it;  
 It is called subtle. . . .  
 It is up, but it is not brightened;  
 It is down, but it is not obscured.  
 It stretches endlessly,  
 And no name is to be given. . . .  
 It returns to nothingness.  
 You face it, but you cannot see its front.  
 You follow it, but you cannot see its back.<sup>3</sup>

Is this only poetry and intriguing verbiage? Actually it is a poetic rendering of the vacuum-plenum paradox. "It" is formless, empty, and void; and yet "it" is the Great Tao, the fullness of reality. And the quotation from the Isa Upanishad is a poetical rendering of the static-dynamic aspect of the same paradox. And therefore to decide the question of whether the two passages quoted are mere rhetoric, what we have to do is to examine the thought content of that paradox *in itself* and apart from the poetical rendering here given and

<sup>2</sup> *Hindu Scriptures*, New York, Everyman's Library, E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1943, p. 207.

<sup>3</sup> This wording in translation is given by Suzuki, *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist*, New York, Harper & Brothers, 1957, pp. 18-19.

see whether paradoxicality inheres in it regardless of its particular verbal presentation. Is it such that contradiction is inherent in the thought and cannot be got rid of, whatever language we use to express it? Before discussing this there are two more lines of Eliot which I should like to quote. One is

The still point of the turning world.

And the other is

So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.

The first of these two lines gives us the picture of a stillness and silence at the centre of the world of flux. The second clause of the second line tells us that the static *is* the dynamic; the stillness *is* the dancing. The first clause of the second line says the same thing as Suso's phrase the "dazzling darkness." In other words, both lines are poetic expressions of the vacuum-plenum paradox. (It is unimportant to us whether Eliot was aware of this or not.)

We have previously had before us in earlier pages the most fundamental of all the assertions of the introvertive mystics, namely, that there exists a kind of consciousness which is void of all particular objects and empty of all content. The vacuum-plenum paradox is derived from this and is a description of it. Now it is impossible to account for this as merely a literary flourish. For in whatever words the description is expressed, whether in poetry or in prose, whether in metaphors or in abstract language, contradiction remains in the description and thought itself. The mind is emptied of all specific content of any kind, sensations, images, thoughts, concepts, propositions, reasonings, volitions. This is the vacuum. There is nothing left to be conscious *of*. And yet there emerges a pure consciousness, which is not a consciousness *of* anything. And the darkness of this empty consciousness is the light of a full consciousness—Suso's "dazzling obscurity." It may be alleged that at least one element of the natural consciousness is left, viz., emotion or affective tone. It may be love, or it may be a serene peacefulness. The mystic's answer would

plainly be that all natural attractions and repulsions which have attached themselves to the obliterated sensations, images, or thoughts have been obliterated along with them, and that an entirely new emotional element of blessedness has emerged as accompaniment of the pure consciousness. In all this what is described is self-contradictory, not merely the words which are used to describe it.

The same contradictory character of what is described appears even more clearly if we remind ourselves that it may be expressed in terms of unity and multiplicity. It is pure unity without multiplicity. But in our ordinary consciousness a one, a unity, or a whole must be a unity *of* many things—for instance, the table is a unity of legs, table top, and other parts. A pure unity by itself would be impossible. Is it not the same thing as a whole without any parts?

It is not necessary to go through the list of all the other paradoxes of the mystical consciousness to see that what has just been said of the vacuum-plenum paradox is true of them all. However we express the pantheistic paradox that the world is both identical with, and distinct from, the One, this assertion remains equally paradoxical and cannot be passed off as a literary device. And so with all the other paradoxes.

### 3. *The Theory of Misdescription*

Of course one can, on the ground of the contradictions, refuse to believe that the mystic has any such experience as he says he has. He is not suspected of telling an untruth, but he must be making a mistake. He may be unintentionally misdescribing his experience. He says that he experiences a total void which is yet a fullness, a light which is also darkness. But any such descriptions—like all descriptions of anything anywhere—include elements of interpretation. Just as it is impossible to obtain pure sense experience without interpretation, so it is impossible to obtain pure mystical experience. Any statements about it, even though apparently pure description, will include conceptual interpretations. And this might result in misde-

scription. If what the mystic experiences were described accurately and correctly, the contradictions might disappear. Let us consider this possible theory.

We may begin by enquiring in general what sort of evidence would convince us of the correctness of a description of anything by anybody, which, for some reason or other, we had suspected of being an unintentional misdescription.

Let us suppose that someone reports to us that at a certain place and time he had a visual experience which he describes as *X*. It appears to us that *X* is an impossible or very improbable experience for anyone to have. We suspect that what he really saw was *Y* but that he mistook it for *X*. By what means could we become convinced that our suspicion is mistaken and that he really did observe *X*, as he said? I assume that we are not in a position to verify the experience ourselves, and that we have to rely on testimony.

First, the *X*-experience would become a little more likely if we found that our man claimed that he had had an *X*-experience frequently, and not merely once; that he was thus quite familiar with it and was sure that he had described it correctly as *X*. Secondly, it would become very much more likely if we found that a great many persons claimed to have had an *X*-experience. The greater the number of witnesses who so described it, the more probable it would become that the description was correct. Thirdly, this probability would increase if we came to know that the evidence came from all over the world, and that witnesses in America, Europe, India, China, Japan, Arabia, Persia, etc., all agreed that they had an experience which was properly to be described as *X*, and not as *Y*. Finally, if there were a high degree of relative independence between groups of witnesses in various countries, so that the agreement of their descriptions could not be explained by supposing that they had carelessly copied from one another, or borrowed each other's descriptive language, or been infected by each other's mistakes, we should surely tend to be convinced that the *X*-description must be correct.

It is easy to see that these conditions of corroboration apply point by point to the descriptions of mystical experience. The description

of it as a pure consciousness which is empty of all content and is nevertheless a rich fullness is suspect because it is paradoxical. But this description of it is not based on the evidence of a single person who claims to have had the experience once. Vast numbers of persons have had the experience, and most of them, or many of them, have had it repeatedly over long periods of their lives. Next, the same paradoxical description of it comes from the main higher cultures all over the world. Finally, there is a great degree of independence between some groups of witnesses and others. One might expect that mystics within the European Christian culture would influence one another's language. Ruysbroeck may have tended to borrow descriptive phrases from Eckhart, St. John of the Cross from St. Teresa. And it is natural to think that the seers who gave the Upanishads to the world may have influenced one another. Their descriptive phrases may have tended to become traditional.

But how are we to explain it when Eckhart and Ruysbroeck agree in their descriptions with the Upanishads, since these two groups were independent of one another, had no contact, and had never even heard of one another. Yet the very language of the Mandukya Upanishad in describing the unitary consciousness is almost identical with the language in which Eckhart and Ruysbroeck describe the consciousness of the undifferentiated unity. And how can one explain by mutual influence the fact that the empty nothingness of pure consciousness as described by Christian mystics is identical in meaning with the Void of the Mahayana Buddhists. These are but two instances of the *independent* corroboration of the world's mystics by one another. The instances could be multiplied. But enough has been said to make clear what the case against the hypothesis of mistaken description is.

There is, however, a further point to be added. I have taken the paradox of the vacuum-plenum as my example. But the argument can be strengthened by pointing out that it applies equally well to the other great mystical paradoxes. For instance, the paradox of the dissolution of individuality, in which dissolution the "I" both disappears and persists, is reported in all ages and cultures by count-

less independent witnesses. So are the paradoxes of the personal-impersonal, and the static-dynamic characters of the Universal Self—though these, of course, are included as aspects of the paradox of the void. The paradox of the identity in difference of external objects in the extrovertive mystical experience is likewise described by independent witnesses in many cultures.

I conclude that the theory of misdescription must be rejected.

It is not to be contended, however, that the case against the theory amounts to a complete refutation of it. But it appears to be fair to say that, although the theory of misdescription remains a possible hypothesis which is always likely to find some adherents, the case against it seems strong enough to show with a high degree of probability that it is false, and that we ought to accept the basic descriptions of the experiences of the mystics as being true descriptions.

#### 4. *The Theory of Double Location*

To speak of one and the same thing as being simultaneously both square and circular is a contradiction. But the contradiction will be got rid of if we can point out that the predicate "square" and the predicate "circular" in reality attach to two different objects or to two different aspects of the same object. It is natural to suggest that the same procedure may be used to resolve the apparent contradictions of the mystical paradoxes. For instance, in the vacuum-plenum paradox, perhaps the two predicates, vacuity and fullness, instead of being simply located in one and the same object, may in reality be doubly located—one in one object and one in another. If so, the contradiction disappears.

What at first sight seems a strong argument in favor of this view is that the mystics themselves can often be quoted as favoring it. But a more careful examination dissipates the strength of this argument. The attempts of Eckhart and Sankara to place the void in one entity and the plenum in another have already been discussed in Chapter 3, Section 5. Eckhart put the void in the Godhead and the

fullness in God. Sankara located the void in the Higher Brahman, the fullness in the lower Brahman. We saw in the earlier section how and why these attempts failed. And it is not necessary to go into the matter in detail again. But we may remind the reader briefly of the main points. The mystics are driven by powerful inner impulses to utter paradoxes. These are not the product of thought or intellect, but rather of inspiration. But being themselves rational men who in their ordinary lives and in regard to their ordinary experiences use and apply the ordinary logical laws, they are likely to be puzzled and even astounded when these basically paradoxical experiences come upon them and break out from their lips in contradictory phrases. Their mysticism drives them to paradox, their logical natures to logical explanations. Hence they vacillate between the two. This is especially true of the West because in Western culture the scientific and logical side of human personality predominates over the mystical. But in the East the opposite is true; logic there tends to be weak and mysticism strong. Yet even in the East, the sense of the logical may in particular cases, such as that of Sankara, cause a mystical writer to appeal to the double-location hypothesis. And even in the West, an Eckhart, though adopting that hypothesis in some of his utterances, rejects it in others. Thus the mystics in the East and in the West can be quoted on both sides of the argument, and we have to use our own judgment and form our own interpretations. And I gave my reasons in the earlier section for insisting that this logical device cannot dissipate the inherent contradiction of the vacuum-plenum paradox. I will not repeat them here.

But whether this view is accepted or not in the particular case of that paradox, it is important to see that the double-location theory breaks down completely if we try to apply it to the other mystical paradoxes. It may on first sight seem at least plausible to suggest that the qualified, dynamic, and personal aspect of the mystical consciousness is to be located in the lower Brahman or God. But there is no way in which one can even begin to apply such a theory to the pantheistic paradox. The world is both identical with and distinct

from God. How can we divide the identity from the difference and place identity in God and difference in the world, or vice versa? For in this case what we have is not opposite attributes, but *relations* or *relational properties* which require two entities to be related. Identity means identity of *X* with *Y*, and difference means difference of *X* from *Y*. A relation cannot, like a quality, be located in one thing only. There is therefore no possibility of saying how the double-location hypothesis could even be stated in the case of the pantheistic paradox.

It is equally impossible to apply the theory to the paradox of the dissolution of individuality. The "I" both ceases to exist and continues to exist. It makes no sense to suggest that there are two individuals, one of whom ceases to exist while the other continues in existence.

### 5. *The Theory of Ambiguity*

In this theory it is suggested that the apparent contradictions are due to using one word in two different senses, so that when this is pointed out the contradiction disappears. To say that *X* is both *Y* and not-*Y* is on the face of it a contradiction. But it may be that the word "*Y*" has two meanings or senses, and that *X* is *Y* in one sense and not-*Y* in the other.

So far as I know no writer on mysticism has ever attempted to apply this solution to our paradoxes. None has suggested what different senses of what particular words will result in solutions of what particular paradoxes. If we wished to give this theory a fair chance, the only way would be to work out the details ourselves, and so to manufacture the ammunition for our would-be critic and opponent. But with the best will in the world I cannot do much to help him in this matter. The only possibility I can think of is the suggestion that the words "nothing" and "nothingness," used often as synonyms of the void in mystical literature, may be used in two senses, and that this might help in regard to the vacuum-plenum paradox. "Nothing" is used in the paradox in an absolute sense as

meaning the totally negative or nonexistent. But it may be that the nothingness which is experienced in the mystical consciousness is only relative. It means "nothing to the intellect"; i.e., it means that what is experienced cannot be understood by the conceptual intellect. But as experienced it is of course a positive experience. Thus when we have the proposition "the mystical consciousness is both something and nothing," there is no contradiction because it means that the mystical consciousness is "something" for experience but "nothing" for the intellect. We experience it but cannot conceptualize it.

Now the assertion that the mystical consciousness is totally impenetrable to the intellect or understanding is certainly put forward in the literature on the subject; and it may sometimes be expressed by using some such phrase as "nothing to the intellect." This will be discussed in the next chapter. But it may be said at once that, even if it is true that mystical experience can be correctly said to be nothing in relation to the intellect, yet it is not in this relative sense that the word "nothing" is used in the paradox. We can see this if we ask what the nothingness or void in the paradox is actually a description of. For the vacuum is reached by emptying consciousness of all content, of all sensations, images, thoughts, etc., so that there is no multiplicity. It is the absence of all objects and all entities, in other words total nonentity. Thus, although it may be true that there are two senses of "nothing" in mystical literature, the one absolute and the other relative, the relative sense does not make its appearance in the paradox, and so there is in it no ambiguity.

Thus this attempt to solve the vacuum-plenum paradox by the theory of ambiguity breaks down. And in the case of the other paradoxes I am unable to suggest how an attempt to apply the theory could even get started. How, for instance, could the pantheistic paradox be dissolved in this way? In the sentences "The world is identical with God" and "The world is distinct, i.e., nonidentical with God," about which one of the words used can it plausibly be suggested that it is being used in one sense in the first sentence and in another sense in the second? I see no foothold here for any

plausible answer to this question. And therefore the attempt to apply the theory cannot even get started. The same will be found to be true of the paradox of the dissolution of individuality. I cease to be this individual, and yet I remain this individual. To what word here can the double-meaning theory be applied?

In regard to the pantheistic paradox, someone may suggest that God and the world are identical in part, but distinct in part, like two circles which intersect each other. This is not exactly an example of one word being used in two senses, but it may as well be brought up at this point. The circles are the sort of sensuous picture or image which tends to intrude itself into our consciousness and to mislead us when certain theologians tell us that God is both immanent and transcendent. The picture is absurd because it implies spatial or temporal parts in God. But it is more to the point to observe that it is rejected by the mystical experience which is the source of pantheism. This is the experience that all things, blades of grass, stone, and wood, are One. The extrovertive mystic does not see the One as partly in the objects and partly out of them. He sees a paradoxical identity of opposites, as was shown in our study of that type of mysticism. "I had no doubt," says N. M., "that I had seen God, that is, had seen all there is to see; yet it turned out to be the world that I looked at every day." <sup>4</sup>

I have now discussed several theories all of which have it in common that they are attempts to show that there are no real paradoxes in the sense of logical contradictions in mysticism. They all break down. And as I am not aware of any other theory by which a critic might seek to show that the paradoxes are capable of rational solution, I have to conclude that they are in fact incapable of rational solution, and that the contradictions which they include are logically irresolvable.

After all, what else ought we to expect? The mystics of all countries and ages have always with one accord affirmed that their experiences were "above reason" or "outside reason." What did we

<sup>4</sup> P. 73.

imagine that they meant by these statements? Did we suppose that they did not really mean what they said, that they were exaggerating for the sake of effect, that this was mere talk not to be taken seriously? The discussions of this chapter have been no more than an attempt to show that they meant what they said, and that what they said is true. That their experience is beyond reason means simply that it is beyond logic. And we cannot reject this testimony unless we reject the whole of mysticism as a fraud. It is evident that all those who have mystical experience feel that there is some sense in which that experience is utterly unique, utterly unlike any common-sense kind of experience, completely incommensurable with the sense experience of the space-time world. He who reaches up to the mystical consciousness has reached a plane utterly outside and beyond the plane of everyday consciousness, not to be understood or judged by the standards or criteria of that plane. It is very clear that mystics feel this. But all attempts to show that the mystical paradoxes can be got rid of by some logical or linguistic device are just so many attempts to reduce mysticism to common sense, to take away its unique character, and reduce it to the level of our everyday experience. There is nothing wrong with common sense or with everyday experience. But we cannot have it both ways. We cannot both believe that the mystical consciousness is unique, different in kind from our ordinary consciousness, and yet at the same time that there is nothing in it which cannot be "reduced" to our ordinary consciousness.

## 6. *An Objection*

But a radical objection may be taken at this point. How, it may be asked, is it possible to discuss mysticism rationally and logically—as we are trying to do—if mysticism itself is full of contradictions? This book is supposed to be a logical analysis and examination of the utterances of the mystics. How can such a book make sense in the circumstances? Does not the admission or assertion that these utterances are logical paradoxes render our whole enterprise senseless?

One may remark in the first place that this objection is never raised against attempts to discuss rationally the paradoxes of Zeno, which have occupied the attention of philosophers for over two thousand years. Have all these discussions been senseless? The critic may reply that the object of such philosophical discussions has always been to show that Zeno's supposed paradoxes are not real logical contradictions and can be logically resolved. But the question what conclusion philosophers *hoped* to reach by their logical examination of the paradoxes—the question of their motivation—is irrelevant. If they had, by careful logical examination, been forced to the conclusion that Zeno was right in his belief that the experience of motion is self-contradictory, would this have made their careful logical examination less logical? Their conclusion would have been reached by logical discussion, and this discussion would not have been in any sense senseless.

But this reply—which is perhaps somewhat *ad hominem*—does not really clear up the puzzle. How, it may still be asked, can we conduct a logical discussion of professedly illogical and contradictory material, whether it be the paradoxes of mysticism or of Zeno? The answer seems to the present writer to be that each side of a paradox may be, if considered by itself, a logical and rational proposition. It will be capable of logical analysis and examination. It will also be possible to draw out from it any possible implications or entailments which are wrapped up in it. Both sides of the paradox can be taken up in turn and treated in this way. Of course we shall never by this procedure get away from paradox. The propositions, if any, which are entailed by "*A* is *B*" will contradict those, if any, which are entailed by "*A* is not *B*." But if the conclusion which we have to draw in the end is that some human experiences—whether the experience of motion or the experience of the One—are actually paradoxical and that logicity therefore is not part of the universal and final nature of the world, these seem to me to be intelligible and important truths which we ought to know. Moreover, this conclusion is itself a perfectly logical and rational one. The proposition "*X* is self-

contradictory and nonrational" is not itself a self-contradictory or nonrational proposition.

But some logician or some supposed expert in the theory of meaning will say that whoever asserts " $A$  is  $B$  and  $A$  is not  $B$ " is in fact saying nothing since the first half of the statement is canceled out by the second. He first asserts something and then takes back his assertion, with the result that no assertion is left. Hence the compound sentence " $A$  is  $B$  and  $A$  is not  $B$ " is meaningless, or senseless. I entirely repudiate this charge as being based upon an elementary logical blunder—notwithstanding the fact that certain contemporary philosophers apparently fall regularly into this mistake. The blunder consists in confusing questions of truth with questions of meaning. The correct doctrine is that the laws of logic are concerned with truth and have nothing whatsoever to do with meaning. What the law of contradiction asserts is that two propositions which contradict each other cannot both be simultaneously *true*. One must be true, the other false. Hence if we say, " $A$  is  $B$  and  $A$  is not  $B$ ," one of the two parts of this sentence will be true, the other false. Hence, in that area to which the laws of logic apply the compound sentence " $A$  is  $B$  and  $A$  is not  $B$ " is false. This conclusion *refutes* the view that the compound sentence is senseless in the technical sense of being meaningless. For to be meaningless means to be neither true nor false. Hence if the compound sentence is false, it is *ipso facto* shown to be meaningful.

Moreover, if " $A$  is  $B$ " is a meaningful statement, and if " $A$  is not  $B$ " is also meaningful, it is impossible that the connective "and" placed between them should render the conjunction of the two meaningful statements meaningless.

If we pose the sentence " $A$  is hairy and  $A$  is hairless," it cannot be alleged that " $A$  is hairy" means nothing. It professes to state a fact. The same is true of " $A$  is hairless." Thus the paradox asserts two factual statements. It says two things and therefore it cannot be said to "say nothing." We must not be misled by the metaphors of "canceling" and "taking back." The utterer of the paradox does not

take back the first half. He continues to assert it along with the second.

## 7. *Previous Recognitions of the Contradiction Theory*

The view that the mystical paradoxes are outright logical contradictions is no unsupported assertion or original discovery of our own but finds recognition—with varying degrees of clarity—in the writings of a number of previous commentators. A few examples—which do not pretend to be exhaustive—may be quoted here.

The reader may be reminded of Rudolf Otto's words quoted on page 65 in reference to the extrovertive experience in which all blades of grass, wood, and stone are one, namely that "black does not cease to be black nor white white. But black is white and white is black. The opposites coincide without ceasing to be what they are in themselves." And speaking of Eckhart's assertions that all distinctions disappear in the One, Otto writes:

This results in the peculiar logic of mysticism which discounts the two fundamental laws of natural logic, the laws of contradiction and excluded middle. As non-Euclidean geometry sets aside the axiom of parallels, so mystical logic disregards these two axioms; and thence the "coincidentia oppositorum," the "identity of opposites," and the "dialectic conception" arise.<sup>5</sup>

There are several things wrong with this passage. The analogy between mysticism and non-Euclidean geometry is false because the axiom of parallels is not self-evident as the laws of logic are. But more important, it is false—at any rate in my view—that mysticism has a peculiar logic of its own, governed by the principle of the identity of opposites. There exists in fact no such logic. There is only one kind of logic, namely the logic discussed by logicians. The position of mysticism in violating these laws is not another kind of logic, but is simply nonlogical. The idea that there is a superlogic, based on the identity of opposites, is due to the influence of Hegel. Hegel was quite right in his historical insight that the identity of opposites is implicit not only in mysticism but also in much of the

<sup>5</sup> Rudolf Otto, *Mysticism East and West*, New York, Meridian Books, Inc., 1957, p. 45.

supposed rationalistic philosophy of the past, notably the pantheism of Spinoza. But he made the disastrous error of mistaking this for a new kind of logical principle and trying to found his own super-logic upon it. This has already been explained in Chapter 4, Section 1.

The only merit of the passage from Otto is that he recognized the logical contradictions involved in the paradoxes of mysticism. But I have to point out that neither he nor apparently any other thinker on the subject has ever felt any urge to pursue the obvious challenge of the antilogicality of mysticism as regards its serious, and perhaps revolutionary, implications in regard especially to the status and foundations of logic. Otto remained content with the bogus solution of Hegel. But if that is rejected, the most serious problems are seen to face us. We are left apparently with a head-on collision between mysticism and logic. Does logic then destroy mysticism, or does mysticism destroy logic? Or is there a third solution possible which will enable us to be loyal to both?

Suzuki can also be quoted as a thinker who has recognized the true antilogical and contradictory character of mysticism. He speaks of "the problem of logical contradiction which when expressed in words characterizes all religious experiences."<sup>6</sup> And he writes further that:

When language is forced to be used for things of this world [the "transcendental world"] it becomes warped and assumes all kinds of crookedness: oxymora, paradoxes, contradictions, absurdities, oddities, ambiguities, and irrationalities. Language itself is not to be blamed for it. It is we ourselves who, ignorant of its proper functions, try to apply it to that for which it was never intended.<sup>7</sup>

Suzuki has also written of *prajna* (which may be translated as "mystical intuition") that:

Sometimes it asserts, sometimes it negates and declares that A is not-A and therefore it is A. This is the logic of *prajna* intuition.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Suzuki, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>8</sup> Charles A. Moore (ed.), *Essays in East-West Philosophy*, Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 1951, p. 43.

Like Otto, Suzuki makes the mistake of supposing that mysticism has a peculiar logic of its own. But our point is that he does recognize the contradictions.

Arthur Koestler, at the beginning of the chapter in which he recounts his own mystical experiences, wrote:

The reflections I have put down so far were all still on the rational level. . . . But as we proceed to others in an inward direction, they will become more embarrassing and more difficult to put into words. They will also *contradict* each other—for we are moving here through strata that are held together by the cement of *contradiction*. [*Italics mine.*] <sup>9</sup>

No doubt the idea of things being held together by contradiction as by a kind of cement is an odd metaphor. But that is of no importance. The important thing is that Koestler evidently feels the sense of contradiction in the words which he is forced to use to describe his experiences. It will be remembered that what he described is the dissolution of individuality, which we have seen to be one of the mystical paradoxes.

## 8. *Philosophical Implications of the Paradoxes*

What the paradoxes show is that, although the laws of logic are the laws of our everyday consciousness and experience, they have no application to mystical experience. And it is very easy to see why logic does not apply to it. For that experience is the One, an undifferentiated unity in which there is no multiplicity. Now it is obvious that there can be no logic in an experience in which there is no multiplicity. For what are the laws of logic? According to the most common contemporary opinion, they are only linguistic or semantic rules. I reject this opinion. I hold rather that they are the necessary rules for thinking of or dealing with a *multiplicity* of separate items. If there are many items *A, B, C, D, . . . , Z*, then we must keep each distinct from the others. *A* is *A* and is not *B*. The laws of logic are in fact simply the *definition* of the word "multiplicity." The essence

<sup>9</sup> Arthur Koestler, *The Invisible Writing*, New York, The Macmillan Company, 1954, p. 349.

of any multiplicity is that it consists of self-identical distinguishable items. But in the One there are no separate items to be kept distinct, and therefore logic has no meaning for it. For the same reason mathematical principles have no meaning for it, since there are no items in it to be numbered. It is for this reason that Eckhart says, "No one can strike his roots into eternity without being rid of the concept of number." Thus logic and mathematics are applicable to all those experiences, realms, or worlds where there is a plurality of existences. But they are not applicable to the undifferentiated unity of the mystic. The many is the sphere of logic, the One not so. For this reason, there is no clash between mysticism and logic. The logic and the illogic occupy different territories of experience.

The view that the many is the sphere of logic while the One is the sphere of paradox is likely to meet the following objection. If the paradoxes were confined to the undifferentiated unity, leaving the multiplicity strictly logical, then—it may be said—our solution might be acceptable. But this is not so. For mysticism asserts paradoxes about the world of multiplicity as well as about the One. For example, the pantheistic paradox asserts that the world, which is the multiplicity, is both identical with God and distinct from him. This plainly asserts the paradox about the multiplicity and not merely about the unity. And the extrovertive mystic asserts about the many "blades of grass, wood, and stone" the paradox that they are all one.

This objection arises because the separation between the multiplicity and the unity is an abstraction. There is a first stage of the introvertive experience in which the unity is experienced alone and the multiplicity is dismissed from consciousness. This is the standpoint of the Mandukya Upanishad, and most mystics never get beyond it. They pass into the distinctionless nirvana leaving distinctions behind in samsara. Nirvana is then paradoxical, samsara logical. But there is still the final distinction to be annulled, namely that between nirvana and samsara. Nirvana and samsara, God and the world are one, or rather are identical in their difference. This is the position of Madyamika Buddhism and also of Zen. In Christian mysticism it is apparently the stage called "deification," which was

attained by St. Teresa and some others. The life in this world and the life in the divine world are integrated in a single permanent union.

In the light of this, the world of flux, of nature, of space and time, in which alone the nonmystic lives, is seen as an abstraction. It contains only a half of the mystic's world. In it the many are not one, nor are distinctions annulled. Therefore in it the laws of logic enforce themselves. Therefore our solution that the many is the sphere of logic, the One the sphere of paradox, is correct. For when we say this, we are taking our stand in the world of the many and speaking from the point of view in which the many is separated from the One. And this is correct because it is only in this standpoint that the distinction between the logical and the nonlogical arises at all. And hence it is only here that either our problem or its solution has any meaning.

But although there is no clash between logic and mystical paradox, each occupying its own territory, yet the discovery that there is an area of experience to which logic does not apply has revolutionary implications for the theory of the status and foundations of logic, and therefore of mathematics also. The paradoxes in fact constitute no threat to logic itself because its principles are in no way affected. The three laws of logic remain what they have always been. Only their application is restricted. But the paradoxes do constitute a threat to certain views commonly held by contemporary philosophers about the nature of logic. These views do not belong to logic but to the philosophy of logic. It is for example a popular dogma among contemporary philosophers that no experience could ever conceivably contravene the laws of logic, and that these laws would be valid for any possible experience in any possible realm or world. It is this dogma which is now shown to be in error.

If we abandon it, several other common views about logic will have to be given up. For instance, we are told that the laws of logic "say nothing" or "tell us nothing about the world." Connected with this is the view that the laws of logic are only verbalisms or linguistic rules. But the existence of a nonlogical kind of experience

forces us to give up these opinions and to say rather that logical principles do tell us something about the world of our everyday experience because they are ways of expressing the nature of multiplicity—the nature of common experience as distinguished from mystical experience.

Logic applies only to *some* actual or possible worlds, not to all possible worlds as is usually supposed. And it is not enough to say that it applies to our everyday world, since it might apply to others as well. We should say rather that it will apply to any world in which there exists multiplicity. And multiplicity will exist wherever there is a principle of individuation by means of which one thing is separated from another. The most common principles of individuation known to us are space and time, so that logic is necessarily applicable to the space-time world, or what Kant called the phenomenal world. But there may be other principles of individuation which are unknown to us. Hence there may be other worlds which are inconceivable to us to which logic also applies. Plato's world of forms, if it were real, would also be a world to which logic applies. For it is a multiplicity of universals.

In our conception of a delimitation of areas of logic and nonlogic there remains perhaps one difficulty which should be explored. It is true that the experience of the introvertive mystic is undifferentiated and therefore it is an area of nonlogic. But the experience of the extrovertive mystic is spatially differentiated—even if it is nontemporal. Therefore it would seem that on our theory logic ought to apply to it. But the experience that all blades of grass, wood, and stone, etc., are one is a logical paradox and is the *fons et origo* of the whole pantheistic paradox. And this seems inconsistent with our theory.

My suggestion is that although in a sense the extrovertive mystic sees the same spatially differentiated world as we do, yet he may also be said to see *through* the space-time world to the unity, the One, which lies behind and beyond it. And this One is not differentiated. Indeed all mystics hold that the One of the extrovertive experience

is identical with the One of the introvertive experience. This is the meaning of the Indian identification of Atman and Brahman. "He who is the Self in man, and he who is the Self in the sun, are one," says the Taittiriya Upanishad.<sup>10</sup> And Eckhart never made any distinction between the One perceived by him in blades of grass, wood, and stones and the One experienced in the apex of the soul. If this is correct, we must distinguish the sensuous physical part of the extrovertive mystic's experience from the unity which is the only mystical part of it, and which is undifferentiated and therefore nonlogical.

The view which I have put forward in this section is in some respects similar to certain of Kant's theories. It will be remembered that the twelve categories which he enumerated were believed by him to be part of the structure of the human mind, which it consequently imposes on everything which it perceives, but which are not present in the "thing-in-itself." Our theory is neutral as regards Kant's idealistic view of experience. It may quite as well be realistically construed. Also the unknowable thing-in-itself does not enter into our theory. But our theory and that of Kant are alike in one very important respect. Both imply the view that logic is restricted in its application and that there is an area of reality to which it does not apply. For Kant's theory that the categories do not apply to the thing-in-itself certainly entails that the laws of logic do not apply to it. For the principles of logic coincide with *some* of Kant's categories. For his categories of quantity, namely, unity, plurality, and totality, simply express the nature of any multiplicity, and are therefore in our view equivalent to the laws of logic. It is possible that the same should be said of two other categories, namely, negation and limitation. The other seven categories have no special importance in our theory.

It is perhaps important to observe that this discussion of the nature of logic is entirely independent of the question of the objectivity,

<sup>10</sup> *The Upanishads*, trans. by Swami Prabhavananda and Frederick Manchester, New York, Mentor Book MD 194, New American Library of World Literature, 1957, p. 57. (Originally published by the Vedanta Press, Hollywood, Calif. Copyrighted by the Vedanta Society of Southern California.)

subjectivity, or transsubjectivity, of mystical experience. It follows that our results regarding the nature of logic will be valid *even if it is held that mystical experience is hallucinatory*. For the laws of logic apply to any experience of a multiplicity, whether the experience is objective or not. They apply to the worlds of dream and hallucination. A dream is a multiplicity of dream-objects. Therefore dream-object *A* is dream-object *A* and is different from dream-object *B*. Likewise if the mystical experience were written off as an hallucination, it would still be an undifferentiated experience to which logic would not apply. It would thus be an area of human experience which would refute the view that no experience could ever contravene the laws of logic. The rest of our conclusions about logic would follow automatically.

These considerations were suggested to me by certain important passages in Hume's *Treatise*. Hume pointed out that it is impossible to *imagine* a self-contradictory state of affairs. One cannot form a mental image of a head which is both hairy and hairless. This means that the laws of logic apply to the world of the imagination, the reason being of course that that world is a multiplicity of images. What Hume says about images is equally true of dreams and hallucinations. It would be impossible to see a round square in a dream, although one might mistakenly think that one had dreamed of one.

There may be some temptation for the philosopher who is sceptical of mysticism to try to use its contradictory character to prove that the experience is subjective. This is what Zeno did in regard to motion. He argued that since the assertion of motion leads to contradictions, our experience of it is illusion. It is important to point out that any such argument, whether as used by Zeno or the critic of mysticism, is entirely fallacious. For, as Hume showed, a contradictory illusion or hallucination is something which cannot exist in the mind at all. From the view that mystical experience is contradictory what follows is that *either* it is an area of experience in which logic does not hold *or* that no such contradictory experience exists at all. The alternative that it exists as an experience but is subjective is ruled out by Hume's principle. And if Zeno really proved that motion involves contradiction, what follows is *either* that logic

has no application to it *or* that we do not even have the experience of perceiving motion. The alternative that we do experience it but that it is subjective is ruled out. For our purposes the importance of this conclusion is that if the paradoxical character of mystical experience is once admitted we are compelled also to admit the view of logic here put forward, namely, that logic does not apply to *all* experience—the only alternative being to deny that the experience is paradoxical.

## CHAPTER 6

### *Mysticism and Language*

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#### 1. *The Problem Stated*

One of the best-known facts about mystics is that they feel that language is inadequate, or even wholly useless, as a means of communicating their experiences or their insights to others. They say that what they experience is unutterable or ineffable. They use language but then declare that the words they have used do not say what they want to say, and that all words as such are inherently incapable of doing so. According to the Mandukya Upanishad the unitary consciousness is "beyond all expression." According to Plotinus, "the vision baffles telling." In a passage which I shall quote more at length later, Eckhart says that "the prophets walking in the light . . . sometimes were moved to . . . speak of things they know . . . thinking to teach us to know God. Whereupon they would fall dumb, becoming tongue-tied. . . . The mystery they found there was ineffable." And modern Europeans and Americans who report having had mystical experiences feel the difficulty just as much as do the ancient or classical mystics. R. M. Bucke says that his experience was "impossible to describe." Tennyson says that his was "utterly beyond words." J. A. Symonds states that he "was not able to describe his experience to himself" and that he "could not find words to render it intelligible." Arthur Koestler says of his experience that "it was meaningful though not in verbal terms," and of his own at-

tempts to describe it that "to communicate what is incommunicable by its nature one must somehow put it into words, and so one moves in a vicious circle." Probably hundreds of similar statements could be collected from all over the world.

On account of these facts, James and other writers have listed "ineffability" as one of the common characteristics of mysticism everywhere and in all cultures. But this word "ineffability" is only the name of a problem, not something the meaning of which we understand at once. The problem which we have to face can be put in a number of interconnected questions. What is this difficulty about the use of language which the mystic feels? *Why* can he not express himself in words? And how is it that, if he cannot describe what he experiences, he nevertheless does write and speak about it often with great eloquence and force? What are his words actually describing if they are not describing his experiences and insights? How do his words function?

## 2. *Alleged Scientific Revelations*

As a rule mystics claim the introvertive experience of the One, or the extrovertive experience of the oneness of external objects, or both. They generally confine their claims to these two kinds of experience. But it occasionally happens that a mystic will allege that he also has had mystical revelations of the truth of propositions in science or general knowledge, which would ordinarily be considered as lying wholly outside the territory of mysticism. And in such cases these mystics usually profess themselves as entirely unable to tell anyone what the truths were of which they received mystical knowledge. They may give one reason or another why they cannot tell us. Or they may give no reason at all. But it is desirable to discuss these cases here and to come to terms with them. We shall find every reason to regret that such claims have ever been put forward, and to exclude them from our further consideration of mysticism.

St. Francis Xavier wrote as follows;

It seemed to me that a veil was raised before the eyes of my spirit, and the truth of the human sciences, even those which I had never studied, became manifest to me in an infused intuition. This state of intuition lasted about twenty-four hours; then, as if the veil had fallen again, *I found myself as ignorant as before.* [Italics mine.] <sup>1</sup>

Evidently St. Francis, after "the veil had fallen," found himself unable to describe or explain the knowledge which he had learned and forgotten. The passage has every mark of irresponsible utterance. What particular sciences were included in his revelation? Which of their propositions were seen to be true? Or does it mean that he came to know all the truths of all the sciences in detail? It is one thing to have a revelation of the goodness of God, and quite another to claim that the truths of astronomy, biology, or chemistry have been revealed during a mystical experience and then forgotten. That something of this sort was meant may perhaps appear more likely if we compare St. Francis Xavier's statement with another rather similar case. It is related of Herman Joseph that:

God . . . showed him the firmament and the stars and made him understand their quality and quantity. . . . When he returned to himself he was not able to explain anything to us. He said simply that his knowledge of creation had been so perfect and so intoxicating that no tongue could express it.<sup>2</sup>

The meaning of this passage at any rate is clear. Herman Joseph was claiming an ineffable knowledge of astronomy. It is essential to observe that the physical sciences consist entirely of propositions, and that propositions are logical structures which as such must be capable of verbal expression. A *proposition* cannot be ineffable; it is already actually or potentially a verbal structure. Genuine claims to mystical ineffability are quite different. What is said to be ineffable is a concrete *experience* which no proposition can describe. Assertions that scientific truths are revealed in mystical trances and then

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by J. B. Pratt, *The Religious Consciousness*, New York, The Macmillan Company, pp. 407-408.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 408.

forgotten should be dismissed as delusions. We need not of course question the truthfulness and honesty of such persons. But their unacceptable claims are probably explicable in ways which do not impugn their honesty. J. B. Pratt quotes Professor Leuba as saying that "we sometimes awake from a dream feeling that in it we have solved some difficult problem but cannot remember the solution." The present writer remembers an occasion on which, in a conversation with a friend after a dinner which had included a handsome supply of wine, he perceived as in a flash of revelation, and communicated to his friend, the truth as to "what Plato really meant"; but in the morning he was quite unable to remember even the smallest item of what the revelation had been. Professor Pratt also mentions the psychological feeling of intense conviction with a minimum of intellectual content. And William James noted the possibility that a man may "sweat with conviction" without having any idea as to what it is that he is convinced of. It seems probable that claims to mystical revelations of astronomical or other scientific truths of which the mystic can subsequently give no account are delusions which are in principle capable of psychological explanation. One must add that such claims are fortunately quite rare. The vast majority of mystics do not make them.

### 3. *Common-sense Theories*

An examination of the major documents of the world's mystical literature will leave any sensitive reader in no doubt that the alleged ineffability of mystical experience cannot be explained by any of the psychological principles which apply to our common everyday consciousness. The mystics believe that their special kind of consciousness does not differ merely relatively and in degree, but rather absolutely and in kind, from the common consciousness. And as they alone are in possession of both kinds, they alone are in a position to know. It is not indeed impossible that they may be mistaken about their own experiences; but it is more likely that the mistake lies with those who would explain away those experiences because they are

unable to believe that anything exists which they cannot themselves see or comprehend. If then the mystics are right, their special kind of consciousness is such that it cannot in any way be understood in terms of the common consciousness or its categories, because they have nothing in common except the fact of being consciousness. The difficulty with language is therefore probably a function of the difference between the two kinds of consciousness. It is probably not due to any of the causes which sometimes make some of our everyday feelings or experiences difficult to put in words. And it cannot be explained in terms of ordinary psychology.

But here as always the commonplace man with his lack of imagination, his inability to believe in anything beyond the range of his own experience, will try his best to drag the mystical down to his own level. Just as he tries by every possible logical trick and device to reduce the mystical paradoxes to the level of commonplaces, so here he will endeavour to explain away the mystic's difficulty with language by reducing it to some common and well-known kind of difficulty with words such as everyone can experience and understand. The result may be a number of commonsense theories of which two examples may be given here. Probably many more are possible.

(a) *The Emotion Theory.* Emotions are more shadowy and elusive, less sharply outlined, than the conceptual structures of thought when these latter are clear and distinct. Hence words tend to fit emotions rather poorly. But over and above this, there is another fact about emotions which is relevant here. The deeper our emotions are, the more difficult they are to express. Tennyson spoke of "thoughts which do often lie too deep for tears." Perhaps he meant feelings rather than thoughts in the narrow sense of conceptual ideas. And no doubt if they were too deep for tears they would be too deep for words. Of our surface feelings we talk freely. But when the depths of human personality are stirred, we fall silent. The emotion theory of mystical ineffability merely extends these psychological generalizations to cover the case of mystical consciousness. Ineffability, then, becomes a matter of degree. The experience of falling in love—at any rate for the first

time—may render the lover speechless. The mystic experiences profound blessedness and joy, sometimes ecstasy and rapture. There may also be feelings of awe and reverence for what is sacred and holy in his experience. The depth of his emotions accounts for his difficulties with words.

It is not necessary to contend that there is no truth whatever in this theory. That the mystic experiences emotions which are "too deep for words" is no doubt a fact and may add to his troubles with language. But it is my contention that this theory taken by itself is quite insufficient to bear the weight of explaining mystical ineffability.

We observe in the first place that mystical experience is not mere emotion, nor even chiefly emotion. Its basic element is more like a perception, though "perception" too, the mystic will feel, is not the right word. The perceptionlike basis of the experience is the apprehension of the undifferentiated unity. And the affective tone which this carries is, in the greatest mystics, quiet and serene rather than very emotional. Mystics range all the way from the hyperemotional kind, such as St. Teresa and Suso, to the calm and serene kind like Eckhart and the Buddha. Eckhart, it will be remembered, tells us that "reasonable satisfaction is a purely spiritual process in which the highest summit of the soul remains unmoved by ecstasy" and that "these emotional storms of our physical nature no longer shake the summit of the soul." Yet both Eckhart and the Buddha find the mystical consciousness ineffable. In the case of Buddhism the mystical consciousness is called nirvana, and this is invariably represented as beyond expression. These considerations show that the emotion theory relies on overemphasizing the role of emotion in the mystical consciousness and paying no attention, or too little attention, to its other aspects.

But this is not the main point I would make against the theory. The most important thing to emphasize is that the whole weight of the mystical tradition is against the theory and supports the view that there is some logical difficulty, and not merely an emotional difficulty, which interferes with the mystic's free expression of his

vision in words. It is the vision itself, not merely its accompanying emotions, which is said to be inexpressible. It is, of course, difficult to document or prove in a paragraph or so any statement about "the whole weight of the mystical tradition." But in one sense the whole of this book is a documentation of it—or at least of the basic incommensurability of the mystical consciousness with the common consciousness, the impossibility of reducing the first to the second, which is at the root of the mystic's difficulty with language. For the rest, one can only assert at the risk of appearing dogmatic that he who is satisfied with the emotion theory and feels nothing in himself with which it jars must either be comparatively ignorant of the writings of the mystics, or—if he is well acquainted with them—must be lacking in insight and sensitivity.

(b) *The Spiritual Blindness Theory*. It has been said that the impossibility of communicating a mystical experience to one who has not had such an experience is like the impossibility of communicating the nature of colour to a man born blind. The nonmystic is spiritually blind. This is the reason why the spiritually seeing man, the mystic, cannot communicate what he has experienced to the nonmystic. This is the cause of ineffability.

There are two fatal objections to this theory. Firstly, the fact that the idea of a colour cannot be verbally communicated to a person who has never seen one is only a particular case of the general principle of empiricism as enunciated by Hume. It is impossible to "frame an idea" of any simple impression or quality unless one has first had experience of it. The principle applies, of course, not only to colour but to any kind of experience whatever, sensory or nonsensory. It therefore no doubt applies to mystical experience. But the very fact that it applies equally to every kind of experience renders it useless for explaining the ineffability of mystical experience. For if this is all that ineffability means, then all kinds of experience—colours, smells, tastes, sounds—will be ineffable in the same way. But the ineffability of mystical experience is plainly understood by those who speak of it to be a unique characteristic possessed only by that kind of experience and not shared with other kinds. Otherwise there

would be no point at all in stating that mystical experience is ineffable. No one says that colour experiences are ineffable merely because words cannot communicate them to a blind man.

The second objection to this theory is that it puts the difficulty of the word barrier on the wrong side of the speaker-hearer relation. If a seeing man says to a blind man "it is red," the seeing man has no difficulty in uttering this. Nor is there anything wrong with the description. It may be perfectly accurate. The experience of seeing red is in no sense indescribable. The difficulty of understanding what the description means lies on the side of the blind hearer. But in the case of the mystical experience, it is the mystic who experiences the word barrier. It is he who says that the experience is unutterable and indescribable. No doubt the nonmystic hearer may also experience difficulty. He cannot "frame the idea" which the mystic is trying to communicate. And the theory which we are discussing does explain *his* difficulty. But this is not the difficulty which the theory sets out to explain, namely, the unutterability which the mystic says he feels. Look again at what J. A. Symonds writes. He disliked the experience partly because, he says, "I could not describe it *to myself*. I cannot even now find words *to render it intelligible*" (my italics). It is the unintelligibility of the experience, the impossibility of understanding it, which renders it ineffable. This puts us, I am sure, on the right track. Ineffability is caused by some radical defect or incapacity of the human understanding or intellect. We have now to follow this clue.

#### 4. *The View That Mystical or Religious Language Is Symbolic*

The mystics constantly reiterate the statement that their experiences are "beyond the understanding," "beyond the intellect," "beyond reason." "Subtler than the subtlest is this Self, and beyond all logic. . . . The awakening which thou hast known does not come through the intellect," says the Katha Upanishad.<sup>3</sup> "This Self,"

<sup>3</sup> *The Upanishads*, trans. by Swami Prabhavananda and Frederick Manchester, New York, Mentor Book MD 194, New American Library of World Literature, 1957, p. 17.

of course, is the Universal Self, the One, which is known in the mystical experience. "Such enlightened men," says Ruysbroeck, "are . . . lifted above reason."<sup>4</sup> "When is a man above mere understanding?" asks Eckhart, and replies, "When he sees all in all, then a man stands above mere understanding."<sup>5</sup> "Reason is in abeyance; and intellection," writes Plotinus.<sup>6</sup>

What are the meanings of the words "understanding," "intellect," "reason," "logic"; and what relations do these bear to one another? As the words come to us in the mystical literature, there is, I think, no difference between "understanding" and "intellect." They refer to the capacity of the mind to use abstract concepts. They mean what Kant called "the faculty of concepts." There does not appear to be any clear distinction in the literature between intellect and reason, nor between reason and logic. Perhaps the four terms may sometimes be distinguished from one another. But in general all four words may be taken as importing one or another aspect of the mind's use of concepts.

The theories which we are to examine in this section seek to explain ineffability as being due to an incapacity of the understanding or intellect to deal with mystical experience. The usual account of the matter asserts that mystical experience is inherently incapable of being conceptualized. It can be directly experienced, this theory states, but it cannot be abstracted into concepts. But since every word in language, except proper names, stands for a concept, it follows that where no concepts are possible no words are possible. Therefore mystical experiences being unconceptualizable are also unverbalizable. For this reason ineffability is not a matter of degree, as for example the emotion theory supposes, but is absolute and ineradicable. Such is the common theory.

The theory should explain why mystical experience is unconceptualizable. In the case of introvertive experience, the reason might

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<sup>4</sup> P. 95 above.

<sup>5</sup> P. 64 above.

<sup>6</sup> Plotinus, *Works*, trans. by Stephen MacKenna, New York, New York Medici Society, Enneads VI, IX, and XI.

be that it is an undifferentiated unity, empty of all empirical content, formless and void. There are in it no distinguishable items. But concepts depend on there being a multiplicity of distinguishable items. The mind notes resemblances and differences between them and arranges those which resemble each other in certain ways into the same class. The idea of the class is the concept. Hence where there is no multiplicity there can be no concept and therefore no words.

This view must presumably be adapted to meet the case of the extrovertive type of experience. The difficulty is that in this kind of experience the sensuous manifold has not been eliminated. Perhaps one should say that, although the multiplicity of sense objects is there, yet the Oneness which is experienced as shining through from beyond or behind them contains in itself no multiplicity and hence is inapprehensible by concepts. The experience is, as it were, a mixture. One part is physical and sensuous, and to this of course concepts apply. It is wood, stone, grass, etc. This is not in itself mystical at all. The other part is the One. This alone is the mystical element, and this is unconceptualizable.

The general principle of the theory, the unconceptualizability of the experiences, has the important backing of Plotinus, Dionysius the Areopagite, and Eckhart. Indeed, almost the whole of the history of Western mysticism is behind it. Thus Plotinus declares:

Our apprehension of the One does not partake of the nature of either understanding or abstract thought as does knowledge of other intelligible objects, but has the character of presentation higher than understanding. For understanding proceeds by concepts, and the concept is a multiple affair and the soul misses the One when she falls into number and plurality. She must then pass beyond understanding.<sup>7</sup>

The essential point is here clearly made that concepts depend on multiplicity and can therefore find no foothold in an experience which is wholly unitary.

Passing over Dionysius for the moment to return to him later, we

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, *Ennead VI. 9.*

may note that Eckhart, writing much more vaguely than Plotinus, nevertheless supports the same view. He says:

The prophets walking in the light . . . sometimes were moved to return to the world and speak of things they knew . . . thinking to teach us to know God. Whereupon they would fall dumb, becoming tongue-tied for three reasons.

First, because the good they knew by sight in God was too immense and too mysterious to take definite shape in the understanding. . . .

Another reason was that what they had gotten in God rivalled God's very self in its immensity and sublimity and yielded no idea nor any form for them to express.

Third, they were dumb because the hidden truth they saw in God, the mystery they found there, was ineffable.<sup>8</sup>

This passage is very muddled. Since the second alleged reason does little more than repeat the first, the three reasons are for all practical purposes reduced to two. The first is the immensity and sublimity of the experience. But if immensity and sublimity were put forward as the only causes of ineffability, this would tend to encourage the view that the alleged ineffability is an exaggeration intended to express the emotions of the experiencer. Immensity is just as easily expressible as minuteness. A billion miles is as easily expressed in words as an inch. The sublime, in so far as that differs from the immense, may take one's breath away so that one cannot talk, or may seem, as the phrase goes, "too wonderful for words"—but is not in any strict sense incapable of being described by language. To find the appropriate language for the sublime is one of the special tasks of the poet, and the fact that nonpoets cannot do it does not make it ineffable. But if we look again at Eckhart's sentences, we see that a deeper thought emerges. He tells us that the vision cannot "take definite shape in the understanding" and yields "no idea or any form for them to express." It is the formlessness, the lack of any definite shape, which is here said to make the experience ineffable. Since the experience is the empty void, without specifiable con-

<sup>8</sup> F. Pfeifer, *Meister Eckhart*, trans. by C. de B. Evans, pp. 236 and 237.

tent, there are no definite forms on which the concept can fix. The formless is the same as the empty or void. It is "not this, not that." And since every concept or word stands for a this as distinguished from a that, no concepts or words are possible. Thus Eckhart also supports the theory of unconceptualizability.

This theory of ineffability may or may not be acceptable. We are at present engaged in exposition and not in criticism. But even if we leave criticism till later in order to examine the full implications of the theory, nevertheless we see at once that it leads to an apparent impasse. The mystic does in fact use language which at least has the appearance of being descriptive of the experience. He tells us, however, that his words do not in fact describe it even partially. It is not that the description is not adequate. It is that the experience is totally indescribable and that therefore his words are not really descriptive. The problem that then arises in an acute form is, *How do the words of the mystic in fact function?* And on this question there have been on the whole two views which we may call respectively the Dionysian theory and the theory of metaphors.

(a) *The Dionysian Theory.* The unknown author who misnamed himself "the Areopagite," thereby implying that he was an associate of St. Paul, is believed actually to have lived in the fifth century A.D. We shall call him simply Dionysius. He taught in an extreme form the view that no words apply to the mystical experience, or to God. He writes of the Divine:

It is not soul, or mind. . . . It is not order or greatness or littleness. . . . It is not immoveable nor in motion nor at rest, and has no power, and is not power or light, and does not live and is not life . . . nor is it one, nor is it Godhead or goodness . . . nor does it belong to the category of nonexistence or to that of existence . . . nor can any affirmation or negation apply to it.<sup>9</sup>

Theorists of ineffability usually take refuge in negatives. They teach that positive words cannot be applied to the Supreme, but seem to think that negative words can. Thus the Upanishad speaks

<sup>9</sup> Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Divine Names and Mystical Theology*, trans. by C. E. Rolt, New York, The Macmillan Company, 1920, Chap. 5.

of it as "breathless, soundless, odorless, colourless, mindless," etc., or simply as "not this, not that." But "colourless," "mindless," "actionless," etc., are as much words as are their opposites, and therefore they stand for concepts. Moreover, there is no such thing as a pure negative. "Dead" is a positive term, and we do not avoid it by calling it "nonliving." Rest is as much a positive concept as motion. That all negation is determination is as true as that all determination is negation. Dionysius understands this, as is shown by the last sentence of the quotation just given—"nor can any affirmation or *negation* apply to it." Strictly speaking, this leads to an infinite regress. The Upanishad says that the Supreme is "not this, not that"; but should have added, "not 'not this not that,'" and then, "not 'not 'not this not that,''" etc.

But Dionysius realizes that we then have the problem posed by the fact that words are nevertheless used of the Supreme, including the words in which he denies the applicability of words, the problem being, How then do the words function? He tries to solve this problem in his book *The Divine Names*, and he deserves great credit—and should endear himself especially to philosophers of the present day—as being one of the earliest, if not the first, among philosophers to discuss the problem of linguistics as applied to religious language.

His theory is far from clear, but its general tenor is that God in himself transcends all predicates, even "One" or "good" or "love," but that the attributes we predicate of him are really predicates of his manifestations or "emanations" which we apply to him symbolically. In general terms, "the manifestations of God" means the world of finite things, including finite souls. For instance, we call him "One" and "Unity" because by him we are unified, i.e., our faculties are unified, and we ourselves enter into union with him in mystical illumination. We call him "wise" and "fair" because all things in the world are beautiful, unless corrupted. God is the cause of the world, although not in the temporal sense of the word "cause" according to which a cause precedes its effect in time. We call God good because he is the cause of good things. We call him existent because he is the cause of existent things. Deity, says Dionysius,

"is the cause of all things, and yet Itself is nothing because It super-essentially transcends them all."<sup>10</sup>

Dionysius seeks to express God's transcendence of all words by the continual use of the word "super," or "supra." God is neither existent nor nonexistent but he is superexistent. He is not one or unity, but super-one or superunity; not excellent, but supraexcellent, not even divine but supradivine. But "superexistent" is after all a word, so that if God is above all words he should be called supersuperexcellent, and so *ad infinitum*.

We may briefly bring out the objections to the theory.

1. What is the justification for calling God the cause of all things? If the word "cause" is literally meant, the theory contradicts itself since "cause" must be just as inapplicable to God as any other word. But if "cause" is like other words, i.e., if it applies to the manifestations of God and not to God himself, then when it is used of God it must mean that God is the cause of the causality which appears in the world. But then he cannot himself be the cause of causality but only the cause of the cause causality. And so *ad infinitum*.

2. If *X* is the cause of *Y*, and if *Y* has a certain quality *q*, this affords no justification for calling *X* *q*, even symbolically. For instance, it would make no sense to apply the word "liquid" to a fire because fire causes liquidity in a piece of wax. Nor would it render such a usage more sensible to say that fire was only being called liquid symbolically.

3. The theory of Dionysius makes God's ineffability *absolutely* ineffable. If we do this, we can never justify the use of any language whether the words are positive or negative, whether they are used literally or symbolically. *The theory of symbolic language does not help* Dionysius. No word whatever ought to be used. We ought not to call the mystical experience an "experience," nor "mystical" nor "ineffable." We should not say that "it" is not this, not that, because the word "it" does not apply. In short, it would be unknowable to us not merely in that relative sense in which, for example, Herbert Spencer—whether sensibly or not—spoke of an unknowable *power*.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, Chap. I.5.

This unknowability would be only relative because it implies that we do know something about it, for instance that it exists and is a power, but that its other characteristics are quite beyond our grasp. Absolute ineffability, as posited by Dionysius, would mean that the something called ineffable would be outside our consciousness altogether in the sense in which God is presumably outside the consciousness of a dog. It may plausibly be supposed that God is *absolutely* unknowable to a dog. A dog could not think "God is unknowable to me." Only a being conscious of God, or at least conscious of some meaning which he attributes to the word "God," could say "God is unknowable to me."

If ineffability were absolute in the way the theory of Dionysius implies, then not only should we say that he ought not to have written his book, but we should have to say that it would have been impossible for him to have done so, because the entire subject matter of his writings could never have entered into his mind at all. We reach here the thought, expressed, I think, both by Hegel and by Wittgenstein, that to be aware of a limit is to be already beyond the limit in thought. If there is an absolute limit to our knowledge, then it must be one of which we are unaware and do not even suspect. The same is true of thought and knowledge. For words are the objectifications of thoughts. If the mystical consciousness were absolutely ineffable, then we could not say so because we should be unconscious of such an experience; or in other words, we should never have had such an experience.

This criticism, of course, is an apparently insoluble difficulty not only for Dionysius, but for any theory of absolute ineffability. We shall meet it again.

(b) *The Metaphor Theory.* The difference between the Dionysian theory and the metaphor theory is as follows. According to Dionysius the word *X* if used of God means that God is the cause of *X*. According to the metaphor theory if the word *X* is used of God, it means that *X* is a metaphor for something in the actual nature of God himself or in the mystical experience. Both views may be regarded as versions of the theory that the mystic's language is sym-

bolic. Another way of expressing the difference between them is to say that in the Dionysian theory the relation between symbolizandum and symbol is *causal*, whereas the metaphor theory implies a relation of *resemblance*. Resemblance is, of course, always the basis of metaphor or analogy. In the phrase "to take arms against a sea of troubles" two distinct metaphors are employed (and mixed together). There is a resemblance between trying to overcome troubles and physical fighting with weapons against an enemy. And there is a resemblance between a "sea" of multitudinous raging waters and a multitude of troubles.

The metaphor theory of mystical language may claim to be supported by the fact that much of the language used by mystics about their experiences is undoubtedly metaphorical. "Darkness" and "silence," as we have seen, are common metaphors for the introverted mystical experience. What is metaphorically described by them is the emptiness or voidness of the experience. Darkness *resembles* the void in that there are no distinctions in it. All distinctions are lost in the dark, as all distinctions (as Eckhart says) are lost in God. Eckhart also invents his own peculiar metaphors for this voidness. He calls it "barren," the "desert," the "wilderness," and so on. The reason is that the barren desert is void of all life (or is so pictured in the imagination). Ruysbroeck uses the metaphor "the wild sea" in much the same sense. This leads to the question, If "darkness," "silence," "desert," and so on are justified as metaphors by their resemblance to the empty void of the mystic's experience, how then is the phrase "empty void" justified? Is that in turn a metaphor of something else? We shall return to this question in due course.

The metaphor theory was developed in an impressive way by Rudolf Otto in his book *The Idea of the Holy*. He holds that the religious experience of what he calls the "numinous" is incapable of conceptualization. Nevertheless the religious man sees some resemblance, perhaps very faint, between a characteristic of the religious experience and some nonreligious quality of something in the natural world. He then uses the name of the natural quality as a metaphor for the characteristic of the experience. For instance, the experience

in one of its aspects is said to produce feelings of religious "awe." Hence God is, in this aspect of his being, spoken of as awful, dreadful, wrathful, terrifying, and so forth. But these words "awful," "dreadful," and the rest are names of natural nonreligious qualities of natural objects, and none of them is literally applicable to God. The characteristic of the numinous experience which they are struggling to express is in fact ineffable. But awe, dread, etc., bear some sort of resemblance to the feelings which it arouses. They are the nearest natural nonspiritual counterparts of the genuine spiritual nonnatural feeling. Hence they are seized on as metaphors to give some faint idea of the numinous quality, or perhaps to evoke it in those who have not had the experience.

Unfortunately the whole metaphor theory seems open to fatal objections, although the present writer once espoused it. In the first place the theory contradicts itself. For it supposes that  $X$  may be a metaphor for something in the unconceptualizable essence of God or the mystical experience. A metaphor implies a resemblance. But wherever there is a resemblance a concept is possible.  $X$  can only be a metaphor for  $Y$  if  $X$  resembles  $Y$  in some way. But any two resemblant things can be placed in a class because of the resemblance. Therefore to say that  $X$  is a metaphor for something in the essence of God is to say that the something can be conceptualized.

In the second place, metaphorical language is only meaningful and justifiable if it is at least theoretically translatable into literal language; or if, at any rate, the thing or the experience for which the metaphor is supposed to be a symbol is before the mind as a presentation—whether there happens to exist a word for it or not. In other words, the user of the metaphor, or whoever is to understand it, must already know what it is meant to symbolize. The metaphor can only operate to bring before his mind what he already knows or has experienced. It cannot produce a knowledge or experience which he did not have before. If  $A$  is used as a metaphor for  $B$ , both  $A$  and  $B$  must be before the mind and also the resemblance between them which is the foundation of the metaphor. If this is not the case, we have what is usually called "meaningless met-

aphor." The conditions of meaningful metaphor are clearly met when the mystical void or emptiness is called a darkness or a desert. For not only are the concepts or images of deserts and darknesses well known, but what is meant by voidness is also known. Thus both terms, the metaphor and its meaning, are present to the mind.

But the problem which now presents itself is this, If "desert" is an intelligible metaphor for the void, or for the undifferentiated unity, how are these phrases "void," "undifferentiated unity," etc., being used? Is this literal language, and does it apply in its literal sense to mystical experience? To admit that this is so would plainly contradict the concept of the ineffable. We should have found both concepts and words for what was supposed to be unconceptualizable and unutterable.

Either "undifferentiated unity," "the void," "obliteration of multiplicity," and the like, are literal descriptions of the mystical consciousness or they are metaphors for something else. Suppose we call this something else *A*. Then either *A* is a literal description or it is a metaphor for *B*. Either we proceed to infinity in a futile search for meaning, or the series comes to an end somewhere. Suppose it comes to an end at *X*. Then *X* is either a literal description or a meaningless metaphor. The only reasonable conclusion from this reasoning is that the symbolic theory may be true in the trivial sense that some words, such as "darkness," are metaphors, but that it is false when it says that no literal description is possible, and that all words used by mystics about their experiences are metaphorical or symbolic.

Finally, the theory of metaphor, like the Dionysian theory, implies *absolute* ineffability. It implies that *all* the descriptive words used are metaphors. Therefore the experience cannot be called an "experience" or "mystical" or "ineffable" or "it" or even "unknowable" unless these words are metaphors. If so, the experience can only be "unknowable" in the sense that God is unknowable to a dog. There could not be such an experience in the human mind any more than there could be an idea of God in the consciousness of the dog.

### 5. *Suggestions towards a New Theory*

Thus all theories have broken down, and we have found no solution to our problem. I shall accordingly try to suggest a new theory. I am deeply conscious of the temerity of such an undertaking. What I have called the common-sense theories are not in my opinion entitled to any respect. They appear to me to be the work of men who either have little knowledge of the subject of mysticism or, if they have book knowledge, are lacking in insight and in sensitivity. But the theory that the language of the mystic is symbolic—of which we have distinguished two versions—is an altogether different matter. It has behind it an enormous weight of authority and tradition. It is the product of the thinking of men who were either themselves mystics or were at least soaked in the literature of the subject and were deeply sensitive to its appeal. Its supporters include the greatest names in the history of Western mystical thought. It goes back in the Western world at least to Plotinus and from him descends through Dionysius to the modern world. And yet the objections to it which we have pointed out seem quite unanswerable. We have therefore no choice but to abandon it and try to find some other solution.

We admitted on an earlier page that the emotion theory, though unsatisfactory as a final explanation of the matter, is not without an element of truth. It may well be that whoever experiences, at any rate for the first time, the blessedness or joy—the peace which passeth all understanding—which the mystical consciousness brings, may be rendered for the moment almost speechless by the depth of his emotion. And no doubt this is sometimes a part of what is in his mind when he says that what he has experienced is beyond all words. But it is not to be supposed that this goes to the root of the matter or exhausts what has to be said about it. It is evident that a much more radical type of explanation is required and that in the last resort the mystic's struggle with words is due to some kind of

logical difficulty and not merely to an emotional block. The agreement among mystics who have expressed themselves on the subject is that what they variously call the understanding, the intellect, or the reason is incapable of handling the mystical experience, and that this is at the root of their trouble with words. Language has been moulded by the intellect as a tool for its special purposes. These statements may be true but are too vague and imprecise to constitute a philosophical explanation of ineffability. What we have to find out is, What precisely is it in the nature of the understanding which causes the difficulty with words?

We can see how the theory that mystical language is always symbolic and never literal has arisen out of an attempt to answer this question. The understanding is what Kant called "the faculty of concepts." Although the word "faculty" is out of fashion, what Kant said is basically correct. It is true that thinking, reasoning, understanding, as distinguished from immediate perception, consist in the use of concepts. It was therefore quite natural to suppose that the proposition that the understanding is inherently incapable of handling mystical experiences is equivalent to the proposition that concepts cannot handle it. This in turn seemed the same as saying that it is unconceptualizable. And since all words, except proper names, express concepts, it would follow that words cannot apply to mystical experiences. Since for this reason the words which mystics use cannot be literal descriptions, they must be symbolical. This all seems to follow as a matter of course. But unfortunately this line of attack on the problem leads, as we have seen, to a hopeless impasse.

And yet in some manner it is the way the understanding works which is the cause of the difficulty with the use of words. Hence our problem is, What is it about the understanding—other than the mere fact that it is the faculty of concepts—which produces in the mystic a sense of extreme difficulty with language, a feeling that the words which he actually uses never succeed in expressing what he wants to say?

Our new theory will begin by pointing out that there are in reality

two problems concerned with alleged ineffability, not one; and that failure to distinguish between them has made both of them insoluble to our predecessors. First, there is the problem of whether words can be used *during* the mystical experience. Secondly, there is the problem whether they can be used *after* the experience when it is being *remembered*. Plotinus makes the right distinction, and in fact briefly states what I believe to be the correct solution. "In this apprehension," he says, "we have neither power nor time to say anything about it. Afterwards we can reason about it."<sup>11</sup> In other words we cannot speak of it when we have it, but we can afterwards. We have only to elaborate this theory in full.

Mystical experience, *during* the experience, is wholly unconceptualizable and therefore wholly unspeakable. This *must* be so. You cannot have a concept of anything *within* the undifferentiated unity because there are no separate items to be conceptualized. Concepts are only possible where there is a multiplicity or at least a duality. Within a multiplicity, groups of similar items can be formed into classes and distinguished from other groups. We then have concepts and therefore words. Within the undifferentiated unity there is no multiplicity, and therefore there can be no classes, no concepts, and no words. We cannot, for example, *at that time* class it and speak of it as "undifferentiated," for this is to classify it as distinct from what is differentiated. We cannot speak of it as "unity" or the "One" because to do so is to distinguish it from multiplicity.

But afterwards when the experience is remembered the matter is quite different. For we are then in our ordinary sensory-intellectual consciousness. We can contrast the two kinds of consciousness. Our experiences can be seen to fall into two classes, those which are differentiated and multiple and those which are undifferentiated and onefold. Since we now have concepts, we can use words. We can *speak* of an experience as "undifferentiated," as "unity," as "mystical," as "empty," as "void," and so on.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted from paragraph 3 of the selection from Plotinus in the present writer's *The Teachings of the Mystics*, New York, Mentor Book, New American Library of World Literature, Inc.

The result of confusing these two quite different situations has been disastrous. It has led to the theory that even a remembered mystical experience cannot be spoken of except in symbolic language. *Theorists have supposed that the impossibility of using concepts during the experience is also characteristic of the remembered experience.* Hence even the experience in memory has been supposed to be unconceptualizable and unutterable. But, since mystics do in fact use words about it, it has been wrongly supposed that they can only be symbolic. This in its turn leads, as we have shown, to a hopeless impasse.

But this is plainly not the whole story. It would seem to imply that after the experience there is no difficulty at all in speaking about it and that the experience is then in no sense ineffable. But the whole literature of the subject makes it clear that mystics do in fact find great difficulty in describing even a remembered experience and still tend to say that it is ineffable. We have now to address ourselves to the solution of this new problem.

We have to begin by pointing to something which is very obvious, namely, that whatever the difficulty may be which the mystic feels, he does in fact normally overcome it. He says that he is speechless, but words break out from his lips. He does actually describe his remembered experiences, and his descriptions are often highly successful and effective. The only alternative to admitting this would be to say that his statements are either meaningless or false. For either he does succeed in communicating at least some *part* of the truth about his experience, or his words are no better than a sound of escaping steam. If he does successfully communicate the truth about a part of his remembered experience, however small that part may be, then he must have given a true description of that part of his experience. And in that case he must be mistaken when he supposes that no language can ever apply to remembered mystical experience.

From here to the end of the chapter when I speak of "mystical experience" it is to be understood that I am speaking of remembered mystical experience.

Let us try the hypothesis that the mystic's use of language is like anyone else's. He often uses words which are literal and correct descriptions of his experiences. Of course he often helps himself out by the use of metaphors. But so do all other users of language. This suggestion does not of course preclude the possibility that he may often make mistaken statements of various kinds. In this respect also we are to suppose that he is like other people who may be quite sincere and truthful in their intentions. But of course it will be asked what, on this hypothesis, becomes of ineffability? Are we not denying it altogether? Our problem is to explain the mystic's difficulty with language, not to deny that there is any difficulty. These questions are of course crucial. At present I will say only that I do not deny either the existence or the seriousness of the mystic's difficulty with words, and I will shortly propose a new explanation of it. But I will postpone that explanation for the moment. I wish first to re-examine the actual language which mystics have used from this new point of view. We may learn something from looking at the sort of phrases and wording which they employ. From this point of view I will go back over some of the quotations describing mystical experiences which we have given in Chapter 2.

The Mandukya Upanishad tells us that the "unitary consciousness" is nonsensuous ("beyond the senses") and that it is a unity "in which all multiplicity is obliterated." These statements are of course very paradoxical and may be disbelieved by a sceptical reader. But that is not point. We are asking what kind of language is being used. My point is that it is not at all like metaphorical or symbolical language. Metaphors and symbols generally consist in sensuous images. But the language here is abstract. "Nonsensuous" is itself an abstract concept. It presupposes a classification of experiences into sensuous and nonsensuous and assigns mystical experience to the latter class. "Unity" is also a highly abstract concept and not a sensuous image. No one would think of using the word "unity" as a metaphor of anything. The same remarks apply to the statement that in the experience "all multiplicity is obliterated." Whether this is

true or false, the language in which it is expressed is plainly meant to be a literal description. It is not in the least like the language of metaphor.

We can easily distinguish this from the metaphorical language which mystics do of course often use. By way of contrast let us take a few examples of their metaphors. When Suso describes his experience as "a glorious and dazzling obscurity," he is plainly using metaphors. So is Eckhart when he speaks of the soul as "flowing full flood into the unity of the divine nature." Or to be more precise, "flowing full flood" is a metaphor, but "the unity of the divine nature" is not. Abulafia is speaking metaphorically when he refers to the breaking down of the separateness of the soul from the infinite as due to an "untying of its knots." Suzuki, speaking of the dissolution of individuality, says that "the shell in which my personality is so solidly encased explodes at the moment of satori." Ruysbroeck writes of the introvertive experience as "the darkness in which all lovers lose themselves." In general, "darkness" and "silence" are among the commonest of all metaphors used by mystics.

Ruysbroeck's "darkness in which all lovers lose themselves" is a metaphor for what in his own language is elsewhere called the "undifferentiated unity." But "undifferentiated unity" is not in turn a metaphor for anything else. It has all the marks of literal language. That it is a literal description is also evident from the way in which the unity is reached. One empties the mind of all sensations, images, and thoughts—of all particular empirical contents. What is left is an emptiness. It is true that according to the mystics this emptiness, which is darkness, is also the shining forth of a great light. It is not merely the vacuum; it is the vacuum-plenum. But the undifferentiated unity is a description of the negative side, the vacuum. Since the multiplicity of particulars has been obliterated, it is a unity. And since there are no distinctions of one particular from another, it is undifferentiated. Plainly this is a literally correct description—if of course one believes that such a state of mind is ever reached, which is not now the question at issue. When Eckhart says

that "in God all distinctions are lost," he is describing the same state in slightly different, but equally literal, language. When the experience is spoken of as the "void"—whether in a Christian or in a Buddhist context—we have another literally correct word for the same thing. The same is true of the frequent use of the words "nothing," "nothingness," etc., which likewise signify the negative aspect of the plenum-vacuum paradox.

Anyone who wishes can of course insist that such words as "unity," "void," and "undifferentiated" *must* be being used symbolically. But this is mere dogmatic assertion for which no reason either is, or can be, given. It is in the nature of the case impossible to suggest what is the meaning of these words if they are taken as metaphors. Metaphors for what? The only possible reason for calling them metaphorical would be that the theory of the symbolic use of mystical language requires it, and that we are determined to uphold that theory no matter what the evidence shows.

It may be urged that the examples of literal language which have just been given are all negative in character and describe the negative aspect of the paradox, and that mystics have never denied that their negations are meant literally. They say that the experience is formless, shapeless, soundless; also that it is "not this, not that." These it will be said are of course literal statements. The issue concerns positive descriptions. Can any words be used literally of the positive or plenum side of the plenum-vacuum paradox? It is here that the test comes; and it is only the positive words that are alleged to be symbolical. It is in fact only the positive side which is alleged to be ineffable.

To this there are two replies. In the first place, it is impossible to divide epithets sharply into positive and negative, as our critic's view presupposes. Perhaps emptiness, voidness, and undifferentiatedness may pass as negatives. But consider the descriptions given by mystics of the experience of the dissolution of individuality. Nearly all of them use such phrases as "fading away," "melting away," "passing away" into the infinite or the divine. Of course "melting" and "fad-

ing" are metaphors. But the literal language for the process will say—as Koestler actually does say<sup>12</sup>—that the "I" or the individuality ceases to exist as a separate ego. If it be said that the cessation of the existence of something is equivalent to its nonexistence and is therefore negative, the logic of this must be denied. Ceasing to exist is just as positive a process as beginning to exist. Death is as positive as life. Negatives usually imply positives. The extrovertive mystics usually say that nothing is dead. Is "dead" a positive or negative state? No doubt it means "not living." But "living" also means "not dead."

In the second place, the positive side of the plenum-vacuum paradox is often described by such positive epithets as "good," "supreme good," "creative," "sacred," "divine," or their equivalents. I can see no reason for thinking that these are not literally meant. So also surely are the words used for the emotional aspect of the experience—such words as "bliss," "joy," "blessedness," and "peace." If these are said to exceed all language, this is merely to admit that element of truth in the emotion theory to which we have already referred. A doubt may be raised about the epithet of creativeness. It will be admitted that this is a positive idea, but it may be doubted whether it is ever alleged to be a part of the experience or whether any language is ever used asserting it. I would remind the critic of the examples given on pages 175-176 and would requote here Aurobindo's description: "Those who have thus possessed the calm within can perceive always welling out from its silence the perennial supply of the energies which work in the universe." There is no reason whatever for supposing that this language is symbolic.

The examples so far given are all taken from descriptions of the introvertive type of experience. The situation will be found similar if we examine the language used to describe extrovertive experiences. Says Eckhart, "All is One," and this is the general formula of that type of experience. He exemplifies the meaning of this by saying that the wood, grass, and stone are not separate and distinct from one another, not many things but one. As usual it is open to any critic to reject this description on the ground that it is self-contradictory. But

<sup>12</sup> Pp. 120-121.

there is nothing in the wording to give any ground for supposing that it is metaphorical or otherwise symbolic. It may be compared to a statement to the effect that a square is circular. Neither the fact that this sentence is self-contradictory nor anything else about it would suggest that the language of it is metaphorical. Going to other examples, we note Jakob Boehme's words, "I recognized God in grass and plants"; and N. M.'s affirmation that everything which he saw out of the window, including broken glass and bottles, was "*urgent* with life," and that the life in himself and the cat and the bottles was one and the same life; and Ramakrishna's perception that everything in the room was "full of consciousness" and "soaked in . . . the bliss of God." The language in all these cases is that of literal and nonsymbolic description, however wild the statements may appear to common sense.

We must now return to the crucial question which we left unanswered on page 299. If we assert that the language of the mystic—though of course it includes its fair share of metaphor, of unclearness, of ambiguity, and so on—is basically literal and a correct description of what he experiences, what becomes of ineffability? Does not our theory as thus far stated deny it entirely? We must try to make it clear that this is not so, that we recognize the problem and have at least a tentative suggestion to put forward as to how it is to be solved.

It is plain that the mystic feels that there is for him some sort of unique struggle, block, or barrier in trying to use language to communicate his experiences to other men. Other men of all kinds, men who are not mystics, often find difficulty in expressing their feelings or thoughts in words. As we have seen, this is especially true of deep emotions. But it is evident that the mystic has some special difficulty which he believes that he does not share with nonmystics. And it is evidently in some way due to the fact that his experience is beyond the reach of the intellect or understanding. However, the common view that it is the *conceptual* character of the understanding which is the source of the trouble—in other words, the view that concepts as such cannot apply to the experiences of the mystic—has been shown to be erroneous.

What else is there then about the understanding which renders it, or seems to render it, unable to grapple with mystical experience? There is only one possible answer. The laws of logic are the characteristic rules of the operations of the understanding. But the laws of logic do not apply to mystical experience. Is this the root of the mystic's difficulty with words; and if so, precisely how?

In its primordial nature the understanding is that operation of the mind by which it distinguishes and discriminates one thing from another thing, *X* from *Y*. To do this is not in itself to form a concept. Concept formation is derivative from this. It arises because it happens that there are usually many *X*'s and many *Y*'s. Hence we develop the habit of putting all the *X*'s in one pile and all the *Y*'s in another pile. This is concept formation. Implicit in these proceedings are certain rules. We must be sure to keep all the *X*'s in the *X* pile, and all the *Y*'s in the *Y* pile. The rules for doing this are called the laws of logic.

In making concept formation dependent upon the existence of a plurality of *X*'s and a plurality of *Y*'s, we are not denying the logician's point that there can be a concept of a unique entity or even the null class. Psychologically there could hardly have been such classes if concepts had not originally been constructed on the basis of their having a plurality of members.

The result is that we have three things which are different from one another although each is an inseparable aspect of the understanding—namely, (1) the act of discrimination (noting differences), (2) the act of concept formation (noting similarities), and (3) the rules for performing these acts, viz., the laws of logic. The result is that it is possible to use concepts correctly and yet to disobey the laws of logic. This is what the mystic does. If he says of his experience, "It is *x*," this is a correct statement, i.e., a correct application of the concept *x*. He then adds of the same experience, "it is not-*x*." This is also a correct use of the concept, since the experience being inherently paradoxical has both the characteristics *x* and not-*x*.

How does this explain the mystic's claim that his experience is ineffable? My suggestion is as follows. The language which he finds

himself compelled to use is, when at its best, the literal truth about his experience, but it is contradictory. *This is the root of his feeling of embarrassment with language.* And he is embarrassed because he is, like other people, a logically minded man in his nonmystical moments. He is not a being who lives solely in the paradoxical world of the One. He lives mostly in the space-time world, which is the territory of the laws of logic. He feels their coerciveness in the same way as other men. When he returns from the world of the One, he wishes to communicate in words to other men what he remembers of his experience. The words come from his mouth, but he is astonished and perplexed to find himself talking in contradictions. He explains this to himself by supposing that there is something wrong with the language. He says that his experience is ineffable.

He is in fact mistaken. The paradox which he has uttered has correctly described his experience. The language is only paradoxical because the experience is paradoxical. Thus the language correctly mirrors the experience. But he had said first of his experience, "It is  $x$ ." The next moment he finds himself compelled to say, "It is not- $x$ ." Hence he then supposes that his original statement "It is  $x$ " was wrong. And similarly if he began by saying, "It is not- $x$ ," and then afterwards, "It is  $x$ ," he supposes, when he makes the latter statement, that "It is not- $x$ " was wrong. Thus whatever he says seems to him to have been incorrect since he always has to contradict it. Thereupon he blames the language.

It should be noted that we are giving what may in a sense be called a psychological explanation of the matter. The mystic in saying that no language can express his experience is making a mistake. He does express it in language—often very well and very impressively. Therefore what has to be done is to explain how he comes to make this mistake. The explanation can only be psychological. The explanation is, in a word, that he confuses the paradoxicality of mystical experience with ineffability. But the basis of the psychological explanation lies of course in the logical difficulty of the paradoxes.

The fact that he is confused implies that he is not himself conscious

of the mistake he is making and hence that he could not himself give the explanation of the matter which we have given here. He is, often enough, a poor logician, a poor philosopher, and a poor analyst. He does not understand the root of his own trouble with language. He only vaguely feels that something must be wrong with what he says and is perplexed by this. What I have tried to do here is to attempt to analyse his strongly felt but inarticulate dissatisfaction with what he says about his experiences.

A possible objection to our theory may be briefly noted and answered. Have we not admitted that where there is no multiplicity there can be no concept and therefore no word? But our theory implies that certain words are literally descriptive of the experience and therefore must express concepts. The reply is that concepts arise only when the experience is being remembered and not while it is being experienced. The remembered experiences of many persons resemble each other and constitute a class which is contrasted with various kinds of nonmystical experience. This explains how such words as "experience," "ineffable," "mystical," "it," "unknowable," regarding which a difficulty was raised, can be used. They are applied to it only when it has become a memory.

## CHAPTER 7

### *Mysticism and Immortality*

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The physiological evidence against the survival of consciousness after death is very strong. Consciousness, in all known cases, exists only in connection with a body and a nervous system. Moreover it varies with the variations of the nervous system and the growth and condition of the body. To say this in no way involves us in any sort of materialism. It is not inconsistent with the view of dualism that consciousness is nonphysical. For even if this is so, the correlation between the physical and the nonphysical is more or less complete. In an infant body we find an infant consciousness. With the maturing of the body consciousness matures. With the running down of the body foolishness and senility supervene on the conscious life. If consciousness survives the death of an old man, is it then in that future state the senile and semi-imbecile consciousness which perhaps existed at the time of death? Or is it the virile consciousness of the man when he was forty? Or is it the crude mentality of his adolescent years? Or does the infantile mind of the baby appear again after death and set out on the road of eternity? We cannot avoid the embarrassment of these questions by pleading that we do not know the right answers. For the point is rather that whatever answer were given would appear equally arbitrary and senseless and unlikely. Further evidence of the dependence of the mind on the body appears in the fact that injury to the brain may produce a mental life disordered or insane.

The doctrine of evolution also makes difficulties for the theory of

survival. Human consciousness must have evolved out of animal consciousness. At what point in the continuous development was an immortal soul, or even a surviving consciousness, suddenly introduced? Did a miraculous change occur with the first man—if it now makes any sense to speak of a first man? How did this happen, and why? We can avoid these questions by saying that all animal consciousnesses, including those of oysters, crabs, and worms, will survive death. This might be consistent with the Indian mystical view that all things are alive and are parts of the one universal consciousness into which all will be reabsorbed. But it is hardly consistent with the Western theory of individual survival. Or at least it makes little sense in that context. Plainly this Western theory originated in pre-evolutionary times when it was still possible to regard man as a special creation unrelated to “the beasts of the field.” Man could then be supposed to have an immortal soul, while the “beasts” were soulless. This argument from evolution does not render the survival of the individual *impossible*, but it clearly increases the difficulties it has to face and makes it appear far more improbable than it appeared in pre-evolutionary days.

The physiological argument and the argument from evolution, though they constitute a strong case against the survival of personality after death, are of course only empirical and probable arguments which are theoretically capable of being refuted by positive evidence on the other side. Some psychical researchers maintain that they have discovered such evidence. But although their assertions should be received without prejudice, and with an open mind, this evidence appears, at least at the present time, to be inconclusive. In these circumstances, and since we admit the logical possibility of a rebuttal of the physiological and evolutionary arguments by positive evidence from some other source, it is natural to ask whether the phenomena of mysticism throw any new light on the subject.

According to R. M. Bucke a “sense of immortality” is one of the characteristics common to all mystical experience. But our own list of common characteristics advisedly did not include it. Furthermore, Bucke expresses some astonishment because in one of the cases of

"cosmic consciousness" which he quotes, the individual who had undergone the mystical experience still firmly disbelieved in survival after death. It is true that mystics do often give expression to a feeling of having attained immortality, but it is not universal, and it is in any case open to a variety of different interpretations. Tennyson says that in his experience "death seemed an almost laughable impossibility." There is no indication that he meant by these words to suggest a life after death. His words on the face of them seem to mean that it appeared to him during that experience that it was laughably impossible that he would ever meet the common human fate of the death and corruption of the body. But unfortunately there is credible evidence that he is now dead.

In the Upanishads there are frequent passages to the effect that he who reaches the Brahmic consciousness has attained to immortality. No doubt the experience which supported this statement was the "sense of immortality" of which Bucke speaks. "He who knows Brahman becomes Brahman," says the Mundaka Upanishad. "He passes beyond all sorrow. . . . Freed from the fetters of ignorance *he becomes immortal.*"<sup>1</sup>

But it is far from clear that this must be interpreted as immortality after death rather than as immortality now. Mystics unite in asserting that their experience is beyond time. And it is natural to surmise that the immortality which they feel themselves to have achieved is the immortality of the timeless moment. No mystic is as insistent as Eckhart that the soul which has attained to the mystic state has passed beyond time into the "eternal now." Of the "apex of the soul" wherein the mystical union with God takes place he tells us that

It ranks so high that it communes with God face to face as he is. [It] . . . is unconscious of yesterday or the day before and of tomorrow and the day after, for in eternity there is no yesterday, nor any tomorrow, but only Now.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Upanishads*, trans. by Swami Prabhavananda and Frederick Manchester, New York, Mentor Book MD 194, New American Library of World Literature, 1957, p. 48. (Originally published by the Vedanta Press, Hollywood, Calif. Copyrighted by the Vedanta Society of Southern California.)

<sup>2</sup> *Meister Eckhart*, trans. by R. B. Blakney, New York, Harper & Brothers, 1941, Sermon 12, p. 153.

No doubt Eckhart as an orthodox Christian believed in a life after death—although perhaps he thought of it not as a continuation in time of the life lived here but rather as a final entrance into the eternal Now. But his belief must have been based upon an intellectual acceptance of the dogmas of the Church, not upon his mystical experience. Assuming that he had experience of the “sense of immortality” previously mentioned, it is not given by him as evidence of a life beyond the grave, but is interpreted as the attainment to the eternal Now during the moment of mystical union.

Mystical experience thus affords no unambiguous evidence of the survival of personality after death, much less of that persistence through everlasting time which is the popular conception of immortality. Indeed it may well be claimed that mystical experience provides evidence *against* any such temporal survival. For as we have seen an important phase of such experience consists in a feeling of the dissolution of individuality, its melting away into the infinite. The very essence of that phase of the experience consists in the fact that the “I” ceases to exist. But this is also inconclusive. For after the temporary experience is over, the “I” does after all come back again. Therefore the experience is consistent with the persistence of the “I” after the particular experience is past and presumably also after the death of the body. Moreover even during the experience it must be remembered that there is the paradox that in some sense the “I” still exists to experience the dissolution of itself. Or, as Eckhart puts it in a passage already quoted, “God has left her [the soul] a little point to get back to herself . . . and know herself as creature.”

Thus we conclude that no clear light is thrown by mysticism on the question whether the soul persists after death as a disembodied spirit. There is of course another form of the doctrine of immortality, namely belief in reincarnation. Those who have held this belief have usually supposed that between any two incarnate lives an interval of time is passed by the spirit in a disembodied state. But a variety of the doctrine is of course logically possible which would maintain that the soul always passes instantaneously from one body to another. But in any case we need not discuss reincarnation here because there

seems no reason to suggest that mystical experience provides any evidence of it. It is true that those who have reached the highest spiritual plane, for instance the Buddha, are supposed by their followers to acquire the power of remembering their past lives, and thus to provide direct evidence of reincarnation. But whatever we may think of this, it would be evidence arising from the source of memory, not from the source of mystical experience. No doubt this miraculous power of memory is supposed to be acquired along with, or simultaneously with, the nirvanic experience, as are also other powers such as the gift of healing. But it remains true that mystical experience is one thing and memory another, and that the alleged evidence of reincarnation arises out of memory and not out of mystical experience. The evaluation of the memory evidence falls outside our enquiry, which is limited to the question whether mystical experience itself throws any light on reincarnation. We conclude that it does not. And this conclusion could have been predicted if we bear in mind that mystical experience, being a timeless and eternal Now, cannot include a memory of past time. To repeat what Eckhart says on this, "It . . . is unconscious of yesterday or the day before."

In spite of the entirely negative result of our investigation, it will be well worth our while to raise and discuss an entirely supposititious question. Granted that mysticism yields no evidence of survival, we may still ask whether, if for any other reason we suppose that survival is a fact, mysticism could throw any light on the *nature* of the life after death. This is not at all the idle question which it may at first sight appear to be. For it will be found that there exists a most interesting and characteristic divergence of opinion between the East and the West about this matter. I do not refer to the difference already mentioned between the Oriental doctrine of reincarnation and the Western belief in disembodied spirits. For both Eastern and Western creeds agree that a time does, or may, come when the spirit will be disembodied. According to Western ideas this happens immediately after the present life. According to Hinduism and Buddhism it happens only after the final liberation of the spirit from the

chain of reincarnate lives. The question therefore is the same for both, namely, What is the nature of the spirit and its life after it has finally got rid of the flesh? It is on this question that the interesting divergence of opinion exists which will be found to have important implications and consequences in the realms of sociology and even political theory, if not in metaphysics or speculative philosophy.

Western religious thought insists that immortality means the persistence of the separate individual as an individual throughout all future time. On the other hand the view of the major Hindu tradition—that of the advaita Vedanta—has always been that after its liberation from the round of reincarnate lives the individual ceases to exist as such and becomes absorbed or merged in the life of the Infinite Being. Various metaphors are used to express this. The individual soul is like a river which loses its separate existence when it flows into the ocean. Or we hear that “the dew-drop slides into the shining sea.” According to Buddhism nirvana can be attained during this life while a man is still in the body. For him who has thus attained it there will be no more rebirth. What then happens to him when his body finally wears out and falls away? In the case of the Buddha he is supposed then to have passed into *parinirvana*—the final deliverance from which there is no return. And what, we ask, is this state of final nirvana? Is it, as in Hinduism, the melting of the finite soul into the Infinite? We shall in a few moments remind the reader of what the Buddha is supposed to have said about this. But in the meanwhile let us return to the Hindu conception of the afterlife as absorption into Brahman. There is no doubt that this conception, like nearly all Indian religio-philosophical thinking, is rooted in mystical experience; whereas Western eschatological ideas are not markedly mystical in origin. From the Indian sources we may therefore expect to obtain some light on the relation between mysticism and the hypothetical question how we ought to think of the future life, if there is one.

It is therefore well worth enquiring what is meant by these Indian conceptions. For as soon as we try to understand them we find ourselves involved in difficulties. As usual, the Indian mind tends always

to be satisfied with poetical metaphors the literal meaning of which, if any, is far from clear. Consider the metaphor about the dewdrop which slides into the sea. What does it mean? The fact that this particular phrase about the dewdrop is not of Indian origin, but was coined by an English writer, in no way vitiates the question. It certainly expresses the spirit of Indian belief. It is a metaphor. But what is the literal meaning of the doctrine about the future life which the metaphor symbolizes? The reader may well think that the analysis I am about to offer is an instance of absurd literalism; or an instance of the saying "we murder to dissect." This reaction would be justified if the metaphor of the dewdrop were to be treated as pure poetry, to be enjoyed for its poetic beauty and left at that. But we cannot regard it in that way. It is supposed to symbolize a truth—which can only mean a literally true proposition—about the fate of the self which has achieved liberation and thereafter dies. We have to ask what this true proposition is. Every metaphor is built upon some resemblance which is supposed to exist between the sensuous imagery of the metaphor and the literal concept which it symbolizes. The metaphor of the dewdrop must mean that what happens to the self after death *is like* what happens to the dewdrop after its absorption in the ocean. But is it? An elementary analysis shows that it cannot be. The dewdrop consists of molecules of water. When it falls into the sea, the drop as a drop, as a little sphere of water, no doubt disappears. But the individual molecules persist and are scattered in all directions east and west so that, if they could be tagged and followed for a few years, one might be found thousands of miles away from another. This cannot be at all like what happens to a soul! It is not composed of little bits of soul—spiritual molecules—nor does the divisionless One have any parts or directions among which the spiritual molecules could be scattered. It is plain that the metaphor becomes nonsensical when pressed in this way. In other words the metaphor in spite of its sensuous beauty is meaningless. Therefore it does not help us to understand the Indian conception of the absorption of the finite self in the Infinite.

The problem which is thus forced upon us is this: The Indian

doctrine of absorption certainly means that the individual ceases to exist as an individual—just as the dewdrop ceases to exist as a unified drop. On its purely negative side of the cessation of individual existence the metaphor may thus be said to be meaningful and accurate. It is when we seek to understand what sort of positive existence the self is supposed to have after its absorption that all metaphors, including the metaphor of absorption itself, break down. For plainly there is a dilemma here. The logical intellect will insist that either the self must continue to exist as an individual or it must cease to exist altogether—in other words suffer annihilation. For the notion of a self which is not an individual self seems to the Western mind absurd. Hence it will be thought that the Indian doctrine of the cessation of the individual can only mean its total annihilation. What the metaphors do, it will then be supposed, is only to hide this unwelcome fact and dishonestly smother it under flowery words and poetic images.

Buddhism tends less to metaphors than does Hinduism. Hence to the Western mind the doctrine of nirvana, not being as a rule so much glossed over by poetic phrases, has constantly appeared as just another name for annihilation. The reports brought back from the East to Europe by early Christian missionaries and others always emphasized this. For they had no understanding or sympathy for mystical ideas and mystical paradoxes. If theirs was a correct interpretation, we should have to conclude that Eastern religions present no credible alternative to the Western conception of immortality as the persistence of separate individuals. But no Buddhist will admit that nirvana means annihilation, nor will any serious Western student of Buddhism at the present day maintain it. To attain nirvana means, it must be insisted, supreme bliss, although it also means loss of separate individuality.

If we are inclined to reject this as impossible, we should remember Tennyson's assertion that the loss of individuality which he experienced seemed to him "no extinction but the only true life." We should also call to mind Koestler's statement that "the I ceases to exist because it has established communication with or been dissolved

in the universal pool," and yet that this experience brings "the peace which passeth all understanding." I fail to see what is the difference between Tennyson's and Koestler's assertions and Buddhist assertions about nirvana. The same loss of individuality, accompanied by beatitude rather than annihilation, is reported by mystics from all over the world, in the Upanishads, by the mystics of Islam, and by the Christian mystics.

It so happens that the dilemma "either after death I must continue to exist as an individual or I must cease to exist altogether and suffer extinction" was posed, according to the Pali canon, to the Buddha himself, and his reply is recorded. I have reported on the passage more fully on an earlier page. I will here merely recall its essential features to the reader's mind. The wandering ascetic Vaccha enquires from the Buddha whether he holds that the saint "exists after death" or "does not exist after death." The Buddha replies that he does not hold either view, and that any such language "does not fit the case." The reason why it does not fit the case is plainly that Vaccha's question attempts, with its "either-or" dilemma, to apply the laws of logic—in this case the law of excluded middle—to a mystical state of mind. For nirvana is simply the introvertive mystical experience, the "unitary consciousness" of the Mandukya Upanishad, carried to its highest possible level. The Buddha also tells Vaccha that the doctrine of nirvana is "not to be reached by mere reasoning"—which is the usual assertion that mystical experience is "beyond reason" or "beyond the understanding." He says further that it is "intelligible only to the wise"—and in this context "the wise" means the mystically enlightened man, not the intellectually or practically wise man. The upshot is that this passage powerfully reinforces our view of the essentially paradoxical character of all mystical ideas, and supports the opinion that the laws of logic do not apply to mystical experience.

We must conclude that there are two possible alternative views of the nature of the future life—if we choose to assume that there is a future life. There is the Western view that it means the persistence of separate individualities. Tom is to remain Tom, Dick Dick, and Harry Harry. But we have found that the Indian view of the

absorption of the separate individual in the life of the Universal Consciousness, or in nirvana, while yet not suffering annihilation, is a real though paradoxical alternative. Hence the question now to be asked is which view the evidence of the mystical consciousness tends to support. And I do not see how it is possible to avoid the conclusion that the Indian view is more in accord with mysticism.

The question is, of course, bound up with the question of pantheism. In that matter also the theistic religions refuse to accept the disappearance of the individual self, even for the brief moment of mystical union. Exactly the same problem is involved here in regard to immortality, except that there is a difference in regard to time, or rather a difference as between time and eternity. In his rejection of pantheism as a "heresy" the theist refuses to surrender his separate individuality during the moment of mystical union, insisting that during that period the soul and the Divine Being remain distinct existences. In his view of immortal life he refuses to surrender his individuality in eternity.

Now we have most carefully reviewed the evidence on this matter in our chapter on pantheism, monism, and dualism. And we concluded that the theist was unable to maintain his dualistic view. We saw that although he was right to insist on the difference between God and the finite self, he was wrong to reject their identity. The truth lay in the paradox of identity in difference. The considerations which led us to that conclusion in regard to the problem of pantheism all possess exactly the same weight when applied to the problem of immortality. We shall therefore be right simply to transfer that conclusion to the present situation. If our study of mysticism has not been in vain we shall have to admit that it points to the conception of the future life as a loss of separate individuality while at the same time the "I" is not annihilated but enjoys an ultimate peace.

We must remember that if we are disagreeing with the theist in so far as he denies identity of the individual with the universal self, our conclusion also disagrees with the Indian view if and in so far as that view is interpreted as denying differences and separateness.

As a matter of fact both interpretations—that of the pantheistic paradox and that of monistic pure identity—are found in India, but there is a better understanding of the mystical paradox view than there is in the West. We have to insist on identity as against the theist, and on difference as against any pure identity view. Therefore our conclusion ought not to be understood as an unqualified acceptance of one side of the paradox or the other. As was the case in our consideration of the problem of pantheism, so here in the problem of immortality our view is offered as a reconciliation between the main tendencies of the East and the main tendencies of the West.

It should be of interest to see whether Eckhart, the most philosophically minded of all Christian mystics, expressed views which have any bearing on the issue we are discussing. For it is also true that of all Christian mystics Eckhart was the one who had most in common with Indian views—without of course knowing anything about them. It is surely remarkable that his views have been the subject of a full-length comparison with those of the Vedantist Sankara in a book by Rudolf Otto;<sup>3</sup> and of another full-length comparison with Buddhist beliefs by Suzuki.<sup>4</sup> It was of course precisely his leaning towards Oriental pantheistic conceptions which got him into trouble with the ecclesiastical authorities. On the question whether mystical union with God should be understood as an identity with God his utterances are, as we have seen, equivocal. There are many passages which support the orthodox theistic position that the creature always remains a distinct existence from the Creator. But there are also many passages which seem to say, or at least to imply, the opposite. It was these that were seized upon for ecclesiastical censure. One gets the impression that his natural and spontaneous tendencies and sympathies were monistic or pantheistic and that the dualistic passages must have been written on those occasions when his obligations to assimilate his views with

<sup>3</sup> Rudolf Otto, *Mysticism East and West*, New York, Meridian Books, Inc., 1957.

<sup>4</sup> D. T. Suzuki, *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist*, New York, Harper & Brothers, 1957.

those of the Church, and to bow to its authority, were uppermost in his mind. This is in no sense to impute to him any lack of honesty or sincerity. He doubtless was not conscious of the conflict of his own ideas with one another. Like most thinkers, he presumably was not aware of his own inconsistencies. Naturally those passages in his writings which would tend to imply the view of immortality which conceives of it as absorption in the divine life are those which also tend to be heretical. In emphasizing them, we are of course aware that they tell only one side of the story of his mind. But it is the side which is of most interest to us in connection with the subject of this chapter.

Certainly he must have held that the soul's union with God in the future life will be, as it is with temporary union in this life, beyond space and time in the "eternal Now." For of our knowledge of God in this life he says:

Nothing hinders the soul's knowledge of God as much as time and space, for time and space are fragments, whereas God is one. And therefore if the soul is to know God, it must know Him above time and outside space.<sup>5</sup>

And in a passage which makes direct reference to the life after death he says:

I charge you, my brothers, and sisters, . . . while you are still in time . . . unite yourselves with His divine nature. Once out of time and your chance is gone.<sup>6</sup>

This certainly implies that the condition of the soul after death to which the Christian is to aspire is mystical union with God. What can there be then to function as principle of individuation either between one finite self and another or between the finite self and God? It cannot be space and time. In an earlier chapter we saw that nothing distinguishes one individual self from another except the stream of consciousness, i.e., the particular mental contents or experiences which constitute the empirical ego. Our empirical egos are

<sup>5</sup> Blakney (trans.), *op. cit.*, Sermon 6, p. 131.

<sup>6</sup> F. Ffeifer, *Meister Eckhart*, trans. by C. de B. Evans, p. 352.

separate and multiple, but there is only one pure ego which is the Universal Self. Hence the persistence of individuality after death is only conceivable on the condition that our empirical selves, each with its particular experiences, persist after death. But Eckhart is quite clear that in our union with God in this life the particular contents peculiar to each individual consciousness have been obliterated. For the union takes place in the "apex" of the soul, leaving the rest of the soul, to wit its empirical contents, outside the union. But of the "apex" he teaches that no "creature," i.e., no finite thing, can enter into it. He writes:

The central silence is there, where no creature may enter, nor any idea, and there the soul neither thinks nor acts, nor entertains any idea either of itself or anything else. Whatever the soul does it does through its agents. It understands by means of intelligence, remembers by means of memory. If it is to love the will must be used.<sup>7</sup>

Eckhart, it is evident, accepted a "faculty" psychology. The "agents" of the soul are its faculties—memory, will, understanding, etc. Hence such an odd-sounding statement as that the soul "remembers by means of memory." The fact that he places his insights in the framework of an out-of-date psychology in no way, of course, robs the insights of their value. He thinks of the agents by analogy with instruments which a craftsman uses. These instruments, together with the actions of remembering, understanding, etc., which they perform, are excluded from the apex and therefore from union with God. If we write off the unacceptable psychology, what is left is the following. The apex is the unity of consciousness, the pure ego. It is this which unites with God. The apex, being identified with God, is both God's eye and the soul's eye. Hence the oft-quoted saying that "the eye with which God sees me is the eye with which I see God. For God's eye and my eye are one and the same." The passage which we are expounding thus means simply that in the mystical union what is one with God is the pure ego, and that the empirical ego, i.e., the stream of ideas, memories, volitions, sensations, images, etc., is left outside the union. Hence it would be im-

<sup>7</sup> Blakney (trans.), *op. cit.*, Sermon 1, p. 96.

possible for Eckhart to argue that the soul when in a state of union in this life is distinguished either from other individual souls, or from God, either by space, time, or by the empirical contents of consciousness. It would also be impossible for him to hold that the eternal union of the soul with God in the future life could be less perfect and less complete than its union during this life. Thus the persistence of individuality after death is quite inconsistent with the most basic principles of his mystical philosophy—whatever he may himself have thought in his more conventional and orthodox moods. The conclusion is that Eckhart's statements are more consistent with the theory of the afterlife as absorption than as persistence of individuality. Whether he himself would have admitted this is another matter. Also, even if Eckhart's views were interpreted to mean identity of the soul with God after death, this would have, in our view, to be corrected by admitting the difference as well as the identity.

Our general conclusion is that mysticism gives no evidence of survival, but that if survival is accepted on other grounds mysticism would favor the absorption theory rather than the theory of individual persistence.

I shall conclude this chapter with some remarks on a possible connection between the eschatological views of the East and West on the one hand and their political philosophies on the other. It might be suggested that there is a connection between the Western belief in the persistence of individuality after death and the idea of the so-called infinite value of the individual, which plays a part in the political thinking of the Western democracies. If so, it might be further suggested that the Eastern theory of immortality as absorption in the Infinite is correlated with the failure of the Orient to develop democratic institutions prior to their importation from Europe in recent times. Perhaps it is the same emphatic assertion of the importance of the individual which expresses itself both in the Western theories of liberty and democracy and in Western religious beliefs about the life after death. And since we condemn political theories which de-emphasize the value of the individual and sub-

merge it in the life of the whole state, ought we not likewise to condemn the same tendency when it appears in religious theories of the life after death?

But such an argument would be doctrinaire and unrealistic. It is true that we talk of the "infinite" value of the individual. But in the first place, the word "infinite" cannot be taken literally here and is plainly no more than a rhetorical device for exalting the importance of individuality and its rights as against the overbearing attitude of a possibly tyrannical state. This type of thinking is in politics entirely praiseworthy and justifiable. Against a brutal totalitarian tyranny, cynical in its contempt for human rights, callous in its infliction of pain and misery, we assert the inherent rights of each human being to be protected against these inhumanities, to be free from oppression, to lead his own life and seek his own happiness. And in the relative world of time and political action all this is right and admirable.

But we must not carry this over into a metaphysical theory of eternity. Its truth is relativistic and pragmatic; relativistic because it is only necessary to insist on the rights and value of the individual because of the existence of tyrannous and wicked men whose interest it is to enslave us and suppress our individuality. It is relative to the background of the human environment in time. It can have no meaning in the "eternal Now." And if there have been Christian and other theologies in which God is anthropomorphically pictured as a cruel and revengeful potentate, we need not at the present date take them seriously in our thinking. And unless we do take them seriously, conceiving God as a being against whom our individual rights have to be asserted, it has no meaning to carry the notion of the infinite value of the individual with us into eternity.

Moreover the Eastern religions might well have their own kind of answer to this attempt to disparage them. Hinduism, but more especially Buddhism, emphasizes that it is the separateness of each individual ego, and the clinging to this separateness, which is at the root of hatred and of moral evil generally. Out of my insistence on the importance of my own ego comes the grasping for whatever I can

get for myself; and out of this come hatred, envy, malice, stealing, cheating, murder, and war. Only if the separate ego of each man is got rid of, if he can feel himself as not merely "I" but one with the life of all other individuals and with the life of God, only then can we hope for salvation. To some extent this is possible even in this life. It is precisely what happens in mystical experience. For in that experience the "I" ceases to exist as a separate being because the Infinite flows into it. And the emotional counterpart of this disappearance of the individual, and this giving up of belief in his own "infinite value," is that love of all other men which is the source of the moral aspect of all the higher religions. This happens even now in our best moments in time. And it is this which ought to be thought of as being fully, finally, and completely realized in the life after death, if there is to be any such life. And the fact that the Western races of men insist on a theory of immortality which includes the persistence of individuality whereas the Indian races, at least in their majority traditions, do not—this, the Indians might plausibly argue, is merely a sign of the greater aggressiveness and self-assertiveness of the Western man.

Such an argument between East and West is profitless. But perhaps it shows at least that an attempt to condemn the Indian theory of immortality by carrying over the Western concept of the infinite value of the individual from the political to the religious sphere is without merit.

## CHAPTER 8

### *Mysticism, Ethics, and Religion*

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#### *1. The Mystical Theory of Ethics*

There are two problems to be discussed in treating of the relation between mysticism and morality. The first concerns the main problem of philosophical ethics, namely, the question, What is the source of ethical rights and duties? For the mystic claim is that, whatever partial or relative truth there may be in utilitarianism, or eudaemonism, or ethical intuitionism, or deontology, the ultimate source of ethical value lies in mysticism itself. Such words as "source" and "foundation" are in this context ambiguous and metaphorical. They may refer to the psychological source, as in those theories which locate the source of ethical values in emotions, preferences, likes and dislikes. Or they may refer to logical justification, as in Kant's attempt to derive ethics from logic. In the first instance at any rate, the mystical theory of ethics uses the word "source" in the psychological sense. Mystical experience, it maintains, is that part of human experience out of which moral feelings flow. The experience is also the justification of moral values, not a logical but an empirical justification. For moral values are a function of that which is *experienced* as the highest human good.

The second problem which we shall find ourselves called upon to discuss is not properly philosophical at all. It is perhaps historical or sociological. It raises the question of the actual influence which

mysticism tends to have, or actually has had, on the living of the good life. Does it make men more moral or less, more active in giving loving assistance to their fellow men or less? Does it tend to operate as an incentive to nobler living, or does it not rather serve mainly as an escape hatch from the responsibilities of life? Though this question is not in the strict sense a philosophical one, yet it cannot be ignored if we are to estimate the value of mysticism as an element in human culture. And it has at least an indirect bearing upon the answer which we may give to our first question—that of the source of ethical value. For we could hardly accept the claim that mysticism is the source of ethics if we should find that in practice its influence on human life is unethical. I will consider these two problems in order.

The basis of the mystical theory of ethics is that the separateness of individual selves produces that egoism which is the source of conflict, grasping, aggressiveness, selfishness, hatred, cruelty, malice, and other forms of evil; and that this separateness is abolished in the mystical consciousness in which all distinctions are annulled. The inevitable emotional counterpart of the separateness of selves is the basic hostility which gives rise to Hobbes's war of all against all. The natural emotional counterpart of the mystical awareness that there is, in that reality which the mystic believes himself to perceive, no separateness of I from you, or of you from he, and that we are all one in the Universal Self—the emotional counterpart of this is love. And love, according to the theory, is the sole basis, and also the sole command, of morality.

Now since the vast majority of men do not profess to have attained at any time to such a mystical experience—and may indeed be highly sceptical of it—and yet such men may exhibit love and unselfishness and in general lead highly ethical lives, there is a gap in the theory here. How can the source of their ethical values be in mystical experience, when they do not have any such experience? The theory will have to hold that their ethical feelings arise from an infiltration into their normal consciousness of some faint mystical sense which is latent in all men and which influences their feelings

and lives without their knowing or understanding it. In this way, if even the most debased and uncultivated man exhibits in his life—in regard to his children, wife, and friends, for example—any feelings of affection, sympathy, kindness, or goodwill, these must be held to have their source in the mystical side of his nature, in this potential and unrealized mystical sense which lies perhaps far below the threshold of his surface consciousness. And to make the theory complete and self-sufficient, it must be held that if it were not for mysticism, whether latent or explicit, there actually could not be any such thing as love, or even mere kindly feeling, in human life. Life would be the wholly unmitigated Hobbesian war of all against all. For the theory cannot admit a rival nonmystical source of morals.

Perhaps Schopenhauer (of all people!) has expressed the metaphysical essentials of the theory as well as anyone in the following passage:

The man who . . . raises himself above particular things, who sees through the individuations of the real . . . sees that the differences between him who inflicts suffering and him who bears it is phenomenal only and concerns not the thing in itself. The inflicter of suffering and the sufferer are one. If the eyes of both were opened, the inflicter of suffering would see that he lives in all that suffers pain.<sup>1</sup>

Schopenhauer was not himself a mystic nor was his own life a model of ethical virtue. But his thought was deeply influenced both by Western mysticism as represented by Jakob Boehme and by the Eastern mysticism of the Upanishads and Buddhism. In the above passage the Kantian influence also appears in his use of the concepts of phenomenal and noumenal. Although the view that the space-time world is illusion, or mere appearance, or phenomenon only, is often found in connection with mysticism, it is not a necessary component of it. For instance, it is not characteristic of Christian mysticism, which in general tends to realism. And in general mysticism goes just as well with realism as with idealism. Therefore, though the above passage does express the essentials of the mystical theory of ethics, the reader should not be misled into supposing that the

<sup>1</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea*, Bk. 4, sec. 63.

view that the world of sense is phenomenal is a necessary part of it.

Our enquiries have led us to maintain that mystical experience is not merely subjective but is transsubjective. It is a union with the One or the Universal Self, which is also the creative source of the universe. If this is a correct interpretation of mystical experience, it will necessarily enter into the mystical theory of ethics. According to that theory, ethical values have their source in mystical experience. If mystical experience were only subjective, this would produce a subjectivistic mystical theory of ethics. The so-called "emotive" theory of ethics usually holds that morals derive from emotions and that emotions are subjective. It would no doubt be possible to substitute mystical feeling or experience for emotion in such a theory. Ethical values might have their source in the mystical elements in human nature, and this mystical part of human nature might be subjective only. But this certainly has not been the view of the great mystics, nor is it the view which is here recommended. According to the theory as it will be expounded here, ethical values arise out of mystical experience, and this experience itself has its source in the One or the Universal Self, which is the foundation of the world. It is therefore part of the theory that ethical value is not merely a human thing, but reflects and is founded in the nature of the universe. Consequently, the usual view of naturalism that the nonhuman world is indifferent to values is rejected by the mystical theory.

Altruistic or moral action may sometimes seem to be motivated by a sense of duty or principle and not by a feeling of sympathy or love for those whom it is intended to benefit. The sense of duty is praised by Kant as the only genuine source of morality. This concerns us because it conflicts with the contention of the mystical theory that moral action is motivated by sympathetic or loving feelings. But Kant's opinion is, in our view, mistaken. For whatever Kant may have thought, it would seem that a sense of duty must ultimately be rooted in sympathetic feelings. Towards the suffering of those who are close to him or belong to his own immediate environment, and especially to those who are in his physical presence, a sensitive man will feel intense sympathy. But it is simply a psychologi-

cal fact that even in the best men these emotional feelings decrease proportionately to the distance of the sufferers from them. And in the case of schemes of wide social reform, for instance the abolition of slavery or the creation of an international institution which aims at the abolition of war, the initiator or supporter of such activities cannot possibly visualize the individual sufferings of the thousands or even millions of absent and far-distant persons whom he hopes to benefit. Personal feelings of sympathy are then impossible. Therefore the man must act on principle or out of duty. The principle is that he should treat all individuals, even those who are wholly unknown to him, *as if* he felt personal love for them. The principle is a rational extension of the feeling which is possible because reason is universal and independent of proximity or distance while feeling is particular and local. A man whose heart is so cold and cruel that he is incapable of sympathy for any sentient being in the world, a man incapable of the feeling of love—if such a man could exist—would never have the sense of altruistic duty which so impressed Kant. This sense of duty to others is itself rooted in genuine love and sympathy, and is a kind of indirect and rationalized form of it.

It may be taken as a fact that love and compassion are feelings which are parts of, or necessary and immediate accompaniments of, mystical experience; and that from this source love can flow into the hearts of men and so come to govern their actions. But this is not in itself enough to establish the mystical theory of ethics. For that theory requires it to be shown not only that love flows from the mystical consciousness but that that consciousness is the *only* source from which love flows into the world. If mysticism is to be the basis of ethics, then the sole fountain of love, which is the principle of ethics, must be in the mystical experience. It will not do to show merely that mysticism is one of several sources from which love comes into men's hearts. For if that were so, then there might be love and ethical action and ethical principles even if there were no mysticism in existence at all.

Now to show that there is no love in the world at all which does not have its source in mysticism would seem to be impossible—and yet

it is a necessity for the theory. When a man loves his children or his friends, these feelings of affection seem to arise quite naturally in human beings including those who certainly are quite unaware of any mystical elements in their own natures. Moreover even animals feel love for their young and act altruistically towards them. And it is likely to be thought fantastic to attribute the feelings of a horse or a dog to mysticism! Yet this would not have appeared foolish to Plato. Important passages in his writings suggest that *all* appetite, all desire of any kind or for anything, is for him a mystical phenomenon. In *The Republic*, speaking in this case no doubt only of human souls, he suggests that the Good, the *summum bonum*, is that which "every soul possesses as the end of all her actions, dimly divining its existence, but perplexed and unable to grasp its nature."<sup>2</sup> In *The Symposium*, putting the words into the mouth of Diotima, he asks: "What is the cause, Socrates, of love and the attendant desire? See you not how all animals, birds as well as beasts, in their desire of procreation are in an agony when they take the infection of love? . . . Why should animals have these passionate feelings? [It is because] love is of the immortal . . . the mortal nature seeking as far as possible to be everlasting and immortal, and this is attained only by generation because generation always leaves behind a new existence in place of the old."<sup>3</sup> The source of all appetite, whether in men or in animals, is the hunger for the Immortal, the Good, the One. Whoever wishes to suppose that Plato was merely indulging in a fanciful idea, a flight of his lively imagination, is welcome to do so. But this is not the interpretation of the present writer. That Plato was a mystic in the sense that he was directly acquainted with mystical experience is uncertain, though there is at least reason to suspect it. But that his system of thought is a strange mixture of rationalistic and mystical ideas is quite certain. In the above quotations from *The Republic* and *The Symposium* the mystical feeling is uppermost.

However fantastic these ideas may seem to the reader, the mystical

<sup>2</sup> Plato, *The Republic*, ed. by F. M. Cornford, New York, Oxford University Press, p. 211.

<sup>3</sup> *The Dialogues of Plato*, Jowett's translation.

theory of ethics is logically forced into the position of maintaining that all love (though not necessarily other kinds of appetition), whether in men or animals, arises out of mystical experience either explicit or latent. The mystical theory can thus only maintain itself by supposing that mystical experience is latent in all living beings, but that in most men and in all animals it is profoundly submerged in the subconscious; and that it throws up influences above the threshold in the form of feelings of sympathy and love. To say that I love or sympathize with another living being is to say that I feel his feelings—for instance, that I suffer when he suffers or rejoice if he rejoices. The mystical theory will allege that this phenomenon is an incipient and partial breaking down of the barriers and partitions which separate the two individual selves; and that if this breakdown were completed, it would lead to an actual identity of the "I" and the "he." Love is thus a dim groping towards that disappearance of individuality in the Universal Self which is part of the essence of mysticism. Our feelings of love are not recognized by us as mystical because the experience of the union of all separate selves in the one cosmic self is hidden from most of us in the abyss of the subliminal. The unifying experience is at a greater depth below the threshold in some men than in others, in selfish and materialistic men more than in altruistic and idealistic personalities. The hypothesis will also have to say that in the animal it is buried beyond all possibility of being dragged up to the light.

Since no reason, evidence, or argument has so far been given for believing what will seem to be wild suggestions, let us now consider whether there is any good reason for supposing that the mystical consciousness must be potential in all beings? First of all, I shall try to show that this has been, either openly or implicitly, the common belief of all mystics. And secondly, I shall show that there are good theoretical grounds which will support the belief. We may begin by glancing briefly at Christian, Hindu, and Buddhist sources.

What we call the mystical consciousness is the same as what in Mahayana Buddhism is called by various names, such as the Buddha-nature, Mind-Essence, the womb of the Tathagata, and so on.

Mind-Essence, the term which is used in the Surangama Sutra, is—as the phrase itself implies—that which is common to all minds or to mind as such apart from its differentiation into individual minds. Of this “pure essence of mind” it is asserted in the sutra that “we conceive it as . . . the ‘storage’ or Universal Mind!”<sup>4</sup> It is described as “pure” because it is empty of all empirical contents. It is therefore identical with the pure ego or pure consciousness which we have elsewhere recognized as being in all of us. Moreover, Buddhist theory carries this view to its logical conclusion with a rigorous consistency which does not exclude the animal mind. For that which is the essence of consciousness will be essential to any consciousness whatever, animal or human. The cat too has the Buddha-nature in it. For the Buddha-nature is nothing but that pure undifferentiated unity which, beyond all multiplicity, is the essence of the introverted type of mystical consciousness wherever found. Now the cat’s consciousness is a unity, and therefore, if it too could “obliterate all multiplicity,” get rid of all empirical content, what would be left would be that pure unity which is the Buddha-nature.

In Hindu thought the doctrine that the mystical consciousness is potential in all of us appears in the central theme of the Upanishads, namely, that the individual self is identical with the Universal Self. It is not that in the enlightenment experience we *become* identical with Brahman. We are now, and always have been, identical with Brahman. But our ordinary sensory-intellectual consciousness does not realize this identity. What happens in the enlightenment experience is that we cease to be deceived by the illusion of separateness. We realize the identity which has always been the truth. In other words we actualize what was always potential in our nature.

Can we trace any such thought in Christian mysticism? If I am not mistaken, we can recognize it quite clearly in Eckhart’s theory of the “apex of the soul.” The apex, which Eckhart also calls the “core” or “essence” of the soul, and the “divine spark,” is not the possession of mystics only, but of all men. It is identical with the

<sup>4</sup> Dwight Goddard (ed.), *A Buddhist Bible*, 2d ed., Thetford, Vt., Dwight Goddard, 1938.

Mind-Essence or Buddha-nature of the Mahayana. What the mystic achieves, according to Eckhart, consists in reaching inwards to this core of his soul after getting rid of the multiplicity of sensations, images, thoughts, and other empirical contents. It follows—though perhaps Eckhart does not explicitly say this—that every man could achieve the mystical consciousness if only he could rid himself of the multiplicity of empirical contents. And this is equivalent to saying that mystical experience is potential in all human beings. We cannot, of course, expect a medieval Christian to carry the theory through to the animal kingdom, since he would be prevented from doing so by the dogma of man as a “special creation” apart from the animals. Buddhism, of course, was never influenced by this belief.

Thus the view which the mystical theory is forced to adopt, namely, that the mystical consciousness is potential at least in all men, is what mystics of the East have always held without question, and what is also implied in the beliefs of the most philosophical of the Christian mystics. What we have now to show is that there are good theoretical reasons for believing that this is correct. And this indeed follows from what has been previously established, namely, that the introverted mystical consciousness is nothing but the bringing to light of the pure ego, the pure unity which underlies all consciousness. If this is so, then mystical experience must necessarily be latent in all beings who possess a single unified centre of consciousness. Indeed any normal sensory consciousness implies a unity of its disparate and manifold elements. The many sensations, images, etc., are together in the unity of *one* consciousness. The mystical experience is simply the realization of the unity after the manifold has disappeared. This will be just as true of the cat or the monkey as of the man. For the animal too must have a consciousness which is the togetherness of a manifold in a unity.

It may be asked what empirical evidence could possibly be quoted in support of the proposition that “mystical consciousness is potential in the animal mind.” It seems to me that although the empirical backing is slight, it is not wholly nonexistent. Presumably Albert Einstein was descended from apelike ancestors. One must assume

that whatever is in the human mind was developed out of the animal minds of our ancestors by natural evolutionary processes. In this sense the mathematical and scientific genius of Einstein was potential in the animal mind. What is true of Einstein will also be true of the Buddha or of St. Teresa or of Eckhart. The Buddha-nature is potential in animals for the simple reason that the Buddha himself must have been descended from animals.

This discussion is intended to show that it is possible to maintain that love and affection and sympathy can have their source in the mystical consciousness even in those men who are unaware of the existence of any such consciousness in themselves or others; and that even animal love may have the same source. But what our discussion up to this point has not shown—and what we have seen to be necessary for the theory—is that mystical consciousness is the *only* possible source: in short, that there could exist no love in the universe which could arise from any other source.

So far as I can see, the only thing which it is possible to say on this subject is that the mystical theory of ethics is in no worse a position in this respect than any other theory of ethics. The difficulty which the mystical theory has to face only amounts to saying that the theory must not only give a self-consistent account of itself and of the arguments which can be used in its favor, but must also, if it is to be accepted as a known truth, refute all rival theories. It must show that all other theories have failed to locate a source of moral obligation. But the same demand could be made of any theory. The only way in which one could attempt to meet it would be to refute systematically all other theories. It would be absurd to embark on such an undertaking here, since this would involve one in writing a general treatise on ethics. The result of these considerations is that the mystical theory, like its rivals, must be regarded as one hypothesis among others, and that therefore it cannot achieve certainty. The mystic may possess his own sense of subjective certainty, but the philosopher who is not a mystic cannot share this. To him it must remain a hypothesis.

Finally, one may claim that the mystical theory restores to morals

once more that basis in a religious view of the world which has been lost, at least in the West, for several centuries.

In this discussion I have not attempted to show that the mystical theory is *true*. I have attempted only to clarify in some degree what the theory actually is and means, what it implies, and what difficulties it has to meet. These difficulties, it will be seen, are very great and certainly constitute a great strain on our capacity for belief, although it does not follow that we should reject it. Perhaps a little more than mere clarification has been accomplished by us. That part of the theory which asserts that love and compassion are actually parts of the mystical consciousness must be accepted as true, since it is so stated by those who have that consciousness. It will follow that love can flow from it into the world and be a source of ethical action. This will follow even if we refuse to accept the speculations of the theory in regard to the potentialities of the animal consciousness. We are left at least with the assurance that the mystical consciousness should be, for those who possess it, a powerful motive and impulsion towards ethical, and therefore towards social, action.

## 2. *Mysticism and the Good Life in Practice*

In the second paragraph of this chapter I pointed out that there are two problems to be discussed in treating of the relation between mysticism and morals. The first was the mystical theory of ethics. On this problem I have said as much as I am able. The second problem was the historical or sociological question of what influence mysticism has actually had on the living of the good life. Has it in fact tended to make men better? And I pointed out that, although this may not be strictly speaking a philosophical problem, yet if it were answered in the negative, if it could be shown, for instance, that mysticism actually inhibits, rather than advances, moral activity, such a finding would inevitably reflect back adversely upon the theoretical claim that mysticism is the source of ethics. I turn now therefore to this second question.

Perhaps the commonest moral accusation against mysticism is

that it functions in practice merely as an escape from the active duties of life into an emotional ecstasy of bliss which is then selfishly enjoyed for its own sake. From this point of view, mystical experience is sought only because of the feelings of peace, blessedness, and joy which it brings. The mystic wallows as in a bath of delicious emotions. This is a mere flight from life and from the urgent work of the world. It may even be suggested, by those who cultivate so-called depth psychology, that what the mystic is "really" trying to do is to go back into the warmth of his mother's womb. I have put the criticism in its strongest possible terms, perhaps exaggerating it in a way which no one who has any knowledge of the actual history of mysticism would endorse. But whether we express the criticism in stronger or weaker language, the essence of it is that in greater or less degree the mystic pursues his own salvation, his own beatitude, in a selfish way, while other men, whom he does not help, suffer.

It has been common to level this sort of accusation more especially at Indian mysticism. The Western critic commonly holds that Christian mystics have generally been devoted to seeking unselfishly the welfare of others while Indian mystics have not. Indian civilization, it is alleged, has in general tended to recognize the right of the mystic to retire from active life into the forest or wherever he may, and to devote himself to nothing but the ecstasy of his own contemplation. It is also often suggested that there is a connection between this tendency and the historical fact that Indian civilization, until it came under the influence of the West, stagnated, and that the ideal of the alleviation of misery through social reform did not take root in the Indian mind.

It is very difficult to evaluate, objectively and fairly, vague charges of this kind leveled against a whole civilization. But I will make a few remarks on this topic. It should be noted in the first place that it has always been the habit of the Indian mystic to attempt to pass on the torch from man to man through the instrumentality of gurus and ashramas. In this way he seeks to show to others the path to salvation which he has found. He is a teacher of what he conceives to be the good life. This activity cannot be called selfish.

In the second place, the Indian tends to have a different set of values from the Western man. To him spirituality is a far higher value than the satisfaction of material needs or even the alleviation of material sufferings. Hence to pass on the torch of spirituality to other men is the highest altruistic action which an Indian mystic can perform. Finally, there is a difference of basic philosophies in another way. The men of the West think that it is theoretically possible to remove or at least to alleviate material misery through schemes of social reform. But Buddha taught that suffering is inherent in life and cannot be removed by any action whatsoever so long as the individual man retains his separateness from other men. Suffering is a consequence of finitude and therefore cannot be got rid of by finite beings. The only way is to get rid of finitude by the expansion of the personality until it coincides with the Infinite. On the whole, the Indian mind has agreed with the Buddha and hence in the past has put little faith in schemes of social reform. However, although the Buddha was right in believing that misery is inherent in finitude and therefore cannot be got rid of completely while finitude remains, yet history has shown that it can be alleviated and that this is worthwhile. This is the rational justification of reform schemes and indeed of altruistic action in general, and the India of today has come to show awareness of this fact.

Thus the coolness of Indian civilization in the past to social reform, to the ideal of helping the poor and unfortunate, has not been wholly due, as the Western critic is apt to think, to callousness and lack of love, but largely to its philosophical beliefs. This is also proved by the fact that the Buddha not only preached but practised universal love and compassion for all beings, yet expressed this in his life almost entirely on the spiritual plane and not much on the material plane. On the other hand, the secret of Gandhi is that, although his basic inspiration, like that of the Buddha, came from the spiritual plane—and in this he remained characteristically Indian—he yet perceived that the alleviation, though not the destruction, or suffering is possible on the material plane and is to be achieved by social and political action. This has now been understood, not

only by Gandhi but by India in general. And this fact, which found its most perfect expression in the life of Gandhi, must be regarded as one of the most hopeful examples of that synthesis of Eastern and Western philosophies and values of which we all ought to be in search. Gandhi's enormous stature is in part due to the fact that he combined in his personality all that is greatest and strongest and noblest in both East and West.

Perhaps Gotama Buddha is the ideal figure of the Indian mystic. And it is true that he left his family and began to seek enlightenment in solitude at an early age. But notice that when he had attained enlightenment he did not remain in retirement in the forest in order to enjoy his own blessedness but, on the contrary, returned to the world of men to found his religion and to bring to all men the way of salvation. For forty years or more he remained in that nirvanic consciousness to which he had attained and yet lived and acted in the space-time world. So that Aurobindo writes that "it was possible for the Buddha to attain the state of Nirvana and yet act puissantly in the world, impersonal in his inner consciousness, in his action the most powerful personality that we know of as having lived and produced results upon earth."<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless it would perhaps be wrong to deny that there is some truth in the contrast between the passive acceptance of social evils in the past history of India and the active fight against them which the West has tended to carry on at least in recent centuries. But how could it be shown that this is to be blamed upon the mysticism of India? It is just as likely that climate is the main cause. Extreme heat produces lassitude and passivity, whereas a cold climate stimulates activity. Of course both suggestions—that mysticism is the cause and that climate is the cause—are presumably oversimplifications. There is no such thing as *the* cause of the characteristics of a whole society or a whole religion. In all such cases there must have been a vast assemblage of conditioning causes. And it is absurd to pick out one factor of Indian civilization and to attribute to it all the national ills.

<sup>5</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, New York, The Greystone Press, 1949, pp. 29-30.

We have instanced the case of the Buddha as a man who poured out in the active service of mankind that compassion which he received as part of the enlightenment experience. And the ideal saint of Mahayana Buddhism, the bodhisattva, is one who, though he has attained enlightenment and with it the right never to be reborn but to pass after death into his final nirvana, yet deliberately gives up this right and comes back again and again in renewed incarnations in order to help other more backward souls along the path to salvation. We may perhaps think that the bodhisattva's vow never to enter final nirvana until all other beings have entered it before him has a slightly theatrical air—as if he wished to dramatize his own unselfishness. Yet we cannot deny that the ideal here preached is not that of a selfish escapism, a flight from practical duties. On the contrary, it is the same ideal as that of the Christian mystics—namely, the enjoyment of mystical beatitude not as an end in itself but for the purpose that its fruits may be poured out in the loving service of mankind. That is the ideal which Mahayana Buddhism preaches. To what extent either Buddhists or Christians have practised what they preach is of course another matter.

But perhaps it is against the ideals of Hindu rather than of Buddhist mystics that the cry of amoralism tends to be raised by Western critics. The root question seems to be whether the blessedness and peace of the mysticial consciousness is regarded as an end in itself in which the mystic who has attained it can rest content as having reached his final goal, or whether that experience is thought of as chiefly a means to a life of active and loving service. Professor R. C. Zaehner in his book *Mysticism Sacred and Profane* contrasts in this respect the theistic mystics of the West, both Christian and Muslim, with Sankara. Sankara, according to him, despised the ideal of the active life, believing that he who has attained to the realization of his identity with Brahman should rest in that as his end.

There is certainly some truth in this contrast. Hindu mystics have tended to be spiritually and speculatively superior to the mystics of the West but lacking in the moral fervor of the latter. The danger of resting selfishly in mystical contemplation has been more clearly

recognized and emphasized by Christian mystics than by the Vedantists or other branches of Hindu mysticism. For instance, Eckhart writes:

What a man takes in contemplation he must pour out in love.

If a man was in rapture such as St. Paul experienced, and if he knew a person who needed something of him, I think it would be far better out of love to leave the rapture and serve the needy man.

It is better to feed the hungry than to see even such visions as St. Paul saw.<sup>6</sup>

In another passage he writes:

Those who are out for "feelings" or for "great experiences" and only wish to have this pleasant side: that is self-will and nothing else.<sup>7</sup>

Ruysbroeck expresses the same certainty that the highest mystical experience must overflow in love into the world. He writes:

The man who is sent down by God from those heights . . . possesses a rich and generous ground, which is set in the richness of God: and therefore he must always spend himself on those who have need of him. . . . And by this he possesses a universal life, for he is ready alike for contemplation and for action and is perfect in both of them.<sup>8</sup>

The last sentence of this quotation from Ruysbroeck teaches us an important lesson. Although the blessedness of the mystical consciousness taken alone and cut off from its fruit in action is not an end in itself, and to treat it as such is the error of which Professor Zaehner accuses Sankara, yet neither is its fruit in action to be treated as an end in itself to which the mystical consciousness is a mere means. What alone is an end in itself is the perfect life, the *summum bonum*, the total situation of the mystical consciousness poured out in loving service to mankind. This is, as Ruysbroeck says, the "universal life ready alike for contemplation and for action and perfect

<sup>6</sup> Quoted by Rufus Jones in *Studies in Mystical Religion*.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted by Rudolf Otto, *Mysticism East and West*, New York, Meridian Books, Inc., 1957, p. 73.

<sup>8</sup> *The Sparkling Stone*, Chap. 14; in Jan van Ruysbroeck, *The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage. The Book of the Supreme Truth. The Sparkling Stone*, trans. by C. A. Wynschenk, London, J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1916.

in both." To treat the enlightenment experience by itself as the final end is selfishness. The opposite error of treating the enlightenment as merely a means to the end of action may result in treating material things as superior to spiritual things, and thus to a false set of values. The life of the spirit must not be degraded to the level of a mere instrumentality for material welfare or worldly success.

The moral force of the Christian mystics is certainly more impressive than that of either the Hindu mystics or any other mystics in the world. It is in this that the great strength of the Christian mystics lies, not in either their purely spiritual or their speculative profundity. In these it seems to me we have to award the palm to the mystics of India and perhaps of the East generally. Whether the moral and social activities of the Christian mystics have been of much actual value to their fellow men is more questionable. St. Teresa spent her life in founding or reforming monasteries. A modern social reformer or philanthropist is not likely to be much impressed by this. But this kind of activity was no doubt the medieval conception of the highest Christian virtue, and we have to take account of the times.

But the real issue tends to be obscured by partisan disputes between East and West, or between one culture and another. If we are considering the general subject of spirituality or mysticism and social action, the important question is whether mysticism as such, wherever it may be found, is necessarily and by its nature a form of escapism, a way of selfishly enjoying bliss while avoiding one's duties to one's fellow men. Our discussion has already shown how serious a distortion of the truth this is. It is true that one who has mystical experience *can* treat it as a means of selfish enjoyment. And this has no doubt often happened. But this is an abuse of mysticism and is no part of its essential nature. Perhaps every ideal has its own characteristic abuse or form of degeneration. For instance, mob rule is the characteristic evil which tends to disfigure the ideals of democracy. Learning tends to degenerate into pedantry; religion into priestcraft. But it is of prime importance to understand that no ideal is to be judged by its abuses, but rather by its inherent nature. The na-

ture of democracy, its ideal, is not mob rule; the ideal of learning is not pedantry; the ideal of religion is not priestcraft. Likewise the ideal of mysticism is not escapism. Perhaps we might use here the idea of a besetting temptation. The besetting temptation of the mystic may no doubt be to enjoy his ecstatic experiences for their own sake, to indulge in what St. John of the Cross calls "spiritual gluttony." But departures from an ideal must not be blamed on the ideal but on the failures and defects of human nature. That Christians do evil is basically because they are fallible human beings. And if mystics do evil, this also is because they are human. The essential tendency of mysticism is therefore towards the moral life, the social life, the life of altruistic action, not away from these things.

But our original question was, Has mysticism actually tended to make men better or not? And it may be objected that we have defended only the ideal of mysticism, but not answered the question about its actual historical results. But this seems to me to be a question which it is almost useless to try to answer. Consider the parallel question whether religion—in so far as it is distinct from mysticism—has done good in the world or not, or more good than harm. Those who disbelieve in the truth of any religion, the sceptics and unbelievers, tend to say that religion has never made men morally better and that in fact it has done harm. Believers in religion take the opposite view. Neither opinion is based, I believe, on an impartial survey of the facts. Both are founded on little but the predilections and preconceived ideas of those who argue pro and con. And for this there is good reason. The empirical facts of history are so complex that the strands of good and evil tendency cannot be disentangled from the vast mass of events. The same must be said of mysticism. Those who dislike it will abuse it as escapism, or say that little or no good can be traced to it. Those who favor it will contend that it has made men better. Some have become saints whose influence for good has been incalculable. It has introduced lofty aspirations into the world, and these have infiltrated all civilizations. I have little inclination to be drawn into this battle of prejudices. I can only point to the fact that in its essence mysticism contains

the love which is the ultimate motivation of all good deeds, that its tendency must therefore presumably be towards the good—however much this ideal tendency may be smirched by the evils and weaknesses and follies of human nature.

### 3. *Mysticism and Religion*

The essential facts regarding the relations between mysticism and religion, as they have emerged during the course of this enquiry, may be briefly summarized here.

It has been a common assumption of writers on the subject that mysticism is a religious phenomenon. Having Western religions, especially Christianity, always in their minds, they may even simply define the mystical consciousness as "union with God." According to our view, the essence of the introvertive experience is the undifferentiated unity, and "union with God" is only one possible interpretation of it, which should not therefore be given as its definition. The same experience can be interpreted nontheistically as in Buddhism. Moreover, if by "religion" one means one or other of the recognized world religions, then Plotinus can be quoted as a non-religious mystic, since the intellectual framework in terms of which he interpreted his experience was a system of philosophy, not a religion. Thus the first answer to the question whether mysticism is essentially a religious phenomenon is that it is not. It may be associated with a religion, but it need not be.

However, a different answer can be given if one understands the term "religion" in a different way. It may refer to feeling rather than to a creed or intellectual structure. There is no reason why mystical experience should not occur, not indeed pure, but pure enough to be free of any recognizable religious "beliefs." But it can still be said to involve religious feeling, the feelings of the holy, the sacred, or the divine. The sacred can be simply understood as that which a person feels to be capable of being profaned. Here I do not use "sacred" and "profane" in the conventional theological sense. The mystic refers always to the timeless or eternal which is felt

to be also the supremely noble, transcending altogether the transient world of flux, vanity, frustration, and sorrow. There goes with it the peace which passeth understanding. All this can be experienced and felt without any creed at all. And in this sense mysticism can be rightly regarded as in essence religious.

The question whether the mystical consciousness favors one creed, one world religion rather than another, can plainly be answered by saying that it does not. The mystic in any culture usually interprets his experience in terms of the religion in which he has been reared. But if he is sufficiently sophisticated, he can throw off that religious creed and still retain his mystical consciousness.

Instead of asking whether mysticism is essentially religious, the converse question may be raised whether all religion is essentially mystical. It can reasonably be answered that Buddhism and the higher forms of Hinduism are essentially mystical because the enlightenment experience is their source and centre. But as Professor E. A. Burtt has noted, mysticism, which is a major component in Indian religions, is only a minor strand in Christianity, Islam, and Judaism.<sup>9</sup> It is a fair question to ask whether the founder of Christianity was a mystic in the strict sense of having in himself the mystical consciousness and living and speaking out of it as a basis for his teachings and his life, as the Buddha did. Perhaps Jesus was a mystic, but I cannot find that there is any real evidence of it. There is nothing of it in the synoptic gospels. In the Gospel of St. John we find several times repeated certain statements about union with God and oneness with God. In view of the negative evidence of the synoptic gospels, there is no reason to suppose that these phrases were ever uttered by the historical Jesus. Possibly they show that the author of St. John's gospel was a mystic or perhaps no more than that he was familiar with a few mystical phrases. They show nothing about Jesus.

It is difficult to suppose that if Jesus possessed the mystical consciousness he would not have set it at the centre of his teaching as

<sup>9</sup>E. A. Burtt, *The Teachings of the Compassionate Buddha*, New York, Mentor Books, New American Library of World Literature, Inc., 1955, p. 16.

the Buddha did. And if one remembers that Judaism is the least mystical of the three great theistic religions—and indeed of all the great world religions—this further adds to the improbability that Jesus, born and brought up as a Jew, was a mystic. If Jesus was not a mystic, this explains the fact that mysticism is only a minor strand in the religion which he founded. This is really inexplicable if he was, in any genuine sense, a mystic. Mysticism comes into later Christianity as a result of influences which had their sources in Greece, not in Palestine.

If in spite of these facts we wish to maintain that mysticism is ultimately the source and essence of all religion, we shall have on our hands a set of problems very similar to those which beset the mystical theory of ethics. We shall have to maintain that mystical consciousness is latent in all men but is in most men submerged below the surface of consciousness. Just as it throws up into the upper consciousness influences which appear in the form of ethical feelings, so must its influences appear there in the form of religious impulses. And these in turn will give rise to the intellectual constructions which are the various creeds. We have seen earlier in this chapter what difficulties this kind of view has to meet, and that these difficulties, though perhaps not insuperable, are very great.

The general conclusion regarding the relations between mysticism on the one hand and the area of organized religions (Christian, Buddhist, etc.) on the other is that mysticism is independent of all of them in the sense that it can exist without any of them. But mysticism and organized religion tend to be associated with each other and to become linked together because both look beyond earthly horizons to the Infinite and Eternal, and because both share the emotions appropriate to the sacred and the holy.



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