



MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE, RELIGIOUS DOCTRINE
AND PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS

P.C. Almond, M.A.(Lancaster), B.D.(Hons) (London), Th.L.

A thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

The Department of Philosophy
The University of Adelaide

December, 1978.

Awarded 12 November 1979

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being available for loan and photocopying.

Date :15.11.79.....Signed :



TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
SUMMARY.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vi
INTRODUCTION : THE PROBLEM OF UNITY AND DIVERSITY IN RELIGIONS.....	1
CHAPTER ONE : R.C. ZAEHNER: THE VARIETIES OF MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE.....	30
CHAPTER TWO : N. SMART: THE MYSTICAL, THE NUMINOUS AND RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS.....	64
CHAPTER THREE: W.T. STACE: EXTROVERTIVE AND INTROVERTIVE MYSTICISM.....	111
CHAPTER FOUR : R. OTTO: THE MYSTICAL, THE NUMINOUS AND METAPHYSICS.....	156
CHAPTER FIVE : A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS.....	204
CHAPTER SIX : MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE AND ITS INTERPRETATION: AN ANALYSIS OF POSSIBLE MODELS.....	213
CHAPTER SEVEN: THE VARIETIES OF MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE: A PHILOSOPHICAL PROLEGOMENON.....	254
SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	295

SUMMARY

The spiritual vacuum generated by the decline of the Christian world-view in the West has created for Western man the opportunity of taking up any one of a variety of modes of spirituality. Religious diversity has become a fact in Western religious life. This increasing pluralism has led to a realisation of the philosophical problem inherent in it, a problem crystallised in the so-called 'conflicting truth claims' problem:- The different religions appear to make different and incompatible claims about the nature of ultimate reality, of divinity, of human nature, and cosmic destiny.

This study allows us to pursue this problem by examining the relationship between certain 'universal' forms of religious experience, especially mystical experience, and the doctrines of various religious traditions. Therefore, the study has a two-fold aim. Firstly, it proposes to give a philosophical analysis of what is involved in and assumed by the phenomenological determination of the nature of religious experience. And secondly, in the light of this, it intends to examine the possibility of resolving the problem of conflicting truth claims by appeal to religious experience.

To this end, we examine a number of seminal writers who, having undertaken the task of determining the nature of religious experience, in so doing, both illuminate the

problem of conflicting truth claims and reflect the difficulties inherent in its resolution. In the latter part of the Introduction and in the first four chapters, we examine the accounts of religious experience offered by S. Radhakrishnan, R.C. Zaehner, W.T. Stace, N. Smart and R. Otto. Simultaneously, we analyse their accounts of the relationship between religious belief and religious doctrines.

In the first section of Chapter Five, we undertake a brief comparative analysis of the major features of these accounts and summarise the similarities and differences between them. In the second section, we review the attempts made by these authors to resolve the problem of truth and religions and conclude that the problem of conflicting truth claims has not been fully resolved by any of the theories previously examined.

In the next chapter, we argue that this failure is especially due to a conceptual impasse generated by inadequate notions of the relationship between mystical experience and its interpretation. We examine this impasse by exposition and criticism of four possible models of this relationship.

We examine a further model in the final chapter and suggest some crucial modifications to it. In the light of this, a number of theses are presented which deal with the relationship between mystical experience and religious doctrine. We suggest that our final model, suitably modified, indicates that a much more complex phenomenology of religious experience is needed. This in turn leads to our

other main conclusion. This is to the effect that the attempt to determine religious truth by appeal to religious experience is a conceptually impossible one and that, therefore, the resolution of conflicting truth claims between different religions needs to be conducted mainly on extra-experiential grounds.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by any other person, except when due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

P.C. ALMOND.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to acknowledge here the encouragement and advice given to me by my Supervisor, Mr. John Gill. My thanks are also due to Mr. Michael Bradley for reading all contained herein in its penultimate form. Finally, I am grateful to Professor James Horne of the University of Waterloo and Dr. Harold Turner of the University of Aberdeen who read and commented upon earlier versions of several of the chapters.

INTRODUCTION

THE PROBLEM OF UNITY & DIVERSITY IN RELIGIONS

Synopsis

Section I.

The subject matter of the study: the nature of the relationship between religious experience and religious propositions. The study arises from two considerations: Firstly, from the interest generated in world religions through the meeting of East and West: The interplay between Eastern and Western modes of thought; the impact of East on West as a result of 'secularisation of the West.'

Section II.

Secondly, the 'chaotic multilogue' of the Western world leads to a recognition of the problem of conflicting truth claims between religions. A possible resolution to the problem is offered by Hinduism's philosophy of tolerance and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan's thesis of the unity of all religions: There is an underlying core of Truth standing over against the religious traditions which only partially enshrine it.

Section III.

How is this thesis justified? Statement of Radhakrishnan's appeal to religious experience.

Section IV.

Radhakrishnan evinces the two main considerations for our study: Firstly, the recognition of the variety of religious doctrines; secondly, the awareness of a common core to all religions, namely, religious experience. Our study proceeds from the premiss that the study of religious experience is a crucial prolegomenon to the analysis of the relationship between world religions. Two provisos regarding the methodology of this study. Definition of 'religious experience.'

Section V.

Problems with Radhakrishnan's thesis of the unity of all religions. The problem of Approximation: Which tradition embodies the Truth to the Highest degree? Both N. Smart and P. Sherrard argue that exponents of the thesis of the unity of all religions adopt an arbitrary normative stance.

Section VI.

The problem of the Priority of Religious Experience: Do all religions place the same priority upon religious experience? Radhakrishnan's distinction between religions of the object and religions of experience.

According to Radhakrishnan, the former are in danger of being outmoded by progress in the natural and historical sciences. A refutation of this by reference to S. Kierkegaard's discussion of religions A and B, and his notion of 'contemporaneity.' It is argued that both religions of the object and religions of experience are ultimately based upon religious experience. A foreshadowing of the possibility that religions of experience and religions of the object are not based on the same experience: The problem of the Unity of Religious Experience.

INTRODUCTION

THE PROBLEM OF UNITY & DIVERSITY IN RELIGIONS

Section I

Recently, the anthropologist, I.M. Lewis, has written,

Belief, ritual, and spiritual experience:
these are the cornerstones of religion,
and the greatest of them is the last.¹

This study proceeds upon the same basis. My primary concern is to examine and illuminate the nature of the relationship between major forms of religious experience and their expression in the propositional formulations of the major world religions, their doctrines, their beliefs etc.

The necessity for and the desirability of undertaking such an enterprise arises from two main considerations. Firstly, it arises from the presence within Western culture of an ever-increasing growth of interest in the study of the great religious traditions of the world. Indeed, the present time, showing as it does the collapse of cultural barriers and an incipient revolt against Western cultural tribalism together with the fore-shadowed development in Western man of a global consciousness, is perhaps the most propitious of all

¹I.M. Lewis, Ecstatic Religion (United Kingdom: Penguin, 1971), p.11.

previous ages for the study of world religions.

This situation has arisen, perhaps paradoxically, from that process in Western societies which has been called "secularisation." On the one hand, Western man, in becoming more "secularised", in becoming very much the child of the scientific and technological revolutions of the past several centuries has freed himself from the dominance which religious belief and its institutions — in a predominantly Christian form — have had over him. Yet, on the other hand, because secularisation has liberated Western man from viewing his world through Christian-coloured spectacles, this very fact has made possible an approach to and an understanding of those spiritual universes within which the peoples of the East have for millenia found their meaning, and by means of which they have mapped out their life journeys.

To be sure, this is not to assert that the secularist mode of thought might not be applied to other religions, nor to deny that the phenomenon of secularisation is making its presence felt in Eastern culture. As Paul Tillich points out,

the main characteristic of the present encounter of the world religions is their encounter with the quasi-religions of our time. Even the mutual relations of the religions proper are decisively influenced by the encounter of each of them, with secularism, or one or more of the quasi-religions which are based on secularism.²

²P. Tillich, Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963) p.5; cf also E. Benz, Buddhism or Communism (London: Allen & Unwin, 1965), and T. Ling, Buddha, Marx and God (London: Macmillan, 1961).

It is certainly true that, to some extent, this ideological assault of the West upon the East did bring about a resurgence in Eastern religions. Nevertheless, as K.M. Pannikar notes, that these religions are stronger today,

...does not mean that they have not undergone profound changes. As against other religions and other philosophies they have more than held their own; but they have also had to undergo subtle transformations to resolve the conflicts which modern science, more than rival religions, forced on them. Thus the new interpretations of Buddhism and Hinduism reflect in a large measure the influence of modern ideas, ³ mostly arising from contact with Europe.

Granted the impact of secularist modes of thought upon the East, it is nevertheless necessary to deny that the process of cultural influence is a purely one-sided affair, that East meets West only in the conflict of the latter's materialism with the former's spirituality. On the contrary, the 'spiritual' gap created by the virtual demise of the Christian scheme of ordering reality has opened up the possibility of Western man taking into his own understanding of the world any one of a variety of Eastern modes of spirituality, a possibility which is becoming a reality in the Western context. This is not to foreshadow the prospect of large scale conversion to Eastern norms, but it is to at least register the presence of, awareness of and interest in these norms within the West. Such an awareness is already leading to

³K.M. Pannikar, Asia & Western Dominance (New York: Collier, 1969), p.329.

Western reflection upon the nature of its own religious heritage,⁴ to an attempt to enrich Western Christianity by an absorption of Eastern spiritual values,⁵ or at the very least to a recognition by Christianity that some elements of religious truth may be enshrined within Eastern traditions.⁶ Pluralism has become, therefore, a fact in Western religious life. Whatever may be the outcome of this incursion of Eastern spiritualities (and prediction at the present time would be foolhardy at best), the words of Hendrik Kraemer are undeniably truer today than when first penned:

The fact remains [he writes] that the peculiar spirit, the dynamic, the motive forces and the achievements of the great Eastern cultures, religions and philosophies occupy a place, play a role, co-determine the chaotic multilogue in which the Western world finds itself, groping in the dark towards an undefined and indefinable new unity of life.⁷

⁴See eg. J. Hick, God and the Universe of Faiths (London: Fount, 1977).

⁵See eg. J. Moffitt, Journey to Gorakhpur (London: Sheldon, 1973); W.J. Johnston, Silent Music (London: Fount, 1977); T. Merton, Mystics & Zen Masters (New York: Delta, 1961).

⁶For a classic account, see E. Troeltsch, The Absoluteness of Christianity (London: SCM, 1972); for a Roman Catholic position, see H. Küng, "The World's Religions in God's Plan of Salvation" in J. Neusner S.J. (ed), Christian Revelation and World Religions, (London: Burnes and Oates, 1967); for a neo-orthodox Protestant approach, see H. Kraemer, Religion and the Christian Faith (London: Lutterworth, 1956).

⁷H. Kraemer, World Cultures and World Religions: The Coming Dialogue (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1950), p.270.

Section II

It is the presence of this "chaotic multilogue", to use Kraemer's phrase, which leads to the second consideration for this study. This second consideration may be clarified by the asking of two questions. Firstly, are the doctrinal statements of the major world religions really saying the same thing, or are they totally (or perhaps only partially) incompatible with each other? The second question is, how do we find the means whereby we may set about answering this first question?

The first set of questions revolves around what has come to be called the 'conflicting truth claims' problem. John Hick summarises it in this way:

The 'conflicting truth claims' problem is just that the different religions seem to say different and incompatible things about the nature of ultimate reality, about the modes of divine activity, and about the nature and destiny of man. Is the divine nature personal or non-personal? Does deity become incarnate in the world? Are human beings born again and again on earth? Is the Bible, or the Qurān, or the Bhagavad-Gītā the word of God? If what Christianity says in answer to these questions is true, must not what Hinduism says be to a large extent false? If what Buddhism says is true, must not what Islam says be largely false?⁸

In essence, in so far as religions make propositional claims, and it is hard to deny that they do, such claims are incompatible. The problem thus generated has led to attempts both to resolve and to dissolve it. Since

⁸J. Hick, "The Outcome: Dialogue into Truth", in J. Hick (ed), Truth and Dialogue, (London: Sheldon Press, 1974), p.140.

the latter do not seriously come to grips with it,⁹ the problem may be more fruitfully illuminated by considering a preferred resolution of it.

This purported resolution arises, perhaps not unexpectedly, within that melding of various religions and philosophies, namely, Hinduism. It springs, in part, from the attitude of tolerance and charity towards all sets of religious beliefs characteristic of Hinduism. The passion for the truth of certain dogmas so apparent in religions of Semitic origin has never asserted itself in Hinduism. This tolerance of Hinduism for other faiths and for variations of belief which occur under its own umbrella, was noted by the first Muslim to give serious consideration to Hinduism. Al-Bīrūnī, the Muslim encyclopaedist, writing in the eleventh century A.D., remarked,

They [the Hindus] totally differ from us in religion, as we believe in nothing in which they believe, and vice versa. On the whole there is very little disputing about theological topics among themselves; at the utmost, they fight with words, but they will never stake their soul or body

⁹The problem may be dissolved in at least either of two ways. Firstly, by arguing, as Wilfred Cantwell Smith does, that (1) the notion of religions as mutually exclusive entities is an illicit reification and that (2) religions are not true or false in themselves, but can only be true or false in the life of the believer. See eg. W. Cantwell Smith, Questions of Religious Truth (New York: Scribners, 1967). Alternatively, the problem may be dissolved by an extreme conceptual fideism in which each religion sets its own criteria of internal truth and falsity. For the most recent example of such conceptual fideism, see D.Z. Phillips. Religion without Explanation (London: Blackwell, 1976). See also my Review of this book in Australasian Journal of Philosophy, Vol. 55, 1977, pp.218-221.

or their property on religious controversy.¹⁰

This statement is a generalisation about a religion, the complexity and variety of which should always make one wary of asserting anything about it in general. Nevertheless, in spite of the fact that, here and there, in the history of Hinduism there have been outbursts of sectarian fanaticism, it is broadly true. The mainstream of Hinduism has always felt respect for and had goodwill towards a variety of religious persuasions.

Perhaps the major modern day Hindu proponent of this attitude of charity to other forms of religious belief is Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. His general philosophy of life is summarised in the following extract from his book The Hindu View of Life. He writes,

The Hindu theory that every human being, every group and every nation has an individuality worthy of reverence is slowly gaining ground. Such a view requires that we should allow absolute freedom to every group to cultivate what is most distinctive and characteristic of it. All peculiarity is unique and incommunicable, and it will be to disregard the nature of reality to assume that what is useful to one will be useful to everyone else to the same extent. The world is wide enough to hold men whose natures are different.¹¹

It is particularly in the religious realm that man, both as an individual and as a group, must have the freedom to accept that form of religious expression which most

¹⁰ Quoted by R.C. Zaehner, Hinduism (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), p.4.

¹¹ S. Radhakrishnan, The Hindu View of Life (New York: MacMillan, 1975), p.38.

adequately represents the nature of the ultimately real for him. Thus, Radhakrishnan writes,

From the R̥sis, or seers, of the Upanishads down to Tagore and Gandhi, the Hindu has acknowledged that truth wears vestures of many colours and speaks in strange tongues.¹²

For Radhakrishnan, there is one 'truth', but many different ways of expressing it. The doctrines, myths, creeds and symbols of the major world religions are but different formulations of the one 'truth', different because of the differing historical circumstances which obtained when they were expressed. For this reason, the way in which the truth is expressed is not in itself of importance. The expressions of the Truth are merely tools which can be used to point us to that Truth which lies beyond all of them:

Behind all the varied expressions, Brahman, Yahveh, Ahuramazda, Allah, there is the same intention, the same striving, the same faith. All religions spring from the sacred soil of the human mind and are quickened by the same spirit. The different systems are tentative adjustments, more or less satisfactory to spiritual reality.¹³

In essence therefore, for Radhakrishnan, and according to him, for the mainstream of Hinduism from the time of the Upanishads onwards, there is an underlying core of truth standing over against or lying behind the religious traditions which, perforce, only partially enshrine it.

¹²Ibid., p.27.

¹³S. Radhakrishnan, East and West in Religion (London: Allen & Unwin, 1933), p.19; cf S. Radhakrishnan, Eastern Religions and Western Thought (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), pp.316-7.

Section III

If the claim that there is an underlying core of truth which cannot be spoken of is to be admitted for consideration, it is necessary that Radhakrishnan should supply an answer to the question, "Whence comes this realisation that there is an underlying core of Truth?" In other words, having maintained that religions are only incompatible from a relative and not from an absolute perspective (in answer to our first question), how is this to be justified? For Radhakrishnan, the answer comes from religious experience. He writes,

To say that God exists means that spiritual experience is attainable; the possibility of the experience constitutes the most conclusive proof of the reality of God: God is given and is the factual content of the spiritual experience. All other proofs and descriptions of God are matters of definition and language...the authority of Scripture, the traditions of the Church, or the casuistries of schoolmen who proclaim but do not prove may not carry conviction to many of us who are the children of science and reason, but we must submit to the fact of spiritual experience which is primary and positive. We may dispute theologies, but we cannot deny facts.¹⁴

In short, according to Radhakrishnan, it is religious experience which both guarantees that there is an 'Ultimately Real' which lies 'beyond' the realm of sense perception, and entails that the ways in which this 'Ultimately Real' is expressed in the religions of the world cannot but approximate to it and act as signposts toward it.

¹⁴S. Radhakrishnan, Eastern Religions and Western Thought (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), pp.22-3.

Section IV

While there are problems in Radhakrishnan's account to which we shall need to return, Radhakrishnan's thesis of the underlying unity of all religions evinces the two factors with which I am particularly concerned: Firstly, the recognition of the variety of religious doctrinal schemes and their apparent (if not real) incompatibility; and secondly, the awareness of the common core of all religions, namely religious experience. This study will not attempt to resolve the problem of conflicting truth claims in religions. For that is perhaps a prophetic rather than a philosophical task. But, it does aim to discuss that common core of religions from which one might begin such a task, to outline that point from which one might seek the connecting thread. That is to say, this study proceeds from the premiss that it is the study of religious experience which is the crucial prolegomenon to the discussion of the relationship between world religions. It is to be hoped that the light thrown upon the relationship between religious experience and religious concepts will justify this. A further premiss may also be noted. That there are religious experiences and that the relationship between these and certain religious notions can be, to some extent, traced is central to this study. This is neither to adopt nor to reject such criticisms of the relationship between religious propositions and religious experience as have been offered by those of a positivist or empiricist

frame of mind.¹⁵ Rather, this study proceeds from a stance of neutrality with regards to the cognitive status of propositional claims made upon the basis of religious experiences, though such a procedure shall not preclude us from offering, albeit indirectly, some clues as to how the justification of such claims might be effected. This latter task can however only proceed upon a firm basis established by a thorough study of the relationship between religious concepts, propositions etc. and those religious experiences to which they are ultimately and irreducibly related. The examination of the possible correlations between religious metaphysics and experience is therefore our primary task.

As to the methodology of the task we are about to undertake, two provisos must initially be made. Firstly, we shall not be aiming to catalogue the large variety of religious experiences which man undergoes. That man does undergo such a variety is of course well exemplified in William James' classic work The Varieties of Religious Experience.¹⁶ Rather, I shall concentrate on those major kinds of religious experience which are seminal for major doctrinal schemes.

Secondly, I shall not attempt to delineate the

¹⁵ Three classical examples of such critiques occur in A.J. Ayer, Language, Truth and Logic (London: Gollancz, 1970); C.B. Martin, Religious Belief (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967); and R.W. Hepburn, Christianity and Paradox (London: Watts, 1958).

¹⁶ W. James, The Varieties of Religious Experience (London: Collins, 1961).

nature of these religious experiences by an exhaustive analysis of their expressions in religious texts. Such a procedure would be fraught with difficulty and it is part of the purpose of this study to indicate the philosophical problems inherent in such a procedure. Rather, I shall take a number of major analyses of religious experience offered by seminal philosophical phenomenologists,¹⁷ in order to examine their respective views upon the structure of religious experience and their analyses of the relation of this structure to religious expression. This procedure will enable us to at least perceive the difficulties of proceeding from accounts of religious experiences to the nature of such experiences. By the use of this method, I shall aim to propose towards the end of this study some guidelines to the determination of the relationship between religious experience and its expression which both utilises the insights of these various scholars and is applicable to the analysis of religious texts.

Before proceeding further however, it is necessary to give a preliminary indication of how the term 'religious experience' is to be used. It can for example be used in a very general sense to mean all those different elements within religions which go to make up man's religious experience as a whole. We could, for example,

¹⁷The title is a clumsy one but perhaps useful in indicating that the phenomenological task is supplemented by a philosophical approach.

classify the myths, rites, doctrines, ethics, and the social milieu of Buddhism as the Buddhist religious experience.¹⁸ Or, alternatively, it can be used to refer to that general awareness of the inexplicability of the world around us which upon reflection, seeks its explication in the affirmation of the existence of the transfinite.¹⁹ In this study, however, we have a more specific use in mind. We are interested in those special kinds of experience in which man comes into 'contact' with the 'beyond', with that sphere of 'being' wholly different from everyday experience. Religious experience is that moment or moments in which man perceives himself as being in touch with the 'sacred' the 'transcendent' or the 'immanent', the 'sacred beyond' or the 'sacred within'. It is that moment or those moments in which man believes he has 'attained Nirvana' or 'become Brahman' or 'entered into union with God', or in which he sees himself as confronted with that Being described by Rudolf Otto as Mysterium, Tremendum et Fascinans. It is from such specific experience that all the more general manifestations of man's religious behaviour are primarily derived. And, it is to the 'Sacredly Real' apprehended within such experience that all the more general manifestations of man's religious behaviour are intricately directed.

¹⁸As eg. Ninian Smart does in his The Religious Experience of Mankind (London: Fontana, 1971).

¹⁹See eg. J. Hick, The Arguments for the Existence of God (London: MacMillan, 1970), pp.46-52; and F.C. Copleston, Aquinas, (U.K.: Penguin, 1955), p.124.

Section V

In order to lay the foundations for the body of this work, we may now return to the thesis of the unity of all religions as propounded by Radhakrishnan and proceed to some criticisms of it. We shall examine three problems with this account which I shall call the problems of approximation, priority and unity.

To clarify the problem of Approximation, we shall examine criticisms of the thesis of the unity of all religions offered by Philip Sherrard and Ninian Smart. In an article entitled "The Tradition and the Traditions,"²⁰ Sherrard is concerned to point out the difference between the Christian conception of the Ultimate and the Hindu conception of the same (as expressed in the Hindu school of Advaita Vedānta). According to Christianity, the Ultimate is, in the main, conceived of in personal terms. He is a Father, a Judge, a Creator, etc. By contrast, the Ultimate of Hinduism can only be spoken of (if at all) in impersonal terms. Thus, there is a conflict between these two different ways of expressing the nature of the Ultimate. For Radhakrishnan, as we have seen, the conflict is resolved by maintaining that, in a sense, neither is to be preferred, since both are merely approximations to an underlying core of truth.

Sherrard is however not satisfied with this resolution. He maintains that, even if it is the case that

²⁰P. Sherrard, "The Tradition and the Traditions", in Religious Studies, Vol.10, 1974, pp.407-18.

all religious expressions are but approximations to an underlying core of truth, there still remains the question as to which religion most truly reflects that core in its expression. Thus, he writes,

...while it is one thing to say that all traditional forms ultimately express the same universal truth, it is quite another to say that they all express it to the same degree.²¹

Sherrard's point may be exemplified in the following way. If a follower of the Theravādin school of Buddhism asserts, "There is no Absolute God" and a follower of Islam maintains, "There is no God but God and Mohammed in his prophet," then on Radhakrishnan's apparent principles, both are correct. But, surely, two such incompatible statements cannot both be correct. Sherrard is therefore concerned to enquire whether there is a means by which it might be determined which religion embodies the universal truth to the highest degree.

Sherrard's conclusion is that no such means exists. Let us examine his argument for this conclusion. Sherrard argues that any attempt by a follower of any one religion to argue that his religion embodies the universal truth or underlying core of truth to the highest degree involves a begging of the question. Why? Consider a religious believer B, who is a believer in and follower of religion M. Let us suppose that B wishes to show that M embodies the universal truth to the highest degree. Then, suppose that B argues in the

²¹Ibid., p.409.

following way:

- (i) I maintain that I have knowledge of the conditions necessary to be fulfilled by any particular religion in order for it to be considered as expressing the Universal truth most fully.
- (ii) M fulfils these conditions.
- (iii) Therefore, M expresses the universal truth most fully.

The argument expressed above is certainly a valid one. But, of course, it is the first statement by B which raises a question. How does B know what conditions are necessary for any religion to be considered as expressing the Universal Truth most fully? Sherrard argues that the conditions necessary will (and can only) be derived in any instance from the knowledge that B has of his own religious tradition, namely M. That is, criteria of religious knowlege inherent in M are the conditions which must be fulfilled. Quite clearly, this may be to assume something for which there is no warrant. As Sherrard points out,

...the assumption that the degree of knowledge one has through a particular tradition is the highest there is, is an arbitrary assumption or an act of faith.

Also, it is clear that one's estimate of which religion most fully approximates to the universal core will differ according to the tradition which one accepts and believes in. Sherrard writes,

²²Ibid., p.414.

...had one obtained one's knowledge from a tradition whose basic principles do not harmonize with those of one's own tradition, one might, and probably would, have been led to quite a different assessment of what constitutes the highest knowledge and hence of what constitutes the truly universal tradition.²³

In essence, Sherrard's position is that the thesis of the unity of all religions demands an answer to the question of which form of religious expression most closely reflects the underlying core of truth. Sherrard maintains that this question cannot be validly answered by any believer in one particular tradition, since in formulating the answer, the ultimate validity of the criteria inherent within his own tradition are assumed and not argued for.

A similar criticism of the thesis of the unity of all religions is proffered by Ninian Smart. His criticism revolves around the parable of the blind men and the elephant. The parable tells of a number of blind men who are holding different parts of an elephant. Each blind man believes he is holding a different object to the others for each believes his description of the part is a description of the whole. So also with religions: The Christian believes he has the whole truth, likewise the Buddhist, the Muslim etc. Yet each in fact holds only part, the whole truth being hidden from all of them. The parallels with Radhakrishnan's thesis are clear.

²³Ibid., p.411.

In a criticism of the central point of the parable, Smart writes,

We can describe the blind men hanging on to different parts of the same elephant as doing so because we see the elephant. The parable depends on the notion that we have eyes whereas the hangers on are blind. In short, if one is in an advantageous position regarding the truth, one can say with confidence that others only have a partial view of it.²⁴

Smart's point is, with respect to religions, who can claim to be in such a position of advantage, whose eyes do work? Again, the claim by adherents of any one tradition that they have vision appears an arbitrary one, indeed, an act of faith.

To be fair to Radhakrishnan, the claim that he is in an advantageous position is not made overtly. Nevertheless, the assumption is present, albeit covertly. Hans Küng indicates that there is no doubt that Radhakrishnan does adopt a normative stance. Regarding Radhakrishnan, he states:

But when he simplifies this identity [ie. of religions] to the point of asserting that all articulate religious statements, all revelations and confessions, all authorities and rites are relative, and the only thing that has any ultimate validity is that inner spiritual experience of the absolute which appears in different forms in all religions and can never be adequately expressed, then he is taking up a dogmatic standpoint. It is only possible to make all religions equal if the underlying formless mystical experience is being taken as an absolute.²⁵

²⁴N. Smart, The Yogi and the Devotee (London: Allen & Unwin, 1968), p.132.

²⁵H. Küng, "The World Religions in God's Plan of Salvation" in J. Neusner S.J. (ed), Christian Revelation and World Religions (London: Burnes & Oates, 1967), pp.48-9.

To be sure, such covert dogmatism is not restricted to Radhakrishnan. It makes its appearance in John Hick's rejection of overt dogmatism. He writes,

...the needed Copernican revolution in theology involves...
 (a) radical transformation in our conception of the universe of faith and the place of our own religion within it. It involves a shift from the dogma that Christianity is at the centre to the realization that it is God who is at the centre, and that all the religions of mankind, including our own, serve and revolve around him.²⁶

Hick, while appearing overtly neutral, is nevertheless normatively theistic.

I do not wish to maintain, as perhaps Sherrard implies, that it is impossible to discuss the relationship between world religions without adopting a particular religious stance which is deemed as normative for other religions. This work proceeds upon the assumption that a stance of neutrality is a possible one. Nevertheless, it is perhaps apparent that Radhakrishnan's stance is a normative one, and one which places him in a greater dilemma than eg. Hick. For, since it is the case that Radhakrishnan operates from within a particular tradition, and since this particular tradition adopts the principle that all statements about the nature of Ultimate Reality are relatively true and not absolutely true, then it is the case that the neo-Vedāntin claim that all religious doctrines, creeds, beliefs, propositions etc. are only relatively true is itself only relatively true.

²⁶J. Hick, God and the Universe of Faiths (London: Fount, 1977), p.131.

On the other hand, a proponent of the thesis of the unity of all religions could avoid being embroiled in this kind of dilemma. He could claim that since the religious experience upon which the thesis is based is an ineffable one, that the question as to which religious tradition embodies the truth to the highest degree is an absurd one, and that the above paradox evinces the absurdity of such a question. In other words, he could claim that all expressions are equally incomplete, though what would complete them, since their 'object' is by its very nature ineffable, cannot be stated. And yet, while one can sympathise with the sense of this statement, it still leaves one curiously unsatisfied. Can such statements as "There is a God" and "There is no God" be treated as equally true expressions of the same sort of religious experience? The nature of the religious experience may well demand it, yet human reason demands also a resolution. We shall leave the dilemma open, in the hope that we may shed light upon it later in this study.

Section VI

We shall now turn our attention to the second problem mentioned above, the problem of the Priority of Religious Experience. We have seen that for Radhakrishnan, the claim that there is an underlying core of truth behind the partial expressions of it is rendered true by the facts of religious experience. It is religious experience which, for Radhakrishnan brings knowledge of the Real and the True such that all empirical knowledge

is seen to have a lesser status. So also, therefore, religious knowledge claims arising from statements about what has happened in the past, or from sets of sacred writings, or from man's use of his reason, are discounted by Radhakrishnan. Or, perhaps it can be said that they are given a secondary importance as those means by which the underlying core of truth has been and is given expression within different human circumstances. The question we shall now examine is this: Do all religions place the same value upon religious experience as the neo-Vedāntin philosophy of Radhakrishnan? If religions do not place a high priority on religious experience, then this study will be vitiated from the outset for it too will then be proceeding from a somewhat normative stance.

Radhakrishnan argues that there are two distinct types of religion. He writes,

The Religions of the world can be distinguished into those which emphasise the object and those which insist on experience. For the first class, religion is an attitude of faith and conduct directed to a power without. For the second it is an experience to which the individual attaches supreme value.²⁷

Among those religions in which experience predominates,

Belief and conduct, rites and ceremonies, authorities and dogma are assigned a place subordinate to the act of conscious self-discovery and contact with the divine.²⁸

²⁷S. Radhakrishnan, Eastern Religions and Western Thought (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), p.21.

²⁸Ibid., p.21.

Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism (at least) may be counted among the religions of experience, while Judaism, Christianity and Islam may be counted among the religions of the object. While we ought to be wary again of such a generalisation (for "experiencers" may be found in Christianity as may "devotees of the object" be found in Eastern traditions), nevertheless, Radhakrishnan wishes to argue that religions of the object are always open to the possibility of being outmoded. This is because they confound "eternal truth with temporal facts, metaphysics with history."²⁹ Radhakrishnan believes that because their religious expressions are dependent upon certain events which are believed to have taken place in the past, the validity of such expressions, or the beliefs based thereupon, are affected by the advance of the historical and natural sciences.

That Judaism, Christianity and Islam have an intimate relationship to certain historical events cannot be gainsaid. The delivery of the Torah and the Quran, and the Incarnation of Christ are obvious examples. But it is the nature of this relationship, in particular its ultimacy, which is of most import. To illustrate my point here, I shall briefly advert to some aspects of Søren Kierkegaard's analysis of the nature of religious belief.

In his Philosophical Fragments,³⁰ Kierkegaard

²⁹ Ibid., p.21.

³⁰ S. Kierkegaard, Philosophical Fragments (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1936).

undertakes to compare the Socratic religious mode (Religion A) with the religious mode of Jesus (Religion B). For Religion A, truth is not something external to the individual but is eternally within the individual. Thus, the Socratic method of midwifery, according to Kierkegaard, consists in the teacher bringing to consciousness that which the student already knows potentially. For this reason, the eternal truth within, brought to consciousness by the process of midwifery has no necessary connection with that temporal point in which it is brought to consciousness, but only an accidental one. Thus, also, the teacher himself neither imparts the truth nor himself forms part of it. In Kierkegaard's words,

From the standpoint of the Socratic thought every point of departure in time is eo ipso accidental, an occasion, a vanishing moment. The teacher himself is no more than this; and if he offers himself and his instruction on any other basis, he does not give but takes away, and is not even the other's friend, much less his teacher.³¹

In Radhakrishnan's terms, in the Socratic mode, eternal truth has no intimate connection with temporal facts, nor metaphysics with history. For Socrates, as for the religions of experience, truth is discovered by means of an act of conscious self-discovery.

By contrast, in Religion B, the historical moment has a decisive significance. For the teacher himself gives and forms part of the truth, which, if it be the

³¹Ibid., p.13.

truth, entails, according to Kierkegaard, that the learner is in a state of untruth. And therefore, if the learner is in a state of untruth, then the condition for understanding the truth must be brought by the Teacher. Kierkegaard continues,

But one who gives the learner not only the Truth, but also the condition for understanding it, is more than teacher. All instruction depends upon the presence, in the last analysis of the requisite condition; if this is lacking, no teacher can do anything. For otherwise he would find it necessary not only to transform the learner, but to recreate him before beginning to teach him. But this is something that no human being can do; if it is to be done, it must be done by the God himself.³²

Thus, that historical moment, in which the learner by receiving the Truth from the Teacher who is the Saviour thereby realises he is in untruth, is of crucial import. To this extent therefore, Christianity, for Kierkegaard has an intimate connection to temporal facts and historical process. But, does this imply that religions of the object are open to the possibility of being outmoded because of this connection. The answer for Kierkegaard to this question is no, and for at least two reasons.

The first of these turns upon the nature of the relationship between the Saviour and his contemporaries. For the latter, the historical circumstances pertaining to the life of the Saviour are of no import. For the historical circumstances merely provide the moment for

³²Ibid., p.18

the disciples' appropriation of the Eternal Truth presented within the historical context. Kierkegaard writes,

But though a contemporary learner readily becomes an historical eye-witness, the difficulty is that the knowledge of some historical circumstance, or indeed a knowledge of all the circumstances with the reliability of an eye-witness, does not make such an eye-witness a disciple.... We see at once that the historical in the more concrete sense is a matter of indifference; we may suppose a degree of ignorance with respect to it, and permit this ignorance as if to annihilate one detail after the other, historically annihilating the historical; if only the moment remains, as point of departure for the Eternal, the Paradox will be there.³³

The second reason arises from this. For, since contemporaneity with the historical facts is not in itself a desideratum, then all generations are in a like relationship to those of the first generation of believers, and therefore for those also the historical facts are only of importance in so far as they frame the Moment in which the individual may appropriate the Truth through encounter with the Eternal. Thus,

If the contemporary generation had left nothing behind them but these words: 'We have believed that in such and such a year the God appeared among us in the humble figure of a servant, that he lived and taught in our community, and finally died,' it would be more than enough. The contemporary generation would have done all that was necessary; for this little advertisement, this nota bene on a page of universal history, would be sufficient to afford an occasion for a successor, and the most voluminous account in all eternity can do nothing more.³⁴

³³ Ibid., pp.73-4.

³⁴ Ibid., pp.130-31.

This brief Kierkegaardian excursus leads me to two conclusions. Firstly, that Radhakrishnan's claim that the religions of the object necessarily are in danger of being outmoded by the advance of the historical and natural sciences is a false one, since for Kierkegaard at least the historical moment, although necessary, nevertheless merely provides the context for the Moment of encounter with the Eternal. And secondly, and for our purposes, more significantly, it is the actual encounter of man with the 'sacred' or the 'revealer' (whether such encounter be mediated through a God-man as in Christianity, or through the Torah and the Quran as in Judaism and in Islam respectively) which is the basis of an 'eternal consciousness.'³⁵ In other words, religious experience is at the roots of both Radhakrishnan's religions of experience and his religions of the object, and this fact is crucial for our discussion.

This is not to assert that the religious experience mediated within the historical context is of the same sort as that to which Radhakrishnan is referring. But this is to move to the next problem with Radhakrishnan's account, the Problem of the Unity of Religious Experience.

³⁵The phrase is Kierkegaard's.



CHAPTER I

R.C. ZAEHNER: THE VARIETIES OF MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE

Synopsis

Section I.

It is necessary to begin with only a shadowy outline of mystical experience. This is because definitions of mystical experience are often in a normative mode: Examples are definitions offered by S. Radhakrishnan and E. Underhill. Definitions of mystical experience trail clouds of philosophical doctrines. A delimiting of the area is offered.

Section II.

Zaehner's definition of mystical experience. His critique of the thesis of the unity of all religions.

Section III.

Definition of the panenhenic mystical experience: the oneness of all things, the transcending of space and time. The panenhenic experience as exemplified in the writings of Forrest Reid, Karl Joel, Alfred Tennyson, Richard Jefferies. The panenhenic experience in the mystical traditions: purported examples from the

Upanishads, and the Bhagavad-Gītā. The absence of autobiographical evidence makes it far less likely that these latter examples arise from a mystical experience of the panenhenic sort. A methodological principle established: That the inference from expression to experience is to be treated cautiously except where there is autobiographical evidence to the contrary.

Section IV.

The monistic experience: an Upanishadic example. Radhakrishnan's commentary thereupon. The distinction between 'sensory' and 'non-sensory' mystical experience. The monistic experience as the isolation of the soul from all that is non-soul. The varieties of monistic expression: Delineation of Sāṅkhya and Advaita Vedānta. Variations in Zaehner's analyses over a period of time are noted. These support the criticism of panenhenic experience in mystical traditions noted in Section III: The boundaries between monistic and panenhenic more fluid than Zaehner overtly admits. Can Sāṅkhya and Advaita Vedānta be justifiably seen as merely variant expressions of the one kind of experience?

Section V.

The distinction between monistic and theistic experience: The latter maintains the distinction between man and God. Question raised as to how Sāṅkhya fits this distinction of monistic and theistic. Theistic

mystical experience as a higher form: Zaehner's examples of this in Jan van Ruysbroeck and the Bhagavad-Gītā.

Refutation of Zaehner's claim: The autobiographical principle reasserted. There is a gap between Zaehner's claim and the experiential data which would validate it.

Adumbration of Zaehner's normative stance as a reason for his claim. Analysis of a text from the Mishkāt al-Anwār of al-Ghazālī: Argued that al-Ghazālī places a theistic interpretation on what is, to all intents and purposes, a non-theistic mystical experience. This raises the question whether there are merely theistic interpretations and not theistic mystical experiences. Noted that Zaehner admits this possibility.

Section VI.

Summary of questions raised: The question of the relation between certain mystical texts and panentheic experience; the question as to how varieties of mystical experience can be determined by analysis of mystical texts.

CHAPTER I

R.C. ZAEHNER: THE VARIETIES OF MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE

Section I

In the Introduction to this study, it was foreshadowed that this study would be concerned with a number of major forms of religious experience as delineated by a variety of seminal analyses of such experiences. We shall begin our discussion by examining the analysis of mystical experience proffered by the late Professor R.C. Zaehner. Before doing so, however, it is necessary to preface the discussion by a short apologetic note. This is to the effect that it is necessary to begin with only a shadowy outline of the nature of mystical experience. This is in part due to the fact that definitions of mystical experience are usually in a functionalist mode and that mode is determined by a normative stance. To take but two examples, the first from Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, the second from the Anglican mystical exegete Evelyn Underhill. Speaking of the mystical experience, Radhakrishnan writes,

This is the fulfilment of man's life, where every aspect of his being is raised to its highest point, where all the senses gather, the whole mind leaps forward and realises in one quivering instant such things as can not be easily expressed.... This state of being or awareness to which man could attain is the meaning of human life.... God is not an intellectual idea or a moral principle,

but the deepest consciousness from whom ideas and rules derive. He is not a logical construction but the perceived reality present in each of us and giving to each of us the reality we possess. We are saved not by creeds but by gnosis, jñāna or spiritual wisdom.... True knowledge is awareness, a perception of the identity with the supreme, a clear-sighted intuition.¹

It is true that, on the one hand, some aspects of the mystical experience as outlined in this passage — its ineffability, its noeticity — do correspond to some of the characteristics of mystical experience given by William James,² for example. However, on the other hand, the penultimate and final italicized passages quite clearly adopt as the appropriate mode for expression of such experience phrases whose provenance is the Advaita Vedāntic exposition of the Upanishads. That 'True Knowledge' is 'a perception of the identity with the supreme' would not be seen either by Theravāda Buddhism, by Sāṅkhya-Yoga, by Jainism, or by most forms of Christian mysticism as the definitive mode of expressing "True knowledge". By the same token, the following passage by Evelyn Underhill which details the goal of the mystic endeavour could not be accepted as it stands, by Theravāda Buddhism, Sāṅkhya-Yoga, Jainism nor, I think, by Advaita Vedānta. Underhill writes,

Since the aim of every mystic is union with

¹S. Radhakrishnan, Eastern Religions and Western Thought (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), p.24 (my underlining).

²W. James, The Varieties of Religious Experience (London: Collins, 1961), pp.299-300.

God, it is obvious that the vital question in his philosophy must be the place which this God, the Absolute of his quest, occupies in the scheme.³

The second reason, therefore, for beginning with a shadowy outline of mystical experience is intimated in the above. For already, it can be seen that mystical experiences come not in utter loneliness but trailing clouds of philosophical systems. Hence, in order not to further befog the atmosphere, it is best to leave the question of the nature of mystical experience unresolved in the hope that in the analysis to come, something of its nature may shine through. Perhaps the following brief statement on the nature of mysticism may at least steer us away from false paths even if it doesn't advance us very far on the correct path. In his Types of Philosophy, William Earnest Hocking remarks,

On account of its common uses, the name 'mysticism' is more misleading than any other of our Type-names. As a form of philosophy, mysticism is not to be associated with occultism or superstition, nor with psychical research, nor with an application of the fourth dimension to psychology, nor with a cult of vagueness, nor with a special love of the mysterious for its own sake.⁴

With the above apologia noted, we may now turn to R.C. Zaehner.

Section II

In a number of writings, Professor Zaehner has

³E. Underhill, Mysticism (London: Methuen, 1930), p.96.

⁴W.E. Hocking, Types of Philosophy (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929), p.255. 'Philosophy' is, of course, being used here in the sense of 'world-view' (Weltanschauung).

maintained that there are three unique and distinct types of mystical experience. These three different types of mystical experience are included within a definition of mystical experience proposed in his book Mysticism, Sacred and Profane. Subsequent to an exclusion from consideration as mystical of such phenomena as clairvoyance, extra-sensory perception, thought-reading, levitation, etc., Zaehner says that mystical experiences are those

...in which sense perception and discursive thought are transcended in an immediate apprehension of a unity or union which is apprehended as lying beyond and transcending the multiplicity of the world as we know it.⁵

In explication of this general definition, Zaehner is concerned to argue that there are varieties of such experience and is thereby determined to show that the assumption that mysticism is an unvarying phenomenon observable in all times and places⁶ is a false one. Further to this, Zaehner also wishes to demonstrate that the thesis of the unity of all religions which is based upon this assumption ought also to be rejected. According to Zaehner, this thesis is accepted by

...those generous but loose-minded persons who would have us believe that all religions are equally true...and that the Spirit

⁵R.C. Zaehner, Mysticism, Sacred and Profane (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp.198-9.

⁶An interesting example of this assumption from a theistic perspective may be found in A.J. Arberry, Sufism (London: Allen & Unwin, 1950), p.11. He writes "It has become a platitude to observe that mysticism is essentially one and the same, whatever may be the religion professed by the individual mystic: a constant and unvarying phenomenon of the universal yearning of the human spirit for personal communion with God."

of God manifests itself in different guises throughout the length and breadth of this wide world, adapting itself to the different conditions of men and exhibiting the One Truth here in Jesus Christ, there in Krishna or in the Buddha, or again in Lao Tzu or Muhammad.⁷

While admitting that such a view may arise from greatness of heart, Zaehner nevertheless also wants to say that it has

...too often sprung from intellectual laziness which would content itself with comfortable half-truths rather than come to grips with the hard facts which so persistently and unkindly break into the fine-spun web of good intentions.⁸

In the light of our discussion above and our emphasizing of the normative philosophical framework of the thesis of the unity of all religions, Zaehner's claim that such a thesis arises from either intellectual generosity or intellectual laziness is perhaps a little harsh, especially with respect to Radhakrishnan.⁹ Nevertheless, whatever be the psychological facts behind the thesis of the unity of all religions, the validity of the thesis is independent of these. It is however, dependent on Zaehner's substantiation of his claim that there are varieties of mystical experience

⁷R.C. Zaehner, op. cit., p.198.

⁸Ibid., p.198.

⁹And also with reference to that group of Islamic perennial philosophers whose mode of thought is exemplified in the writings of F. Schuon, R. Guenon and S.H. Nasr. See eg. J. Needleman (ed), The Sword of Gnosis (Baltimore: Penguin, 1974) and F. Schuon, Islam and the Perennial Philosophy (UK: World of Islam Publishing Company, 1976).

and to this substantiation we shall now turn. I shall begin by considering Zaehner's category of panenhenic or natural mystical experience.

Section III

The panenhenic experience¹⁰ may be described as an experience of the 'oneness' of all things. It is that experience which leads to the 'knowledge' that behind the multiplicity and diversity of all finite things there is an all embracing unity. Furthermore, the recipient of such experience has an awareness that such experience has put him in contact with the world as it really is. As Zaehner points out,

In all cases the person who has the experience seems to be convinced that what he experiences, so far from being illusory, is on the contrary something far more real than what he experiences normally through his five senses or what he thinks with his finite mind. It is, at its highest, a transcending of time and space in which an infinite mode of existence is actually experienced.¹¹

This 'transcending of time and space' which for

¹⁰Zaehner's category of panenhenic experience is closely related to that which R.M. Bucke takes to be the essence of mystical experience, namely, 'Cosmic Consciousness.' See R.M. Bucke, Cosmic Consciousness (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1966), pp.17-18. Bucke maintains that Cosmic Consciousness "...shows the cosmos to consist not of dead matter governed by unconscious, rigid and un-intending laws; it shows it on the contrary as entirely immaterial, entirely spiritual and entirely alive; it shows that death is an absurdity, that everyone and everything has eternal life; it shows that the Universe is God and that God is the Universe, and that no evil ever did or ever will enter into it." cf. also R.C. Zaehner, Concordant Discord (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp.40-60.

¹¹R.C. Zaehner, op. cit., p.50 (my underlining).

Zaehner is the essence of the panenhenic experience may be illuminated by a number of examples. Our first example comes from a novel by Forrest Reid entitled Following Darkness:

And then a curious experience befell me. It was as if everything that had seemed to be external and around me were suddenly within me. The whole world seemed to be within me. It was within me that the trees waved their green branches, it was within me that the skylark was singing, it was within me that the hot sun shone and that the shade was cool.... I could have sobbed with joy.¹²

This passage exemplifies the transcending of space in that the self is imaged as expanding and thereby taking into itself the whole cosmic process. The following passage from Karl Joel however has a different perspective upon such a transcending. In this case, the self does not so much expand so as to 'imbibe' the world but rather, the normal consciousness of 'self-over-against-the-world' is abrogated. In other words, the subject-object polarity of normal waking consciousness is dissolved. Joel writes,

I lay on the seashore, the shining waters glittering in my dreamy eyes; at a great distance fluttered the soft breeze; throbbing, shimmering, stirring, lulling to sleep comes the wave beat to the shore — or to the ear? I know not. Distance and nearness become blurred into one; without and within glide into each other. Nearer and nearer, dearer and more homelike sounds the beating of the waves; now like a thundering pulse in my head it strikes, and now it beats over my soul, devours it, embraces it, while it itself at the same time floats out like the

¹²Forrest Reid, Following Darkness (London: Arnold, 1902, p.42), quoted by R.C. Zaehner, op. cit., pp.40-41.

blue waste of waters. Yes, within and without are one. Glistening and foaming, flowing and fanning and roaring, the entire symphony of the stimuli experienced sounds in one tone, all thought becomes one thought, which becomes one with feeling; the world exhales in the soul and the soul dissolves in the world.¹³

'The transcending of time' is illustrated for Zaehner by a letter of Alfred Tennyson. He had written,

I have never had any revelations through aesthetics, but a kind of waking trance... I have frequently had.... This has come upon me through repeating my own name to myself silently, till 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 not a confused state but the clearest, the surest of the surest, utterly beyond words — where death was an almost laughable impossibility.¹⁴

Here we see not only the transcending of time ('death was an almost laughable impossibility'), but also the collapse of subject-object polarity ('individuality itself seemed to dissolve'), the conviction of the 'realness' of the attained state ('the surest of the surest'), and the characteristic ineffability ('utterly beyond words') of such an experience. But, while the meaninglessness of death (which I take to be the intention of Tennyson's words) gives us some clue as to the nature of 'the transcending of time', the following passage from

¹³R.C. Zaehner, op.cit., pp.38-9. The passage was originally quoted in C.G. Jung, Psychology of the Unconscious (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1919), pp.198-99 (my underlining).

¹⁴R.C. Zaehner, op.cit., pp.36-7. The passage was originally quoted in W. James, The Varieties of Religious Experience (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1902), p.384 (my underlining).

Richard Jefferies' spiritual autobiography gives us a much clearer indication of what is meant. For here, past and future are dissolved in the present 'now' and the dissolution of the past and the future into a series of continuous 'presents', renders the latter eternal:

I cannot understand time [he writes]. It is eternity now. I am in the midst of it.... Nothing has to come; it is now. Now is eternity; now is the immortal life.... To the soul there is no past and no future; all is and will ever be in now. For artificial purposes time is mutually agreed on, but there is really no such thing.¹⁵

The passages we have been examining come from a poet, a philosopher, and several novelists. But, how does the panenhenic experience relate to mystical traditions in world religions. According to Zaehner, panenhenic experience is clearly indicated by a number of passages within the Upanishads. Consider the following passage:

He who consists of mind, whose body is breath (spirit or life), whose form is light, whose idea is the real, whose self (ātman) is space, through whom are all works, all desires, all scents, all tastes, who encompasses all this (ie. the whole Universe), who does not speak and has no care — He is my self within the heart, smaller than a grain of rice or a barley corn, or a mustard-seed, or a grain of millett, or the kernel of a grain of millett; this is my self within my heart, greater than the earth, greater than the atmosphere, greater than the sky, greater than these worlds.... This my self within the heart is that Brahman. When I depart from hence, I shall merge into it.¹⁶

¹⁵ R. Jefferies, The Story of My Heart, Ch. 3, in F.C. Happold (ed.), Mysticism (U.K.: Penguin, 1970), p.390.

¹⁶ Chāndogya Upanishad, 3.14, quoted by R.C. Zaehner, op.cit., pp.136-7.

Such a passage is certainly a far cry from our earlier examples of panenhenic expression, and this for a number of reasons. Firstly, unlike the earlier passages, there is no indication within this passage that the contents thereof are intended as a description of mystical experience. That is to say, this passage is neither overtly descriptive of mystical experience nor is it overtly autobiographical as our previous passages were. The relationship between this passage and any underlying mystical experience is a far more tenuous one than the relationship between, for example, the experience of Karl Joel and his description of it. Secondly, unlike our earlier passages, this passage is a highly ramified one in that contained within it lie the crucial Upanishadic concepts, Brahman and Ātman. To be sure, Zaehner does admit that this passage contains more than the mere identification of microcosm and macrocosm, namely "a tentative definition of the Godhead and its relation to the individual."¹⁷ But this admission in itself should warn us against taking this passage as an expression of mystical experience to be considered on a par with those of Jefferies, Tennyson, Joel, etc.

The following passage is perhaps a little clearer; again from the Chāndogya Upanishad.

In this city of Brahman there is a dwelling-place, a tiny lotus-flower; within that there is a tiny space.... As wide as this space [around us], so wide is this space within the

¹⁷R.C. Zaehner, op.cit., p.137.

heart. In it both sky and earth are concentrated, both fire and wind, both sun and moon, lightning and the stars, what a man possesses here on earth and what he does not possess: everything is concentrated in this [tiny space within the heart].¹⁸

According to Zaehner, this particular Upanishadic passage exemplifies the "transcending of space."¹⁹ While this passage does evince an expansion of the self comparable with the earlier passage from Forrest Reid, there is one crucial difference. This is that the section of Following Darkness is quite explicitly offered as an autobiographical account of a particular experience. That is, a relationship between this passage and the experience it is expressive of may be quite justifiably posited. That relationship is by no means clear in the passage from the Chāndogya Upanishad, for there is no mention there that the description of the identification of microcosm and macrocosm has any direct relationship to a particular experience (though this is not to deny an ultimate dependence of such passages on an experiential datum). The point is an important one and will need fuller development later. The following adumbration will for the moment suffice. The principle which

¹⁸Chāndogya Upanishad, 8.1.1-3, quoted by R.C. Zaehner, Concordant Discord (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp.200-201.

¹⁹In Concordant Discord, the category of panenhenic experience is further divided into the components of 'transcending of spatial limitations' and 'transcending of temporal limitations.' In so doing, four types of mystical experience are thereby distinguished. The expanded classification does not affect our analysis at this point.

arises from the above distinction is that when an attempt is made to relate a particular text to a particular sort of mystical experience, then closer attention should be paid to that text in which there is an explicit relationship indicated between that text and any praeternatural experience upon which it is putatively based. With regards to the passage from the Chāndogya Upanishad, for example, it could be argued that this microcosm-macrocosm identification has arisen from the penchant of the earlier Vedic texts for the making of numerous cosmic identifications for the greater efficacy of the Vedic sacrificial rites.²⁰ Certainly, it is the case that where no explicit experiential reference is made, greater caution in exegesis is necessary.

This lack of connection between text and experience is even more clear in the passage which Zaehner offers as an exemplary text for the 'transcending of time.' According to Zaehner, the classic formulation of this aspect of panenhenic experience is Bhagavad-Gītā 2:12-21:

Never was there a time when I was not, nor you, nor yet these princes, nor will there be a time when we shall cease to be — all of us hereafter.... Of what is not there is no becoming; of what is there is no ceasing to be: for the boundary-line between these two is seen by men who see things as they really are.... Finite, they say, are these (our) bodies (indwelt) by an eternal embodied (self) — (for this self) is indestructible, incommensurable.... Never is it born nor dies; never did it come to be nor will it ever come to be again: unborn,

²⁰ See eg. F. Edgerton, The Beginnings of Indian Philosophy (London: Allen & Unwin, 1965).

eternal, everlasting is this (self) — primeval. It is not slain when the body is slain. If a man knows it as indestructible, eternal, unborn, never to pass away, how and whom can he cause to be slain or slay?²¹

Neither in terms of the context of this passage²² nor in terms of its content²³ can it be clearly seen as an expression of the panenhenic experience, certainly not to the same extent as the aforementioned section from Richard Jefferies may be seen to be such.

In summary therefore, while there is a clear relationship between the 'secular' texts and the experiences upon which these are based, there is by no means such a clear relationship between the 'religious' texts quoted by Zaehner and the panenhenic experiences upon which these are supposedly based. For this reason, the argument that the panenhenic experience is described in such 'religious' texts ought, for the moment, to be treated as unproven.

Section IV

With this caveat entered with respect to panenhenic experience, we may now turn to Zaehner's category of monistic mystical experience. We shall begin by quoting

²¹R.C. Zaehner, Concordant Discord (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p.201.

²²The context is that of Krishna, the avatar of Vishnu, justifying in a fairly crude style to Arjuna the killing of the latter's relatives in the battle about to commence. Arjuna's trepidations are to be mollified by the realization that only the body and not the soul is slain.

²³The passage seems to have virtually no relation of content to panenhenic experience dealing as it does with the rebirth of the soul. The eternity of the soul, if this bears any relationship to mystical experience, would relate more suitably to Zaehner's monistic category.

a text which Zaehner says is an expression of the monistic experience:

Conscious of neither within nor without, nor of both together, not a mass of wisdom, neither wise nor unwise, unseen, one with whom there is no commerce, impalpable, devoid of distinguishing mark, unthinkable, indescribable, its essence the firm conviction of the oneness of itself, bringing all development to an end, tranquil and mild, devoid of durability, such do they deem this fourth to be. That is the self: that is what should be known.²⁴

This passage, taken from the Māndūkya Upanishad, details the fourth and highest state of consciousness, namely the blissful state of turiya, which transcends the states of waking, dream-sleep and dreamless sleep. Although neo-Vedāntin doctrinal ramifications enter into Radhakrishnan's analysis of this passage, his description points quite clearly to the nature of this turiya state. He writes,

Though objective consciousness [states pertaining to waking and dream sleep] is absent in both the prajna [state pertaining to dreamless sleep] and turiya consciousness, the seed of it is present in the state of deep sleep while it is absent in the transcendent consciousness. Empirical consciousness is present though in an unmanifested condition in the state of deep sleep while the transcendent state is the non-empirical beyond the three states and free from their interruptions and alterations. It is present, even when we are immersed in the activities of the waking world or lost in the unconsciousness of sleep. Man's highest good consists in entering into this, the self, making it the centre

²⁴ Māndūkya Upanishad, 7, quoted by R.C. Zaehner, "Mysticism Without Love" in Religious Studies, Vol.10, 1974, p.263. See also, R.C. Zaehner, Mysticism Sacred and Profane (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp.153-4.

of one's life, instead of dwelling on the surface.²⁵

Radhakrishnan points here to a crucial difference between panenhenic expressions and expressions of monistic experience, a difference with which Zaehner's analysis concurs. In the panenhenic experience, in the terms described by Joel, Jefferies, Tennyson etc., there is an involvement with the world external to the self. That is to say, the panenhenic experience is a special kind of 'sensory' experience, or, in Radhakrishnan's terms, the 'objective consciousness' is still involved. By contrast, the monistic experience as expressed by the Māndūkya Upanishad and interpreted by Radhakrishnan, there is a withdrawal of senses from their objects — the experience is 'non-sensory' — and a bracketing out of conceptual content. Thus, the monistic experience means, in practice, "the isolation of the soul [the pure self within, free from 'interruptions and alterations'] from all that is other than itself."²⁶ Whereas, in the panenhenic experience, the soul may be said to expand such that the whole world is within itself, in the monistic experience, the soul realises its eternal separations from everything which is other than itself. Zaehner writes,

...the sense that the individual is at one

²⁵S. Radhakrishnan, The Principal Upanisads (London: Allen & Unwin, 1953), p.698.

²⁶R.C. Zaehner, Mysticism Sacred and Profane (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p.165.

with all Nature, that all is one and one is all, does not mean that all is God and God is all. It is the realization of the oneness of Nature. It is quite distinct, and necessarily so, from any state the achievement of which is dependent on the withdrawal of the senses from their objects; and this is the classic technique of the Hindus. For how can a sensation, the essence of which is to feel that one actually is the outside world, be identical with the result of a technique which uncompromisingly separates the immortal soul from all sensible images.²⁷

While both the panenhenic and monistic experiences involve abrogation of subject-object polarity and are thus unitary experiences, the former includes the 'world' whereas the latter excludes it. To put it crudely, panenhenic experience is mystical experience with the eyes open; monistic experience is mystical experience with the eyes closed.

Granting the nature of monistic experience, Zaehner questions whether it may have different kinds of expressions. He asks,

Does it necessarily mean the absolute oneness of the Absolute or does it not rather mean the basic oneness of each human soul as it exists in eternity?²⁸

If the monistic experience is expressed in terms of the Absolute Oneness of the Absolute with the consequence that all multiplicity is illusory, then the Indian system of Advaita Vedānta is the resulting philosophy. If it is expressed in terms of the oneness of each human soul existing in eternity, then the Indian system of

²⁷Ibid., pp.144-5.

²⁸R.C. Zaehner, "Mysticism Without Love" in Religious Studies, Vol.10, 1974, p.263.

Sāṅkhya is the consequent philosophy. In order to give some flesh to Zaehner's point, I shall briefly outline the relevant aspects of these systems.

For the system of Sāṅkhya, matter and spirit are totally distinct since there is no connection between nature (prakṛiti) and soul (puruṣha). Souls exist in infinite number. Each soul is a separate entity and as such is completely separate from all other souls. With the evolution of nature which ontologically comes about because of an imbalance in the three "qualities" (guṇas) which constitute it, and teleologically comes about for the ultimate liberation of puruṣhas, the souls are drawn into Nature and are imprisoned therein through primordial ignorance of their true being. Release (kaivalya) for the Sāṅkhya system is attained in the realization that the pure self (puruṣha) is not essentially part of Nature but qualitatively different from it. From Zaehner's perspective, such realization comes via monistic mystical experience. While Sāṅkhya has traditionally been silent regarding the method by which such experience might be gained, its sister system Yoga is centred upon the ways and means whereby such realization might be gained.²⁹

In comparison to the Sāṅkhya system, the following passage from the founder of Advaita Vedānta, Gaudapāda, may be noted:

²⁹ For a succinct analysis of the Sāṅkhya system, see M. Hiriyanna, Outlines of Indian Philosophy (London: Allen & Unwin, 1932), Ch.XI.

The Divine Self conceives of himself by himself through his own magic power (māyā); he alone is aware of differences. This is the certainty of the Vedānta. With his mind turned outward he modifies different states already existing in his consciousness which themselves are finite. So does the Lord mould (or imagine) the world. Those things which are inside and whose time is (measured by) thought and those things which are outside and are subject to past and future time are all simply imagined (or moulded). There is no other cause for differentiation. What is unmanifested inside and what is revealed outside is all simply imagination.... As dream and mirage and castles in the air are seen, so is the whole universe seen by those who are learned in the Vedānta. There is neither dissolution nor origination, neither bound nor Sādhu (one who has achieved liberation) there is none who seeks release and none who is released: this is the absolute truth.... The manifold universe does not exist as a form of reality, nor does it exist of itself. It is neither separate nor not separate (from Brahman): this is known by those who know the truth.... Thus knowing the Self to be such, one should fix one's mind on the non-dual.³⁰

Whereas for Sāṅkhya, release comes about through the realisation of the ontological difference between matter (prakṛiti) and spirit (puruṣa), in Advaita Vedānta, liberation is attained through the realisation of the One, and the consequent illusoriness of the many. Further, the 'eternal' does not consist of a multiplicity of liberated souls, but rather there is only the 'one' Reality — Brahman. That which the Sāṅkhya accepts as ontologically real (prakṛiti), Advaita Vedānta denies as

³⁰ Kārikā, 2, quoted by R.C. Zaehner, Mysticism Sacred and Profane (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp.154-5.

ontologically ultimate denoting it as māyā.³¹

With the main outlines of panenhenic and monistic experience as expounded by Zaehner etched in, let me turn to a question of inconsistency in his analysis, not to cast stones at Zaehner for the sake of it (for in the area of philosophy and mysticism one cannot be 'without sin' oneself), but rather in the hope that in the recognition of a problem, a resolution may at some point be arrived at.

We have noticed already that sharp lines are drawn by Zaehner between panenhenic experience and monistic experience, at least in so far as we have remained particularly within the ambit of Mysticism, Sacred and Profane. In Concordant Discord, to which we have already referred while examining panenhenic experience, the analysis is significantly different. As mentioned above,³² the category of panenhenic experience is divided

³¹I believe that Zaehner overstates the case to a small extent with regard to the meaning of 'māyā' as in the following passage from Mysticism, Sacred and Profane, p.156:

"Once release is achieved, it is realised that since nothing exists except the One, realised as oneself, all actions, all religious ceremonies, all devotion addressed to any God, the Gods, or God himself are pure illusion and absolute nothingness."

Thus, I prefer to take 'māyā' as "the not-having of ontological ultimacy." The following passage from I. Kesarcodi-Watson's Eastern Spirituality (Delhi: Agam Prakashan, 1976), p.110, illustrates my point. He writes, "To an enlightened man..., to one possessed of Brahma-vidya per se, devas do not 'exist'. But then, realising his identity with Brahman, such a being does not consider himself to exist either. 'Existence' as that level where manifest things are real, has no ultimacy for him."

³²Footnote 19.

into the components of 'transcendence of space' and 'transcendence of time.' But further, the monistic experience is now seen as emerging from the convergence of 'the transcendence of space' and 'the transcendence of time.'³³ In other words, the monistic experience is seen as a development of the panenhenic experience. Sāṅkhya and Advaita Vedānta are now viewed as two possible interpretations of the monistic experience converging from the panenhenic.

A number of points are worthy of mention. Firstly, the variant analyses give some credence to my aforementioned concern over the relationship between mystical texts and panenhenic experience. For, quite clearly, Zaehner himself views the relationship as a tenuous one. But further, and this is perhaps of more importance, the boundaries between panenhenic mystical experience and the monistic variety may be more fluid than Zaehner overtly admits but nevertheless are succinctly reflected in his subtly changing analysis over a period of time.³⁴ We shall need to investigate this relationship much more closely in pages to come. Our third point relates to

³³R.C. Zaehner, Concordant Discord (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p.202.

³⁴Thus, in Mysticism, Sacred and Profane (1957), we have three varieties; in Concordant Discord (1967-9), we have four varieties with the first two converging into the third; in Zen, Drugs and Mysticism (New York: Vintage, 1972), we have four varieties with a clear distinction between the first two and the third; and in "Mysticism Without Love" (1974), we have the original three varieties. The variety of theistic mysticism remains constant throughout.

this. Since Advaita Vedānta includes a theory of the cosmos within its ultimate perspective (that is, that it is māyā) and for this reason appears to have possibly some relation to panentheic modes of expression, and since Sāṅkhya with its radical rejection of this prakritic realm thereby includes no cosmology in its view of the nature of the ultimate state (that is, an infinity of souls in isolation from prakriti), the question as to whether both of these systems may justifiably be seen as merely variant expressions of the one kind of experience needs to be foreshadowed for future development.

Section V

For Zaehner, the major criterion for distinguishing between monistic and theistic experience is that, while both are experiences "within" the self, theistic mysticism maintains the distinction between man and God whereas monistic mysticism obliterates it. He writes

Here, then, are two distinct and mutually opposed types of mysticism, the monistic and the theistic. This is not a question of Christianity and Islam versus Hinduism and Buddhism: it is an unbridgeable gulf between all those who see God as incomparably greater than oneself, though He is, at the same time, the root and ground of one's being, and those who maintain that soul and God are one and the same and that all else is pure illusion.³⁵

From this analysis of the difference between monistic and theistic mysticism, it is difficult to see how Sāṅkhya, which does not recognise the existence of an Ultimate

³⁵R.C. Zaehner, Mysticism, Sacred and Profane (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p.204.

Being, identification with which brings realization, can be accused of obliterating the distinction between man and God. (Again, the necessity of an answer to that question which was raised at the end of the last section may be noted). Nevertheless, it is probably true to say, as Zaehner does, that insofar as we are speaking of Advaita Vedānta, the Vedāntin is denied that experience of the love of God which Zaehner claims is the essence of the theistic experience. Thus, of the monist, Zaehner remarks,

...so long as he sticks to this monistic view of life and feels that his philosophy is confirmed by his experience, then I do not think that his bliss can be identical with that experienced and described by the Christian and Muslim mystics (in so far as they remain theist) whose bliss consists rather in the total surrender of the whole personality to a God who is at the same time love.³⁶

Similarly also, of monism

And in monism there can be no love, — there is ecstasy and trance and deep peace...but there cannot be the ecstasy of union nor the loss of the self in God which is the goal of Christian, Muslim, and all theistic mysticism.³⁷

But, not only is theistic mystical experience a different kind of mystical experience, for Zaehner, it is a higher form. Indeed, he wants to maintain that, in both Christian, Hindu and Muslim mystical writings, the monistic experience may be seen to be transcended in the higher experience of the soul's union with God in love. Since this relationship will be of considerable importance

³⁶ Ibid., pp.168-9.

³⁷ Ibid., p.172.

in a later part of this study, it is fruitful at this juncture to detail the specific texts and then to address ourselves to the question as to whether such texts may be seen as arguing that theistic mystical experience transcends monistic experience.

With reference to Christian mysticism, Zaehner makes much of the writings of the Flemish mystic, Jan van Ruysbroeck. In particular, it is his attacks on the Brethren of the Free Spirit (the quietists) to which Zaehner points. He quotes Ruysbroeck to this effect:

...all those men [ie. the quietists] are deceived whose intention it is to sink themselves in natural rest, and who do not seek God with desire nor find him in delectable love. For the rest which they possess consists in an emptying of themselves, to which they are inclined by nature and by habit. And in this natural rest men cannot find God. But it brings man indeed into an emptiness which heathens and Jews are able to find, and all men, however evil they may be, if they live in their sins with untroubled conscience and are able to empty themselves of all images and all action.³⁸

Zaehner argues that the experience of these quietists is an example of monistic experience. As such the emptiness and rest which is attained "is only the purification of the vessel which can if it will be filled with God" and is thereby only a 'prelude to Holiness.'³⁹

In so far as Hindu mysticism is under consideration,

³⁸Blessed Jan van Ruysbroeck, The Spiritual Espousals, Eric Colledge (transl.) (London: Faber & Faber, 1952), p.167, quoted in ibid., p.172.

³⁹R.C. Zaehner, Mysticism, Sacred and Profane (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p.173.

Zaehner points in particular to the only classical Hindu text which claims to be a direct revelation from God, namely the Bhagavad-Gītā. According to Zaehner, that experience in which the sage realizes his own identity with the God-head is transcended by an experience in which the soul enters into God. Zaehner writes,

In the Gītā the mystical stages are clearly defined. First there is the integration of personality into its immortal ground which is the same in all beings, and this leads to 'liberation', that freedom of the spirit implied in the phase 'to become Brahman'. Then after becoming Brahman the mystic communes with Krishna in love and so finally enters into him. But both Krishna's love and the love of the mystic remain, as the last chapter of the Gītā makes abundantly clear. This means that in eternity personal relationships at least as between the soul and God remain, though transformed onto a higher plane.⁴⁰

Let me adopt a critical stance once again in order to illuminate a number of questions arising from Zaehner's case for theistic mysticism. Firstly, that Ruysbroeck (among others) and the Bhagavad-Gītā regard theistic mystic experience as the attaining of a higher state than monistic experience is not sufficient reason for claiming that it is so.⁴¹ Within Advaita Vedānta, the opposite stance is adopted. The recognition of the separateness of God and man, and the worship and

⁴⁰R.C. Zaehner, Concordant Discord (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p.205.

⁴¹With respect to the Gītā (at least), there is of course the prior question as to whether it does assert that the theistic mystical experience is a higher state. Since this is a question of literary exegesis without direct philosophic ramifications, I shall not take it further.

devotion which follow from this recognition, are means for the concentrating of the mind and are ultimately themselves transcended by the realization of the oneness of Brahman.⁴²

Secondly, one might be willing to give credence to Ruysbroeck and to the Bhagavad-Gītā that theistic mystical experiences are higher than monistic if there were clear autobiographical evidence that this was the case. That is, if it could be shown convincingly that Ruysbroeck had himself claimed to go beyond a monistic state by entering into union with God or that the "author" of the Bhagavad-Gītā was quite consciously outlining a contemplative path which he himself had trod, then the argument that theistic mystical experience is "experientially" transcendent to monistic might be substantiated. Unfortunately, Ruysbroeck appears only to be criticising the states attained by others, and the Gītā is clearly not a model of the contemplative path. In both cases, there would appear to be a gap between the claim that theistic mystical experience is a higher form of mysticism and the experiential data which might substantiate such a claim.⁴³ To a large

⁴²There are, of course, sound Upanishadic reasons for such a stance. See eg. Brihadāranyaka Upanishad 1.4.10.

⁴³In correspondence with me on a related issue, Professor James Horne of the University of Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, drew my attention to a passage in Martin Buber's Between Man and Man in which Buber appears to cite his own transcending of monistic experience for the higher reality of 'self in relation to others' and 'self in relation to God.' However Buber certainly does not appear to be arguing that the I-Thou relation is a form of theistic mystical experience.

extent therefore, I am reiterating in a slightly different context that principle which was announced when we examined the alleged relationship between certain mystical texts and the panenhenic experience; namely that, when it is maintained that a particular mystical experience is a higher form of mystical experience, then that claim needs to be firmly based on the actual experience of such transcending of a lower form by a specific individual.

Thus, on the face of it, and from a textual basis, there does not appear to be sufficient reason for agreeing with Zaehner's claim that theistic mysticism is a higher form, nor is it particularly easy to see why Zaehner himself argues that it is, for he himself recognises that the Vedāntin alternative is a possible one. One possible reason is that Zaehner himself believes that it is a higher form. In his 'Introduction' to Mysticism, Sacred and Profane, he admits to stressing theistic mystical experience "because I happen to believe that it is true."⁴⁴ Even if it is the case that Zaehner's own beliefs have influenced his analysis (and blame should perhaps be apportioned, not for having done so, but rather for being unaware of it, for no one approaches a conceptual problem with a mental tabula rasa), such a criticism of Zaehner as is made by the Indologist Frits Staal should be firmly rejected. Of Zaehner's book, Hindu and Muslim Mysticism, he writes,

⁴⁴R.C. Zaehner, Mysticism, Sacred and Profane (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p.xvi.

...the main difficulty with this book as a whole is the author's own religious allegiance, which clearly prevents a fair and adequate description and evaluation of differing points of view and which led the author to a classification which is nothing but a reflection of his own beliefs.⁴⁵

There is of course a world of difference between Zaehner's admission that he emphasises theistic experience because of his own beliefs and Staal's claim that he classifies mystical experience as he does to intentionally (presumably) reflect his beliefs. Therefore, rather than enter into a debate on Zaehner's motives in this matter, I shall turn to a text offered by Zaehner from the Islamic context. Consideration of this text will enable us to ask the question as to whether theistic mystical experience may be considered to be a separate variety of mystical experience at all. Because of the importance of this question within our study as a whole, I shall quote it in extenso. The passage is from the Mishkāt al-Anwār of Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī:

The mystics, after their ascent to the heavens of Reality, agree that they saw nothing in existence except God the One. Some of them attained this state through discursive reasoning, others reached it by savouring it and experiencing it. From these all plurality entirely fell away. They were drowned in pure solitude: their reason was lost in it, and they became as if dazed in it. They no longer had the capacity to recollect aught but God, nor could they in any wise remember themselves. Nothing was left to them but God. They became drunk with a drunkenness in which their reason collapsed. One of them said, 'I am God (the Truth).' Another said, 'Glory be to me! How great is my glory' while another said, 'Within

⁴⁵F. Staal, Exploring Mysticism (U.K.: Penguin, 1975), p.74.

my robe is naught but God.' But the words of lovers when in a state of drunkenness abates and the sovereignty of their reason is restored, — and reason is God's scale on earth, — they know that this was not actual identity, but that it resembled identity as when lovers say at the height of their passion:

'I am he whom I desire and he whom I desire is I; We are two souls inhabiting one body.'

...There is a difference between saying, 'The wine is the wineglass,' and saying, 'It is as if it were the wine glass! Now when this state prevails, it is called 'naughting' (fanā) with reference to the person who experiences it, or the 'naughting beyond naughting,' for (the mystic) becomes naughted to himself and naughted to his own naughting; nor is he conscious of himself in this state, nor is he conscious of his own unconsciousness; for were he conscious of his own unconsciousness, he would be conscious of himself. This condition is metaphorically called identity with reference to the man who is immersed in it, but in the language of truth (it is called) union. Beyond these truths there are further mysteries the penetration of which is not permissible.⁴⁶

The above text is an ambiguous one on a number of levels, and Zaehner's exegesis of it reflects this ambiguity. The ambiguity arises from the fact that it doesn't appear clearly to reflect monistic mystical experience in either a Sāṅkhyin nor Vedāntin mode of interpretation. Nor does the experience itself fit in Zaehner's theistic category although it's quite clear that al-Ghazālī has given the experience a theistic gloss in his interpretation of it. Let me expand.

⁴⁶Ghazālī, *Mishkāṭu'l-Anwār*, Sabrī al-Kurdī (ed), (Cairo, 1353/1935), pp.121-3. English translation by W.H.T. Gairdner, reprint (Lahore, 1952), pp.103-8, quoted by R.C. Zaehner, Mysticism, Sacred and Profane (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp.157-158.

With respect to the experience itself, it is fairly reasonable to accept that it is that of an undifferentiated unity in which the subject-object polarity of normal consciousness is completely abrogated. As Zaehner himself admits, there are close similarities between the state described here and the state of turiya in the Māndūkya Upanishad. Yet of an experience of this sort, we have already seen that Zaehner maintains that there are two possible modes of interpretation, the one — the isolation of the individual life monad (purusha), the other — the realization of the absolute identity of the self and the Godhead (Ātman is Brahman). But, here, there is neither the isolation of the soul, nor the realization of the identity relation of man and the Godhead, but rather, the experience is interpreted by the mystics (al-Ghazālī apparently excepted) as the realization that the only real existent is God (in fanā 'Nothing was left to them but God'). As Zaehner remarks, "the Muslim starts with the dogma that God alone is Absolute Being and that all things perish except His face."⁴⁷ If this is monistic mystical experience then it is expressed quite differently from the Sāṅkhyin and Vedāntin versions.

But further, and perhaps more important is the gloss placed upon this experience of undifferentiated unity by al-Ghazālī. For while admitting on the one hand that phenomenologically the experience is one of

⁴⁷R.C. Zaehner, Mysticism, Sacred and Profane (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p.158.

undifferentiated unity and that therefore it appears as if a monistic interpretation is valid, yet he alleges on the other hand that the proper interpretation is one of union between the soul and God and likens the seeming undifferentiatedness to the seeming unity of two lovers at the height of their passion. In other words, he appears to be thrusting onto an experience — which phenomenologically would most appropriately merit a form of monistic interpretation — an interpretation of a theistic variety and presumably for the apologetic purpose of giving certain Islamic mystical experiences an orthodox flavouring. This raises a crucial question. Since, in this case, a theistic interpretation is being placed upon an experience of undifferentiated unity, should theistic mystical experiences be considered a separate category of mystical experience at all, or are theistic interpretations merely a different mode of interpreting the one kind of interior mystical consciousness? With respect to the above quoted passage, I believe that an affirmative reply should be given to the latter alternative for the reasons stated. But, as one swallow maketh not a summer, neither does one example of theistic interpretation of a non-theistic mystical experience (in Zaehner's sense) rule out the possibility of phenomenologically theistic mystical experience. Suffice it therefore for the moment that the question has been raised and will occupy us considerably throughout this study. By way of concluding this section it is perhaps worth noting that the possible

fluidity of monistic and theistic experience and the interpretation of them is remarked upon by Zaehner himself.

He writes,

Though there is a difference, and a real difference, between the Vedāntin and Christian ways of defining the unitive experience, the difference may well be only one of terminology.⁴⁸

Our earlier question as to which of the two varieties of interior mysticism, theistic or monistic is higher, will of course be dissolved if it is the case that the theistic mystical experience is not a different category of mystical experience but rather that theistic and monistic interpretations are merely different expressions of what is but one experience.

Section VI

By way of summarising this Chapter, it is sufficient to draw attention to those critical questions which have arisen in this Chapter. Firstly, what is the relationship between certain forms of mystical text and panentheic experience? And secondly, are these varieties of interior mystical experience and can these be determined by textual analysis? These questions shall occupy us further in the next chapter.

⁴⁸Ibid., p.33. It is also worth noting that with reference to al-Ghazālī, Zaehner states quite clearly in Hindu and Muslim Mysticism (New York: Schocken, 1969), p.166 that al-Ghazālī adopts a theistic stance only for apologetic reasons. Thus, of al-Ghazālī's Persian commentary on the Mishkāt, namely, Fadā'il al-Anām, Zaehner remarks, "Here at last Ghazālī forgets to worry about the orthodoxy he usually chooses to parade, and declares himself a non-duatist of whom Sankara himself might have been proud."

CHAPTER II

N. SMART: THE MYSTICAL, THE NUMINOUS AND RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

Synopsis

Section I.

The presuppositions of Smart's analysis: His place in a tradition reaching back through J. Wach, R. Otto to F. Schleiermacher; His divergence from these writers; the reasons for this divergence.

Section II.

Smart's delineation of 'mystical experience'. His exclusion of the panenhenic experience from the category of 'mystical experience': The grounds for this exclusion; the reservation of 'mystical' for experiences which arise from the pursuit of contemplative techniques and which are 'interior' experiences.

Section III.

Smart's critique of Zaehner's distinction between theistic and monistic mystical experience: The distinction between experience and interpretation; interpretations made from different points of view. The possibilities generated for descriptions of mystical

experience. Smart's criticism of Zaehner's classification of Theravāda Buddhism as monistic; Zaehner placed on the horns of a dilemma. This leads to Smart's claim that theistic mystical experience may be explained not in terms of a unique experience, but in terms of a different interpretation. A caveat entered: Smart's thesis, while appealingly parsimonious, is not absolutely persuasive. A further criticism of Zaehner: the conflict of Ruysbroeck with the quietists explicable on Smartian grounds. Zaehner's importation of his own beliefs into his account. The issue regarding the possibility of theistic mystical experiences remains an open one.

Section IV.

Why are there such varying auto-interpretations of mystical experience if all mystical experience is identical? Zaehner and Radhakrishnan on this; another possible explanation mentioned. The Smartian answer: The variety of interpretations explained by the interplay between two forms of religious experience, the mystical and the numinous.

Section V.

A brief excursus on Rudolf Otto's analysis of the numinous experience. Examples given from Judaism, Hinduism, and Islam. The essence of religion as its non-rational element: The Numen as Mysterium, Tremendum et Fascinans. Delineation and exemplification of this.

Section VI.

The mystical and numinous compared. Smart's concept of doctrinal schemes. The incorporation of logical strands, the numinous and the mystical, in doctrinal schemes. The classification of doctrinal schemes. Determining criteria for resolving incompatible truth claims in religions: basic, organic, formal and preferential criteria. Priority decisions in preferential justification. The mystical and numinous strands produce different kinds of cosmology and theology. A question regarding the validity of Smart's connecting of mystical experience and philosophical idealism. Smart's interpretation of the language of theistic mystics: the interweaving of numinous and mystical with the former predominant; Comparison with Zaehner. Preferential justification: Dependent upon the harmonious incorporation of both strands. Smart's preference criticised. A conceptual dilemma in Smart's analysis: How to determine which of the preferentially justified doctrinal schemes is to be preferred.

Section VII.

Smart's claim that religious truth is to be determined by appeal to religious experience compounds the dilemma. Smart's conceptual bind: religious truth as dependent on both religious experience and factors external to religious experience. The bind cannot be resolved. Smart's criterion of formal justification is

insufficient to determine religious truth by appeal to extra-experiential factors. Critique of Smart's grounds for the exclusion of panenhenic experience: His criteria are either circular or not validated.

Section VIII.

The revision of Smart's thesis of the unity of mystical experience to the unity of 'interior' mystical experience. Smart's analysis is not sufficient to rule out the possibility of theistic mystical experiences. The sharp outlines of Smart's account blurred if panenhenic expression can be detected in mystical texts. However, with respect to the passage from al-Ghazālī cited in the last chapter, Smart's interpretation is more persuasive than Zaehner's.

CHAPTER II

N. SMART: THE MYSTICAL, THE NUMINOUS AND RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

Section I

In the Introduction to this study, it was indicated that we would proceed from the perspective that questions of religious truth might most appropriately be considered by delineating the relationship between religious expression as formulated in doctrines etc. and certain forms of religious experience. To this extent, this study stands in a tradition which leads from such as Joachim Wach¹ back to Rudolf Otto² and finally to Friedrich Schleiermacher.³ The basic presupposition for these three investigators of religious expression and its relation to religious experience is summed up in Wach's belief that

...if we can only pierce deeply enough through the coating of customs and ideas which are really only outward manifestations and lay bare the basic attitude conceived and nurtured by a decisive religious experience, then the various factors of religious expression will become immediately intelligible, and seemingly divergent

¹See esp. J. Wach, Types of Religious Experience: Christian and Non-Christian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951).

²See Ch.IV of this study.

³See esp. F. Schleiermacher, On Religion : Speeches to its Cultured Despisers (New York: Harper & Row, 1958).

and incongruent thoughts and acts will be found to contain one central motivation.⁴

To begin to enter into dialogue with the writings of Wach, Otto and Schleiermacher, one must be willing to begin from the following presuppositions: Firstly, that there is within human nature a capacity for religious experience; secondly, that religious experience is at the basis of all religion and that all religious expression is ultimately referable to it; that this religious experience, in all its forms, reflects a single 'ultimate reality.'⁵

Ninian Smart also stands firmly in accordance with this tradition,⁶ in that he too quite clearly wishes to keep in the forefront of his writings the relationship between experience and expression. There is little doubt that Smart would accept the first two presuppositions above. He would not, however, be in agreement with the third presupposition, and perhaps for the following two reasons. Firstly, if we take it as a hermeneutical principle of any investigation of religious texts that in such investigation, there is always an interplay between the meaning of the text and the 'pre-understanding' which the interpreter brings to the text in order to elicit its meaning, then Wach, Otto and Schleiermacher bring to any

⁴J. Wach, Sociology of Religion (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944), pp.45-6.

⁵I am indebted at this point to C.M. Wood, Theory and Understanding (Montana: Scholars Press, 1975).

⁶As does the writer of this study whose debt to Smart is clear throughout.

religious text with which they deal the pre-understanding reflected in the third presupposition above. To this extent, the text is forced to 'fit' the presuppositions implicit in the approach to the text.⁷ By contrast, for Smart the texts are allowed to stand much more (but not completely) independently of such hermeneutical devices, at least with respect to the question as to whether religious experiences are reflective of a single 'ultimate reality.' Thus, we find in Smart, not so much an ontological quest for the nature of such an 'ultimate reality' but rather an analysis of the phenomenological content of religious experience as such. It is the relation between forms of religious expression and the nature of the two major forms of religious experience — the numinous and the mystical⁸ — as analysed by Smart with which we shall be

⁷For a more detailed discussion of this point in Otto, see Ch. IV, Section VI of this study. For an example of this technique in Wach, see esp. J. Wach, "The Study of Mahāyāna Buddhism" in Types of Religious Experience : Christian and Non-Christian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951).

⁸The distinction between the forms of expression and these two types of religious experience was, to my knowledge, first made by N. Söderblom. The most lucid adumbration in English is tucked away in Hastings' Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, iii. p.738: "These two kinds of communion with deity are intermingled and graduated in manifold ways in real religion, but the difference coincides ultimately with the difference between acosmic salvation and prophetic, or revealed, religion. The communion with deity differs (a) as to the place accorded by religion...to the ethical standard aimed at or recognised...(b) History is in the former case indifferent or troublesome to piety; in the latter it represents God's dealings with humanity, and constitutes the basis of communion with Him. (c) On the one side there is a lofty detachment and aloofness,... ultimately raised above every kind of authority; on the other, an emphasizing of personal and moral authority (d) On the one side there is exaltation of unio substantialis...and of unio sponsalis; on the other side is unio filialis at the top of the scale. On the one side there is a higher appreciation of ecstatic states of mind...; on the other side, a higher appreciation of trust and unaffected self-forgetfulness in the presence of the great tasks of life, the beauty of the ideal, the great works of God...(e) The gulf to be bridged by communion is considered by the former type mainly as a gulf between the finite and the infinite, between temporal succession and change, and timeless contemplation and eternity, between complexity and One-ness; on the other side, between what is and what should be, between sinful man and Holy God."

concerned in this chapter. We shall begin with a consideration of Smart's analysis of the mystical experience.

Section II

In the course of the last chapter I argued that the relationship between certain religious texts and Zaehner's category of panenhenic experience was not as clear cut as Zaehner indicated. That panenhenic experience played a large part in religious expression was thereby opened to some critical doubt. In the writings of Ninian Smart, there is little doubt that according to Smart, the panenhenic experience plays little part in the formation of mystical expression in the mystical texts of the major world religions.

To be sure, it is difficult to perceive in any of Smart's writings a definition of mystical experience. Nevertheless, in a number of places Smart does give an indication of how he would delimit the use of the words. Thus, for example, he writes,

Let us say that a mystical experience is one which is reported by a class of persons generally referred to as 'mystics' — such men as Eckhart, St. John of the Cross, Plotinus, the Buddha, Saṅkara and so on. Such men are characterised by spirituality and asceticism and pursue a certain method.⁹

While such a delineation avoids the dilemma of interpreting mystical experience from the viewpoint of a prior understanding of it, it nevertheless does rule out

⁹N. Smart, Reasons and Faiths (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958), p.55.

the possibility of the inclusion of Zaehner's panenhenic variety of mystical experience within the category of the mystical. As may be seen from our earlier examples of panenhenic experience, the experience "of Nature in all things or of all things as being one"¹⁰ is, at least in the cases of Reid, Joel and Jefferies, very much a spontaneous experience, one which occurs unexpectedly.¹¹

That is to say, the experience has not occurred as the result of the pursuit of a particular contemplative method. Moreover, since such contemplative methods occur within the confines of particular religious traditions, such men as Reid, Joel and Jefferies could not be characterised as spirituals or ascetics in the sense that the Buddha, Eckhart and Shankara were, since their asceticism and spirituality has meaning only within the criteria of spirituality accepted by their respective traditions. Indeed, that Smart does exclude the panenhenic experience from consideration is quite apparent when he remarks in his The Yogi and the Devotee that he wishes to reserve the term 'mystical' for those experiences which are both the result of contemplative techniques (and therefore not spontaneous), and interior (as opposed to the exterior vision

¹⁰R.C. Zaehner, Mysticism, Sacred and Profane (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), p.50.

¹¹That experience of Tennyson's arising from his repeating his own name to himself is slightly different. Such repetition has parallels to the use of mantras in the Indian tradition, and the use of the 'Jesus Prayer' in the Hesychast tradition of Eastern Orthodox Christianity.

of the unity of Nature).¹² Although Smart admits that the panenhenic experience may help "to reinforce the Absolutism of the Upanishads, Shankara and the Mahāyāna,"¹³ there is no discussion in the Smartian corpus as to how such reinforcement takes place. In summary therefore, in so far as the panenhenic experience forms no part of Smart's conceptual framework, Smart's analysis is at variance, not only with Zaehner's, but also with the analyses of Stace and Otto. At a later point in this chapter, it will be argued that Smart's criteria for such an exclusion may well be arbitrary. For the moment however, we shall investigate Smart's critique of Zaehner's monistic and theistic categories.

Section III

While Smart does exclude Zaehner's category of panenhenic experience from his account of the relation between experience and expression, it is above all Zaehner's distinction between monistic and theistic mysticism which Smart wishes to attack. This attack is based on the claim that Zaehner has failed to distinguish sufficiently between mystical experience and its interpretation; and this for two reasons. Firstly, Smart argues that Zaehner fails to realize that different interpretations may have degrees of ramification. That is, that the interpretation

¹²N. Smart, The Yogi and the Devotee (London: Allen & Unwin, 1968), p.66.

¹³Ibid., p.69.

of the experience may have a greater or a lesser dependence on religious concepts, doctrines etc. which have no direct connection with such experience. He writes,

It is to be noted that ramifications may enter into the descriptions either because of the intentional nature of the experience or through reflection upon it. Thus a person brought up in a Christian environment and strenuously practising the Christian life may have a contemplative experience which he sees as a union with God. The whole spirit of his interior quest will affect the way he sees his experience; or, to put it another way, the whole spirit of his quest will enter into the experience. On the other hand, a person might only come to see the experience in this way after the event, as it were: upon reflection, he interprets his experience in theological categories.¹⁴

Secondly, Smart argues that different interpretations may be made from different points of view. Thus,

...if a Christian says that the Buddha's Enlightenment-experience involved some kind of interior vision of God, he is describing the experience from his own point of view and not from that of the Buddha.¹⁵

He continues,

We crucially, then, should distinguish between a mystic's interpretation of his own experience and the interpretation which may be placed upon it from a different point of view. In other words, we must distinguish between what may be called auto-interpretation and hetero-interpretation.¹⁶

¹⁴ N. Smart, "Interpretation and Mystical Experience", in Religious Studies, Vol.1, 1965, p.79. In fact, enshrined within this passage are two quite different notions of the relation between experience and interpretation. Smart, however, develops his critique of Zaehner on the basis of interpretation as retrospective to experience.

¹⁵ Ibid., p.80.

¹⁶ Ibid., p.80.

In accordance with the methodological principles thus established, Smart generates the following possibilities for descriptions of mystical experience:

- (i) Auto-interpretation with low degree of ramification;
- (ii) Hetero-interpretation with low degree of ramification;
- (iii) Auto-interpretation with high degree of ramification;
- (iv) Hetero-interpretation with high degree of ramification.¹⁷

Smart utilizes these possibilities to criticize Zaehner in a number of ways. Firstly, Smart takes Zaehner to task for his classification of Buddhism as a form of monistic mysticism, that is, a mysticism of the isolation of the soul from all that is non-soul. Against Zaehner's assertion that the Buddha taught a doctrine of the Soul,¹⁸ Smart argues that the doctrine of non-soul (anatta, anātman) is attested in the earliest traditions, and that Zaehner mistranslates and misinterprets Pali

¹⁷Ibid., p.81.

¹⁸Perhaps the pre-eminent exponent of the view that the Buddha taught a soul doctrine is Mrs. Margaret Rhys Davids. According to her, the teaching of the Buddha was in accord with the Upanishadic doctrine of the immanent Ātman. Thus, the Sākya religion,

"...at its birth, was a new word of a certain 'More' to be recognised in man's nature and life, he was very real, not a 'being' but as one who becomes that, as becoming, he is capable at length of consummation as that (Most) the form which Deity as immanent had assumed in Indian religious teaching of the day."

M. Rhys Davids, Sākya or Buddhist Origins (1931), quoted by T.R.V. Murti, The Central Philosophy of Buddhism (London: Allen & Unwin, 1960), p.21. For a critique of Davids, see T.R.V. Murti, ibid., pp.20-24.

texts containing the word 'atta'.¹⁹ Further, Smart maintains, even if it were the case that the Buddha taught a soul-doctrine, the non-soul doctrine of later Buddhism still remains to be explained. If a certain connection between mystical experience and the doctrine of anatta is

¹⁹N. Smart, "Interpretation and Mystical Experience", in Religious Studies, Vol.1, 1965, p.82. For a more extended critique, see N. Smart, Doctrine and Argument in Indian Philosophy (London: Allen & Unwin, 1964), pp.211-213. The issue at stake is an important one, and therefore, a few words of comment might be fruitful. Thus, there can firstly be no doubt that there are many texts which preach the doctrine of Anatta. These may take any of three forms. Firstly, those which deny that there is anything in the physical or mental realms which may properly be called one's self for in these realms impermanence and dependence rule. This is not the denial of the 'self' as such, but only a denial of the possibility of the identity of the 'self' with anything in the phenomenal realm. This form may be usefully compared with Hume's critique of the concept of self. See esp. D. Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888), pp.250-263. Secondly, there are those texts which conceive of man as only an aggregate of causally connected psychic and physical elements. Here, there is a quite explicit denial of the 'self'. Thirdly, there are those texts which support a middle doctrine between atta and anatta: Thus, eg., S.N. XLIV.X.10,

"Then Vacchagotta the Wanderer went to visit the Exalted One...and said:-
'Now, master Gotama, is there a self?'
At these words the Exalted One was silent.
'How, then, master Gotama, is there not a self?'
For a second time also, the Exalted One was silent.
Then Vacchagotta the Wanderer rose from his seat and went away."

I would imagine that this middle doctrine is most probably the actual position of the Buddha with regard to the self-non-self dichotomy. And further, I would agree with T.R.V. Murti, G.C. Pande, Studies in the Origins of Buddhism (Allahabad: University of Allahabad, 1957), pp.504-510, and S. Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy (London: Allen & Unwin, 1958) i, pp.682-3, that the correct interpretation of the Buddha's silence is that the true state of affairs falls beyond words and thought. Thus, in the undifferentiated unity of the mystical experience, all distinctions disappear and predication with respect to it is impossible.

admitted,²⁰ then Smart's analysis places Zaehner on the horns of a dilemma. Either, he must admit that there is a form of mysticism which is neither monistic nor theistic, (for there is neither ultimate deity²¹ nor ultimate personal essence in Theravāda Buddhism) thereby recognising the inadequacy of his classification of mystical experience; or, he must show that it is possible for Buddhism to have misinterpreted mystical experience, and hence argue that it is feasible to interpret Buddhist mystical experience monistically. Smart points out that if Zaehner were to choose the latter alternative, then, in admitting that Theravāda Buddhism might be mistaken in its auto-interpretation, might it not be the case that the interpretation proffered by a Christian mystic with a high degree of ramification is also mistaken, and thus, that there is no justification for the isolation of theistic mysticism as a separate category. He writes,

If the monistic category includes heterogeneous high auto-interpretations there is no guarantee that we should not place all mystics, including theists, in the same category; and explain their differences

²⁰ Although, as indicated in Footnote 19, the Buddha does not admit to a certain connection between 'anatta' and mystical experience, this should not be taken as an indication that, in so far as mystical experience is conceptualised, a better case cannot be made out for anatta as a more correct interpretation of mystical experience than atta. See p.103 of this chapter. In spite of this, the silence of the Buddha on the question still places Zaehner on the horns of a dilemma.

²¹ On the nature and function of the Gods in Theravāda Buddhism, see H. von Glasenapp, Buddhism, a Non-Theistic Religion (London: Allen & Unwin, 1970), Chs.1 and 2.

not in terms of radically different experiences, but in terms of varied auto-interpretations. The gaps within the monistic category are big enough for it not to seem implausible to count the gap between monism and theism as no wider.²²

Thus by utilising the principle of parsimony and a sharp distinction between experience and its interpretation, Smart maintains that all mystical experience is identical, its varied expressions occurring because of the ramifying effect of various doctrinal schemes.

Yet, in spite of the Ockhamistic appeal of the Smartian thesis of the unity of all mystical experience, a caveat ought to be entered at this point. On the one hand, it is certainly the case that Smart's criticism of Zaehner is sufficient to cast some doubt upon Zaehner's classification, specifically, that Zaehner's category of monistic experience is too broad to take into account the significant varieties of religious expression which are putatively expressive of such experience. Nevertheless, on the other hand, the recognition of this fault in Zaehner's account does not necessitate the adoption of the Smartian thesis. For, an alternative account alluded to above could be adopted. That is, the thesis could be proposed that there are as many different types of mystical experiences as there are different expressions of it. The simplicity of the Smartian thesis would still remain persuasive; yet, on the other hand, it could plausibly

²²N. Smart, "Interpretation and Mystical Experience", in Religious Studies, Vol.1, 1965, p.83. See also N. Smart, The Yogi and the Devotee (London: Allen & Unwin, 1968), pp.71-2.

be argued that the aesthetic appeal of the simpler hypothesis must needs be rejected because of the weight of textual evidence pointing to the existence of a much larger number of varieties of mystical experience.

That Zaehner does not find the Smartian proposal persuasive is perhaps evidenced by the fact that I can find no rejoinder by Zaehner to Smart in any of Zaehner's work published subsequent to Smart's discussion of it. Zaehner, of course, has his reasons for not being persuaded by Smart's thesis. Prime among these is his own belief that theistic mystical experience is a unique and higher form of mystical experience.²³ The question of the variety of other forms of mystical experiences is irrelevant to this claim. However, this leads us to a consideration of Smart's second criticism of Zaehner.

To advert to Ruysbroeck's criticism of the quietists, it will be recalled that Zaehner claimed that Ruysbroeck was criticising the quietist's monistic experience from the viewpoint of a higher experience, namely, the theistic experience. Of Ruysbroeck's conflict with the quietists, Smart remarks that Ruysbroeck's comments are compatible with the thesis of the unity of mystical experience on the grounds that Ruysbroeck is not so much criticising the quietists on the basis of their lower-order mystical experience, but rather on the basis of their incorrect auto-interpretation — incorrect, that is, on the criteria of correctness embedded in the ordinances and teachings of the

²³Cf. Ch.I, Section V above.

Church. Thus, Ruysbroeck's high hetero-interpretation conflicts with the quietists' high auto-interpretation, but "the experiences for all that could belong to the same type."²⁴

Thirdly, Smart criticises Zaehner for having imported into his account of mystical experience his own high hetero-interpretation of mystical experience. I shall quote a relevant passage from Zaehner, and then summarise Smart's remarks upon it. Zaehner writes,

We have already said that when the mystic claims attributes that are necessarily divine and demonstrably not human, — such as omnipotence and omniscience, — it is fairly clear that he is not enjoying union with God, but rather some sort of natural mystical experience. Apart from this important consideration it would seem that the mystic who is genuinely inspired by the divine love, will show this to the world by the holiness of his life and by an abiding humility in face of the immense favours bestowed which he always will see to be God's doing, not his own. Only such criteria can enable us to distinguish between the genuine state of union with God and the 'natural' or rather 'praeternatural' phenomena we have been discussing.²⁵

According to Smart, the theological and moral criteria of mystical experience implicit within this passage (and also within Ruysbroeck's quietist criticism)

²⁴N. Smart, "Interpretation and Mystical Experience", in Religious Studies, Vol.1, 1965, p.85. Smart also refers to the passage from the Mishkāt of Al-Ghazālī quoted in the last chapter as further evidence for his thesis.

²⁵R.C. Zaehner, Mysticism, Sacred and Profane (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), p.193. This passage appears in a context in which the distinction between monistic and theistic mystical experience is allied with a theological excursus upon the fall of man.

do not derive from an examination of the nature of mystical experience but rather are made on the basis of criteria external to mystical experience. Thus, the theological criterion depends on the truth of certain theological doctrines (eg. that no-one is omniscient, omnipotent but God alone). So also, the moral criterion depends upon the truth of certain theological doctrines (eg. that he who has received divine grace will evidence this in holiness and humility of life.)²⁶ To this extent then, Zaehner has imported his own high auto-interpretation of mystical experience into his account of mystical experience.

By way of summarising this section, we may note the following. Firstly, Smart's postulation of the thesis of the unity of mystical experience need not necessarily be adopted, but his critical scrutiny of Zaehner's categories is sufficient to cast doubt on them. Certainly, Zaehner's argument that theistic mystical experience is

²⁶ Similar criteria are adduced by James Horne in his attempt to distinguish true and false mystics in "Which Mystic Has the Revelation" in Religious Studies, Vol.11, 1975, p.288. According to Horne, the mystic who should be believed,

"...ideally exhibits a character of integrity, accomplishment, and deep rooted sanity, and he incorporates in his statements and expands upon, the religious knowledge already enunciated in a viable religious community."

Both Zaehner and Horne have not taken into account the distinction between criteria which have been utilised (as by Ruysbroeck against the quietists) and criteria the utilisation of which has not been justified. To this extent, Horne's criteria come under similar criticism to those of Zaehner.

a higher form of mystical experience, in so far as it is based on a theological stance towards mystical experience is invalid. This invalidness should not however blind us to the fact that it may be possible by other means to show that (1) theistic mystical experience is a separate category in some specifiable instances and that (2) theistic mystical experience is a higher form. In other words, Zaehner's basic stance, while not validated by him, may be validated by alternate procedures; the issue remains an open one.

Section IV

From the perspective of the Smartian thesis that all mystical experience is phenomenologically identical, then, there is the implication that the experiences of St. John of the Cross or St. Teresa of Avila are the same as the experiences of the Buddha or Shankara. If this is the case, why is it that there are such widely varying auto-interpretations? For Radhakrishnan, as we saw in the Introduction, this is to be explained by the fact that religious expression is a crude attempt to conceptualise that which, in its essence, is unconceptualisable and can only be mystically experienced. For Zaehner, the variations are explained in part at least by the postulation of varieties of mystical experience. During the course of the last section, I proffered the possibility that the variety in expression was dependent upon there being as many different types of mystical experience as there are expressions of it. Accord-

ing to Smart, the variety of auto-interpretations is to be explained by the interplay between two distinct, unique and non-reducible dimensions of religious experience, the mystical and the numinous.

In a context in which he is speaking of the Indian religious milieu, Smart asks what it is that differentiates the Absolutisms of Advaita Vedānta and Mahāyāna Buddhism from the soul-pluralism of Sāṅkhya-Yoga and the non-theistic Theravāda Buddhism:

The secret of Absolutism [he writes] is the presence of a non-contemplative element in the religion in question. This non-contemplative element is supplied in the Upanishads by the speculative sacrificialism which threw up the concept of Brahman as the underlying reality. In Shankara it is supplied by the Upanishadic concept plus the bhakti which directed itself at the personal God Shiva. In the Mahāyāna it is supplied by the bhakti directed at the celestial Lord Buddha, as unified ultimately in the truth body. In all these cases we notice the presence of bhakti and the religion of the numinous in conjunction with the practice of contemplative dhyana.²⁷

The religion of the numinous is based upon the numinous experience, the major characteristic of which, according to Smart, is the confrontation with a being qualitatively different from any previously encountered. The experience occurs unexpectedly and not, as in the case of interior mystical experience as the result of a quest. Both the experience of the numinous and the attitude of worship give rise to a sense of the separateness of the individual from that which lies 'beyond' the

²⁷N. Smart, The Yogi and the Devotee (London: Allen & Unwin, 1968), p.50.

world, although this is not to deny that signs of the 'numen' may be detected 'within' the world.²⁸ The experience and attendant bhakti both signalise that there is a "great gulf fixed between the sinful worshipper and the pure and resplendent object of worship."²⁹ Before continuing further with Smart's analysis and in order to give some flesh to the Smartian bones, we shall turn to Rudolf's Otto's analysis of the numinous experience upon which Smart is ultimately dependent.³⁰

Section V

As a preliminary indication of the nature of numinous experience, I shall detail three passages from three different religious traditions. From Judaism, we shall consider the vision of the God Yahweh which Isaiah has while worshipping in the temple. Isaiah is reported as saying:

- (1) In the year that King Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.
- (2) Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly.
- (3) And one cried unto another, and said, 'Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of Hosts: the

²⁸The so-called "Argument from Design" is a clear instance of such detection in a highly conceptualised form.

²⁹N. Smart, Reasons and Faiths (London: Allen & Unwin, 1958), p.53.

³⁰Although, as we shall see in Ch.IV of this study, Smart adopts as 'experience of the numen' what for Otto is only one mode of the numen's manifestation.

whole earth is full of his glory.'

(4) And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke.

(5) Then said I, 'Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts.'

(6) Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar.

(7) And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, 'Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.'³¹

From the Bhagavad-Gītā, we may consider the words of Arjuna after Krishna has manifested himself in his true form. Arjuna says,

I behold Thee...massed in radiance, on all sides glistening, hardly discernible...immeasurable.... All the Spirits and Divine Powers that live in heaven and earth...all gaze on Thee in amazement...as I behold Thee with yawning mouths, with wide eyes agleam, my inward soul trembles, and I find not constancy nor peace. O Vishnu...Thou devour-est...all the worlds around with flaming mouths; filling the whole universe with radiance, grim glow of Thy splendours, O Vishnu!... In a vision I have seen what no man has seen before; I rejoice in exultation, and yet my heart trembles with fear. Have mercy upon me, Lord of Gods.³²

Finally, from the Quran, we may consider a passage which presages the delivery of the Quran to Mohammed by Allah, through the angel Gabriel. Surah 53 reads,

This is none other than a revelation revealed.
One of awesome might has taught him,
One endured with strength. Standing there
He was, away on the horizon;
Then he drew near, hovering down,
Two bow lengths away, nearer still,

³¹Isaiah, 6.1-7.

³²Bhagavad-Gītā, Ch.11.

And what He revealed to His servant He revealed.
 The heart does not lie: he saw.
 Are you disputing with him, with him who saw?³³

In these three passages may be seen the expressions of three theistic experiences. Here, there is no non-duality, no dissolution of the subject-object polarity, no expression of the Unity of the Self and nature, nor of the isolation of the self from the world, nor of the union of God and man in love. Rather, there is exhibited the complete and utter separateness of God and man. The Holy Being confronts man and stands over against him. It is he who approaches man, in the case of Isaiah, to call him to be his prophet, in the case of Arjuna, to reveal himself in his true form, in the case of Mohammed, to bring God's revelation.

The seminal delineation of this kind of experience occurs in Rudolf Otto's The Idea of the Holy. Otto includes this kind of experience within a category of religious experience which he dubs the numinous - derived from the latin word 'numen'. According to Otto, religions may be said to consist of both rational and non-rational elements, and these, to use his metaphor, constitute its warp and woof. But, while religions considered as socio-cultural manifestations, have to do with theoretical concepts and with moral ideas, they are not ultimately dependent on such rational notions. Rather, the essence of religion is to be found in its non-rational element and this element is constituted by the numinous experi-

³³Quran, 53,4-12.

ence.³⁴ Thus, Otto maintains that the rational and theoretical concepts of religion refer to a "Subject" which can only be apprehended in a non-rational "unique original feeling response" which is the real innermost core of all religions, the numinous experience.

The nature of the 'subject' (Otto uses the term 'subject' to indicate that it is the Holy Being who initiates the experience) or object of the numinous experience cannot be spoken about since it eludes conceptual analysis by definition. In Kantian terms, the numen cannot be spoken about as it is in itself, since in the attempt so to do, the non-rational is inevitably expressed in the 'rational' categories of the mind. Nevertheless, Otto wishes to use a number of words which point us towards it. Thus, Otto describes the Numen, that which is apprehended in numinous experience, as Mysterium, Tremendum et Fascinans. Although Otto probably intended to convey a sense of the numinous by the use of

³⁴ Otto, in spite of his neo-Kantian framework derived from Jakob Fries, stands firmly with Schleiermacher's critique of the Kantian justification of religion. For example, he writes, "He [Schleiermacher] wished to show that man is not wholly confined to knowledge and action, that the relationship of men to their environment — the world, being, mankind, events — is not exhausted in the mere perception or shaping of it. He sought to prove that if one experienced the environing world in a state of deep emotion, as intuition and feeling, and that if one were deeply affected by a sense of its eternal and abiding essence to the point where one was moved to feelings of devotion, awe, and reverence — then such an effective state was worth more than knowledge and action put together." R. Otto, Introduction to F. Schleiermacher, On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), p.xix.

these Latin words, to be evocative and not descriptive, we may say that in the numinous experience, man comes in-to contact with a mysteriousness which is both awful and dreadful, and yet is also fascinating and compelling.

Let us begin by considering the aspect of Tremendum. The first element of the aspect thus indicated is its awefulness. It is important to note that such an element appears in all forms of religion, from the 'daemonic dread' which is apparent in primitive religions to the purest form of theistic religion. He writes,

Though the numinous emotion in its completest development shows the world of difference from the mere 'daemonic dread', yet not even at the highest level does it belie its pedigree or kindred. Even when the worship of 'daemons' has long since reached the higher level of worship of 'Gods', those Gods still retain as numina something of the 'ghost' in the impress they make on the feelings of the worshipper, viz. the peculiar quality of the 'uncanny' and 'aweful'.³⁵

In the higher religions, this quality of awefulness may become that "feeling of personal nothingness and submergence before the awe-inspiring object directly experienced."³⁶ Yet, also, this element of awefulness is connected with the word 'wrath' considered also as an expression which is evocative of the nature of the numen.

³⁵R. Otto, The Idea of the Holy (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), p.17. Otto is very much heir to the 19th century approach to Religionsgeschichte. This was dominated by the quest for the origins of religion, and therefore, the postulation of the evolutionary development of religion was very much in evidence. See esp. M. Eliade, The Quest (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969) and E.E. Evans-Pritchard, Theories of Primitive Religion (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965).

³⁶Ibid., p.17.

Otto admits that, in the process of the rationalisation of the non-rational, the wrath of God has taken on moral qualities; yet still,

Something supra-rational throbs and gleams, palpable and visible, in the 'wrath of God', prompting to a sense of 'terror' that no 'natural' anger can arouse.³⁷

The second element of the aspect of Tremendum is its overpoweringness (majestas) its 'might' and 'power'. It is especially before this overpoweringness that there is the feeling of the self as being but dust and ashes, of being nothingness. In the face of the majesty of the numinous being, there is the feeling that it alone is the sole reality, and that the self does not exist in comparison to it. Otto exemplifies this element by a passage from James' The Varieties of Religious Experience:

The perfect stillness of the night was thrilled by a more solemn silence. The darkness held a presence that was all the more felt because it was not seen. I could not any more have doubted that He was there than that I was. Indeed, I felt myself to be, if possible, the less real of the two.³⁸

The third element in the aspect of Tremendum is 'Energy' or Urgency. This feature again occurs from primitive religions right up to the highest forms of theism. It is particularly connected with the wrath of God. Otto maintains that

...it everywhere clothes itself in symbolical

³⁷ Ibid., p.19.

³⁸ Ibid., pp.22-3.

expressions — vitality, passion, emotional temper, will, force, movement, excitement, activity, impetus.³⁹

Even the love of God, says Otto, may be felt as a consuming fire.

The Numen is further said to be Mysterium. The word most appropriate to signify the mental reaction to this Mysterium is 'stupor'. For Otto, 'stupor' "signifies blank wonder, an astonishment that strikes us dumb, amazement absolute."⁴⁰ The Numen is not only Mysterium because it is beyond our comprehension, but because in our apprehension of it is revealed something which is Wholly Other, something whose nature is qualitatively different from our own, and before whom we therefore step back in numbed wonder. Thus, in following the line of development from 'daemonic' experience to the higher forms of expression of the numinous experience,

...this element in the numinous consciousness, the feeling of the 'wholly other', is heightened and clarified, its higher modes of manifestation come into being, which set the numinous object in contrast not only to everything wanted and familiar (ie. in the end, to nature in general), thereby turning it into the 'supernatural', but finally to the world itself, and thereby exalt it to the 'supramundane', that which is above the whole world order.⁴¹

If the Numen were only terrible and dreadful, religions would only be concerned with expiation and propitiation. But, the Numen is also Fascinans, the devotee

³⁹ Ibid., p.23.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.26.

⁴¹ Ibid., p.29.

is drawn towards the object of the numinous experience with longing and desire for it. Otto writes,

But in all the manifold forms in which it is aroused in us, whether in eschatological promise of the coming of the Kingdom of God and the transcendent bliss of Paradise, or in the guise of an entry into that beatific reality that is 'above the world'; whether it come first in expectancy or pre-intimation or in a present experience...; in all these forms, outwardly diverse but inwardly akin, it appears as a strange and mighty propulsion towards an ideal good known only to religion⁴² and in its nature fundamentally non-rational.

As one of a number of passages which Otto quotes from The Varieties of Religious Experience, we may note the following example of the moment of fascination:

For the moment, nothing but an ineffable joy and exaltation remained. It is impossible fully to describe the experience. It was like the effect of some great orchestra, when all the separate notes have melted into one swelling harmony, that leaves the listener conscious of nothing save that his soul is being wafted upwards and almost bursting with its own emotion.⁴³

Such, in outline, is Otto's analysis of the numinous experience, within which may be placed the experiences of Isaiah, Arjuna, and Mohammed. The individual is confronted by the Wholly Other, the Mysterium, which has a bi-polar character. On the one hand, it is an object of Tremendum, thereby generating boundless awe and wonder in the experiencer. On the other hand, it is an object of Fascinans, entrancing and captivating the individual. As compared to the undifferentiated unity

⁴² Ibid., p.36.

⁴³ Ibid., p.37.

of some mystical experience, or if there be theistic mystical experience, the experienced oneness of man and God, we perceive in the numinous experience of Isaiah, Arjuna etc. the quantitative and qualitative difference between God and man,⁴⁴ a difference determined by the moment of awe and wonder, yet balanced by the simultaneous moment of longing and desire.

Section VI

To return to Smart's analysis after this brief diversion upon the nature of theistic experience, we may note that, for Smart, the mystical experience is the contrary of this. As compared to the spontaneity of the numinous experience, we have noted already that the mystic consciousness occurs subsequent to a quest for that experience by means of a particular method. And further, the contemplative or mystical experience is one of undifferentiated unity, subject-object polarity being obliterated. As Smart remarks,

In the contemplative state...discursive thought and mental images disappear.... If the contemplative experience is void of images, etc., it is also void of that sense of distinction between subject and object which characterizes

⁴⁴See also eg. N. Smart, Doctrine and Argument in Indian Philosophy (London: Allen & Unwin, 1964), p.140. He writes,

"It is worth commenting too on the way in which the religion of worship is expressed by the notion of and distinction between the Lord and selves. For the attitude of worship, and a sense of the holy or numinous other, as object of worship, implies a distinction between the worshipper and the Object of worship."

everyday experience.⁴⁵

According to Smart, religions are in part doctrinal schemes. A doctrinal scheme is a system of linked propositions which are taken to be true, belief in which is one of the criteria for any individual belonging to any religion. Further, doctrinal schemes may incorporate either one or more logical strands, the two main logical strands being the numinous and the mystical. Thus, the mystical strand consists of the mystical experience, mystical discourse, plus the appropriate religious practices, meditation, contemplation etc. The same applies, mutatis mutandis, to the numinous strand.⁴⁶ Experience, doctrines, and practice form a coherent and cohesive network. Since the numinous and mystical strands are prevalent across the major religious traditions, it is possible to classify any one doctrinal scheme under any one of the following four categories:

- (1) Incorporating the mystical strand;
- (2) incorporating the numinous strand;
- (3) incorporating both strands with predominance given to the mystical;
- (4) incorporating both strands with predominance given to the numinous.

⁴⁵N. Smart, The Yogi and the Devotee (London: Allen & Unwin, 1968), p.42; cf. also N. Smart, Reasons and Faiths (London: Allen & Unwin, 1958), p.41.

⁴⁶At this point, I am particularly indebted to J. Gowen, "Religion, Reason and Ninian Smart," in Religious Studies, Vol.9, 1973, pp.219-227.

In his book, Reasons and Faiths, Smart wishes to determine criteria by means of which rational decisions might be made between those sets of doctrinal schemes which have incompatible and conflicting world views. In other words, Smart is concerned with determining criteria of truth in world religions. To this end, he sets out a decision procedure for justifying doctrinal schemes which depends on their ability to satisfy four types of justification criteria — basic, organic, formal and preferential.⁴⁷ Most important is the criterion of preferential justification and it is above all with this that we shall be concerned.

The criterion of preferential justification is dependent on the notion of priority decisions. Thus,

This other element in the justification of doctrines may be called the making of priority decisions as between strands (and we may call the justification of one doctrinal scheme as against another by appeal to priorities a preferential justification).⁴⁸

To expand, Smart's point is that within doctrinal schemes a decision is made in favour of either the priority of the mystical strand or, alternatively the priority of the numinous strand. Thus, a priority decision between strands will result in a doctrinal scheme of types (3) or (4) above. Quite clearly also there are limiting cases of such priority decisions. These limiting cases occur

⁴⁷For a succinct account of these see ibid., pp. 221-2.

⁴⁸N. Smart, Reasons and Faiths (London: Allen & Unwin, 1958), p.127.

in those doctrinal schemes in which only one logical strand is operative. Thus, there will be two possible types of limiting cases, viz., (1) and (2) above. Limiting cases of the first kind are eg. Theravāda Buddhism, Jainism, and Sāṅkhya Yoga.⁴⁹ Limiting cases of the second kind are Judaism, Islam (excluding Sūfism) and Evangelical Protestantism.⁵⁰

Let us now turn to a consideration of Smart's analysis of the influence of mystical and numinous experiences and their inter-relationship upon doctrinal schemes. Smart points out that in those doctrinal schemes which include the concept of God (or an analogue), the mystical and numinous strands produce different kinds of cosmology and theology. Firstly, the mystical strand tends to produce a philosophical idealism. With reference to the Upanishadic doctrine of Brahman, Smart remarks,

Now it will readily be seen that an extreme idealism dovetails well with the Brahman doctrine. For in the latter we have this picture : that beyond phenomena lies a mysterious and supremely holy Reality [numinous strand]. In the mystical picture of the world as unreal we also have the picture of Reality as lying outside phenomena. The world is, as it were, a screen, and what lies outside that screen whether that side or this, is the truly Real. Thus the mystical doctrines of spiritual transcendence and worldly illusion assimilate the Ātman even closer to that immortal

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp.128-9; cf. also N. Smart, The Yogi and the Devotee (London: Allen & Unwin, 1968), pp.23-30, and N. Smart, Doctrine and Argument in Indian Philosophy (London: Allen & Unwin, 1964), p.133.

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp.29-30; cf. also N. Smart, The Yogi and the Devotee (London: Allen & Unwin, 1968), pp.77-8.

being which lies shrouded behind the shifting events of this illusory world.⁵¹

By contrast, the numinous strand tends to produce a philosophical realism. In the monotheistic faiths in which God is creator of the world, the reality of the world of phenomena is asserted since,

...a radical denial of its reality not only constitutes a slighting of the Creator, but also helps to undermine the evidence in the shape of traces of glory in the world and in life, upon which faith has its basis.⁵²

While it is certainly the case that type (2) doctrinal schemes do have a "realistic" view of the world, (for the world is the stage upon which the divine action is executed and man has a part to play in bringing the world to its telos), there is perhaps some room for doubt as to the intimacy of the connection between philosophical idealism and the mystical strand. Certainly, in type (3) doctrinal systems — and here Advaita Vedānta would be the paradigm — the interweaving of the two strands generates such a stance. Nevertheless, philosophical idealism is not apparent in the Vedāntin or, for that matter, in the Mahāyānan sense in either Theravāda Buddhism or Sāṅkhya. In both of these doctrinal schemes, the world is ontically real,⁵³ and not illusory. Thus, a certain wariness as to the assimilation

⁵¹ Ibid., p.105.

⁵² Ibid., p.129.

⁵³ See, eg., T.R.V. Murti, The Central Philosophy of Buddhism (London: Allen & Unwin, 1960), Ch.3.

of philosophical idealism and mystical experience when the latter is not ramified by a doctrine of God should be adopted. To be sure, there is a moderate idealism in Theravāda Buddhism, for the world is impermanent (anicca) by contrast with the permanence of nibbāna, but such impermanence nevertheless approximates more to the flux of Heraclitus than to the māyā of the Vedantin school. As a foreshadowing of later developments in this study, I would suggest that extreme or absolute idealism tends to have a connection with the notion of divinity beyond the world but assimilated with a turning of mystical consciousness towards reflection upon this world.⁵⁴

Secondly, with reference to theology, the numinous strand tends to provide a positive theology and the mystical strand a negative theology, the latter consisting of such expressions as 'reality', 'being', 'unity', etc. Smart argues that it is of the very essence of mystical theology to generate negative or ontological theology though such expressions should not be considered as having descriptive content but rather a valuational use. Nevertheless, even though all mystics tend to use ontological language, mystics operating within a numinous or theistic tradition may be constrained by the positive theology of that tradition. Therefore, such mystics effect a compromise:

⁵⁴ Thus, I shall argue at a later point that there is an expression in mystical texts of a panenhenic consciousness which arises from interior mystical experience.

The numinous strand will thus remain doctrinally predominant in their way of speaking, and their goal will be described in terms of spiritual marriage etc.: contact with the Divine, not deification.... Thus the marriage analogy serves to retain the subject-object (Worshipper-divine) distinction while also portraying the raptness of the soul.⁵⁵

It follows then that, according to Smart, the language of 'Spiritual Marriage', 'Union with God', 'the Union of God and the soul in love' is the closest the theistic mystic can approximate in his description to the undifferentiated unity of the mystical state without obliterating that distinction between God and the soul necessitated by the tradition in which he is operating. Zaehner's category of theistic mystical experience, based as it is upon various modes of mystical expression is, from this perspective, rejected also, for the theistic mode of mystical expression is interpreted in terms of the interplay of numinous and mystical strands.

With this delineation of the possibilities for priority decisions, we shall now consider the question of preferential justification. Smart argues that a doctrinal scheme of type (4) is preferentially justified over those schemes under type (3). That is, only those doctrinal schemes which make a priority decision in favour of the numinous strand are preferentially justified. His argument is as follows.

The preferentially justified doctrinal scheme is

⁵⁵N. Smart, Reasons and Faiths (London: Allen & Unwin, 1958), p.144.

that one which can harmoniously incorporate both logical strands. Type (3) doctrinal schemes deny both the gap between Creator and created, and the philosophical realism endemic to the numinous strand. Thus, in such schemes, the numinous strand is obliterated. He writes,

The Absolutistic interpretation of religion thus seems to render bhakti ultimately meaningless. And this is brought out explicitly in Advaita, with its doctrines of levels of truth. Bhakti has a provisional importance only. In the experience of 'That Art Thou' all rituals and praise die away. Given then, the principle of equality between bhakti and dhyana, the dialectic of religious experience seems to militate against an Absolutistic interpretation.⁵⁶

By contrast, Smart claims that type (4) doctrinal schemes incorporate the mystical strand without obliterating it. The key to this incorporation is the analogy of 'love' and 'Spiritual Marriage'. Thus,

The image of love, of the Spiritual Marriage, is the key to the equal life of bhakti and dhyana.... The two intertwine but they do not strangle each other. Both remain meaningful moments of religious experience under the wing of the right kind of theism.⁵⁷

Leaving aside for the moment the question of the validity of treating bhakti and dhyana (the numinous and mystical strands) equally, it is nevertheless difficult to see how the mystical strand is any less obliterated by its incorporation into type (4) doctrinal schemes than the numinous strand is obliterated by its incorporation into type (3) doctrinal schemes. That is

⁵⁶N. Smart, The Yogi and the Devotee (London: Allen & Unwin, 1968), p.80;

⁵⁷Ibid., p.82.

to say, if the main characteristic of the mystical strand is subject-object distinctionlessness and the major feature of mystical theology is philosophical idealism, then these would appear to be obliterated just as much in a type (4) scheme as the gap between creator and created, and philosophical realism are obliterated in a type (3) scheme.

Further, even if it were the case that type (4) doctrinal schemes were preferentially justified over type (3) schemes, Smart's criteria do not enable the determination of which particular type (4) doctrinal scheme is to be preferred. As Julie Gowen remarks,

If we grant Smart, for the sake of argument, his conclusion that if there is a true doctrinal scheme it will be theistic, it follows that the true doctrinal scheme will be built around the belief in the existence of a divine being. Judaism and Christianity, both theistic doctrinal schemes, characterise the divine being significantly differently, which is to say that these two doctrinal schemes embody at least in part incompatible doctrines. Smart's criteria do not suffice to tell us which is the correct or superior interpretation of the given of numinous experience.⁵⁸

More importantly, it is difficult to see how Smart within his conceptual framework could determine which particular scheme is to be preferred. That this is so is due, in part, to his notion of the nature of religious truth. Of religious truth, he quite appropriately comments,

It concerns the Transcendent, it moves in the

⁵⁸J. Gowen, op. cit., p.225.

sphere of intimate experience, it is bound up with awe and bliss, it is entangled powerfully and fruitfully in symbolism. It is scarcely plausible to expect the truths of religion to be demonstrable or for the evidences to be like those of the law court or the laboratory.... It seems sad that when our lives are to be shaped by belief there is no absolutely authoritative way of establishing that belief.⁵⁹

There is, however, a more compelling reason for Smart's inability to specify which particular type (4) doctrinal scheme is to be preferred, and this reason turns on his crucial distinction between experience and interpretation. It is to this that we shall now turn.

Section VII

As we have seen, Smart argues that mystical experience is phenomenologically everywhere the same, and that differences in interpretation are due to the different doctrinal schemes by means of which the descriptions of mystical experience are ramified. This means that in order to determine which interpretation is the most correct description, it is necessary to examine low auto-interpretations. That is to say, if one is seeking a phenomenological analysis of mystical experience without the overlaid interpretations derived from any extant doctrinal schemes, it is fruitful to seek a variety of low auto-interpretations to compare and contrast them and thus derive a series of descriptive propositions which would most closely approximate to the mystical

⁵⁹N. Smart, The Yogi and the Devotee (London: Allen & Unwin, 1968), p.142.

experience. And this appears to have been the Smartian method by means of which is generated the description of mystical experience as an experience of undifferentiated unity in which the subject-object polarity of everyday experience is abrogated. However, this type of analysis could not possibly bring about a resolution of the problem of which doctrinal scheme is preferable since the purpose of the exercise is to bracket out the influences of such schemes upon the descriptions of mystical experience.

But further, Smart argues that the truth of any interpretation of religious experience depends in large measure on factors external to the experience.⁶⁰ This places Smart in a conceptual bind since he wishes to maintain both that if we are to find religious truth, we should look to religious experience (and this as we have seen is a conceptual presupposition of Smart's approach to the resolution of incompatibility in doctrinal schemes); and that the truth of any interpretation depends (in part at least) on the truth of the doctrinal scheme which ramifies the interpretation (and thus the question of religious truth becomes the question of the truth of the ramifying doctrinal scheme).

This conceptual bind could be resolved by arguing that the true doctrinal scheme is the one which most approximates to the given of religious experience. In this case, one would perhaps generate the Islamic doctrinal scheme as that which most closely approximates to

⁶⁰N. Smart, "Interpretation and Mystical Experience", in Religious Studies, Vol.1, 1965, p.87.

theistic experience (for Allah is preeminently the wrathful deity, yet also the merciful and compassionate one), and the Theravādin doctrinal scheme as that most closely approximating to the mystical experience. Indeed, Smart does suggest that the non-self doctrine of Theravāda is to be preferred to the soul-pluralism of Sāṅkhya and Jainism on the grounds that "non-self" is a more correct description of the phenomenological content of mystical experience. He writes therefore,

...since the experience of the Yogi involves going beyond the ordinary discriminations of perceptual, imaginative and ratiocinative experience, thus attaining a certain 'voidness', looked at from the point of view of the world, it is rather hard to distinguish one mystic's content of experience from another's. The undifferentiated nature of the experience thus opens the way to the abandonment of individual souls or selves, though without the implication that therefore there is just one Self... Thus the Buddhist position of, so to say, starting from a pluralistic base but going beyond it is an intelligible development from soul-pluralism.⁶¹

Nevertheless, even granting the close connection of mystical experience and the doctrinal scheme of Theravāda Buddhism, since candidacy for religious truth entails the incorporation of both logical strands, Smart could not resolve the conceptual bind by this means. As he himself notes, it could be argued

that a complicated creed does achieve a degree of comprehensiveness which the simpler ones do not. For instance, Brahmanism has the advantage that it welds together both the activities

⁶¹N. Smart, Doctrine and Argument in Indian Philosophy (London: Allen & Unwin, 1964), pp.139-40.

of sacrifice and those of asceticism; and the Sūfi movement transformed Islām in such a manner that it became clear that one could love Allah with two loves.⁶²

Moreover, and without putting too fine a point on it, even if it were possible to base a case for religious truth on the notion of least-wide ramification, it would still be necessary to decide what was to count as grounds for being least-widely ramified without either creating a set of phenomenological criteria which could include all doctrinal schemes, (William James' criteria of mystical experience could be seen in such a light), or committing oneself in advance to the viewpoint of any particular doctrinal scheme.

Alternatively, it may be possible to resolve the conceptual bind by arguing that the truth of any particular doctrinal scheme might be excogitated without reference to the given of religious experience. For example, Smart's criteria of formal justification might be seen as such extra-experiential criteria. Two such criteria adumbrated by Smart are simplicity and concealment of the Divine Being. Thus, for example, monotheistic religions are formally justified over polytheistic religions, and non-idolatrous religions over idolatrous ones. Nevertheless, and excluding the question as to the validation of these criteria, in that we would then be faced with deciding between a number of monotheistic, non-idolatrous systems, we would be required to either

⁶²N. Smart, Reasons and Faiths (London: Allen & Unwin, 1958), p.157.

expand our formal criteria, or return to the given of religious experience. Validation of the former (if such could be found) would be a necessary requisite, adoption of the latter, as we have seen, only exacerbates the problem. Thus, in conclusion, in that Smart appears committed to seeking religious truth in religious experience (both mystical and numinous) and outside of it, and since Smart's framework does not allow resolution of this dichotomy, the conceptual bind remains.

As we have seen throughout this chapter, crucial to Smart's analysis is the phenomenological unity of mystical experience. We have already entered a caveat with respect to the validity of this thesis, and shall now consider a further criticism of it. As noted above, the mystical experience is an interior experience, an experience "in the depths of the soul."⁶³ As such, it is to be compared with the panenhenic experience of the unity of nature as outlined by Zaehner. Smart, in contrast to Zaehner (and also, as we shall see, to W.T. Stace and Otto), excludes this experience from the category of mystical experience. Such an exclusion facilitates the possibility of the assertion of the phenomenological unity of mystical experience since a phenomenologically different experience (at least in so far as it is an 'exterior' and not an 'interior' experience) is definitionally excluded from consideration. In the first chapter of this

⁶³N. Smart, Doctrine and Argument in Indian Philosophy (London: Allen & Unwin, 1964), p.131.

study, some questions were raised as to the interpretation of certain texts as reflecting panenhenic experience. Our task, for the moment however, is to determine whether Smart's exclusion of panenhenic experience is justified.

Smart's criteria for the exclusion of panenhenic experience are that it neither follows from the the pursuit of a contemplative method, nor is it phenomenologically compatible with the experiences of such men as are called 'mystics'. I shall attempt to show that Smart's second criterion is either circular and therefore arbitrary, or that it collapses into the first criterion. I shall then argue that the first criterion is an evaluative one and thus not justifiable as a necessary criterion for the application of 'mystical'.

With reference to the second criterion, it is fruitful to ask the question what it is that such men as St. John of the Cross, the Buddha, Shankara etc. have in common which entails that their experiences are mystical ones. This question arises from the consideration that if these men are to function as paradigms of the sorts of people who have mystical experiences, it is necessary to indicate a common factor among them apart from or in addition to their being the recipients of certain sorts of experiences. Smart appears to suggest, in part at least, that what they have in common is the fact that they are called 'mystics'. But, this is tantamount to saying that mystical experiences are had by these men because they are

called 'mystics' and, in the absence of any other defining characteristic of 'mystics', they are called mystics because they have mystical experiences. In other words, Smart appears to be involved in circularity at this point and his choice of these individuals as paradigmatic and the exclusion of such as Joel, Jefferies etc. has a hint of arbitrariness about it.

Smart's first criterion does attempt to show that there is a common factor among these mystics which is additional to and, to a large extent, separate from the experience itself. That is, the justifying criterion for their being the recipients of mystical experiences is that they all followed some particular ascetical path. In this way, therefore, the second criterion may be seen as dependent upon the first. Nevertheless, it is necessary to give reasons why the predication of 'mystical' to any experience is dependent upon the fulfilling of this first criterion. This is of course not to deny that there is a connection between the attainment of mystical experience and the treading of a contemplative path. Such a contingent relationship is attested in all the major mystical traditions. But to argue 'no contemplative method, therefore no mystical experience' is a far stronger claim than is implied in the registering of the contingent connection. In order to verify it, one would need to ascertain firstly, that no 'interior' mystical experience arises spontaneously; and secondly, that no non-interior (eg. panenhenic) experiences arise as the result of the pursuit of a contemplative method. This

is not to criticise Smart for not fulfilling a probably impossible task, but rather to indicate some dubiety as to the necessity of the connection of method and experience.

Further to this, Smart's first criterion is a more general version of a similar criterion held by Zaehner and criticised by Smart. Smart contended that since Zaehner had imported moral and theological criteria into his account, the uniqueness of theistic mysticism was not based on an analysis of the experience but on factors external to it. By the same token, Smart's argument for the restriction of the term 'mystical' to only these experiences consequent upon the pursuit of some ascetical method is also an importation of an extra-experiential criterion into the evaluation of any putative mystical experience. In other words, Smart's first criterion depends upon an evaluative judgement which restricts the term 'mystical' to those experiences which occur within religions incorporating dhyana, meditation or contemplation. Since, as I have indicated above, Smart offers no reasons for such an evaluative criterion, the putative necessary connection between the predication of 'mystical' and the first criterion is not persuasive.

Section VIII

There are a number of conclusions which may be drawn from the above analysis. Firstly, since neither of Smart's criteria are justifiable, there is no reason to exclude the panenhenic experience from the predication

of 'mystical'. This is not to assert that the panenhenic experience does find expression in doctrinal schemes, for we have expressed doubts as to this possibility in the last chapter. It is however to maintain that the panenhenic experiences of Joel, Jefferies etc. cannot be denied as 'mystical' experiences on Smartian grounds. This necessitates the revision of the Smartian thesis of the phenomenological unity of mystical experience to the thesis of the phenomenological unity of interior mystical experience. Secondly, however, we have also alluded to reasons why this thesis also ought not to be accepted as validated, for while its Ockhamistic simplicity is appealing, this factor ought not to be allowed to prejudice the issue of whether there are, for example, phenomenologically theistic mystical experiences. Thirdly, and most importantly, the unjustified exclusion of panenhenic experience from the category of mystical experience raised some questions concerning Smart's analysis of the inter-weaving of logical strands in doctrinal schemes. If it is the case that some form of panenhenic consciousness is reflected in religious expression, then this will necessarily blur the sharp outlines of the account of the relationship between experience and doctrinal schemes proffered by Smart.

In our previous chapter, we saw how Zaehner had argued that Advaita Vedānta and Sāṅkhya were merely different expressions of the same kind of experience, viz. monistic mystical experience. Certainly with regards to these two systems, their differences are far more clearly

illuminated by Ninian Smart in his assigning of Sāṅkhya to the mystical strand, and his classification of Advaita Vedānta by means of the notion of its interweaving of the numinous and mystical strands with the latter predominant. His further claim that expressions of theistic mysticism are not to be taken as evidence of a different kind of mystical experience but are to be seen in terms of the interweaving of numinous and mystical strands with the former predominant certainly appears to be reflected in eg. the passage from the Mishkat of Al-Ghazālī which we examined earlier. That, in this passage, the undifferentiated unity of mystical experience is interpreted by Ghazālī in orthodox theistic terms is important evidence for the necessity of taking the numinous strand into account. And, from the perspective of this passage, Smart's analysis is certainly more persuasive than that of Zaehner.

In the next chapter, we shall turn to the analysis of mystical experience offered by W.T. Stace. For Stace, neither theistic mystical experience nor the numinous experience are part of his conceptual framework. Rather, mystical doctrines are related to the presence of extrovertive experiences (Zaehner's panenhenic category) and introvertive experiences, (the unity of 'interior' mystical experience being a presupposition of Stace's account).

CHAPTER III

W.T. STACE: EXTROVERTIVE & INTROVERTIVE MYSTICISM

Synopsis

Section I.

Stace includes the panenhenic or extrovertive experience in his analysis, and the phenomenological unity of 'interior' mystical experience. His phenomenological task is to delineate the central core of mystical experience. This is supplemented by a philosophical task, viz. the determining of which mystical interpretation is the true one.

Section II.

The delineation of the shared characteristics of all mystical experiences. Their inner nucleus: the experience of an ultimate and basic unity. The unitary experience as extrovertive or introvertive: A delineation of these. Reiteration of our autobiographical principle with respect to the purported extrovertive experiences of Eckhart and St. Teresa. Panenhenic experience in Jakob Boehme. This leads to a distinction between modes of panenhenic expression: Those arising from spontaneous panenhenic experience; those arising from reflection subsequent to interior mystical experience.

A methodological principle outlined: That, subject to the autobiographical proviso, panenhenic modes of expression are dependent upon interior mystical experience.

Section III.

The 'trans-subjectivity' of mystical experience. Stace's definition of 'subjectivity' and 'objectivity'. The postulation of a Universal Self: Criticisms of the necessity of this postulation. Mystical experiences as 'self-transcending': Clarification of the implications of this. The Vacuum-Plenum Paradox: The tension within the concept of the Universal Self between positive and negative emphases. The incompatibility between positive predicates and the Contentless One: Stace's inability to explain this. The absence of the paradox in non-theistic systems; its presence in theistic systems. The paradox as apparent where theistic and mystical strands in interplay. Stace's critique of theism as the reason for his inability to take theistic strand into account.

Section IV.

Pantheism, Monism and Dualism as ways of interpreting mystical experience. Stace's critique of dualism. The reason for dualist interpretations: the pressure of ecclesiastical authorities. Two problems with this explanation: Stace's notion of the relation between experience and interpretation; the presence of dualism within the Indian tradition. Delineation of cosmic and

a-cosmic monism. Stace's critique of these. The pantheistic paradox outlined. Pantheism as the true interpretation of mystical experience. Incompatibility between Stace's phenomenological account of extrovertive experience and his philosophical discussion of it. Pantheistic mystical experiences in Eckhart and Suso. Criticisms of Stace's claim that there are such: Incompatibility between phenomenological account of introvertive experience and philosophical justification of pantheism.

Section V.

The corollaries of these incompatibilities: Discussion of these. Examples from Eckhart and Suso to evidence their being recipients of experiences of undifferentiated unity: This leads to rejection of the possibility that Eckhart and Suso are recipients of pantheistic experiences and to rejection of the possibility that all mystical experiences are pantheistic. The Theravādin position examined again. The assertion of the second corollary: that introvertive experiences are of undifferentiated unity and that identity in difference is an interpretation of these. Supported by reconsideration of experience and interpretation: Such interpretations reflect a Plotinian-based realism dovetailed with a realist theistic schema. Reconsideration of panenhenic modes of expression in the light of this: panenhenic modes of expression arising as a result of

introvertive experiences exemplified in Ibn Tufayl and Meister Eckhart.

Section VI.

Summary of the chapter.

CHAPTER III

W.T. STACE: EXTROVERTIVE & INTROVERTIVE MYSTICISM

Section I

It has been argued in the previous chapter that Smart's exclusion of the panenhenic experience as mystical experience is an unjustified exclusion. As we have also noted, R.C. Zaehner maintains that panenhenic experience must be taken into account in any analysis of mystical experience. Similarly, both W.T. Stace and Rudolf Otto, whose analyses of the nature of mystical experience we shall be concerned with in the next two chapters of this essay, include the panenhenic experience in their accounts. For the reason that W.T. Stace also incorporates in his framework what amounts to the thesis of the phenomenological unity of interior mystical experience, it will be fruitful to examine his proposals firstly.

In his major work, Mysticism and Philosophy¹, Stace sets out, not only to delineate the central core of mystical experience by describing those characteristics which are common to all mystical experience, but also to demonstrate which interpretation of mystical experience

¹W.T. Stace, Mysticism and Philosophy (London: MacMillan, 1961).

is the true one. Thus, as for both Zaehner and Smart, a study in the phenomenology of the mystical experience is supplemented by a philosophical task.

After an examination of Stace's account of the two varieties of mystical experience, viz., the introvertive and the extrovertive, we shall turn to his arguments for the existence of a Universal Self, for the notion of the vacuum-plenum paradox, and for identity in difference as the essence of mystical experience. I shall endeavour to exhibit the incompatibilities and inconsistencies which arise when we contrast Stace's phenomenological analysis of mystical experience with those claims which arise from his philosophical arguments.

Section II

The pivotal point of Stace's account relies upon his elucidation of the following question:

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

He primarily discounts visions, voices, raptures, hyper-emotionalism etc. as subsumable under the category of mysticism, while nevertheless admitting that such phenomena may accompany the mystical experience. Such an exclusion may appear arbitrary for Stace neither offers a comparative analysis of these phenomena, nor gives reasons why his definitive characteristics of mystical

²Ibid., p.43.

experience are operating as more than functionalist clues as to how he will use the words 'mystical experience'. Nevertheless, having registered this point, we may note that according to Stace, all mystical experiences share the following characteristics:

- (i) Sense of objectivity or reality;
- (ii) Feeling of blessedness, peace etc.;
- (iii) Awareness of the holy, sacred or divine;
- (iv) Paradoxicality;
- (v) Ineffability.³

These characteristics, however, revolve around a nucleus which is the inner essence of the mystical experience. This nucleus is the experience of a unity "which the mystic believes to be in some sense ultimate and basic to the world."⁴

This unitary experience may take either of two forms, the extrovertive or the introvertive. As for Zaehner and Smart, so also for Stace, the difference between them is that "the extrovertive experience looks outward through the senses, while the introvertive looks inward into the mind."⁵ In essence, extrovertive mysticism involves the apprehension of a "One" or "Universal Self" through a unifying vision of the external world. By contrast, introvertive mysticism involves the 'apprehension' of an undifferentiated unity of 'pure consciousness',

³Ibid., pp.131-2.

⁴Ibid., p.132.

⁵Ibid., p.61.

...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.⁶

Without continuing to belabour a point made at some length in our discussion of Zaehner, it is worth noting that the passages from Meister Eckhart and from St. Teresa of Avila, which are adduced as examples of their being the recipients of panenhenic or extrovertive experiences, are not conclusive. This is for the reason that there is lacking in the passages cited any stated connection between these expressions and the having of an extrovertive experience.⁷ In this sense, these passages are quite distinct from the detailed autobiographical account offered by "N.M.", which is closely comparable to the experiences of Joel, Tennyson, Jefferies etc. It is "N.M.'s" autobiographical account which is the basis upon which Stace illuminates the extrovertive experience. The passage which perhaps gives the closest apparent connection of panenhenic experience to panenhenic expression is a passage which Stace finds in the writings of Evelyn Underhill. According to Evelyn Underhill, in the life of Jakob Boehme,

⁶Ibid., p.110.

⁷The passages drawn from Eckhart are derived from Otto's analysis of the mysticism of Eckhart and Shankara. As far as I have been able, I have checked the passages quoted against Blakney's translation of Eckhart's writings. I can find there also no autobiographical statements making the connection of panenhenic expression and panenhenic experience explicit.

...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 word 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 harmonised with what he had seen.⁸

Of importance here is not the fact that Boehme uses panenhenic modes of expression. Rather, the panenhenic mode of expression arises from his gazing upon the world subsequent to being the recipient of an interior mystical experience. In other words, the nature of interior experience "within the self" reflects back upon the way the individual views himself, himself in the world, and himself and the world, subsequent to that experience. To paraphrase Underhill, "actual nature harmonised" with the content of the interior experience. In essence, panenhenic modes of expression in mystical texts arise from reflection upon the world subsequent to the interior experience.

This means, therefore, that a distinction between modes of panenhenic expression needs to be made. On the one hand, there are those panenhenic expressions which are quite clearly the result of a (normally) spontaneous

⁸E. Underhill, Mysticism (London: Methuen & Co., 1930), pp.255-6, quoted by W.T. Stace, op. cit., p.140.

panenhenic experience. We may take as certain examples of this mode of panenhenic expression only those cases where there is an autobiographical reference to the connection of expression and panenhenic experience. On the other hand, there are panenhenic expressions which occur as a result of reflection upon the relation of self and world, and the world in se, subsequent to interior mystical experience.

From this above discussion, we may generate a methodological principle of some importance. This is to the effect that, subject to the autobiographical proviso above, panenhenic modes of expression are dependent upon that apprehension gained via interior mystical experience, and therefore, spontaneous panenhenic experience need not be taken into account in analysis of the relationship between religious experience and religious expressions. At this point therefore, we may say that Smart is vindicated with respect to his exclusion of spontaneous panenhenic experience from consideration. However, he is in error to the extent that panenhenic modes of expression arising from interior experience reflecting upon the world are not taken into account. We shall leave to a later stage, however, the question of the relation of the numinous strand, the expression of interior mystical experience, and the relevant panenhenic mode of expression.

Section III

Before proceeding to a more detailed analysis of

Stace's account, it is necessary to outline his argument for the 'trans-subjectivity' of that experience. By 'trans-subjective', Stace wishes to indicate that neither 'subjectivity' nor 'objectivity' are suitable descriptions of the mystical experience. As his criterion of objectivity, Stace adopts the notion of orderliness. By contrast, he adopts the notion of disorderliness as the criterion of subjectivity. He writes,

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.⁹

The notion of orderliness is further specified as "...law, that is to say, regularity of succession, repetition of pattern, 'constant conjunction' of specifiable items."¹⁰

To be sure, Stace's definitions of subjectivity and objectivity are by no means conclusive for, since they are not so much argued for as merely asserted, there are varieties of alternative definitions.¹¹ Nevertheless, the point of these definitions is quite clear. Since the introvertive (or interior) mystical experience is one of undifferentiated unity, Stace maintains that

⁹W.T. Stace, op. cit., p.140.

¹⁰Ibid., p.140.

¹¹For a number of characterisations of alternative meanings of 'subjectivity', 'objectivity', 'subjective claim', 'objective claim', see W.J. Wainwright, "Stace and Mysticism" in Journal of Religion, Vol.50, 1970, pp.143-4.

it cannot be objective because, "There are no distinguishable items or events among which repeatable patterns or regular sequences could be traced."¹² By the same token, since a unitary experience cannot exhibit positive infringements of natural law by virtue of its undifferentiated nature, it cannot be subjective either. Therefore, in order to delineate that sense of objectivity or reality (ie. Williams James' 'noeticity') which is one of the characteristics of the mystical experience, Stace coins the terms 'trans-subjective'. Such trans-subjectivity applies for Stace to both types of mystical experience.

If Stace is claiming that, by virtue of his definitions of subjectivity and objectivity and his delineation of 'trans-subjectivity', he has vindicated the claims of the mystics to be in touch via mystical experience with the ultimate realness of the world, then he is very much mistaken. For, apart from the questionableness of his definitions of 'subjectivity' and 'objectivity', the claims of mystics and the linguistic hybrid 'trans-subjective' by no means entail the existence of that which does transcend the mystic in the mystical experience. On the other hand, if Stace is maintaining that claims to objectivity should not be ruled out of court on the basis of criteria of objectivity and reality which operate in the everyday world of duality and

¹²W.T. Stace, op. cit., p.144.

multiplicity, then Stace's point is a valid one. The mystics' claims to objectivity and reality deserve to be treated with respect, even if, in the final analysis, their claims must be judged to be unwarranted.

As indicated above, Stace maintains that the unity experienced is that of the pure self (or mind) emptied of its empirical contents. He further maintains that any one self emptied of its empirical contents cannot be distinguished from any other self in an identical situation.¹³ Thus, argues Stace, we are logically forced to postulate the existence of a Universal Self. He writes,

...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.¹⁴

Stace further argues that since both the introvertive One and the extrovertive One are empty of content, "there is nothing to constitute a principium individuationis between them," and thus there are good grounds

¹³Ibid., pp.150-1:

"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...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."

¹⁴Ibid., p.203.

for the mystics' identification of the two.¹⁵ A preliminary problem may be dealt with at this point. Stace equivocates between the nature of the experience and the 'object' of the experience. That is to say, according to his analysis, it is the experience which is contentless. In the passage immediately above, this lack of content is predicated of the 'object' of the two types of experience, namely, the Extrovertive One and the Introvertive One. This equivocation is only justified if it is the case that the transition to Universal Self is justified.

There are a number of points against Stace's argument to the Universal Self. Firstly, as we shall see later, Stace himself admits that the notion of the pure self is an interpretation of the unitary consciousness attained in the introvertive mystical experience. Thus, it would follow that there is no intrinsic connection between the notion of a pure self and the introvertive experience, ie., other interpretations are possible. This implies that we are not compelled to posit a pure self as that which is isolated from its empirical surroundings in the introvertive experience. Hence, on

¹⁵ Ibid., p.152, Cf. also, p.110:

"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."

these premises, neither are we compelled logically to posit a Universal Self. Secondly, even if it were the case that the notion of a pure self without empirical properties were substantiated such that there was no principium individuationis by means of which a plurality of pure souls can be established, this does not justify the postulation of a single Universal Self. As Ninian Smart remarks,

If there is no principium individuationis, both singular and plural would seem to be inapposite, and there is no more need to speak of a Self than of Selves.¹⁶

Thirdly, and from an Indian perspective, the argument against a Universal Self and an argument for the plurality of souls proceeds along the following lines. If it were the case that all souls were one, ie., that all were ultimately the Universal Self, then what happens to one soul, ought to happen to all souls. Thus, if one soul attains release by realising its true nature, then all souls ought simultaneously to gain release. But this is manifestly not the case for some souls attain release while others continue inextricably connected to the realm of samsāra. Therefore, a pluralism of souls is the true situation.¹⁷

Stace maintains that both the introvertive and the

¹⁶N. Smart, "Mystical Experience," in Sophia, Vol.1, 1962, p.19.

¹⁷I am, of course, not supporting the case for soul pluralism, but rather indicating a Sāṅkhyin perspective on Stace's claims.

extrovertive experiences are self-transcending, that is, both kinds of experience point towards a trans-subjective reality. Accordingly, that the mystic apprehends a Universal Self in both types of experience helps explain why the experience is a self-transcending one. That is to say, the vast majority of mystics take the experience to be a self-transcending one because the notion of a reality beyond the individual is not part of the interpretation of the experience but is part of the experience itself.¹⁸

However, Stace's analysis is not at all clear or ambiguous; for, within several mystical systems, the notion of self-transcendence may have a variety of meanings. Thus, 'self-transcendence' can mean: Transcendence of the empirical self (as in Sāṅkhya): transcendence of the self (as in Advaita Vedānta in the identity of the self and Brahman); Transcendence, in the sense of rejection of the self in an empirical and a metaphysical sense (as in Theravāda Buddhism). As we have noted earlier, according to the Sāṅkhya philosophy, release consists in the realization of the absolute distinction of purusha (soul) from everything which is prakriti (non-soul). The empirical self (including the mind)¹⁹ is part of

¹⁸W.T. Stace, op. cit., p.153.

¹⁹Stace fails to make a clear distinction between mind and soul, a distinction of some import in Sāṅkhya. In fact, there is a subtle relationship between purusha and buddhi (mind). See especially S.N. Dasgupta, Yoga as Philosophy and Religion (Delhi: Motilal Barnasidass, 1973), pp.17-23. Dasgupta remarks that although we cannot distinguish purusha separately from the mind, nevertheless,

"...purusha only sees himself; he is not in any way in touch with the mind. He is absolutely free from all bondage, absolutely unconnected with prakriti.

prakriti. Self-transcendence in Sāṅkhya thus consists in the isolation of the self from the empirical self consisting of prakriti. By contrast, in Advaita Vedānta, the selves (jīvas) are only many from the 'empirical' perspective. The respective individuality of each soul is due to its adjuncts such as the senses and the body. From the absolute perspective however, each jīva is alike the supreme reality (ie. Brahman). As the Vedāntasāra puts it,

The great theme of all Vedantic teaching is the identity of the individual life-monad with Brahman, which is of the nature of pure consciousness or spirituality.²⁰

Such a schema reflects more closely the logic of 'self-transcendence' as outlined by Stace. Nevertheless, Stace himself is concerned, as we shall see at a later point, to reject the monism of Advaita Vedānta as an adequate interpretation of the mystical experience. In consonance with both Sāṅkhya and Advaita Vedānta, Theravāda Buddhism rejects the equivalence of the ātman with any psycho-physical characteristics of the individual. Yet, it also rejects the notion of a substantial soul at the basis of the individual. The notion of soul (ātman, atta) is transcended by nairātmya-vāda (doctrine of no-self).²¹ Thus, in both Sāṅkhya and Theravāda Buddhism, different notions of self-transcendence

²⁰Vedāntasāra 27, quoted by H. Zimmer, Philosophies of India (New York: Meridian, 1956), p.417.

²¹See eg. The Questions of King Milinda 2.1.1.

dence can be discerned, the former rejecting the empirical self as the absolute, the latter rejecting the notions of both empirical and metaphysical selves. Further, in neither of these systems does the Universal Self have a place. In summary, this brief analysis indicates the tenuousness of the adoption of 'self-transcendence' as a means of vindicating the concept of a Universal Self.

According to Stace, the essence of the concept of the Universal Self is found in the concept of the Vacuum-plenum paradox. Stace argues that there is a tension within the concept of the Universal Self between positive emphases (the plenum) and negative emphases (the vacuum). He maintains that these emphases or modes of expression are found in tension with each other in all religions and philosophies in which mysticism plays a part. On the one hand, the Universal Self has qualities; it is personal, creative, dynamic and active (the plenum aspect). On the other hand, it is qualityless; it is impersonal, inactive, static, and motionless (the vacuum aspect). It is difficult, however, to see the connection between the Universal Self as the contentless One and the Universal Self as exhibiting the vacuum-plenum paradox, and this for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is certainly feasible to argue that the negative predications of the vacuum-plenum paradox are refusals to predicate anything of the Universal Self (the via negativa) and thus to show that there is

a subtle interplay between the contentless (and thus ineffable) One and the desire to describe it.²² On the other hand, however, there appears to be a prima-facie incompatibility between a contentless One and the predication of positive attributes. In effect, having registered the phenomenon, Stace is at a loss to explain it. It is certainly the case that the vacuum-plenum paradox is generated in the Bhagavad-Gītā, in the writings of Shankara, in Mahāyāna Buddhism, in Pseudo-Dionysius, in Eckhart, and in the Eastern Orthodox tradition of mystical theology.²³ Yet, it is conspicuously

²²As Raoul Mortley notes in "Negative Theology and Abstraction in Plotinus" in American Journal of Philology Vol.96, 1975, p.377,

"One may conclude that the main problem in grasping the One is the avoidance of multiplicity: to conceive of the One as an object is to see him as one among many. The normal use of intellect involves predication, which introduces plurality since the logic of predication involves the multiple structure of the subject and the predicated quality. Abstraction has an opposite logic, since it involves subtracting from the subject rather than adding to it."

²³The paradox remains in the Bhagavad-Gītā. See eg. Bhagavad-Gītā, Ch.11 and 13.12-17. The paradox is in most cases, however, resolved: In Shankara, by means of the distinction between sagunā and nirgunā Brahman, see P. Deussen, The System of the Vedānta (New York: Dover, 1973), p.102; in Mahāyāna, by means of the doctrine of the trikāya, see D.T. Suzuki, Outlines of Mahāyāna Buddhism (New York: Schocken, 1963), pp.243-276. In Eastern Orthodoxy, through the distinction between the essence (ousia) of God and his relation to created being (oikonomia), see V. Lossky, The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church (Cambridge: Clarke & Co., 1958), ch.4; and in Eckhart, dependent preeminently upon the Pseudo-Dionysian teaching on the God of unknowing, by means of the notion of the Godhead beyond the triune deity, see R.B. Blakney, (trans.), Meister Eckhart (New York: Harper & Row, 1941), pp.200-201.

absent in those systems which, if we work on a Smartian model at this point, epitomise mystical religion, namely, Theravāda Buddhism, and Sāṅkhya, the former of which is recognised by Stace himself to be a test case for any theory of mysticism.²⁴ Thus, with regards to Theravāda Buddhism, and by stretching a point in allowing Nibbāna and the Universal Self to be compared, I can find no evidence of positive predication with respect to Nibbāna in Johansson's semantic differential for Nibbāna.²⁵ Indeed, to the contrary, perhaps the most famous discourse on Nibbāna is couched in almost totally negative terms:

There is that sphere wherein is neither earth nor water nor fire nor air; wherein is neither the sphere of infinite space nor of infinite consciousness nor of nothingness nor of neither-ideation-nor-non-ideation; where there is neither this world nor a world beyond nor both together nor moon and sun; this I say is free from coming and going, from duration and decay; there is no beginning and no establishment, no result and no cause; this indeed is the end of suffering....

Monks, there is a not-born, not-become, not-made, not-compounded (condition). Monks if that not-born, not-become, not-made, not-compounded (condition) were not, no escape from the born, become, made, compounded (condition) had been known here. But, monks, since there is a not-born, not-become, not-made, not-compounded (condition), therefore an escape from the born, become, made, compounded (condition) is known.²⁶

Granting also the comparability of the isolated soul in Sāṅkhya and the Universal Self, I can discern no positive

²⁴W.T. Stace, op. cit., p.43.

²⁵R. Johansson, The Psychology of Nirvana (London: Allen & Unwin, 1969), pp.112-113.

²⁶Udāna 80. See also ibid., ch.12.

ascriptions of the state of kaivalya. For since not only sorrow but also bliss are dependent upon association with the natural world (ie. with prakṛiti), the released soul has no further experiences. As Hiriyanna indicates,

The ideal is kaivalya or aloofness from prakṛti and all its transformations, which is quite in consonance with the pessimistic attitude of the doctrine. It is also termed apavarga, for the self in that state escapes from the realm of suffering. But no positive bliss is associated with it. The self not only has no pain or pleasure in that condition; it is also without knowledge, for it has not the means, viz. the buddhi and its accessories, wherewith to know.²⁷

Elucidation of the paradox may be facilitated by the recognition that the Bhagavad-Gītā, the writings of Shankara, Mahāyāna Buddhism, Eckhart, Pseudo-Dionysius, Gregory Palamas etc. contain elements of theistic belief, ie. notions of a deity (or deities) who can be an active agent in the process of salvation, and with whom individuals may enter into a personal relationship. This is not to deny that there are theistic elements in both Theravāda Buddhism and in Sāṅkhya. Nevertheless, the existence of a God (or Gods) is ultimately irrelevant to liberation in both these systems.²⁸ Thus, in those

²⁷M. Hiriyanna, Outlines of Indian Philosophy (London: Allen & Unwin, 1932), p.293.

²⁸On the nature and function of the Gods in Theravada Buddhism, see H. von Glasenapp, Buddhism, a Non-Theistic Religion (London: Allen & Unwin, 1970), chs.1 & 2. Sāṅkhya is atheistic insofar as we are speaking of the Sāṅkhyakārikās. See eg. G.J. Larson, Classical Samkhya (Delhi: Motilal Barnasidass, 1969), pp.132-5; Cf. also F. Edgerton, "The Meaning of Sāṅkhya and Yoga" in American Journal of Philology, Vol.45, 1924, pp.1-26.

systems in which theism has a prominent aspect, the positive aspects of the paradox are apparent. Stace's framework is unable to take this into account, whereas, by contrast the Smartian analysis of the numinous strand provides a most adequate explanation for those contexts in which the vacuum-plenum paradox is evident; the positive aspect is provided by the numinous strand, the negative aspect by the mystical strand.

Stace's failure to recognise the possibility that the positive aspects of the paradox are based on the numinous strand derives from Stace's philosophical critique of theism. A basic presupposition of Stace's conceptual framework is the methodological postulate that the reign of law in nature is a universal law. He writes, "...all macroscopic existences and events occurring in the space-time world are explicable without exception by natural causes."²⁹ It follows from this that theism is ruled out a priori:

The naturalistic principle forbids us to believe that there ever occur interruptions in the natural workings of events or capricious interventions by a supernatural being.³⁰

Thus, for Stace, the positive aspect of the vacuum-plenum paradox can only be attributed to an 'object' which does not intervene in the causal nexus but rather 'underlies'

²⁹W.T. Stace, op. cit., pp.22-3.

³⁰Ibid., p.23.

it³¹ (the Universal Self). Nevertheless, as is apparent from our analysis of the numinous strand, the notions of creativity, activity and personality would seem to be far more applicable in a context in which there is the postulation of a connection between the cosmos and a 'supra'-cosmic deity. To this extent, the vacuum-plenum paradox cannot be seen as related only to the mystical experience but rather to the interweaving of mystical and theistic (or numinous) modes of expression.

Section IV

In the chapter entitled "Pantheism, Monism and Dualism", Stace compares and contrasts three different ways of interpreting the mystical experience. The nature of these is defined by Stace in the following way:

Dualism is the view that the relation between God and the world, including the relation between God and the soul, when in a state of union is one 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.³²

Stace maintains that neither dualism nor monism are correct interpretations of mystical experience. We may begin by considering his critique of the dualist interpretation.

³¹See ibid., p.25.

³²Ibid., p.219.

Stace argues that there are two main problems with the dualist interpretation. Firstly, the dualist interpretation distorts the key phenomenological characteristic of mystical experience, namely, that it is an undifferentiated experience beyond all multiplicity. Thus, he argues, an interpretation which asserts any dichotomy between God and the soul contradicts the nuclear characteristic of mystical experience. Secondly, he maintains that the dualist interpretation arises from almost exclusive emphasis on introspective experience. Stace considers that this is because, in the dualist interpretation, there is between the soul and God an affinity of psychic elements — of will, emotion, and cognition — and that such an affinity cannot be applied to the extrovertive experience since..." it does not make sense to speak of a resemblance between the volitions, emotions, and cognitions of pieces of wood and stone."³³

Nevertheless, if it is the case that a dualist interpretation directly contradicts the nature of the experience (and this necessitates the bracketing out of the question posed in an earlier chapter as to the possibility of theistic mystical experiences), the question arises why it is the case that dualist interpretations are preferred. Stace explains this by postulating that mystics (especially those of Judaism, Christianity and Islam) are forced into this position by ecclesiastical authorities. Stace writes,

³³Ibid., p.235.

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 in 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 judgement of the Church or whatever the institutional authority in their religion may be.³⁴

There are two problems with this account of the reasons for dualistic interpretations. The first of these turns upon Stace's notion of the crucial distinction between mystical experience and its interpretation. While Stace admits that the distinction between experience and interpretation is hard to draw, nevertheless, he maintains that 'interpretation' may be understood 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.³⁵

The implication of this passage, and of the preceding one when considered in its light, is that interpretation only occurs post eventum. That is to say, the experience itself is a tabula rasa which is only subsequently written upon. This is substantially the same notion of the relation between experience and interpretation used by Smart in his critique of Zaehner. We shall develop the point at some depth later and therefore, suffice it to say at the moment that this notion ignores other possible

³⁴ Ibid., p.234.

³⁵ Ibid., p.37 (my underlining)

relationships between mystical experience and its interpretation. Thus, for example, it may be postulated that 'ramifications' may enter into accounts of mystical experience, not only because of retrospective interpretation, but also because a mystic's beliefs, practices, expectations etc. may colour the experience itself. That is to say, an extant interpretative framework is a constitutive factor of the mystical experience. This means that we ought to take into account the possibility that the interpretation of mystical experience is influenced by a set of social and cultural factors far more complex than mere ecclesiastical pressure. The second problem with Stace's critique of dualism is that the postulation of ecclesiastical pressure cannot explain the pressure of dualist interpretations within the Indian tradition in which no such pressure exists.³⁶ If we take Madhva, a pious Vaishnavite, as an Indian example of such dualist metaphysics, then the prime motive for his dualism would appear to be, not ecclesiastical pressure, but rather the necessity of an attack upon Advaita Vedānta which was perceived by Madhva as a direct threat to the numinous element within Vaishnavism. This also amounts

³⁶ Speaking of the 'Six systems' of Indian philosophy, Joseph Campbell remarks that they "never attained the position of an exclusive dogmatic orthodoxy." He continues,

"In the final analysis, the orthodoxy of India has never been grounded in a college or academy. Neither can it be defined by any numbering of views. For its life is in the mokṣa of the actual sages."

H. Zimmer, Philosophies of India (New York: Meridian, 1956), p.613-4 (appendices by J. Campbell).

to the possibility of course that the crucial element in Madva's system is not the mystical but rather the numinous.³⁷ But this possibility is in itself sufficient to show the untenability of ecclesiastical pressure as the primary causative factor in dualist interpretation.

To turn to monism, Stace holds the view that it may take either of two forms, atheistic or acosmic. Atheistic monism means that nothing exists apart from the universe and that God is merely a name for the collection of finite objects which comprise the universe. Taken in this way, Stace is quite right in his assertion that it is of little philosophical interest.³⁸ By contrast, acosmic monism is that type which holds that the universe as separate from God (or the Godhead) does not exist, that God alone as an undifferentiated unity is real. The Advaita Vedānta of Gaudapāda and Shankara is the paradigm of this type.

Stace argues that this type of monism must end in nonsense. This is because no reasonable answer can be given to the question, "How does the theory explain the

³⁷ God, in Madhvās' system, has quite explicitly numinous (or positive) qualities, S.N. Dasgupta, A History of Indian Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1949), IV. 155 remarks,

"God, or Paramātman, is in this system [ie. Madhvās] considered as the fulness of infinite qualities. He is the author of creation, maintenance, destruction, control, knowledge, bondage, salvation and hiding... He is different from all material objects, souls and prakṛiti, and has for his body knowledge and bliss, and is wholly independent and one, though He may have diverse forms (as in Vāsudeva, Pradyumna, etc.)."

³⁸ W.T. Stace, op. cit., p.237.

appearance of the multiplicity of finite objects?"³⁹

There is no doubt that Stace has criticised the major weakness for any monistic scheme such as Advaita Vedānta. The dilemma for the Advaita school may be expressed in this way: Either, one must deny the unity, immutability, simplicity and permanence of the Absolute (Brahman) by asserting that there is a real transformation of the Absolute into the multiplicity of phenomena in which case explanation of the appearance of the multiplicity of finite objects can be facilitated; or, one may retain the unity, immutability etc. of the Absolute and remain agnostic regarding the nature and origin of illusion.⁴⁰ The latter is the position taken by Advaita Vedānta. The former is the position adopted by the Vishishtadvaita Vedānta of Rāmānuja who rejected the monism of Advaita in part because of its inability to resolve the question of the origin of the appearance of phenomena.⁴¹

Similarly, Stace would wish to maintain that the correct form of monism is that in which the world is both identical with God and distinct from (ie. not identical with) God. This relationship constitutes, according to Stace, the pantheistic paradox. In Stace's opinion, dualism errs in that it fails to recognise the

³⁹ Ibid., p.237.

⁴⁰ See P. Sherrard, "The Tradition and the Traditions", in Religious Studies, Vol.10, 1974, p.413.

⁴¹ See eg. Rāmānuja's commentary on the Vedānta-sūtras, 1.4.27.

the former of the two alternatives, and monism errs in being unable to assert the latter alternative.

Thus, for Stace, pantheism or the realisation of identity in difference is the true interpretation. Stace is quite correct in his claim that this interpretation is present in the Upanishads.⁴² I find it also quite explicitly not only in Eckhart, but also in Islamic mystics such as Ibn 'Arabī⁴³ and Ibn Tufayl,⁴⁴ and (in so far as these can be considered as within a mystical tradition) in Spinoza⁴⁵ and Hegel.⁴⁶ Furthermore, the philosophy of Plotinus, upon which ultimately depends both the Christian and Islamic streams of mysticism, is quite clearly pantheistic in Stace's sense of the term.⁴⁷

⁴²See eg. Mundaka Upanishad, 1.1.6. However the seeds of acosmic monism are also present, see eg. Brihadāranyaka Upanishad, III. VIII.

⁴³See eg. H. Corbin, Creative Imagination in the Sūfism of Ibn 'Arabī (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), ch.III.

⁴⁴See eg. S.S. Harwi, Islamic Naturalism and Mysticism (Leiden: Brill, 1974), ch.VII.

⁴⁵See eg. G.H.R. Parkinson, "Hegel, Pantheism, and Spinoza," in Journal of the History of Ideas, Vol.38, 1977, pp.449-59.

⁴⁶See eg. F.C. Copleston, "Hegel and the Rationalisation of Mysticism", in Philosophers and Philosophies (London: Search Press, 1976).

⁴⁷See eg. Enneads, 2.9.3.8; 4.8.6.12-13; 4.8.6.1-3. Cf also J.M. Rist, The Road to Reality (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), pp.74-5. For the influence of Neo-Platonism on Islamic Thought, see M.J. Fakhry, A History of Islamic Philosophy (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), pp.32-44. For the influence of Plotinus on Christian mysticism, see E. Underhill, "The Mysticism of Plotinus" in Journal of Studies in Mysticism, Vol.1, 1977, pp.82-113.

However, if Stace's postulation of pantheism as the true interpretation of the mystical experience is to be acceptable, it will need to be shown that the utterances of mystics of both introvertive and extrovertive types, when considered without doctrinal ramifications (whether arising from ecclesiastical pressure or from some other means), give support to the mystical experience as being in essence one of identity in difference.

In the section entitled "Justification of Pantheism", Stace initially examines the notion of the infinity of God. He argues that this notion means "that outside which and other than which there is nothing."⁴⁸ That is to say, the world is contained in God. He points out that it is this notion that explains the relation between mystical experience and pantheism in that it gives us "the monistic half of the pantheistic paradox, the identity of the world and God."⁴⁹ It is not at all clear whether Stace, at this juncture, in referring to relations between God and the world, is including therein relations between God and the individual soul. Let us presume that he is talking of the relation between God and the world exclusive of the relation between God and the soul. If this is the case, then he is arguing that the extrovertive experience provides the monistic half of the pantheistic paradox. That is to say, he is asserting

⁴⁸W.T. Stace, op. cit., p.42.

⁴⁹Ibid., p.242.

that it is the absence of multiplicity in the world and a recognition of its oneness as apprehended in the extrovertive experience which provides the identity relation within the pantheistic paradox.

However, if Stace is arguing thusly, then this conflicts with his analysis of the characteristics of the extrovertive experience. While commenting on the experience of 'N.M.', Stace remarks in an earlier section,

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.⁵⁰

Similarly, he earlier describes the major characteristic of extrovertive mysticism as,

The unifying vision, expressed abstractly by the formula 'All is One.' The One is...perceived through the physical senses, in or through the multiplicity of objects.⁵¹

Thus, on the one hand, Stace appears to be asserting that the extrovertive experience leads to a monistic interpretation (in which, by his definition, the multiplicity of objects is illusory) in the section dealing with the conceptual justification of pantheism. On the other other hand, his conceptual analysis of the extrovertive experience asserts that its major characteristic is the seeing of the One through the many which entails that the many are real and not illusory. These different perspectives on the extrovertive experience are incompatible.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.72 (my underlining).

⁵¹ Ibid., p.79 (my underlining).

That Stace is referring to the extrovertive experience in his discussions of relations between God and the world is moreover demanded by the fact that it is above all in the introvertive experience that he wishes to argue that the notion of identity in difference is apparent. Were Stace to argue that both the extrovertive and introvertive experiences were equally valid as sources of knowledge of trans-subjective reality, then it would be necessary for him to show that the notion of identity in difference was applicable to both. However, Stace maintains that the extrovertive type of experience is one which finds its completion and fulfilment in the introvertive. Thus, and in order to be fair to Stace, if he can show that the notion of identity in difference may be extrapolated from the utterances of introvertive mystics, his claim that pantheism is the correct interpretation of mystical experience is not invalidated by the above critique of his analysis of extrovertive experience.

Now, to be sure, as I have indicated above, there is no dearth of mystical utterances evincing the notion of identity-in-difference. But the crucial question is whether these utterances actually do reflect the mystical experience itself. Stace fully appreciates the point that the most effective means of demonstrating that pantheism and the mystical experience are inextricably and ineluctably connected is to show that there are pantheistic experiences and not merely pantheistic

interpretations. To this end, Stace sets out to eliminate the gap between experience and interpretation. Consonant with his critique of dualist interpretations as being the result of ecclesiastical pressure, Stace's method is to eliminate those aspects of mystical interpretation which would appear to be derived from such pressure.

In order to demonstrate that there are such pantheistic experiences, Stace examines the following extract from Eckhart:

Does she [ie. the soul] find herself or not?...
God has left her one little point from which to
get back to herself and know herself creature.⁵²

Stace points out that although the soul loses itself in the Divine unity (the identity), nevertheless, "the 'little point' is the element of difference."⁵³ Similarly, in the passage from Suso — "in this merging of itself in God the spirit passes away and yet not wholly"⁵⁴ — Stace argues that the actual experience of identity in difference is evidenced. Although, as Stace points out, Suso goes on to interpret his experience in an overtly dualistic way, Stace maintains that the 'yet not wholly' is a direct reflection of the experience, whereas the dualistic interpretation is that of a dutiful son of the church who has left direct experience behind.

⁵² Ibid., p.244.

⁵³ Ibid., p.244.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p.244.

The following problems arise from this account. Firstly, Stace is arguing that the actual experience manifests identity in difference. However, his phenomenological analysis of the introvertive experience purported to show that the major characteristic of such experience was its absolute non-duality. That is to say, undifferentiated unity was the essence of the introvertive experience. There is then a prima-facie incompatibility between Stace's two notions of the introvertive experience. If he wishes to assert the absolute non-duality of the experience, he is forced to the position of maintaining that such expressions as 'the little point' are not expressive of the experience itself but are part of the interpretation. Alternatively, if he wishes to assert that identity in difference is the essence of the introvertive experience, he is forced to relinquish his postulation of non-duality or undifferentiated unity as the universal core of mysticism. The incompatibility noted above between the conceptual justification of pantheism and the phenomenological analysis of the extrovertive experience is repeated with reference to the introvertive experience. That is to say, in the earlier sections of Mysticism and Philosophy, Stace analyses the extrovertive experience as evincing identity-in-difference, while in later sections he argues that the extrovertive experience provides the monistic half of the pantheistic paradox. By contrast, he initially characterises the introvertive experience as one of undifferentiated unity and only subsequently

argues that it is an actual experience of identity in difference. Indeed, he maintains in his phenomenological analysis of the introvertive experience that the extrovertive experience finds its completion in the introvertive precisely because it is only in the latter that the identity in difference of the former is completely obliterated in an experience of total unity.⁵⁵

Section V

What are the corollaries for Stace's account in the light of the above discussion? The possible corollaries are as follows:

- (i) That introvertive experiences are experiences of identity in difference and not of undifferentiated unity;
- (ii) That introvertive experiences are experiences of undifferentiated unity and that identity in difference is merely an interpretation of such experiences;
- (iii) That there are both experiences of undifferentiated unity and experiences of identity in difference.

Determination of extrovertive experience may be seen as

⁵⁵Ibid., p.132.

"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.... But in the extrovertive experience the multiplicity seems to be, as it were, only half absorbed in the unity."

dependent upon acceptance of one of these. We shall consider these in the order (iii), (ii) and (i).

We have seen above that Stace makes much of two passages from Eckhart & Suso which he claims are evidence of identity in difference. By way of contrast, we shall consider two other passages. The first, from the writings of Eckhart, reads as follows:

The soul should be independent and should not want anything and then it would attain godly stature by reason of likeness [to him]. Nothing makes for unity as much as likeness. For God, too, is independent and needs nothing. In this way the soul enters 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 and it has no more to do with things than it had before it existed.⁵⁶

The second passage is from the writings of Suso and describes the mystical union:

'Lord tell me,' says the Servitor, 'what remains to a blessed soul which has wholly renounced itself.' Truth says, 'When the good and faithful servant enters into the joy of his Lord, he is inebriated by the riches of the house of God; for he feels, in an ineffable degree, that which is felt by an inebriated man. He forgets himself, he is no longer conscious of his selfhood; he disappears and loses himself in God, and becomes one spirit with him as a drop of water which is drowned in a great quantity of wine. For even as such a drop disappears, taking the colour and the taste of the wine, so it is with those who are in the full possession of

⁵⁶R.B. Blakney (trans.), Meister Eckhart (New York: Harper & Row, 1941), pp.200-201 (my underlining).

blessedness.... If it were otherwise, if there remained in the man some human thing that was not absorbed, those words of Scripture which say that God must be all in all would be false.⁵⁷

I have quoted these passages at length to make two points. Firstly, in both passages, the relationship between the self and the Godhead is said to be one of complete identity. And secondly, therefore, neither Eckhart nor Suso provide evidence that identity in difference is part of the mystical experience; on the contrary, the clear implication is that the experiences about which both Eckhart and Suso are speaking at this point are experiences of undifferentiated unity, albeit ramified in theistic terms. Thus, unless Suso and Eckhart are speaking of different experiences in the respective passages, and this seems highly unlikely, then corollary (iii) must be denied. To be sure, there remains the possibility that there are other experiences of identity in difference apart from the purported ones of Eckhart and Suso. However, in so far as we are speaking of these two mystics, the rejection of corollary (iii) is necessary.

Turning to corollary (i), we may note that verification of this proposition would not only entail the denial that the above two passages are expressive of experiences of undifferentiated unity, but would also

⁵⁷H. Suso, Buchlein der Wahrheit, ch. IV, quoted by E. Underhill, Mysticism (London: Methuen & Co., 1930), p.424 (my underlining).

necessitate demonstrating that the notion of identity in difference is evident in the writings of such a tradition as Theravāda Buddhism. It is to be noted that in Stace's elaboration of identity in difference he makes reference only to passages from mystics who operate within traditions which have theistic elements and fails to advert to Theravāda Buddhism at all.

In order to investigate this possibility, however, we shall briefly turn again to the Theravādin tradition. More specifically, we need to ask whether in Theravāda Buddhism there may be said to be an X which is both identical with yet different from a God (or Universal Self). Clearly, however, in the asking of this question, the question is dissolved. For, with respect to Theravāda, denying as it does the concept of a self⁵⁸ and denying also the concept of a Universal Self, the question is a nonsensical one.

Stace could perhaps maintain that Theravāda Buddhism, in not taking cognisance of the apprehension of difference in the mystical experience, has misinterpreted it. That is to say, Stace could argue that Theravāda Buddhists do experience identity in difference but their interpretation is in error. Such a claim would however be difficult to substantiate, and this for three reasons. Firstly, from an examination of the Pali texts, particularly those dealing with the nature of Nibbāna it would be

⁵⁸See Ch. II, n.19.

difficult to show that the Theravādin experience is one of identity in difference.⁵⁹ Secondly, Stace has offered no criteria by means of which he can argue that an error of interpretation has occurred in Theravāda Buddhism. His criticisms of monism and dualism are not applicable since Theravāda is neither monistic (because it asserts the reality of the world),⁶⁰ nor dualistic (because it denies the existence of an absolute deity).⁶¹ Thirdly, in his discussion of Theravāda Buddhism, he rather surprisingly maintains that even the notion of a pure self emptied of its empirical contents is an interpretation, and, that "what is actually experienced is simply the unity."⁶² From this, it follows that the 'difference' aspect of the pantheistic paradox cannot be a part of

⁵⁹For a comprehensive examination of the Pali texts dealing with nibbāna, see R. Johansson, op. cit.

⁶⁰This is not to maintain that the world as perceived is real, since this would be incompatible with the concept of anicca (impermanence). Rather, as T.R.V. Murti, op. cit., p.73, notes,

"The real is momentary; it is particular, unique... Existence is the momentary flash into being, a subsidence into non-being of material and mental states — feelings, perception, volition etc."

⁶¹H. Von Glasenapp, op. cit., p.35 writes,

"Buddhism is a philosophy of becoming; consequently it cannot acknowledge the existence of an eternal, permanent and personal God. If there is nothing that is permanent in the world, if unconditioned substances do not exist, and if each personality is but a continuously flowing stream of changing Dharmas, then no Ishvara can exist, no matter whether he is conceived as Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, or whatever."

⁶²W.T. Stace, op. cit., p.125.

the experience itself (as Stace maintains in his justification of pantheism) since the aspect of difference is totally dependent upon there actually being an entity pertaining to the individual such as a soul. This point leads to a consideration of the second corollary above.

Our second corollary agrees with both the Smartian analysis of mystical experience and with Stace's phenomenological analysis of the introvertive experience. We have seen earlier that for Stace, the interpretation of mystical experience is always retrospective to the experience and that dualist interpretations are due to ecclesiastical pressure. From this perspective, it is not at all difficult to see that such expressions as 'the little point' and 'yet not wholly' are expressive of the experience itself, for it is unlikely that the occurrence of such doctrinally unramified expressions are the result of, for example, ecclesiastical pressure. However, if it is the case that the whole cultural set of the mystic enters into his interpretation, then such expressions as 'the little point' and 'yet not wholly' may be seen in a number of different lights. They may, for example, be seen as the reflections of a cultural set in which the status of the Creator over against the creature is a central point and the assertion of the identity of God and the soul an impious impossibility. This would certainly fit Suso's gloss

on the 'yet not wholly' passage.⁶³ Alternatively, they may be seen more broadly as the reflection of an Occidental set which takes the reality of this world as a basic presupposition in the development of any Absolutist metaphysic. This presupposition which, within a mystical schema, may be traced at least as far back as Plotinus,⁶⁴ dovetails well with a theistic schema which entails a physical realism. Thus, from this viewpoint, 'the little point' may be seen as a recognition on the part of Eckhart that while from the perspective of mystical consciousness all is identity, from the perspective of the everyday consciousness in which, to paraphrase Eckhart, the soul finds herself subsequent to the mystical experience, there must be difference. Thus, while the mystical experience demands identity, the realist presupposition demands at least some relative (yet not absolute) difference. A similar position is reflected in the writings of Ibn Tufayl. Thus, according to S.S. Hawi, when Ibn Tufayl affirms that God

⁶³Suso writes,

"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."

Ibid., p.244.

⁶⁴It is true that in Plotinian union there is no consciousness of difference from the One, no longer Seer and Seen, but only unity. Yet, there is never any suggestion in Plotinus that all things except the one are merely fleeting appearances. Platonic realism runs too deep for this.

both is and is not identical with the soul, then the affirmation and negation are operating on two different modes and levels. Thus Hawi writes,

The fact of the matter is that Hayy understood and contended that the World is identical with God only during his utter annihilation. God, through extreme subjectivism (intuitive method) appears to be identical with the world.... But such an awareness of undiluted pantheism is of a different order than the sensible world of which our language is part; such being the case, the expression of this awareness by an objective sensible language can only be effected metaphorically by saying that He is and He is not identical with the world.⁶⁵

In essence, therefore, for Ibn Tufayl the notion of identity in difference arises from the necessity of interweaving an ontology arising from the mystical experience of undifferentiated unity with an ontology arising from the evidence of the sensory realm. For Eckhart, Ibn Tufayl, and Suso, identity in difference is not part of the mystical experience but part of its interpretation.

In summary, we have seen that neither corollaries (iii) nor (i) are adequate as accounts of mystical experience, and that, on the contrary, our discussion of corollary (ii) renders it the most plausible proposition for us to adopt in the light of our critique of Stace. Turning to panenhenic modes of expression, I shall detail two passages, from Eckhart and Ibn Tufayl. The passage from Ibn Tufayl may be seen as a reflection on

⁶⁵S.S. Hawi, op. cit., p.218.

the organic connection of facts in the world from the perspective of the undifferentiated unity of the mystical experience. Here are Ibn Tufayl's words:

Having reached this point, Hayy understood that the heavens and all that is in them are, as it were, one organism whose parts are joined organically together. All the bodies he had known before, such as earth, water, air, plants, and animals, were enclosed within this being and never left it. The whole was like an individual animal. The light-giving stars were its senses. The spheres, articulated one to the next, were its limbs. And the world of generation and decay within was like the juices and wastes in the beast's belly, where smaller animals often breed, as in the macrocosm. Seeing the whole universe as in reality one great individual, and uniting all of its many parts in his mind by the same sort of reasoning which had led him to see the oneness of all bodies in the world of generation and decay, Hayy wondered whether all this had come to be from nothing.⁶⁶

The following passage, from Eckhart, is clearly dealing with the introvertive experience. Yet, there is the suggestion that such experience has implications for the world external to the self. Thus,

...the soul is purified in the practice of virtues by which we climb to a life of unity. That is the way the soul is made pure — by being purged of much divided life and by entering upon a life that is focused to unity. The whole Scattered World of lower things is gathered up to oneness when the soul climbs up to that life in which there are no opposites.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Ibn Tufayl, Hayy Bin Yaqzān (Beyrouth, 1936), pp.80-81, quoted in ibid., p.211.

⁶⁷ R.B. Blakney, op. cit., p.173 (my underlining).

Section VI

In this chapter, I have argued that Stace's inability to take theism seriously, his failure to come to grips with the modes of expression in Theravāda and Sāṅkhya, and his unsubtle model of the relationship between mystical experience and interpretation render his philosophical arguments problematical. Our discussion has however given credence to his claim that there is a mystical experience of undifferentiated unity, and, in so far as Stace recognises the unity of interior mystical experience, he is in agreement with Ninian Smart. Thus, against Zaehner, both would agree that interior mystical experience admits of no varieties. I believe, on the other hand, however, that it would be premature at this stage to rule out the possibility of theistic mystical experiences completely.

We have seen also, that Stace's philosophical exclusion of theism, and his subsequent inability to consider the numinous strand in an account of mystical experience renders his analysis dubious at a number of points. Furthermore, while Smart excludes panenhenic experience from consideration, both Zaehner and Stace agree on the necessity for including panenhenic or extrovertive mystical experience in their analyses. During the course of this chapter however, I have suggested the possibility of distinguishing two modes of panenhenic expression, that which arises as the result of spontaneous extrovertive experience, and that which arises as the result of

reflecting upon the world of everyday consciousness subsequent to an introvertive experience. Furthermore, I have suggested as a general methodological principle that, except where there is autobiographical evidence to the contrary, and of course, where there is evidence of introvertive experience, that panenhenic modes of expression be taken as reflections of the relationship of that experience to the multiple and diverse realm of everyday consciousness.

In essence, therefore, our analysis has generated the likelihood of there being introvertive experiences of undifferentiated unity, panenhenic experiences of a spontaneous kind (though no evidence that these are of importance in doctrinal schemes has yet been accepted), and numinous experiences of a theistic kind. In chapter two of this essay, we noted in broad outline the nature of numinous experience as outlined by Rudolf Otto. We shall now return to the writings of Rudolf Otto to consider his analysis of the relationship between numinous experience, and introvertive and extrovertive mystical experience.

CHAPTER IV

R. OTTO: THE MYSTICAL, THE NUMINOUS, & METAPHYSICS

Synopsis

Section I.

The importance of Rudolf Otto and The Idea of the Holy. The emphasis in interpretation of Otto is upon the theistic implications of Otto's writings. This Chapter aims to apply a corrective by examining the relationship between numinous and mystical experience in the writings of Otto.

Section II.

Examples of theistic interpretations of Otto: R. Hepburn and N. Smart. Smart's critique of Otto: That Otto ignores the mystical experience. Delineation of crucial questions: What is the relationship for Otto between mystical and numinous experience?; Must the numinous experience be conceptualised in theistic terms?

Section III.

Otto's Mysticism East and West. The Mysticism of Introspection and the Mysticism of Unifying Vision: The differences between these. Three stages in the Mysticism

of Unifying Vision: The unity and multiplicity as a coincidentia oppositorum; emphasis upon the unity; the sole reality of the One. Otto's examples fall prey to our autobiographical principle. Examination of two passages from Eckhart. Panenhenic modes of expression in Eckhart arise from interior experience dovetailed with Neo-Platonic philosophy. E.R. Dodds and E. Underhill on this. Mystical experience reinforces incipient absolutist tendencies and generates panenhenic modes of expression. Rejection of absolutist thought in Theravāda and Sāṅkhya and consequent absence of panenhenic modes of expression. Meditation within Theravāda: the mystical component and the intellectual component. Mystical experience reinforces Buddhist doctrines about the world. Being and Non-Being in Eastern and Western thought. Mystical language as descriptive and as catalytic.

Section IV.

The Mysticism of Introspection: rejects the external world for the inward quest. May be taken as a state of Union with the One; or in terms of the isolation of the soul. 'Ātman is Brahman' as a synthesising of qualitatively different entities. Summary of section: The mystical experience may be conceptualised in trans-theistic, non-theistic and theistic terms.

Section V.

The mystical and the numinous experience examined as

to their relationship. The mystical and the Tremendum: The correlation of mysticism with 'awefulness', 'overpoweringness' and 'energy'. Some preliminary conclusions. The mystical and the Mysterium: The correlation of the Mysterium and Otto; two forms of mystical experience. The mystical and the Fascinans. Some further conclusions. For Otto, there is one general kind of religious experience within which may be subsumed (at least), theistic experiences, introvertive mystical experience, and extrovertive mystical experience.

Section VI.

The phenomenological disparity of theistic and mystical experiences leads to the question as to why Otto should have placed them under the one category of numinous experience. The answer to be found in Otto's acceptance of the Neo-Kantianism of Jakob Fries: specifically, the notion of the Holy as an a priori category and the concept of Ahnung. Fries overcomes Kantian subjectivism according to Otto; Ahnung leads to a realisation that the Ideas are not merely formal and empty but have content and are valid. Otto is thereby enabled to argue that religious experience has objective validity. Ahnung is equivalent to the numinous experience. Otto's two starting points for the true Science of Religion: the 'empirico-deductive' investigation of religions; the generation of a metaphysic of religion. Otto's claim that these two paths will meet. Bastow's critique of this. Ahnung and theistic experience are incompatible.

Yet, Ahnung and mystical experience are closely related in Otto's writings: Fries's 'transcendental apperception' and Eckhart's mystical intuition; a Friesian interpretation of the relation of exterior and interior mystical experience. Otto is committed to a theory of religious truth comparable with Radhakrishnan's. Yet, is also committed to a theory of religious truth which entails that the most 'rational' religion, ie. Christianity, is the true one. This incompatibility is not easy of resolution.

CHAPTER IV

R. OTTO: THE MYSTICAL, THE NUMINOUS, & METAPHYSICS

Section I

There is no doubt that the central contribution of Rudolf Otto to the study of religion, his analysis of the numinous experience, has permeated the philosophy of religion to the extent that no consideration of religious experience is possible without at least a reference to his work. In the light of his influence, it is perhaps surprising that there have been very few major works upon Otto in the English-speaking world which attempt to present the thought of Otto in its full complexity.¹

It is probably because of this dearth of material, that those references to Otto which appear in numerous articles, anthologies, etc., have invariably emphasised the theistic implications of Otto's writings, and in particular, of The Idea of the Holy, the book for which Otto is justly most renowned. Certainly, the theistic implications of Otto's writings have been validly delineated; indeed, I have attempted to do just this

¹The only two to my knowledge are R.F. Davidson, Rudolf Otto's Interpretation of Religion (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), and J.M. Moore, Theories of Religious Experience (New York: Round Table Press Inc., 1938).

in an earlier chapter of this study. Nevertheless, the emphasis upon these has been so great that interpretations of Rudolf Otto's writings have been in consequence, one-sided and unbalanced.

In this chapter, it is hoped that there is the beginning of a corrective to this one-sided emphasis upon the theistic ramifications of Otto's thought. Hence, by means of an exposition of Otto's understanding of the mystical experience, and a consideration of the relationship between this experience and the category of the numinous experience, I shall attempt to show that for Otto, the numinous experience may be conceptualised, not only in theistic terms, but in transtheistic and non-theistic terms. Thereby, we shall hope to cast some fresh light on the possible relation of mystical and numinous experience. Furthermore, this will enable us to delineate some problems regarding Otto's theory of religious truth.

There can be no question that interpreters of Rudolf Otto's writings are correct when they maintain that for Otto, all religions are based on the numinous experience, the experience of a Mysterium, Tremendum et Fascinans. However, as indicated above, it is often presumed that according to Otto the numinous experience is invariably and inexorably couched in theistic terms. Examples of this presumption may be derived from numerous and varied writings in the philosophy of religion. To take but two of these:- In a context in which he is

speaking of the relation between the World and God, and subsequent to an outline of Otto's major thesis, R.W.

Hepburn asks the question,

Could numinous experience be taken as an actual privileged awareness of the world as related to God, of God as related to the world?²

In this passage, Hepburn is questioning whether numinous experience is the source for the tenacity of the cosmological Argument in the history of the philosophy of religion. For our purposes, it is sufficient to note that for Hepburn, the numinous experience is conceptualised in theistic terms, in terms of the relation between World and God, between the created and the creator. At no point does Hepburn indicate that for Otto, as we shall see, the numinous experience may be conceptualised in quite different terms. To be sure, Hepburn's error is not all that earth-shattering and, in the context of the question as to whether religious experience grants privileged access to religious truth, does not affect his analysis. It does, however, give evidence of the almost unquestioned acceptance of the assumption indicated above. Of more importance is our next example.

That for Otto, the numinous experience is pre-eminently conceptualised in theistic terms is not only accepted by Ninian Smart but is also used as an argument against Otto's purported position. Thus, speaking of

²R.W. Hepburn, "From World to God", in B. Mitchell (ed.), The Philosophy of Religion (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p.173.

the relation between the aspects of mysterium tremendum and fascinans, he remarks,

Though a man, when confronted with the Holy, thinks of it as wholly other — there is, so to speak, a great gulf fixed between sinful man and the holy deity which he confronts — nevertheless he is drawn towards it.³

This connection of the numinous experience with its conceptualisation in theistic terms leads Smart to the following conclusion:

Otto has certainly illuminated an important type of religious experience. But perhaps he has not adequately represented the nature of mysticism — that is, the quest through contemplation for inner insight.⁴

The implication of the word 'type' in the first sentence of the above passage from Smart is that Otto has omitted the category of mystical experience from his analysis of religious experience. The implication of the remainder of the passage is however that Otto, although representing the nature of mysticism in some (unexplained) sense, has not adequately done so. That there are two major types of religious experience, the numinous and the mystical, and that each is completely unique and non-reducible to the other is, as we have seen in chapter II, a major presupposition of Smart's own analysis of religions. However we interpret the above passage, if the Smartian criticism of Otto is to be valid, the following questions need to be resolved. Firstly, what is the relationship for Otto between the numinous and the

³N. Smart, Philosophers and Religious Truth (London: S.C.M. Press, 1964), pp.110-11.

⁴Ibid., pp.112-13.

mystical experience? And secondly, and consequent upon the first, must the numinous experience be conceptualised in theistic terms.

Section III

Otto's major consideration of mystical experience is contained in his comparative analysis of Meister Eckhart and Shankaracharya, Mysticism East and West.⁵ In this book, Otto, in like manner to Stace,⁶ argues that there are two types of mystical experience which may be inferred from mystical writings in general, and from the writings of Eckhart and Shankara in particular. These are designated the Mysticism of Introspection (the Inward Way) and the Mysticism of Unifying Vision (the Outward Way). Before proceeding to a more detailed examination of these, it will be useful to indicate the basic difference between them. As with the analysis offered by Stace, so also with Otto's, the Mysticism of Introspection turns away from the world of things external to the self and looks "within" for the inmost depths of the self. By contrast, the Mysticism of Unifying Vision looks out upon the world of finitude and multiplicity and, within the finite perceives the infinite, within the temporal perceives the external, and within the multiplicity perceives a unity. We shall turn our

⁵R. Otto, Mysticism East and West (New York: MacMillan, 1932).

⁶In fact, Stace is primarily dependent on Otto's analysis.

attention primarily to this latter form.

Otto maintains that three 'logically' ascending steps can be discerned in the Mysticism of Unifying Vision. At the lowest stage, the perceived world is transfigured in a unity in which space and time are transcended, in which all is one and one is all. Concurrent with this vision of the identity-in-difference of the world external to the perceiver of it, the perceiver recognises that he himself is part of this unity. That is to say, the distinction between the perceiver and the perceived collapses. Otto quotes Plotinus to this effect:

He who has allowed the beauty of that world (seen in ideal unity) to penetrate his soul goes away no longer a mere observer. For the object perceived and the perceiving soul are no longer two things separated from one another, but the perceiving soul has (now) within itself the perceived object.⁷

While mystical intuition may remain at this lowest stage, Otto maintains that it can progress to a higher. In the lowest stage, the unity and multiplicity are a coincidentia oppositorum. In the second stage, however, emphasis is placed upon the Unity which now becomes conceptualised as 'the One'. 'The One' is the substantial, the permanent and the constant 'behind' or 'beyond' the changing and fleeting many. Otto writes,

In relation to the many it [the One] becomes the subject in so far as it unifies, comprehends and bears the many. It is in fact its essence, being, existence. Already at this

⁷R. Otto, op. cit., p.67.

point the One concentrates attention upon itself, draws the value of the many to itself, silently becoming that which is and remains the real value behind the many.⁸

With respect to the relation of the One to the many at this second stage, Otto is fairly obscure. He appears to argue that, in so far as this relation is rationally determinable, such conceptualisation may take either of two forms. Firstly, where this stage of mystical intuition is grafted upon theism, 'the One' is called 'God'. In this case, the relationship between God and the world is a causal one, the indeterminable non-rational mystical relationship being conceptualised in the rational category of cause and effect. Thus, Otto appears to maintain that a conceptualisation in terms of a transcendent Creator over against an ontologically real creation may be generated. Shadows of theistic numinosity are quite clearly evident. Alternatively, the notion of immanence may be generated whereby the One "conditions" the many in the sense of lying at the basis of the many as its principle. In other words, either a transcendent One or an immanent One may be generated. Or, both may be combined as in the Isha Upanishad: "It moves and It moves not; It is far and It is near; It is within all this and It is also outside all this."⁹

⁸Ibid., p.68.

⁹Isha Upanishad 5, S. Radhakrishnan (trans), The Principal Upanisads (London: Allen & Unwin, 1953).

If these alternative conceptualisations are not taken as final, the ascension to the third stage may be made. In this stage, 'the One' appears over against the many as the only truly Real. Otto writes,

The many, at first identical with the One, comes into conflict with it, and disappears. It disappears either by sinking down into the invisible One, as with Eckhart, or by becoming the obscuring veil of the One, the illusion of māyā in Avidyā, as with Śankara.¹⁰

Again, Otto's exposition of this third stage, since it is extremely succinct, is by no means clear. Nevertheless, his intention appears to be that the two conceptualisations of the second stage, viz. transcendent creator deity or immanent One, may be transcended by a conceptualisation in which, since only the One exists, a cosmic idealism is generated. Thus the immanence of the One in things is transcended in the case of Shankara by the assertion of the sole existence of the Godhead, Brahman. As we would expect from our discussion of the realist strand in Plotinian-based mysticism in the last chapter, for Eckhart the One remains immanent. Nevertheless, beyond the immanent One, there rises for Eckhart the completely transcendent One, 'the silent void of the Godhead.'

There are a number of features of the above analysis which are worth some elaboration in the light of our discussions in earlier chapters of this essay. Firstly, Otto's examples of the Outward Way all fall prey to our

¹⁰R. Otto, op. cit., pp.70-1.

previously enunciated autobiographical principle. That is to say, there is no evidence adduced by Otto that the panenhenic modes of expression quoted by him are the result of panenhenic experience. Further, let us consider two passages adduced by Otto as examples of the transition from the second to the third stage. The first passage, from Eckhart, deals with the unity beneath the multiplicity of the world:

So long as the soul still beholds a divided world, all is not well with it. So long as anything separate looks in or peeps out, so long there is not yet unity....
 The soul is troubled so long as it perceives created things in their separateness. All that is created, or that is capable of being created is nought. But that (viz. the thing itself beheld in its ratio ydealis) is apart from all creation, indeed from all possibility of creation. Because it is something united, something without relation to another.¹¹

According to Otto, there is in the following passage a transition to a higher stage of mystical consciousness.

So long as the soul beholds forms (nāmarūpe, mūr̥ti), even though she beheld an angel, or herself as something formed: so long is there imperfection in her. Yes, indeed, should she even behold God (as separate), in so far as He is with form and number in the Trinity: so long is there imperfection in her. Only when all that is formed is cast off from the soul, and she sees the Eternal-One alone, then the pure essence of the soul feels the naked unformed essence of the divine Unity — more, still, a Beyond-Being. O wonder of wonders, what a noble endurance is that where the essence of the soul suffers no suggestion or shadow of difference even in thought or in name. There she entrusts herself alone to the One, free from all multiplicity and difference,

¹¹Ibid., pp.77-8.

in which all limitation and quality is lost and is one.¹²

Otto is quite correct in his claim that there is a movement in these passages from unity in diversity to absolutely undifferentiated unity. The question is however, whether this logical development in any way is a reflection of experiential development. Now, to be sure, these passages can be interpreted so that they fit Otto's model of the mysticism of unifying vision. Yet, it is perhaps fruitful to consider them in the light of the model we have been developing in this study. According to this model, panenhenic modes of expression are interpretations of the external world of multiplicity subsequent to the interior experience of undifferentiated unity. From this perspective, the second passage is a description of consciousness turning inwards, casting off all external forms, consciousness of itself, consciousness of any duality (even of that between the soul and God), until there is reached an undifferentiated unity 'free from all multiplicity and difference.' Certainly, this psychological experience of undifferentiated unity is given ontological status as the One. But, this arises from the reflection upon the seeming ultimacy of the experience in its relation to the world of multiplicity, in terms of the underlying Plotinian philosophy. Indeed for Plotinus too, the unitive experience provides a guarantee experientially of the

¹²Ibid., p.78.

demands of abstract thought. As E.R. Dodds points out with reference to Plotinus,

The term to 'EV [the One] was given in the tradition; the concept can be reached, and by Plotinus most often is reached, through a purely philosophical argument, an argument from the existence of the relative to the necessity of an Absolute.... What the experience of unification seems to do is to give the assurance that the outcome of this regressive dialectic is no hollow abstraction, that the minus signs of the via negativa are in reality plus signs.... It is, as it were, the experimental verification of the abstract proposition that the One is the God; for to experience unification is to experience the highest of all forms of life.¹³

We may therefore suggest that the first passage above is evidence of this reflection upon the world subsequent to the unitive experience, Here is evidenced the necessity of perceiving in the external world that which has been apprehended within. As Evelyn Underhill writes of mystics in general,

The mystic assumes — because he tends to assume an orderly basis for things — that there is a relation, an analogy, between this microcosm of man's self and the macrocosm of the world-self. Hence, his experience, the geography of the individual quest, appears to him good evidence of the geography of the Invisible.¹⁴

¹³E.R. Dodds, "Tradition and Personal Achievement in the Philosophy of Plotinus", in Journal of Roman Studies, Vol.50,1960,pp.6-7.

¹⁴E. Underhill, Mysticism (London: Methuen, 1930), p.102. The logic of the assumption to which Underhill refers is spelt out with reference to the Indian tradition most clearly by J. Varenne, Yoga and the Hindu Tradition (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1976), p.45. He writes,

...if it is true that man is analogous with the universe then he must have a 'center', a 'fixed point' within himself, something equivalent to the hub of the cosmic wheel. And if this essential something is in fact concealed at the heart of the existential manifestation that is man, it is self evident that it can only be That, tad, brahman, because the absolute is by definition one and indivisible."

Cf also I. Kesarcodi-Watson, Eastern Spirituality (Delhi: Agam Prakashan 1976), Ch.3.

A number of clarificatory points need to be made at this stage of our argument. Firstly, there may appear to be some incompatibility between the passages from Dodds and Underhill quoted above. For, according to Dodds, the experience of undifferentiated unity reinforces the philosophical postulation of the One at the basis of multiplicity. On the other hand, according to Underhill, the mystical experience at the individual level generates the assertion of the macrocosmic One. In fact, there is no incompatibility. In order to illuminate this, it is necessary to digress a little.

It may be recalled that according to Stace, there was apprehended the Universal Self in the introvertive mystical experience. We criticised this notion on the grounds that there was no necessity to postulate such a Universal Self and that, in the traditions of Sāṅkhya and Theravāda Buddhism, the mystical experience was related to the notions of individual purusha and anatta respectively. Yet, in those traditions in which there is a philosophical tradition of Absolutist thought, as in the Upanishadic and Neo-platonic traditions,¹⁵ that which is apprehended in the mystical experience is expressed

¹⁵For early examples of the Absolutist tendency in Indian thought, see Rig Veda 1.164.6 and 1.164.46. There has been much debate on the historical influence of Indian thought upon Neo-platonic absolutism. The most notable proponent of the argument for such a connection is E. Bréhier, The Philosophy of Plotinus (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1959). For a critique of his position, see A.H. Armstrong, "Plotinus and India" in Classical Quarterly, Vol.30, 1936, pp.22-38.

in terms of the One, the Universal Self, etc. Thus, Dodds is correct in his claim that the mystical experience reinforces any incipient tendencies towards philosophical absolutism. Indeed, the presence of absolutist tendencies together with the mystical experience is precisely that which brings about the panenhenic mode of expression. Inversely, the rejection of absolutist conceptions in Sāṅkhya and Theravāda Buddhism means the absence of panenhenic modes of expression in these traditions. Thus, to elaborate upon Underhill's statement, the mystic who develops a microcosm-macrocosm relation does so, not merely because of the assumption of an orderly basis for things, but because of his acceptance of a tradition of absolutist thought. In essence therefore, the presence of panenhenic modes of expression in the writings of some mystics, particularly those in the Upanishadic and Neo-platonic traditions, and the absence of such expression in others, especially those in the Theravādin and Sāṅkhyin traditions, is determined by the acceptance or rejection (whether overtly or not is of no consequence) of a tendency towards philosophical absolutism. There is, in other words, a complex interplay between the mystical experience of undifferentiated unity, and panenhenic modes of expression deriving from this, and connected with philosophical absolutism.

The point made above with reference to Theravāda Buddhism is perhaps deserving of a little more expansion. During the course of this study we have noted that

both Stace and Otto claim that extrovertive mystical experience generates an ontology which deals with the 'One' which underlies the multiplicity of phenomena. On their models, therefore, the absence of such an ontology in eg. Theravāda Buddhism can only be explained by the absence within Theravāda Buddhism of the extrovertive experience. I have suggested in this study that panenhenic modes of expression and therefore such ontologies are better explained by being viewed as reflection upon the multiplicity of phenomena subsequent to the introvertive experience by mystics within a tradition which is clearly or incipiently absolutist. I shall now attempt to indicate that reflection upon the world within the Buddhist tradition in relation to the mystical experience generates a substantively different mode of expression.

In a recent paper, Robert Gimmelo outlines the connection and distinction between mystical experience and meditational praxis within the Buddhist tradition. The essence of his argument is the establishing that meditation is a two fold discipline, and that the attainment of mystical experience is but a part. He writes,

On the one hand, there is what might be called a psychosomatic and affective component. This consists in acts of calming and concentrating the mind-body complex of the meditator, usually by the deliberate inducement of certain rarefied states of mind. These states are characterized by such qualities as ecstasy, joy, tranquillity, zest, equanimity, and one-pointedness of mind. These, in turn, precipitate or accompany extraordinary experiences in which the normal conditions of material, spatial, temporal, and mental existence seem

suspended. Multiplicity, material resistance, distinction between subject and object, and the like — all vanish.... The purpose allegedly served by these practices is that of quelling, if not extirpating, desire, attachment, and other elements of the affective life.¹⁶

According to Gimello, such mystical experience is subsequently attended by an intellectual or analytic component of meditation:

This consists in the meditatively intensified reflection upon the basic categories of Buddhist doctrine and in the application of them to the data of meditative experience. It is a form of discrimination, critical and sceptical in tone, which serves invariably to inhibit speculation or the formulation of views about the nature of reality. It does employ concepts — ideas like suffering, impermanence, emptiness, interdependence, etc. — but these it employs homoeopathically, as conceptual devices to counteract the mind's tendency to attach itself to concepts.¹⁷

Let us consider an example of this dual discipline. In the Uttarabhāvanākrama of Kamalashīla, there is the following passage:

The yogin, fixing his mind on the physical form of the Tathāgata (ie. the Buddha visualized in meditation) as it might appear to his senses, practices calming. He attends continually to the form of the Tathāgata, brilliant as refined gold, adorned with the major and minor marks (of a superior person) Attracted by these qualities, the yogin quells all distraction and agitation and remains absorbed for as long as they appear to him distinctly, as if they were actually present. Then the yogin practices discernment by scrutinizing the coming and going of these reflections of the Tathāgata's form. He considers

¹⁶ R.M. Gimello, "Mysticism and Meditation" in S. Katz (ed.), Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis (London: Sheldon Press, 1978), pp.187-8.

¹⁷ Ibid., p.188.

thus: Just as these reflections of the form of the Tathāgata neither come from anywhere nor go anywhere, are empty of own-being and devoid of self and its properties, so are all dharmas empty of own-being, without coming or going like a reflection, and lacking the features of an existent thing.¹⁸

Thus, subsequent to the meditative experience of the Buddha, there is an intellectual reflection which serves to substantiate the doctrine that as all Buddhas are empty of substantial existence, so are all things thus empty. Within Buddhism therefore, and particularly Mahāyāna Buddhism, mystical experiences are used as reinforcers of particular Mahāyānist views about reality, specifically, that there are no valid views. As Gimello puts it,

The only view confirmed by the Buddhist use of mystical experience is a reflexively negative one, namely the view that no views capture the nature of reality.... Likewise it is certain that Buddhists do not ontologise the contents of their mystical experiences, nor people the cosmos with mystical entities, since their very purpose is having them is to discern their illusoriness.¹⁹

As the mystical experience provided a guarantee of the demands of abstract thought for Plotinus, so also in Mahāyāna Buddhism, the mystical experience reinforces doctrinal views within this tradition. In both the Buddhist and the Neo-Platonic traditions, the mystical

¹⁸Kamalashīla, Uttarabhāvanākrama, trans. from Giuseppe Tucci's edn. of the Sanskrit, Minor Buddhist Texts, Pt. III (Rome: Istituto Italiano per Il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1971), pp.4-5. Quoted in Ibid., pp.184-5.

¹⁹Ibid., p.193.

experience is central. Yet in both, disparate views of the nature of the multiplicity of phenomena are generated.

In an article entitled "Non-Being and Mu: The Metaphysical Nature of Negativity in the East and the West,"²⁰ Maseo Abe suggests reasons for the disparity in views between the Mahāyānist and Chinese view upon reality, and the Western view determined as it is by Platonic and Neo-platonic thought. There has been in the West, according to him, a fundamental thrust towards the granting of ontological priority to being as against non being. This thrust is derived from both the major strands of Greek philosophy (through the ideas of TO ON and ME ON) and from the Christian tradition (through the assertion of creatio ex nihilo). These two have intertwined so that,

...since being prevails in the balance of being and non-being, to overcome the opposition between being and non-being means to approach Being with a capital B as the end. In the same way, to overcome the opposition between life and death means to reach Eternal Life, and to overcome the opposition between good and evil means to move towards Supreme Good.²¹

By contrast, in the Mahāyānist tradition, both

²⁰M. Abe, "Non-Being and Mu: The Metaphysical Nature of Negativity in the East and the West", in Religious Studies, Vol.11, 1975, pp.181-192.

²¹Ibid., p.183. For a modern example of this thrust towards Being, see eg. P. Tillich, Systematic Theology (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1951), Vol.1, p.189 and The Courage to Be (London: Fontana, 1962), pp.34,40,43,48. A most notable modern exception to this rule is Martin Heidegger. For an interesting argument on similarities between Heidegger and Buddhism, in relation to being and non-being see J. Steffney, "Transmetaphysical Thinking in Heidegger and Zen Buddhism", in Philosophy East and West, Vol.XXVII, 1977, pp.323-333.

being and non-being are on equal footing. Thus, ontological priority is given neither to being nor non-being but rather to that which transcends and embraces both. This is particularly exemplified in Nāgārjuna's idea of shūnyatā (emptiness). Abe writes,

Emptiness which is completely without form is freed from both being and non-being because 'non-being' is still a form as distinguished from 'being'.... Accordingly, Nāgārjuna's idea of the Middle Path does not simply indicate a midpoint between two extremes as the Aristotelian idea of to meson might suggest. Instead, it refers to the way which transcends every possible duality including that of being and non-being, affirmation and negation.²²

In the light of the two modes of thought thus outlined, a note upon the relation between these and the use of language within each may be fruitful. There are in effect two main ways of viewing the function of mystical language. The first of these is to see mystical language as attempting to describe that which is apprehended in mystical experience, that is, the 'subjective' or 'objective' reality (or both) therein. Thus, eg., Stace, Otto and Evelyn Underhill all view mystical expression as descriptive language, in essence as the mystic's vain attempt to put into words that which cannot be said because the Real is (subjectively) undifferentiated unity or (objectively) undifferentiated Being. There can be no denying that a large amount of mystical

²² Ibid., p.185. The crucial factor in this mode of thought may well be Nāgārjuna's assertion of the sameness of Nirvāna and Samsāra. See Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā, XXV.

language is descriptive and this is particularly the case with those mystics operating within an ontology which is concerned with the relation between the One and the many, or with the nature of such a One or of Being. Otto outlines the dilemma for Eckhart and Shankara quite correctly:

As pure Being (esse) God is completely 'fashionless' without 'How' or mode of being, neither this nor that, neither thus nor otherwise, just as Brahman is pure Being, is 'nirgunam' and 'neti, neti', absolutely 'One'. Therefore it is already as esse purum and simplex above all conceptions and conceptual differentiations, and so beyond all comprehending and apprehending (akaranaqocharam avāgmanoqocharam). For our comprehension is bound up with distinctions, with genus and differentia specifica.²³

There is however an alternative view of the relationship between mystical experience and its expression, a view exemplified predominantly in Mahāyāna Buddhism. According to F.J. Streng, where a mystic assumes a transcendent awareness not oriented towards undifferentiated being-itself, but rather towards a dynamic process of neither being nor not-being (shūnyatā, tathata),

...words do not function primarily as descriptions of something, but as a catalyst to free the mystic from a mental-emotional attachment to either being or non-being. The soteriological significance will be to cultivate an awareness of the emptiness of both form and non-form in which one is neither attached to, nor fearful of, either.²⁴

In essence, therefore, freedom must be gained from the

²³R. Otto, op. cit., p.22.

²⁴F.J. Streng, "Language and Mystical Awareness", in S. Katz (ed.), op. cit., p.162.

illusoriness of all conceptualisations and perceptions, from the conceptual formation that has control of the individual's perceptions of reality, from the belief that there is a one-to-one correspondence between language and reality. Such freedom is not gained by sinking into undifferentiated bliss or views thereupon, but by discerning upon the basis of this the "suchness" of all things. The suchness of all things is known through being non-attached to form without seeking the elimination of all form. Thus as Streng puts it,

To know things as they are is not to know an undifferentiated ground or source of all things as set over against particular forms. Rather it is to be freed from 'clinging'. Both 'the state of all knowledge'... and the constituents or properties of experienced things (dharmas, skandhas) are without self-existent 'being' and thus incomparable, immeasurable and unthinkable. To be free one must not 'settle down' in form by grasping it; one must not even try to 'grasp' or settle down in all-knowledge by discriminating between form and a formless reality.²⁵

This means that in Mahāyāna Buddhism, the goal is neither the attainment of mystical experience, nor the having of right views about the world. Rather, the goal is a certain orientation of the self in the world, a certain way of being and acting.²⁶ The point of Buddhist meditation is not to obtain a certain 'thing' whether this be the bliss of undifferentiated unity or

²⁵ Ibid., p.162.

²⁶ It can be argued that the same holds true for Theravāda Buddhism. See eg., T. Ling, "Buddhist Mysticism", in Religious Studies, Vol.1, 1965, pp.163-175.

a right view about reality but to become a certain kind of man. Perhaps this element within Mahāyāna Buddhism is well exemplified in the 'Ten Oxherding Pictures' which depict in Zen Buddhism the stages on the way to enlightenment. The mystical experience is symbolized by an empty circle thereby pointing towards the transcending of all opposites in the undifferentiated experience. But, in the last two paintings, a wealth of detail returns. The last is entitled 'Return to the Market Place with Gift-Giving Hands.'²⁷

Perhaps sufficient has been said for us to make three points by way of summary: Firstly, that panentheic modes of expression are not dependent upon extrovertive experience but rather upon a thrust towards Absolutism in traditions where there is an ontological priority of being over against non-being. Being (the One) lies behind the relative plane of being and not-being; secondly, that where being and non-being are considered as polar but ontically equal opposites, language is not merely descriptive of that which transcends both but evokes the existential realisation of that which transcends and embraces both; thirdly, therefore, that mystical experience may support and reinforce both of these modes of thought, but does not necessitate either.

²⁷ Reproductions and discussions of these paintings may be found in D.T. Suzuki, Manual of Zen Buddhism (New York: Grove Press, 1960).

Section IV

In contrast to the Mysticism of Unifying Vision, the Mysticism of Introspection rejects the external world for the 'inward' quest. For Eckhart, this inward quest leads to das Gemüte; for Shankara, to the ātman. Otto writes,

Both ātman and soul must free themselves from the world which surrounds them. They must withdraw from the senses and from sense-impressions, without attachments to the objects of sense; they must free themselves from all outward objects as well as from objects of thought, and thus from all manifoldness, multiplicity and difference.²⁸

Thus, in this unitive state, the distinction between knower, known and knowing is obliterated, subject-object polarity is abrogated. According to Otto, for Eckhart, the soul "has become completely one and is the One."²⁹ That is to say, since the introspective state is one of undifferentiated unity, this may be taken as a state in which union or identity with the One is attained.

However, while the unitive experience may be taken as tantamount to union or identity with the One, the former may remain independent of such interpretation. There is no necessary connection between that which is apprehended in the two types of mystical experience outlined by Otto, nor does introspective mystical experience necessitate conceptualisation in theistic or trans-theistic terms. Thus, in contrast to Stace, Otto

²⁸R. Otto, op. cit., p.100.

²⁹Ibid., p.100.

recognises that if the introspective mystical experience is spoken of as the unification of the soul and God or as the identity in essence of the two, then it is impossible to account for those forms of mysticism in which theistic concepts are of little or no importance. For example, therefore, the introspective experience may be conceptualised in the non-theistic terms of the 'system' of Yoga. He writes,

We distinguish a Sa-is'vara-yoga and an an-is'vara-yoga ie. a yoga with God and a yoga without God. That the latter cannot be a unio mystica with God is clear; but in the former also God and union with him is not the goal. There is here no effort after such a union, but after 'the isolation of the Ātman' for which God is merely an aid.³⁰

Thus, since the introspective mystical experience can be formulated in terms which do not include 'God' or one of its cognates, the 'Godhead' of Eckhart and the 'Brahman' of Shankara are not alternative names for the soul which has 'realised itself' in the introspective experience. That is, there is nothing ineluctable about the relation between the soul (or Ātman) and the Godhead (or Brahman); rather, the relationship between these is one of the synthesis of qualitatively different 'entities'. According to Otto, it is this synthesising of the Ātman-Brahman dichotomy that differentiates Shankara's speculation from that of Yoga. He writes,

Because it [Ātman] is also Brahman, something incalculable has been added to the Ātman, which is not contained in the kaivalyam

³⁰ Ibid., p.160.

of the ātman merely stripped of limitations.
And exactly the same applies to Eckhart.³¹

Accordingly, the One of the Mysticism of Unifying Vision (the Brahman, the Godhead) is combined with the One of the Mysticism of Introspection (the Ātman, the Soul) in a creative synthesis. In Otto's words,

...the numinous depth of the eternal One in and behind all things (including the perceiver) calls to the numinous depth of the soul in its inmost being.³²

Having indicated that the mystical experience may be conceptualised in trans-theistic and non-theistic terms, as well as theistic terms, I shall now advert to the question of the relationship between mystical and numinous experience. I shall try to show that there is a significant correlation between the types of mystical experience outlined above and the analysis of the numinous experience as the apprehension of a Mysterium, Tremendum et Fascinans.

Section V

As we have already noted in an earlier chapter, Otto distinguishes between rational and non-rational elements in religion and maintains that it is these non-rational elements which constitute its warp and woof. So also, the rational concepts of religion must be predicated of a non-rational or supra-rational subject.

Otto argues that it is mysticism which pre-eminently

³¹ Ibid., p.102.

³² Ibid., p.275.

emphasises the non-rational aspect of religion. He writes,

Mysticism enters into the religious experience in the measure that religious feeling surpasses its rational content, that is... to the extent to which its hidden non-rational numinous elements predominate and determine the emotional life.³³

In the light of this passage it is quite clear that there is a prima-facie case for the subsuming of the mystical experience within the general type of the numinous experience by Otto. This can be substantiated by further examination of Otto's analysis of the numinous experience.

As an essential preliminary to a further examination of "Mysterium Tremendum et Fascinans", we must note that the numinous experience may be said to have occurred where any one of these epithets can be applied to that which is apprehended; i.e., the various aspects of the numinous experience may occur either singly or in combination. For example, the aspect of mysterium may occur without the element of awefulness which is included under the tremendum aspect, and vice versa. Otto notes that

The elements of meaning implied in 'awefulness' and 'mysteriousness' are in themselves definitely different. The latter may so far predominate in the religious consciousness, may stand out so vividly, that in comparison with it the former almost sinks out of sight; ...Occasionally, on the other hand, the reverse happens, and the tremendum may in turn

³³Ibid., p.159; cf also R. Otto, The Idea of the Holy (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), pp.22, 85n, 197.

occupy the mind without the mysterium.³⁴

Thus, we need not expect Otto's analysis of the mystical experience to be integrally correlative with all the aspects of the numinous experience, nor aspects of each type of mystical experience to be equally correlative with all the aspects of the numinous experience. If it can be shown that the mystical experience may be correlated significantly with some of the numinous aspects, this will be sufficient evidence for the subsuming of mystical experience within the general category of numinous experience, at least, as far as Otto is concerned.

The tremendum aspect of the numinous experience is divided by Otto into the three elements of awefulness, overpoweringness and energy. In the higher religions, the element of awefulness appears as a feeling of personal nothingness and submergence before the awe-inspiring object which is so experienced. It is possible to relate this 'awefulness' element to Otto's analysis of the Mysticism of Unifying Vision since in the highest stage of that experience there is the recognition that only the One exists. Otto's remark that the feeling of personal nothingness before the numen is evoked by 'mystical awe' would certainly point in that direction.³⁵ However, this remark is not sufficiently elucidated to sufficiently justify such a correlation.

³⁴R. Otto, The Idea of the Holy (London: Oxford, University Press, 1958), p.25.

³⁵Ibid., p.17.

The case is otherwise with respect to the element of overpoweringness (majestas). This element evokes in the recipient of the experience the consciousness of being dust and ashes. It is crucial to note that Otto is concerned to differentiate this feeling of overpoweringness from Friedrich Schleiermacher's 'feeling of absolute dependence.'³⁶ Otto argues, quite correctly, that by this 'feeling of absolute dependence' Schleiermacher means the consciousness of being conditioned, of being a created being, and that this consciousness is related to the notion of a creator-being. Otto points out that, for this reason, Schleiermacher develops the implications of this sense of createdness in his sections on Creation and Preservation in The Christian Faith. By contrast, Otto maintains that the feeling of overpoweringness is not that of createdness but rather the consciousness of creaturehood. Thus, he indicates that the conceptualisation of the aspect of overpoweringness in terms of a causal relationship between Creator and created does not come to terms with the full import of this aspect. Rather, if reason attempts to analyse this aspect, it generates the notion of the non-reality of the self and the sole reality of the numen. Otto writes,

In the one case you have the fact of having been created; in the other, the status of the creature. And as soon as speculative

³⁶See F. Schleiermacher, The Christian Faith (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1948).

thought has come to concern itself with this latter type of consciousness...we are introduced to a set of ideas quite different from those of creation or preservation. We come upon the ideas, first, of the annihilation of self and then, as its complement, of the transcendent as the sole and entire reality.³⁷

In our analysis of the Mysticism of Unifying Vision, it was seen that Otto maintains that the second stage of this kind of mystical experience may be conceptualised in theistic terms, in terms of Creator and created. We saw also that Otto maintains that this second stage of conceptualisation may be transcended by a third which may be conceptualised in terms of the One as the sole and entire reality. This mystical schema is significantly parallel with the schema outlined in the above discussion of the meaning of majestas. On the basis of this correlation, we may make two preliminary conclusions. Firstly, the mystical experience of Unifying Vision is subsumable under the majestas element of the numinous experience. And therefore secondly, the numinous experience may be conceptualised in theistic terms (God, Creator, Cause of the Universe etc.) but such conceptualisation may be transcended, and the numen described in trans-theistic terms (The Only Real, Brahman, the Godhead).

Turning to the element of Energy, this is most correlative to mysticism when combined with majestas. In this combination, there is the welling up of "a force

³⁷R. Otto, The Idea of the Holy (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), p.21.

which is urgent, active, compelling, and alive."³⁸ This urgency, activity, and compellingness is a significant factor, according to Otto, in 'voluntaristic' mysticism. It is evidenced in such mysticism "in that 'consuming fire' of love whose burning strength the mystic can hardly bear."³⁹ While the element of energy is not correlative with Otto's analysis of mysticism into its two prevailing types, its presence is nevertheless a major criterion for distinguishing the mysticism of Eckhart from that of Shankara. While the mysticism of the latter is centred upon the rigid and static 'being' Brahman, the Godhead of Eckhart flows out of and returns to itself as "both the principle and the conclusion of a mighty inward movement, of an eternal process of everflowing life."⁴⁰ Otto remarks,

Eckhart's conception of God is thoroughly voluntarist. His Esse is will as an eternally active and dynamic principle in contrast to a rigid and static Being.⁴¹

The mysterium is designated the stupendum by Otto. The numen is a mystery which arouses stupor and amazement. As mysterium, the numen is wholly other, quite beyond the sphere of the usual, the intelligible. The wholly other aspect reaches its zenith in mysticism.

³⁸ Ibid., p.24.

³⁹ Ibid., p.24.

⁴⁰ R. Otto, Mysticism East and West (New York: MacMillan, 1932), p.187.

⁴¹ Ibid., p.187.

Otto writes,

Mysticism continues to its extreme point this contrasting of the numinous object (the numen), as the 'wholly other', with ordinary experience.⁴²

According to Otto, the extreme point of this contrasting of the numen and ordinary experience is reached when the numen is designated as 'that which is nothing' (nothingness, shūnya, shūnyatā), as that about which nothing can be said or thought. He writes,

Not content with contrasting it with all that is of nature or this world, mysticism concludes by contrasting it with Being itself and all that 'is' and finally actually calls it 'that which is nothing.'⁴³

The wholly other aspect of the numen correlates with our earlier analysis of mysticism in two ways. Firstly, it is the wholly other aspect of the numen which generates the ascending stages of the Mysticism of Unifying Vision. That is, it is the quest to indicate the qualitative otherness of the apprehended numen which evokes its eventual expression as the Only Real. From the above passage, it would also appear that even this expression can be transcended by a complete denial of all predicates as applicable to the Real. Suffice it for us to note therefore, that the mystical schema of Unifying Vision as outlined earlier is part of a logical progression towards this ultimate stage of silence.

⁴²R. Otto, The Idea of the Holy (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), p.29.

⁴³Ibid., p.29.

Secondly, the wholly other aspect of the numen may also be seen as correlative with that which lies at the basis of the individual. Otto maintains that what is true of the supreme, spiritual Being (the numen external to the self) is also true of the human soul or spirit. He writes,

In us, too, all that we call person and personal, indeed all that we can know or name in ourselves at all, is but one element in the whole. Beneath it lies, even in us, that 'wholly other' whose profundities, impenetrable to any concept, can yet be grasped in the numinous self-feeling by one who has experience of the deeper life.⁴⁴

The conceptualisation of this 'numinous self' occurs most rigorously according to Otto in the doctrine of souls in Indian Sāṅkhya. Nevertheless, even this extreme conceptualisation and systematisation

...cannot entirely conceal the fact that 'Soul' or Ātman is properly the thing of marvel and stupefaction, quite undefinable, outsoaring all conceptions, 'wholly alien' to our understanding.⁴⁵

In summary therefore, the mysticism of Introspection is intimately connected with the mysterium aspect of the numinous experience since that which is apprehended in the introspective experience has an explicitly numinous flavouring.

Moreover, it is because of the numinousness both of the self and of that which lies beyond the self (the One, the Real, etc.) that there is the possibility of the

⁴⁴Ibid., p.203.

⁴⁵Ibid., p.195.

intertwining of the two ways of mysticism. Thus,

For however different it may be, on the one hand the discovery of the miraculous depths of the soul and God indwelling in the heart of man, and on the other the depth of the world in unity and oneness: both are above all experiences of wonder.... To express it roughly: Brahman and ātman are both descended from a numinous sphere.⁴⁶

With the fascinans element, there is also possible a transition to mysticism. At this highest point, the fascinating becomes the over-bounding, the exuberant. Thus, of the Buddhist experience of Nirvāna, Otto maintains that

It is only conceptually that 'Nirvana' is a negation; it is felt in consciousness as in the strongest degree positive; it exercises a 'fascination' by which its votaries are as much carried away as are the Hindu or the Christian by the corresponding objects of their worship.⁴⁷

The fascinans element in connection with mysticism may be spoken of as "Bliss-unspeakable."⁴⁸

On the basis of the above exposition, we may generate the following further conclusions. Firstly, the mystical experiences of Unifying Vision and of Introspection both involve the mysterium aspect of the numinous experience and are thus subsumable within that experience. Secondly, the numinous experience may therefore be conceptualised in non-theistic terms, e.g. soul, ātman, purusha etc. Thirdly, some general aspects of

⁴⁶ R. Otto, Mysticism East and West (New York: MacMillan, 1932), pp.278-9.

⁴⁷ R. Otto, The Idea of the Holy (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), p.39.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.39. These are not the words of Otto, but were addressed to him as a description of Nirvāna by a Buddhist monk.

mysticism are correlative with the aspect of urgency and the element of fascinans.

The implication of the conclusions generated in this chapter thus far are clear. Firstly, analysis of Otto's exposition of the numinous experience will need to take into account the much wider ramifications of the numinous experience as presented above. Secondly, either defense of or criticism of Otto needs to be based upon the fundamental premiss of interpretation established in this chapter — that the numinous experience may be conceptualised in theistic, trans-theistic and non-theistic terms. Thirdly, when we take into consideration both the examination of Otto in chapter two, and our analysis in this chapter, then we may say that for Otto, there is one general kind of religious experience, the numinous experience, and under this umbrella may be sheltered (at least) three different varieties of this experience — theistic experience, introvertive mystical experience and extrovertive mystical experience. Nevertheless, and fourthly, we have again put forward reasons for expressing doubt as to the role of extrovertive experience in the establishing of or reinforcing of religious doctrines.

Section VI

It is beyond doubt that phenomenologically, the awe-inspiring experience of Isaiah, Arjuna, and Mohammed is quite distinct from the mystical experience of introvertive unity in Eckhart and Shankara. Thus, while we

have shown that Smart's exegesis of Otto is incorrect, for Otto does not ignore mystical experience in his analysis, nevertheless the question remains why Otto should have placed such phenomenologically disparate varieties of religious experience under the one broad category of the numinous. And further, why does Otto, in spite of his own predilection for Christianity, seem to make mystical experience the experience most correlative to the essence of religion, viz. the non-rational apprehension of a Mysterium, Tremendum et Fascinans? In what follows, I shall attempt to show that the answer to both these questions lies in Otto's adoption of the Neo-Kantianism of Jakob Fries as the philosophical substructure of his phenomenological enquiry. In particular, I shall examine Otto's notion of the Holy as an a priori category and the relationship between numinous experience and the Friesian concept of Ahnung (Ahndung).⁴⁹

Fries's philosophy stands firmly in the Kantian tradition and yet modifies the Kantian theories considerably. According to Kant, experience is the product of formal elements contributed by the mind itself and the experience of the senses which has for us the form of the

⁴⁹ My knowledge of the philosophy of Fries is derived from three secondary sources, for none of Fries's writings have as yet been translated into English. Firstly, R. Otto, The Philosophy of Religion (London: Williams & Norgate Ltd., 1931); secondly, J.M. Moore, Theories of Religious Experience (New York: Round Table Press Inc., 1938); thirdly, although there is some measure of disagreement between myself and David Bastow, I am nevertheless especially indebted to his "Otto and Numinous Experience" in Religious Studies, Vol.12, 1976, pp.159-76.

pure intuitions, space and time. The basic formal elements of the mind, the categories, are our ways of bringing the diverse data of experience into a unity of understanding. The original unity, and its articulation in the categories does not derive from understanding or intellect. Rather, it is completely a priori. Its application to human experience is universal and necessary. Nevertheless, there is quite clearly a strain of subjectivism in Kant. Otto expresses it in this way:

The discovery of this 'a priori' in general was the great task of the Kantian Criticism of Reason. But, in establishing the a priori types of knowledge, Kant had at the same time made the perilous affirmation that their validity was merely subjective and that whatever was known through them was ideal.⁵⁰

According to Otto, Fries improved upon the philosophy of Kant in two ways. Firstly, Otto claims that Fries has shown that there is immediate knowledge of reality, independent of perception, and produced by pure reason. The content of this knowledge is the notion of the objective synthetic unity of all the manifold given in sense. Otto writes,

He [Fries] proves that all nature-concepts are merely the various forms of one fundamental idea of the reasoning mind — the idea of universal unity and necessity; or, differently expressed, that they are single and individual determinations of the fundamental knowledge about the necessity and unity of everything that is, in general, which rests on the foundation of every

⁵⁰R. Otto, The Philosophy of Religion (London: Williams & Norgate Ltd., 1931), p.18.

Single Reason as something most immediate and most profound.⁵¹

This transcendental apperception is more clearly explained by Bastow. He writes,

Transcendental apperception then is the whole of immediate knowledge of reality; but because the whole is a necessary and absolute unity, we in our limited human spatio-temporal circumstances cannot know it as a whole. Nevertheless, if it has been shown that reason has its own immediate knowledge, ie. formal apperception, this is sufficient to destroy Kant's Formal Idealism — his view that our knowledge of the necessary rules of the form of experience has only subjective validity. So this formal knowledge is according to Fries objective; it tells us about reality.⁵²

Secondly, Otto claims that Fries has improved upon Kant by means of his notion of Ahnung. Bastow points out that the judgements of sense experience do not directly reveal the relation of material apperception to transcendental apperception, that is, the relation between those objects the knowledge of which is basic to sense perception, and the whole of absolute reality. To put it crudely, sense experience cannot reveal the relation of the fundamental knowledge of unity to knowledge of multiplicity. Nevertheless, Fries asserts that this relationship can be felt, can be intimated, and this feeling or intimation (Ahnung) is characterised as aesthetic judgement. This feeling leads, for anyone who has it, to a realisation that the Ideas are

⁵¹ Ibid., p.49; see also p.52.

⁵² D. Bastow, op. cit., p.162.

not merely formal and empty but have content, and therefore can be said to be valid. Otto writes,

The aesthetic idea is a form of the unity of the multiplex, a form which cannot be expressed. In our conceptions of Nature and in the ideas we attain real knowledge of Unity (and of Necessity) in things. In the aesthetic judgement the perception of the multiplex thus comes in an undefined way under the power of the concepts of Nature and of the Ideas. That is to say, in an undefined, obscure manner, by the way of 'Ahnung' I gain real knowledge of the universe in a quite particular way, following the supreme laws of its unity and necessity which are clearly presented in conceptual form in the Categories as a whole.... In aesthetic ideas I gain an obscure comprehension of the unity and connection of true reality in the world of appearance, of this reality in its essential nature.⁵³

Both of these modifications of Kant by Fries are of importance for Otto's theory of religion, and therefore, for our understanding of Otto. With respect to the first, it enabled Otto to utilise a philosophical theory to rescue religion from its reduction to metaphysics in the case of the pre-Kantian rationalists, and to ethics in the case of Kant. Moreover, Fries's 'objectivising' of the Kantian framework enabled Otto to

⁵³R. Otto, The Philosophy of Religion (London: Williams & Norgate Ltd., 1931), p.141. Fries's notion of Ahnung is quite clearly related to Schleiermacher's claim that the essence of religion is 'intuition' and 'feeling (Anschauung and Gefühl) for the Eternal in the temporal and the Infinite in the finite. See esp. F. Schleiermacher, On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), pp.275-284. In fact, Fries writes of the basis of faith, "the feeling on which his [the religious man's] faith is really based is the instinctive sensation of the Eternal in the Finite." Quoted by R. Otto, Ibid., p.32.

both establish religion as having its roots in a distinct kind of experience with its own a priori categories, and to argue that such experience has objective validity. Thus, Otto writes,

We find...involved in the numinous experience, beliefs and feelings qualitatively different from anything that 'natural' sense perception is capable of giving us. They are themselves not perceptions at all, but peculiar interpretations and valuations, at first of perceptual data, and then — at a higher level — of posited objects and entities, which themselves no longer belong to the perceptual world, but are thought of as supplementing and transcending it.... The facts of the numinous consciousness point therefore...to a hidden substantive source, from which the religious ideas and feelings are formed, which lies in the mind independently of sense experience; a 'pure reason' in the profoundest sense, which, because of the 'surpassingness' of its content, must be distinguished from both the pure theoretical and the pure practical reason of Kant as something yet higher or deeper than they.⁵⁴

In another context, speaking of 'intuitions' and 'feelings' in Schleiermacher, Otto writes,

...they must certainly be termed cognitions, modes of knowing, though of course, not the product of reflection, but the intuitive outcome of feeling. Their import is a glimpse of an Eternal, in and beyond the temporal and penetrating it, the apprehension of a ground and meaning in things in and beyond the empirical and transcending it.⁵⁵

⁵⁴R. Otto, The Philosophy of Religion (London: Williams & Norgate Ltd., 1931), p.223.

⁵⁵Ibid., p.147. Otto's belief that Fries has overcome the subjectivism of Kant invalidates H.J. Paton's claim that Otto seems unaware of the difficulty inherent in basing religious knowledge on Kantian subjectivism. In fact, Paton seems to be unaware himself of the relation between Otto and Fries for he makes no reference to the latter. See H.J. Paton, The Modern Predicament (London: Allen & Unwin, 1955), pp.129-45.

The above passages also give us quite clear indications of Otto's use of the notion of Ahnung. Specifically, Ahnung is equivalent to the numinous experience. The following passage leaves us in no doubt whatsoever. Summarising Fries's philosophy, Otto says,

...in all these respects this philosophy reveals the disposition to religion in the spirit of man in general, the hidden source of all its manifestations in history, the ground for its claim to be true, to be indeed the supreme and ultimate Truth.⁵⁶

We began this section by asking why Otto placed such phenomenologically disparate varieties of religious experience under the one broad category of numinous experience. We may now broach an answer to this question. In the final chapter of his The Philosophy of Religion, Otto describes two starting points to the true Science of Religion. The first of these is the 'empirico-inductive' investigation of religions which will secure a proper conception of the real nature of religion. The focal point of this study will be religious experience. The other starting point follows the work of the Critique of Reason as a whole with a view to generating a metaphysic of religion. Otto claims that these two paths, although at first different must ultimately meet. Bastow offers the following appropriate comment:

But how can Otto claim to know that the paths will meet? My suggestion is that this is only because he builds assumptions taken from his philosophical position into his supposedly

⁵⁶R. Otto. The Philosophy of Religion (London: Williams & Norgate Ltd., 1931), p.223.

empirico-inductive investigation, i.e. he assumes a phenomenological unity based on religious experience, and considers that he merely has to find out its nature. In summary, to share Otto's confidence about the fundamental unity of all religious experience and hence basically of all religion, we must first adopt his Friesian metaphysic, and second provide the argument Otto omits, to show the paths must meet.⁵⁷

By way of summary, therefore, we may note that it is the adoption by Otto of the Friesian notion of Ahnung and the development of the notion of the a priori category of the Holy which both militate against Otto taking seriously the phenomenological disparities we have been referring to, and persuade him to place both theistic and mystical experience within the broad category of the numinous experience.

A further point is of some value. Bastow wishes to inquire about the relation between Fries's Ahnung and Otto's experience of the numinous. As he points out, the general description of Ahnung is of an aesthetic experience in which the world is seen as one and as necessary. He continues,

This realization of the unity of transcendental apperception as a whole would be quite distinct from experience of a numen, separated by an infinite and awful gulf from the earthly being who experiences him.⁵⁸

In so far as Ahnung is compared to numinous experience when conceptualised in theistic terms, Bastow's point is a valid one. Nevertheless, as we have seen in

⁵⁷D. Bastow, op. cit., p.169.

⁵⁸Ibid., p.170.

an earlier part of this chapter, it need not be so conceptualised. For, mystical expressions are conceptualisations of the numinous experience, and, insofar as these express a fundamental unity behind the multiplicity of the phenomenal world, there is a comparability between Ahnung and the numinous experience to the extent to which the hidden non-rational elements of numinous experience predominate. To put it simply, mystical experience and Ahnung do seem similar. There is a hint to this effect in a description of the experience of Ahnung by Otto. He writes,

It is in the truest sense a Platonic anamnesis of the Idea, and through it alone is conceivable the unspeakable profundity, the mighty rapture, the spell of mystery that plays around this experience.... Here 'mystery in religion' comes into play. Religion itself is an experience of mystery; not the sort of mystery which would exist only for the uninitiated, which would be solved for the adept, but the sensible mystery of all existence in time as a whole — external reality breaking through the veil of temporal existence, to the unlocked heart. Here is the truth which underlies all 'mystic' excess and imagination; here is the seat of the mystic element in all religion.⁵⁹

There are quite clear intimations of the proposed connection of mystical experience and Ahnung in the above passage. It would of course be most useful if the connection could be made with reference to Otto's Mysticism East and West. In fact, Otto develops, but unfortunately only briefly, the relationship between Friesian

⁵⁹R. Otto, The Philosophy of Religion (London: Williams & Norgate Ltd., 1931), p.93.

philosophy and introvertive and extrovertive mystical experience. Otto remarks that insofar as for Kant all perceptions of unity, meaning and value rise from a depth of mind beneath the level of senses and understanding, he too knows the 'ground of the soul'. He goes on to maintain that Fries has developed this further in his doctrine of Transcendental Apperception. He writes,

This transcendental apperception is formed through the unifying functions of 'formal apperception', and this in turn is a fundamental and primordial knowledge of eternal unity and fulfilment. This basic cognition of Fries' doctrine could not be otherwise or better described than by the mystical intuition of Eckhart, which is also not an individual act of empirical consciousness, but a fundamental element of the soul itself, independent of all here and now, and only in individual moments breaking forth out of its depth to actualize itself in empirical consciousness.⁶⁰

In another context, Otto argues that where the capacity to perceive the self through the mysticism of Introspection is awakened, so also the capacity to perceive the unity behind the multiplicity of phenomena is awakened. He gives the following Friesian interpretation of this:

In the language of secular speech we should have to say: 'Knowledge of the (mystical) unity of the universe and of my own unity with it is Knowledge a priori? The senses provide the raw material for this. But what this 'is', what is 'so' in truth, wherein lies its depth, meaning and essence, the senses do not reveal. This is also

⁶⁰R. Otto, Mysticism East and West (New York: MacMillan, 1932), p.266.

discovered immediately by the soul 'through itself' and that means that the soul finds it 'indwelling' in itself.⁶¹

Hopefully, sufficient has been said to indicate the close connection of Ahnung and mystical experience. The implications of this are deserving of a little more expansion. Firstly, this comparability when taken together with the connection of the numinous experience and Ahnung reinforces considerably our earlier analysis of the relation of mystical and numinous experience. There is however a more far-reaching implication. It would be unwise of me, both in the light of the brevity of the foregoing discussion and in the light of Otto's style which is most often evocative rather than analytic, to make too strong an assertion. Nevertheless, our discussion would suggest that the essence of the non-rational component of religious experience is mystical experience, and therefore, that, to the extent that philosophical truth is identified with religious truth, those religious experiences which are conceptualised in theistic terms are less 'in touch with absolute reality' than those experiences conceptualised in mystical modes of expression. In other words, I am suggesting that Otto may be committed to a thesis of the nature of religious truth not entirely dissimilar to that of Sarvepelli Radhakrishnan which we examined in the Introduction to this study. This is not to

⁶¹Ibid., p.281.

suggest that this is Otto's intended position. For, at another level, the most true religion for Otto is that which is the furthest developed in the translation of the non-rational component of religion into metaphysical and moral conceptual structures and this religion is, without doubt for Otto, Christianity.⁶² Nevertheless, I would suggest that something of this sort is necessitated by both the philosophical substructure and the phenomenological analysis of mystical experience offered by Otto. Thus, there is, at the very least, an incompatibility between the implications of his phenomenological-philosophical approach to religious truth and his own predilection to delineate Christianity as the highest religion by a different criterion of religious truth.⁶³ And further, committed as it appears to be to the idea that religious truth relates both to religion in its most non-rational manifestation, ie. numinous experience and religion in its most rational manifestation, ie. Christianity, this incompatibility within Otto's theory of religion does not appear easy of resolution.

⁶² See eg. R. Otto, The Ideal of the Holy (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), p.1. But cf also p.3 where Otto criticises Christianity for failing to recognise the value of the non-rational element in religion, thus giving to the idea of God a one-sidedly intellectualistic and rationalistic interpretation.

⁶³ For a recent Kantian approach to religious experience which appears to get into similar difficulties as does Otto's, see J. Hick, "Mystical Experience as Cognition" in H. Coward and T. Penelhum (eds.), Mystics and Scholars (Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1977), pp.41-56. For a criticism of Hick on grounds not entirely dissimilar to the above criticism of Otto, see T. Penelhum, "Unity and Diversity in the Interpretation of Mysticism", in Ibid., pp.79-80.

CHAPTER V

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Synopsis

Section I.

The nature of religious experience: A comparison of the phenomenological analyses heretofore individually discussed. Comparison of analyses of interior mystical experience. Theistic experience examined only by Smart and Otto. A further critique of Stace's methodological exclusion of theism. Comparison of analyses of the panenhenic experience. Summary of our discussion of this. The phenomenological analyses summarised.

Section II.

Religious experience and religious truth: A summary of the heretofore examined resolutions and our criticisms of these.

CHAPTER V

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Section I

In this essay, we have been concerned with the relationship between religious experience — especially mystical experience and, to a lesser extent, theistic experience — and doctrinal formulation in religion. Specifically, we have examined the relationship between these, by reference to the models of religious experience proposed by S. Radhakrishnan, R.C. Zaehner, N. Smart, W.T. Stace and Rudolf Otto. At this juncture, it is fruitful to look at these models to see how they relate to each other and to attempt to draw together the results of our study thus far.

It is apparent from our study that all those with whom we have dealt recognise that mystical experience must be taken into account as a major factor in religious formulations. For Radhakrishnan, spiritual or religious experience is mystical experience and it is on the basis of this presupposition that the philosophy of tolerance and the thesis of the unity of all religions is developed. On the other hand, Professor Zaehner wishes to argue that such a philosophy of tolerance is not acceptable. This is for the reason that,

according to him, there are different varieties of mystical experience which such a philosophy does not take into account. Thus, he argues that there is not only a clear distinction between mystical experience with the eyes open — panenhenic experience — and mystical experience with the eyes closed, but that there are two different varieties of non-sensory mystical experience, the monistic and the theistic of which the latter is the higher form. In the latter part of the Introduction, the thesis of the unity of all religions was also criticised on the grounds that, on the one hand, it unjustifiably viewed one kind of religious experience as normative thereby ignoring other possible forms of religious experience and, on the other hand, that it assumed that 'higher truth' was expressed in a particular mainstream tradition of Hinduism, namely, that in which the essence of the self is identical with the Godhead.

In contrast to Zaehner, however, we have noted that Smart, Stace and Otto all argue that there is only one form of interior mystical experience. I have argued that Zaehner's claim for theistic mystical experience was not validated by his analysis, and therefore also, that his claim that theistic mystical experience was a higher form of mystical experience, was not acceptable. Nevertheless, this did not entail our accepting the thesis of Smart, Stace and Otto that there is a phenomenological unity of interior mystical experience. Rather, the possibility that there are phenomenologically

theistic mystical experiences was left quite open. We shall need to consider this possibility much more fully in a subsequent chapter.

We may further note that only two of the writers examined saw the necessity of including theistic experience in their analyses, namely, Smart and Otto. Such an omission by Radhakrishnan and Zaehner must count against the comprehensiveness of their accounts. In the case of Stace, we noted that the exclusion of such experience probably derived from his philosophical critique of the possibility of such experience; that is to say, according to him the naturalistic principle forbids us to believe that there ever occur interruptions in the normal course of events by a supernatural being. If Stace's exclusion of theistic experience arises from such a principle, and it most probably does, then this does not justify the exclusion of theistic experience from consideration. For, even if it is the case that the naturalistic principle is perfectly valid, theistic experiences nevertheless still do occur. What the naturalistic principle does forbid is not the recognition that theistic experiences play an important role in doctrinal formulations, but rather, the claim that such experiences occur as the result of the intervention of a supernatural being. This is perhaps another example of the confusion of phenomenology and philosophy in Stace's work.

Smart, as we have seen, includes theistic experience (incorrectly called 'numinous experience' by him)

in his analysis. According to him, expressions which appear to be derived from theistic mystical experience are to be distinguished from non-theistic mystical expressions by the ramifying presence of doctrines derived from the numinous experience. Furthermore, the differences between, for example, Advaita Vedānta and the mystical expression of St. Teresa of Avila are to be explained by different priority decisions made within different traditions between the numinous strand and the mystical strand. In essence therefore, for Smart, the religious traditions may be seen as consisting of the numinous or mystical strands, or the subtle interweaving of the two.

Similarly, for Rudolf Otto, theistic experience is taken into account. For Otto however, in contrast to Smart, both theistic and mystical experience are placed under the one category of the numinous. I have argued that this classification is not warranted because of the phenomenological disparity of mystical and theistic experience and have indicated that it arises, not from phenomenological analysis, but rather from philosophical presuppositions derived from the Neo-Kantian metaphysics of Jakob Fries.

With reference to mystical experience with the eyes open, we have seen that Zaehner, Stace and Otto all argue that its occurrence must be taken into account in an analysis of mystical expressions. Furthermore, we criticised Smart for his exclusion of such experience on

the basis that his grounds for such exclusion were unjustified. Nevertheless, it has been indicated at various points in this study that while panenhenic or extrovertive modes of expression may be discerned in mystical texts, these are not to be taken as expressive of a unique kind of experience. Rather, in the absence of any autobiographical evidence to the contrary, such modes of expression ought to be seen as the expression of reflection upon the world subsequent to a unitive or introvertive experience and prevalent within those traditions which have an incipient thrust towards a philosophical absolutism. To this extent, Smart's exclusion of such extrovertive experience is vindicated, albeit on quite different grounds.

We may summarise the similarities and differences between these writers in the following series of propositions:

- (1) For Radhakrishnan, there is one kind of religious experience, viz. the mystical;
- (2) for Zaehner, there are three varieties of mystical experience — the panenhenic, the monistic and the theistic;
- (3) for Smart, there are two main varieties of religious experience — the numinous (theistic) and the mystical;
- (4) for Stace, mystical experience admits of two varieties — the extrovertive and the introvertive;

- (5) for Otto, both theistic experience and two varieties of mystical experience (the inward way and the outward way) are classified under the general category of numinous experience.

Section II

It has been one of the prime concerns of this study to outline the relationship between religious experience and religious doctrine insofar as these have been delineated by the various authors with whom we have been particularly concerned. To the extent that candidacy for religious truth is determined by the correspondence between religious experience and derivative doctrines, we have been concerned with the means whereby conflicting truth claims in religious traditions might be resolved.

Each of the authors whose works we have examined have attempted to propose such a resolution. According to Radhakrishnan, there is an underlying core of truth standing over against or lying behind the religious traditions which only partially enshrine it. In criticism of Radhakrishnan, it was argued that such a claim makes a covert assumption that religious truth is ultimately dependent upon mystical experience. To the extent that this assumption is a covert one and is not argued for, Radhakrishnan has adopted a normative stance which cannot be accepted.

For Ninian Smart, the most valid form of doctrinal framework is that which combines both the numinous and

mystical strands with the former predominant. Against Smart, it was argued that, in the final analysis, he is caught in a conceptual bind since his conceptual framework entails both that the truth of any interpretation of religious experience depends in large measure on factors external to the experience, and also that if we are to find religious truth, we should look to religious experience.

It may also be noted at this point that we suggested that Rudolf Otto was in somewhat the same dilemma. Otto was committed on the one hand to arguing that truth in religion is closely related to the non-rational factors therein and these factors are particularly prevalent in mysticism. On the other hand, his own penchant for Christianity orientated him towards a theory of religious truth which deemed the most true religion to be that religion which is the most highly developed morally and theologically, viz., Christianity.

Zaehner, albeit on quite different grounds, is in agreement with Smart that candidacy for religious truth is most likely to be found in systems of theistic mysticism. Our criticism of Zaehner depended on the argument that his textual examples were not persuasive and that his criteria for the superiority of theistic mysticism were most probably normative ones.

Finally, in the case of Stace, it was argued that there was a large measure of incompatibility between

his phenomenological analysis and his conceptual claims concerning the truth of pantheistic interpretations of mystical experience. It was shown that pantheistic interpretations could not be said to be actual reflections of the mystical experience and that such pantheistic examples as were cited by Stace were better explained by alternative means.

To summarise: Although all of the models, to varying degrees of validity, demonstrate the nexus between various types of religious experience and doctrinal formulations, the resolution of the problem of conflicting truth claims between different religious traditions has not been accomplished by any of the models heretofore examined.

In the next chapter, it will be argued that this conceptual impasse is due in the main to the respective notions of the relationship between religious experience and its interpretation. By an analysis of various theses of the relationship between experience and interpretation we shall hope, as far as is possible, to delineate in some detail the nature of and grounds of this impasse.

CHAPTER VI

MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE & ITS INTERPRETATION : AN ANALYSIS OF POSSIBLE MODELS

Synopsis

Section I.

All the previous models founder upon the same conceptual rock, viz, inadequate notions of the nature of the relationship between mystical experience and its interpretation. Delineation of the crucial question: Are there varieties of mystical experience and consequent variety of modes of expression; or is there only one form of mystical experience and a variety of modes of expression? Outline of five possible models of the relationship between mystical experience and its interpretation.

Section II.

Model one: There is a unanimity about mystical utterances which points towards the unanimity of mystical experience. James' account of this. Criticism of this: There is no obvious unanimity in mystical utterance. A possible reply to this. The reply is valid but at the expense of a vicious circularity. G.K. Pletcher's attempt to avoid this circularity by appeal to the

characteristics of mystical experience. James', Stace's, Suzuki's characteristics of mystical experience; criticism of these as either inclusive of other forms of experience or unjustifiably exclusive of some possible forms of mystical experience. Can a proposition be generated with which all mystical traditions would agree. Such a proposition would only disguise the real differences.

Section III.

Model three: There is a small number of types of mystical experience which cut across cultural barriers, and which each receive their own characteristic modes of expression. Evidenced in Zaehner, Stace and Otto. The possibility of theistic mystical experiences noted. Zaehner's methodology effectively commits him to a model four approach.

Section IV.

Model four: There are as many varieties of mystical experience as there are paradigmatic expressions of it. Definition of 'paradigmatic expression'. Model four exemplified in G. Larson's analysis of Indian mysticism, and in M. Fakhry's analysis of Islamic mysticism.

Section V.

Criticisms of model four: The assumption that mystical utterance 'mirrors' mystical experience; the

problem of ineffability. Critique of the notion of radical ineffability. Ineffability and first, second and third order mystical texts. Third order accounts evidence radical ineffability. First and second order accounts evidence partial and qualified ineffability. The complex interplay between experience and interpretation renders model four uncertain. Rejection of M. Laski's model four approach. H.P. Owen's model four approach: experience and interpretation cannot be separated. A passage from The Ladder of Perfection considered: Its compatibility with both Owen's and Smart's approach. Model two: All mystical experiences are the same, the interpretations being dependent upon the religious and/or philosophical framework of the mystic. Exemplified in Smart and Radhakrishnan. E. Underhill's theistic version of model two examined. Her agreement with Smart and disagreement with Owen.

Section VI.

Summary of the chapter: Models one to four fail to solve the problem of the relationship between experience and interpretation.

CHAPTER VI

MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE & ITS INTERPRETATION : AN ANALYSIS OF POSSIBLE MODELS

Section I

In the preceding chapters of this study, we have seen that various attempts to plot the relationship between religious experience and religious doctrines are severally fraught with difficulties. In this chapter, I shall be concerned to argue that the proposals which we have so far examined all founder upon the same conceptual rock, viz. that they all have an inadequate notion of the nature of the relationship between religious experience and its interpretation.

We shall attempt in what follows to substantiate this charge and to develop further the current understanding of this relationship by specific reference to the following question: Are there varieties of mystical experience which give rise to a variety of symbolic expression, or is there only one form of mystical experience and a variety of modes of expression of it? In short, we shall be concerned with the question as to the relationship between mystical experience and its interpretation; and further, with the question as to how we may loosen the philosophical bonds which seemingly restrict this problem from resolution.

Our initial task in this chapter shall be therefore to outline five possible models of the relationship between mystical experience and its interpretation. The five models are as follows:

- (M1) All mystical experience is the same. There is a unanimity about mystical utterances which points towards the unanimity of mystical experience.
- (M2) All mystical experience is the same but the interpretations of the experience are dependent upon the religious and/or philosophical framework of the mystic.
- (M3) There is a small number of types of religious experience which cut across cultural barriers.
- (M4) There are as many different types of mystical experience as there are paradigmatic expressions of them.
- (M5) There are as many different types of mystical experience as there are incorporated interpretations of them.

Before proceeding to a consideration of the first four of these in this chapter, it is necessary to point out that the boundaries between these models are to some extent fluid, as is perhaps only to be expected in a typology of this sort. Nevertheless, it is to be hoped that the models summarised above will be sufficiently useful to enable our analysis to bear some fruit.

Section II

In his book The Varieties of Religious Experience, William James makes the following remark:

In Hinduism, in Neoplatonism, 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 a critic stop and think, and which brings it about that the mystical classics have, as has been said, neither birthday nor native land.¹

According to James, this recurring note is that of the overcoming of all barriers between the individual and the Absolute. On the basis of such purported unanimity in mystical utterance, James makes the following claim with regard to the nature of mystical experience. He writes,

In mystic states we both become one with the Absolute and we become aware of our oneness. This is the everlasting and triumphant mystical tradition, hardly altered by differences of clime or creed.²

Thus, in the light of the purported unanimity of mystical expression, James implies that there is but one kind of mystical experience.

A number of points need to be made with respect to this model. The first point is simply this: In so far as we are referring to descriptions of that which is "encountered" in mystical experience rather than to general characteristics of the experience itself, then

¹W. James, The Varieties of Religious Experience (New York: MacMillan, 1961), p.329.

²Ibid., p.329.

James' claim is false. It is certainly true that the overall theme of a number of mystic traditions in Hinduism, Sūfism and Christian mysticism is that of the oneness of the Self and the Absolute. But, sufficient has been said already in this thesis to indicate that there are a number of mystic traditions — Theravāda Buddhism, Sāṅkhya Yoga, Rāmānuja's Vishishtadvaita Vedānta — which express the mystical experience in quite different terms. Furthermore, as we have earlier noted, in the case of Mahāyāna Buddhism, there is a rejection of all views as to the nature of the ultimate realness of things.

To be sure, the defenders of such an approach could argue that the above-mentioned exceptions are not exceptions by virtue of the fact that they do not include mystical utterances within their doctrines, texts etc. A defense of this sort however, is bought at the expense of a vicious circularity. In a review of W.T. Stace's Mysticism and Philosophy, W.E. Kennick writes,

Stace is impressed by the fact that mystics everywhere describe their experiences in similar ways; but this is surely not an occasion for surprise, since one recognises a man as a mystic largely by what he says. To be surprised at this fact is like being surprised at the fact that zebras have stripes.³

It can therefore be seen that an arbitrary selection of mystics, eg. those who operate in traditions with a

³W.E. Kennick, review of W.T. Stace, Mysticism and Philosophy (London: MacMillan, 1961), in The Philosophical Review, Vol.71, 1962, p.387.

thrust towards absolutism, effectively rules out our regarding the unanimity of mystical utterance as in any sense evidence for the unanimity of mystical experience.⁴

In an article entitled "Agreement Among mystics", Galen Pletcher attempts to avoid the above mentioned circularity. He agrees that if we determine who mystics are by examining the propositions the mystics maintain then we are involved in circularity. Nevertheless, he wishes to argue that there is an alternative means for determining who is to count as a mystic. This alternative means is the examination, not of the propositions maintained on the basis of the experience, but rather of the qualities or characteristics of the mystical experience. Thus, he claims, quite rightly I believe, that

This procedure is not circular, because characteristics of the experience are used to select mystics, while their conclusions based on the experience are what is to be established by the argument from agreement.⁵

In order to validate his point, Pletcher offers three lists of characteristics of mystical experience derived from James, Stace, and D.T. Suzuki. We shall now consider whether such lists of characteristics are sufficient to determine who shall count as a mystic.

The four characteristics of mystical experience determined by James are these:

⁴This is a point developed from G.K. Pletcher, "Agreement Among Mystics" in Sophia, Vol.11, No.2, 1972, p.7.

⁵Ibid., p.8.

- (1) Ineffability;
- (2) Noetic quality;
- (3) Transiency;
- (4) Passivity.⁶

Without labouring the point, let us consider the two qualities which James considers to be defining characteristics of mystical experience, namely, ineffability and noetic quality. With respect to the former of these, James gives the following account:

The subject of it [mystical experience] immediately says that it defies expression, that no adequate report of its contents can be given in words. It follows from this that its quality must be directly experienced; it cannot be imparted or transferred to others.⁷

James' definition of "ineffability" is an accurate one, and while it is certainly the case that the mystical experience is often delineated as such,⁸ the notion of ineffability is not such as lends itself to the claim that different experiences have something in common in the sense that they are instances of the same or similar situations. In other words, the term 'ineffable' can fit incomparable experiences. Thus, Steven Katz writes,

...an atheist can feel a sense of dread at the absurdity of the cosmos which he labels ineffable, while the theist can experience

⁶W. James, op. cit., pp.299-300.

⁷Ibid., pp.299-300.

⁸Although not pertinent to our concern at the moment, it is worth noting that both James and Stace fail to distinguish between the ineffability of the experience and the mystical doctrine of the ineffability of the 'object' of mystical experience.

God in a way that he also insists is ineffable. Thus in I and Thou, Buber describes the dialogical encounter with God, the Absolute Thou, as ineffable, whose 'meaning itself cannot be transferred or expressed', while Kafka, whose brilliant and haunting tales also suggest the ineffability of existence intends no such encounter, nor reflects any faith in the existence of an Absolute Thou.⁹

Turning to the characteristic of noeticity, we may venture a similar criticism. James defines this characteristic as follows:

Although so similar to states of feeling, mystical states seem to those who experience them, to be also states of knowledge. They are states of insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect.¹⁰

Again, one would not wish to question the fact that mystics claim their experiences to be noetic. Nevertheless, the connection between mystical experience and noeticity is by no means an exclusive one. The point is made clearly by Katz:

To argue, as James does, that because each such experience claims to give 'insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect' all the experiences are the same, fails to recognise both the variety of 'insights' one could have into the 'depths of truth' and the variety of 'truths' which can lurk in these depths waiting to be 'plumbed'. The varying claims made for such knowledge of 'truth' is staggering, running from Pythagorean speculations to voodoo, animism and totemism, to Madame Blavatsky's theosophy and Huxley's and Ramakrishna's philosophia perennis, to say nothing of the variety of

⁹S.T. Katz, "Language, Epistemology and Mysticism" in S.T. Katz (ed.), Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis (London: Sheldon Press, 1978), p.48.

¹⁰W. James, op. cit., p.300.

more traditional religions.¹¹

Let us now advert to the lists of characteristics offered by Stace and Suzuki. According to Stace, both extrovertive and introvertive experience share the following characteristics:

- (1) Sense of objectivity or reality;
- (2) Feeling of blessedness, joy, happiness, satisfaction, etc.;
- (3) Feeling that what is apprehended is holy, sacred or divine;
- (4) Paradoxicality;
- (5) Ineffability;¹²

In addition to these five characteristics, we may recall that the extrovertive experience is differentiated from the introvertive by the former's entailing the proposition that 'all is One' and the latter's being the attainment of a unitary consciousness. The following characteristics are adduced by D.T. Suzuki:

- (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 (coming of a sudden).¹³

Turning firstly to W.T. Stace's list, Pletcher excludes from the list the unifying vision expressed by the formula 'All is One' on the grounds that such a criterion might pre-judge the propositions a mystic might

¹¹S.T. Katz, op. cit., p.49.

¹²W.T. Stace, Mysticism and Philosophy (London: MacMillan, 1961), pp.131-2.

¹³D.T. Suzuki, quoted in ibid., p.20.

utter. We shall also exclude from the list the attainment of the Unitary Consciousness on the grounds, yet to be justified, that it invalidly excludes as mystical some experiences which do have some conceptual content. This leaves us with characteristics one to five. There are a number of reasons why these characteristics are not definitive of mystical experience. Firstly, characteristics one, two and three may be predicated of theistic experience just as appropriately as of mystical experience. Isaiah's experience of Yahweh in the Temple certainly evinces all these qualities as does also Arjuna's vision of Krishna in the Bhagavad-Gītā. Secondly, if these characteristics are taken as necessary ones, then characteristic three may well be taken as excluding certain apparent forms of mystical experience. Thus, for example, it is difficult to see Theravādin experience as fitting such a characteristic for it is difficult to assert that the experience is of the holy, the sacred or the divine, or indeed that anything is apprehended at all. Thirdly, by virtue of the fact that two experiences are paradoxical, we are not thereby entitled to assume that they are the same experience. All we are entitled to assert is that two such experiences are similar to the extent that they are both claimed to be paradoxical. But we may make no further claim than this.

Without putting too fine a point on it, D.T. Suzuki's list comes under similar criticism. Charac-

teristics two to eight and excluding six may all be said to correspond with the experience of Arjuna or Isaiah. While a tone of impersonality is not characteristic of theistic experience, it may be said to be characteristic of certain experiences of the natural world. The classic example occurs in the writings of Pascal:

When I consider how short a time my life lasts — absorbed as it is in the eternity that precedes it and that which follows it — and how small is the space that I occupy or even that I can see, lost as I am in the infinite immensity of spaces which I do not know and which do not know me, I am appalled and wonder that I should be here rather than there.... The eternal silence of these infinite spaces appals me.¹⁴

Moreover, while an impersonal tone is characteristic of much mystical expression, acceptance of this characteristic as a necessary one would necessitate the exclusion of mystical expressions of the love between God and the soul. If such expressions do reflect the phenomenological content of some mystical experience, then an impersonal tone cannot be accepted as a characteristic of mystical experience in general.

In summary therefore, Pletcher's suggestion that such characteristics may be utilised as a means of selecting mystics is not validated. This does not entail that such a set of characteristics does not exist.

¹⁴Blaise Pascal, Pensées in Oeuvres complètes (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Gallimard, Paris, 1957), pp.112-3, quoted by R.C. Zaehner, Drugs, Mysticism and Makebelieve (London: Collins, 1972), p.17.

What it does mean, however, is that the most well known lists of mystical characteristics are not valid as such selection criteria since they both appear to exclude some obvious candidates for inclusion and include some just as obvious candidates for exclusion.

Nevertheless, let us assume for the moment that such a set of characteristics can be developed as the basis upon which to select mystics. And further, while recognising the multifarious and diverse nature of mystical expressions, let us nevertheless consider the question whether propositions can be generated which are representative of the sort which mystics might maintain. If it can be shown that there are such propositions (or even one such proposition) of this sort, then this might provide at least some grounds for an assertion of the unanimity of mystical experience.

Consider the following proposition:

There is an ultimate realness 'beyond' the multiplicity of phenomena which cannot be apprehended by means of the normal modes of perception and conception.¹⁵

I believe that this proposition is broad enough to be a candidate for assent by all mystical traditions. To attempt to make such a proposition less broad by eg. asserting that such 'ultimate realness' is that of a One behind the many or, of the ultimate unity of all multiplicity, would be to risk the rejection of the

¹⁵G.K. Pletcher, op. cit., p.8 offers five such propositions for consideration.

proposition by one or more traditions. To be sure, the proposition is so broad that it may include traditions which are not overtly mystical. This however is irrelevant to the matter in hand. It is only if this proposition can be made sense of that the question of its relationship to any other particular forms of religious expression becomes a pertinent one.

We may begin our consideration of this proposition by examining a comparison to such a proposition made by Terence Penelhum. According to Penelhum, Plato, Aristotle, Spinoza and Leibniz all created metaphysical systems which provide the person who has done the necessary intellectual and imaginative labour with a profound vision by means of which he may be enabled to understand the universe and the place of man in it. All these systems are distinguishable to this extent from the sceptical and anti-metaphysical philosophies of a Hume or a Wittgenstein. He continues,

It would not naturally occur to us to say, as a result of these similarities, that the doctrinal differences between them are merely superficial differences that mask a deeper identity of intent. For the similarities are the similarities that exist between those who accept a certain manner of proceeding in philosophy but get different results from it. If you say that the differences between Spinoza and Leibniz are in some way not real differences, this is a way of rejecting both, not of accepting either.¹⁶

¹⁶T. Penelhum, "Unity and Diversity in the Interpretation of Mysticism" in T. Penelhum and H. Coward (eds.), Mystics and Scholars (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1977), p.73.

The implications for our proposition are reasonably clear. Just as Plato, Aristotle, Spinoza and Leibniz could agree that the 'ultimate realness' of the world cannot be apprehended apart from certain modes of metaphysical thought, so also would the mystical traditions assent to our proposition. However, assent to this proposition cannot disguise the real differences which appear were each mystical tradition to spell out what it meant by 'ultimate realness'. Steven Katz expresses this point most forcibly. He writes,

Henry Suso's 'intoxication with the immeasurable abundance of the Divine House...entirely lost in God [of Christianity]', the Upanishad's 'sat [what is]...is expressed in the word satyam, the Real. It comprises this whole universe: Thou art this whole universe', as well as the Buddhist's 'dimension of nothingness' (ākincannāyatana) all can be included under these broad phenomenological descriptions of 'Reality', yet...it is clear that Suso's Christian God is not equivalent to the Buddhist's 'nothingness', and that the experience of entering into the Divine House is not equivalent to losing oneself in Buddhist 'nothingness'. It becomes apparent on reflection that different metaphysical entities can be described by the same phrases if these phrases are indefinite enough.¹⁷

By way of concluding this discussion of model 1, we may note the following results. Firstly, in so far as we examine mystical utterances in their contexts, there is by no means an eternal unanimity. Secondly, any unanimity can only be bought at the expense of a vicious circularity. Thirdly, the attempt to avoid

¹⁷S. Katz, op. cit., p.51.

such circularity by an appeal to characteristics of the mystical experience as such is futile since the latter err by way of a far too broad inclusiveness or an unjustified exclusiveness. Fourthly, while propositions can be generated which would receive assent by mystical traditions, such propositions effectively mask deep underlying differences between mystical traditions. With respect to the nature of mystical experience, a number of conclusions have been reached. Firstly, we have seen that the argument from unanimity in mystical utterances to the unanimity of mystical experience is an unsound one. Such unanimity of mystical utterance cannot be demonstrated. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, we have seen that it is difficult to define mystical experience in terms of lists of characteristics, and the attempt to determine the essence of mystical experience by paying attention to mystical propositions is fraught with difficulties. The necessity of seeking an alternative means to delineate mystical experience is therefore also foreshadowed in this discussion.

Section III

Let us now turn to consider model three, the view that there is a small number of types of mystical experience which cut across cultural barriers and which each receive their own characteristic modes of expression. During the course of this study we have examined three instances of this model in the writings of Zaehner,

Stace and Otto. We may review some of the conclusions reached in the light of this present discussion of experience and interpretation. With reference to panentheic or extrovertive modes of expression, where these occur in the context of religious systems, we have argued that these are not to be seen as reflections of a particular kind of religious experience. In other words, we have suggested that the leap from mode of expression to experience is unjustified. Rather, the claim has been made that such modes of expression are neither interpretations of extrovertive or of introvertive experience although they may be reinforced by experiences of the latter kind.

In the case of interior mystical experience, with reference to Stace's analysis, we have seen that the unanimity of such experience can only be gained by means of a crude notion of the relationship between experience and interpretation which both ignores contrary evidence supplied by Theravāda Buddhism and Sāṅkhya and invalidly argues that any theistic mystical expression must be explained by the pressures of ecclesiastical orthodoxy.

That the interpretations of theistic mystics need to be taken seriously is certainly a point in favour of Zaehner. At this level, Zaehner is correct in his recognition of the need to recognise the diversity of mystical utterance. Nevertheless, we have argued that the interpretations of theistic mystical experience which

Zaehner examines do not warrant his claim that they are interpretations of theistic mystical experience. Zaehner fails to justifiably bridge the gap between experience and interpretation. Furthermore, even if it were the case that the gap between theistic mystical experience and theistic mystical utterance were bridged, the question remains as to whether we would then need to postulate varieties of theistic mystical experience. The expression of the Mystic Kiss of Christ of St. Bernard is quite alien to St. Benedict's description of the Vision of God and also to St. Gregory's interpretation of it.¹⁸ In fact, Zaehner's inability to take into account the diversity of mystical expression within his category of monistic mystical experience was also the basis of our earlier criticism of Zaehner. The differences in expression between Advaita Vedānta, Sāṅkhya and Theravāda Buddhism were too great for them to be considered as reflections of merely one kind of experience.

In essence, therefore, while the recognition of the possibility of a larger variety of mystical experience is present in Zaehner's writings as against those of Stace and Otto, he does not carry the logic of his methodology to its proper conclusion. That is to say, the methodology of determining the varieties of mystical experiences by an examination of post-experiential

¹⁸See Dom C. Butler, Western Mysticism (London: Constable, 1967), pp.86,98.

interpretation entails the possibility of, not only a variety of mystical experiences within his monistic category but also a variety of such experiences within his theistic category. In effect therefore, Zaehner's methodology does not commit him to model three but rather pushes him towards model four. It is to an examination of this model that we shall now turn.

Section IV

The view that there are as many varieties of mystical experience as there are paradigmatic expressions of it has not, to my knowledge, been offered as a thorough-going theory of the relationship between mystical experience and its interpretation. Nevertheless, it is implicit within a number of analyses of mystical experience to which we shall shortly refer.

For the purposes of our discussion, we may take the following definition of 'paradigmatic expression':

A paradigmatic expression of mystical experience is an expression which refers to the central focus (eg. God, Brahman, Nirvāna), aim (eg. attainment of union with God, attainment of Kaivalya), or nature (eg. that it is objectless, non-dual, identity-in-difference), of the mystical experience.

In other words, model four is the view that there are as many types of mystical experience as there are variously expressed foci, aims or descriptions

of the nature of mystical experience. We can perceive model four in the analyses of G.J. Larson¹⁹, M. Fakhry²⁰ with respect to Indian and Islamic mysticism respectively, in Marg^{han}erita Laski's²¹ analysis of mystical states, and in an exposition of Walter Hilton's The Ladder of Perfection by H.P. Owen.²²

According to Gerald Larson, the procedure by means of which the classification of the varieties of mystical experience is to be determined is examination of the various descriptions of moksha (release) within various Indian traditions. He writes,

In the complex religious traditions of India (Hindu, Jain, Buddhist etc.) considered diachronically or synchronically, attempts to describe the mystical experience invariably involve a discussion of the search for and realization of 'emancipation', 'cessation', 'release', or 'freedom' — expressed most often by the terms mokṣa, mukti, apavarga, kaivalya or nirvāna.²³

In our terms, the paradigmatic expressions of the Indian mystical traditions are those which are intimately connected with the quest for liberation, more

¹⁹G.J. Larson, "Mystical Man in India", in Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, Vol.12, 1973, pp.1-16. S.N. Dasgupta's classification of Hindu mysticism closely parallels Larson's. See S.N. Dasgupta, Hindu Mysticism (New York: Ungar, 1927).

²⁰M. Fakhry, "Three Varieties of Mysticism in Islam", in International Journal for Philosophy of Religion, Vols. 2, 1971, pp.193-207.

²¹M. Laski, Ecstasy (London: Cresset, 1961).

²²H.P. Owen, "Christian Mysticism", in Religious Studies, Vol. 7, 1971, pp.31-42.

²³G.J. Larson, op. cit., p.4.

specifically, those which focus on the issues of free-
dom-from and freedom-for. From an analysis of four sym-
bolic modes of expressing moksha, Larson proposes four
varieties of Indian mystical experience — unitive,
isolative, copulative, and nihilative. A brief resume
of these is in order.

Larson defines mystical experience as

...the intuitive realization and under-
standing that any separation is somehow
a threat or a terror, coupled with the
realization that this threat can be over-
come.²⁴

From this perspective, the unitive mystical experience
is freedom from all differentiation, all multiplicity
and all polarity, and freedom for the bliss of undif-
ferentiated unity. Such experience finds its expres-
sion above all in the Upanishads²⁵ and in the later
Vedāntic philosophical traditions, especially Advaita.
In contrast to unitive experience, Larson argues that
the isolative experience is determined by the neces-
sity of overcoming the apparent ontological unity of
the world. In Larson's terms, it is freedom from the
undifferentiated unity of purusha/prakriti (in
Sāṅkhya-Yoga) or jīva/ajīva (in Jainism) for the re-
alization of the absolute distinction of purusha or
jīva from prakriti or ajīva. This type of mystical

²⁴ Ibid., p.6.

²⁵ See eg. Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upanishad, 2.4.11;
Chāndogya Upanishad, 6.8.7; Māndūkya Upanishad, 7.

experience, he writes, involves

...a constant refusing to be reduced, on the one hand, to the oneness of nature and the world, and on the other hand, to any kind of cosmic self or absolute.²⁶

Nihilative mysticism, represented preeminently by the Buddhist tradition, entails freedom from suffering, old age and death, and freedom for a state of being beyond existence, self, Brahman etc. Essentially, in this type of experience, nothingness or non-existence is the ground upon which the meaning of existence is revealed. By contrast, because of the affirmation of human existence in the world characteristic of the copulative experience, the copulative experience, embodied in the Bhagavad-Gītā,²⁷ in the later traditions of theistic piety (Rāmānuja, Madhva, Caitanya) and in some Tantric traditions, means freedom from meaningless and undisciplined worldly existence, and freedom for responsible yet detached involvement in the world. Larson writes,

Man comes to realize that the fulfilment of himself comes from outside himself, and yet that very encounter from outside turns out to be experientially and theologically the manifestation of man's innermost nature. The two entities or persons in the relationship, though separate and each fully real on one level, become one in the mystical experience.²⁸

²⁶G.J. Larson, op. cit., p.9.

²⁷See eg. Bhagavad-Gītā, 18.65.

²⁸G.J. Larson, op. cit., p.11; cf S.N. Dasgupta, op. cit., p.124.

In the light of this brief exposition, it is apparent that Zaehner's category of theistic mystical experience is equivalent to Larson's category of copulative mystic experience and that Zaehner's monistic category is extended by Larson into the three varieties of unitive, nihilative and isolative. In contrast to both Larson and Zaehner, Fakhry's utilisation of model four generates, as we shall shortly see, a type of mystical experience not in evidence in either Zaehner's or Larson's categories.

As his criterion for discerning varieties of mysticism in Islam,²⁹ Majid Fakhry draws a distinction between the mystical experience and the 'object' of such experience. It is his contention that the failure to discriminate between different possible objects of mystical experience has led to philosophical confusion. His main task therefore is to resolve the question whether the object sought in all forms of mysticism is the same one or different kinds of objects. By means of the above-mentioned criterion, Fakhry argues that there are three varieties of mysticism in Islam, namely, the philosophical, the visionary and the unitary. He summarises these the following way:

The Divine (however it may be conceived) is the object of the second and the third variety, but not of the first. The apprehension or vision of this Divine is

²⁹For a review of various approaches to the study of Islamic mysticism, see D.P. Brewster, "The Study of Sufism", in Religion, Vol.6, 1976, pp.31-47.

the purpose of the second, whereas union or identification with the Divine is the goal of the third;... A subordinate entity lying halfway between God and man is the object of the first, and theoretical communication or 'conjunction' with the object is its goal.³⁰

According to Fakhry, philosophical mysticism is associated with three principle figures — al-Fārābi, Ibn Sīnā, and Ibn Bājja. Based on the neo-Platonism of Plotinus and Proclus,³¹ reinforced by the Aristotelian notion of an unmoved Mover, and determined by the infinite difference between God and man necessitated by Quranic teaching, the Muslim philosophical mystics forged into one identity the Aristotelian, Plotinian and Quranic deities. Such an identification led to the interposing of a series of ten intermediaries or emanations, between the world and the Godhead, the tenth of which dominates and superintends the world of generation and corruption and is the major focus of Muslim philosophical mysticism.³² Of conjunc-

³⁰ M. Fakhry, op. cit., p.194.

³¹ Fakhry argues that the neo-Aristotelian Alexander of Aphrodisias (c.205 A.D.) is not the source of this mysticism. Such a viewpoint is adopted by Ph. Merlan, Monopsychism, Mysticism, Metaconsciousness (The Hague: Brill, 1963), pp.18 ff. A. Altmann while recognising Alexander as a possible source, nevertheless argues for Plotinus as the most likely provenance of this form of mysticism. He argues that the term for 'conjunction' (ittisāl) reflects the term sunaptein in the Enneads. See A. Altmann, Studies in Religious Philosophy and Mysticism (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), pp.103-4, and Enneads, VI.9.8.

³² See M. Fakhry, op. cit., p.197; cf also M. Fakhry A History of Islamic Philosophy (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), pp.137-40 and p.174 for the process of emanation in al-Fārābi and Ibn Sīnā respectively.

tion with this tenth emanation, the Active Intellect, Fakhry writes,

The whole process of human cognition is described in terms of a progression from the lowest condition of potentiality to that of full actualisation by means of 'conjunction' or contact (ittisāl) with this supermundane agency, which is the principal link between man and God. It is in this conjunction that the realization of man's intellectual potentialities, as well as his moral and spiritual vocation, consist.³³

Fakhry points out that there is a certain vacillation in the Muslim neo-Platonists as to the ultimacy of this state of conjunction. Both Ibn Sīnā and Ibn Bājjah suggest, on occasion, that conjunction may be transcended by union with God. Nevertheless, he indicates that the intellectual humanism characteristic of philosophical mysticism failed to appeal to the adepts of practical mysticism (the Sūfis) as well as to the theologians and the masses at large. For this reason, the visionary and unitary mystics, proclaiming as they did the apprehension of or union with the Deity, were of far more significance.

We need not devote much space to an exposition of the visionary and unitary mystical experiences for they are in effect Islamic instances of Zaehner's theistic category in the one case, and closely parallel to Larson's unitive experience in the other. Suffice it

³³ Ibid., p.198; cf also M. Fakhry, A History of Islamic Philosophy (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), p.139.

to say therefore, that the two principal representatives of visionary mysticism are al-Junayd and al-Ghazālī and the most typical representatives of unitary mysticism are al-Bastāmi and al-Hallaj. While in the case of the former pair, an ultimate distinction between man and God is maintained, for the latter pair, the complete identity of the self and God is asserted.

In summary, therefore, the paradigmatic expressions of philosophical mysticism, concerned as they are with a different focus to those expressions of unitary and visionary experience, are the means by which Fakhry determines that philosophical mystical experience is a separate variety within the Islamic tradition. By contrast, the determination that unitary and visionary paradigmatic expressions reflect different types of mystical experience arises from a distinction made, not between their respective objects, but rather between the variant expressions of the nature of such experiences.

Section V

Before proceeding to the accounts offered by Laski and Owen, it may be as well to outline a number of problems inherent in this model. The major problem with this model is its major assumption. The problem lies in the fact that proponents of the model assume that paradigmatic expressions do reflect the actual phenomenology of the purported varieties of mystical experience. This assumption is not justified by the

proponents of this model and indeed, it is not easy to see how paradigmatic expressions can be guaranteed to be 'verbal images' of mystical experiences. To this extent therefore, model four is circular for, in order to argue from a paradigmatic expression to a particular form of mystical experience, the question as to the relationship between paradigmatic expression and the phenomenological content of the mystical experience is begged.

Furthermore, to look upon the mystic as a mirror who accurately reflects the contents of his experience is to totally ignore the possible distortions of the experience in the mystic's interpretation. In short, model four does not take into account the mystic's own religious environment as a major factor in any expression of mystical experience.³⁴ Thus, model four, as also models one and three, fails to bridge the gap between experience and interpretation.

A further consideration is worthy of mention and this relates to the notion of the ineffability of the mystical experience. The question of the meaning of "ineffability" with reference to mystical experience is a most bedevilling one and therefore a number of

³⁴Although Fakhry ventures it as a possibility that the differences in paradigmatic expression between visionary and unitary mysticism may be due to the influences of the Islamic doctrinal scheme and not to the varying content of the mystical experience. See ibid., p.207.

clarificatory points are necessary. Firstly, I do not wish to suggest that I support a position of radical ineffability which would assent to the proposition that mystics fail absolutely to communicate their experiences to non-mystics. There are a number of problems with such a position. Firstly, such a proposition is non-sensical. For if it is impossible for mystics to communicate their experiences to non-mystics, then there are no criteria by means of which we can determine who are mystics and who are not. The only possible commonality would reside in the fact that such experiences are radically ineffable. However, as we have seen earlier in this chapter, ineffability is not the exclusive prerogative of mystical experience and cannot be used as the sole determining criterion of such experience. Secondly, I believe that if any individual were to have an experience in which his personal ego was dissolved by melting into an ocean of undifferentiatedness, and which, furthermore, gave him a sense of utter peace and tranquillity, he could be fairly certain that he had experienced for himself that which is alluded to in a variety of mystical traditions. Thirdly, even where mystical experience is acknowledged as difficult of description this does not entail that it is impossible to communicate. P.G. Moore writes,

...if mystics are using language at all responsibly then even what they say about the indescribable types or aspects of experience may at least serve to define them

in relation to a known class of experiences. Thus when St. John of the Cross calls ineffable the experience of 'the touch of the substance of God in the substance of the soul', he is none the less communicating something of the experience by defining it in terms of categories 'substance', 'touch', and so on.³⁵

Our second point of clarification arises from this. It is to the effect that it is necessary to distinguish three basic categories of mystical writings: (i) autobiographical accounts of mystical experiences; (ii) accounts, not necessarily autobiographical, in which mystical experience is described in generalised and abstract terms; (iii) accounts referring to a mystical object or reality which do not refer, unless very obliquely, to mystical experience itself. P.G. Moore dubs these three categories of mystical writings first-order, second-order and third-order categories respectively.³⁶ According to him, a large proportion of statements cited in support of radical ineffability come from the third-order

³⁵ P.G. Moore, "Mystical Experience, Mystical Doctrine, Mystical Technique", in S.T. Katz (ed.), op. cit., p.105.

³⁶ I am indebted to P.G. Moore, ibid., p.103, for this distinction. Moore's distinction between third-order reports and the other two categories is somewhat parallel to B.K. Matilal's distinction between reports of the ineffability of the object and ineffability of the experience. See B.K. Matilal, "Mysticism and Reality: Ineffability" in Journal of Indian Philosophy, Vol.3, 1975, pp.217-252. 'First order accounts' is analogous to our earlier enunciated autobiographical principle.

category.³⁷ In contrast to third-order statements which are comprehensive and uncompromising in their reference, Moore maintains that first and second-order statements are usually partial and qualified in their reference. Thus, he quotes St. Teresa of Avila referring to one of the lower stages of the contemplative experience as "easily understood by anyone to whom Our Lord has granted it, but anyone else cannot fail to need a great many words and comparisons."³⁸ There is here no recognition of the impossibility of communicating to the non-mystic, but rather of the necessity to explain and illuminate as copiously as is possible. However, of a putatively higher stage of her experience, St. Teresa writes,

I do not know if I have conveyed any impression of the nature of rapture: to give a full idea of it, as I have said, is impossible.³⁹

Moore argues that if, in some contexts, mystics say

³⁷ Although Moore offers no examples of radical ineffability in third-order statements, the following references would be representative: Gregory Nazianzus, The Second Theological Oration, in H. Ware and P. Schaff (eds.), A Select Library of Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers (Oxford: Parker & Co., 1894), Vol.VII, p.294; Tao te Ching, Ch.1, and cf A. Waley, The Way and Its Power (New York: Grove Press, 1958), pp.142-3; Pseudo-Dionysius, The Mystical Theology, Ch.5; Enneads, 5.3.13 and cf J.M. Rist, Eros and Psyche (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964), pp.69-70. The limiting case of radical ineffability would be the Mādhyamika School of the Mahāyāna.

³⁸ E. Allison Peers (ed.), The Complete Works of St. Teresa of Jesus (London: 1964), Vol.1, p.327, quoted by P.G. Moore, op. cit., p.104.

³⁹ Ibid., Vol.2, p.292, quoted in ibid., p.104.

that an experience is describable, and in others, that it is beyond description, then this is not evidence of uncertainty or inconsistency but rather reflects the fact that a different stage or aspect of the experience is being referred to.⁴⁰

What is the implication of the notion of 'ineffability' for our discussion? On the one hand, 'ineffability' does not necessitate the absolute impossibility of arguing from a paradigmatic expression of mystical experience to a claim about the nature of that experience. Nevertheless, our above discussion indicates that the possibility of a gap between the nature of mystical experience and its expression needs to be taken into account. Thus, if model four is to be justified, not only does it need to examine possible extra-experiential influences upon mystical interpretations (and this applies for all categories of mystical writings), but also it needs to examine the possibility that there is a "looseness-of-fit" between mystical experience and its expression, and a complex interplay between the experience or the apprehended "Reality" and the language, enmeshed as it is within our common stream of consciousness, which must perforce express that experience or that "Reality". Evelyn Underhill recognises both of these necessities. She writes, with reference to

⁴⁰I find a similar example of such development in a passage from the autobiography of al-Ghazālī. See W. James, op. cit., pp.317-8.

mystical symbolism,

The mind must employ some device of the kind if its transcendental perceptions — wholly unrelated as they are to the phenomena with which intellect is able to deal — are even to be grasped by the surface consciousness.... The nature of this [symbolic] garment will be largely conditioned by his [the mystic's] temperament...and also by his theological education and environment.⁴¹

The problems of model four which we have just indicated would certainly appear to rule out of court the methodological procedure of Marguerita Laski in her book Ecstasy.⁴² She is concerned primarily with what she calls spontaneous and momentary 'intensity ecstasy' rather than with 'withdrawal ecstasy', the transic nature of which arises from the pursuit of a contemplative method. As her main methodological tool she adopts a philological approach and bases her analysis upon the principles that "some images are appropriate to one experience, some to another", and that

common language derives from common experience rather than from deliberate or unconscious borrowing with the intention of faking or elaborating experience.⁴³

By means of this methodology, she distinguishes four main varieties of mystical state within the category of 'intensity ecstasy' — adamic, knowledge, knowledge-contact and union ecstasy. In the light of our

⁴¹E. Underhill, Mysticism (London: Methuen, 1930), pp.78-9.

⁴²M. Laski, Ecstasy (London: Cresset, 1961).

⁴³Ibid., p.15.

critique of model four, the following criticism of her approach is most apt. According to P.G. Moore, the truth of her guiding principles

...does not warrant the rigid and atomistic view of the relationship between language and experience which Laski appears to hold in tending to treat the different types or features of linguistic expression as infallible criteria for isolating different types and features of mystical experience.⁴⁴

Our final instance of a model four approach occurs in an exposition of Walter Hilton's The Ladder of Perfection by H.P. Owen, in a context in which Owen criticises Smart's thesis of the phenomenological unity of mysticism. Above all, Owen is concerned to criticise Smart's distinction between experience and interpretation. He argues that the close interweaving of dogma and mysticism evident in Hilton's work and in the writings of other Christian mystics counts decisively against Smart's claim that there is an experiential equality between all mystical experiences. Owen maintains that if the Christian elements are abstracted from Hilton's book nothing remains since

The whole life of contemplation that he describes is indissolubly linked to belief in Christian doctrines, in the authority of the Church, in the objective efficacy of the sacraments, and in the necessity of acquiring the Christian virtues.⁴⁵

⁴⁴P.G. Moore, "Recent Studies of Mysticism", in Religion, Vol.3, 1973, p.151.

⁴⁵H.P. Owen, "Christian Mysticism" in Religious Studies, Vol.7, 1971, pp.36-7. There is an intimation, which remains undeveloped, of model five in this passage.

He continues,

Throughout the whole of Hilton's book there is not the slightest hint of any gap between experience and interpretation, contemplation and dogma, the individual mystic and the mass of non-mystical Christians.⁴⁶

Yet, in spite of the above, Owen nevertheless admits that some parts of The Ladder of Perfection when considered in isolation are applicable to Advaitin mysticism. Thus, while on the one hand, one can appreciate Owen's assertion of the inseparability of experience and interpretation and thereby the implication that the interpretation does reflect the actual experience, yet, on the other hand, that there are not only passages with such a low degree of theistic ramification that they are compatible with Advaitin mysticism, but also passages with a markedly high degree of Christian ramification, would appear to be an argument for Smart's thesis as much as it is an argument against it.

The difficulties involved in trying to resolve the conflict between proponents of a model four and a model two (ie. Smartian) approach may be exemplified by considering a passage from The Ladder of Perfection:

The third degree of contemplation, which is the highest attainable in this life consists of both knowledge and love; that is, in knowing God and loving him perfectly. This is achieved when the soul is restored to the likeness of Jesus and filled with all virtues. It is then endowed with grace, detached from all earthly and carnal affections, and from all unprofitable thoughts

⁴⁶Ibid., p.37.

and considerations of created things, and is caught up out of its bodily senses. The grace of God then illumines the mind to see all truth — that is, God — and spiritual things in him with a soft, sweet, burning love. So perfectly is this effected that for a while the soul becomes united to God in an ecstasy of love, and is conformed to the likeness of the Trinity.... Whenever a soul is united to God in this ecstasy of love, then God and the soul are no longer two but one: not indeed in nature, but in spirit. In this union a true marriage is made between God and the soul which shall never be broken.⁴⁷

Certainly it can be argued that the close interpenetration of experience and dogma in this passage is quite apparent. Thus, the soul is restored to the likeness of Jesus, endowed with grace, and conformed to the likeness of the Trinity in an ecstasy of love etc. By contrast, the statements that the soul is "detached from all earthly and carnal affections", "caught up out of its bodily senses", and "united to God" so that "God and the soul are no longer two but one" are applicable to Advaitin mysticism. Owen argues that

the context shows that both the conceptual meaning and the experiential reference of these expressions are exclusively theistic and Christo-centric.⁴⁸

But, this is not sufficient for it is merely to beg the question as to the grounds of the context ie. that it is experience-based and not due to extra-experiential and post-experiential ramification. Let us

⁴⁷Quoted in ibid., pp.31-2.

⁴⁸Ibid., p.37.

consider the penultimate sentence of the above-quoted passage and ask why a distinction is made between God and the soul in nature while their identity in spirit is allowed. It is plausible to suggest, as Smart might, that the mystic is striving to assert the undifferentiated nature of the mystical experience and thereby wishes to evince the experiential identity of God and the soul, and yet is constrained by a doctrinal tradition which demands their ontological separateness. From this perspective, the expression 'not indeed in nature, but in spirit' is the compromise necessitated by the demands of the mystical experience and doctrinal orthodoxy. In short, therefore, there is a plausibility about both Owen's and Smart's positions. Criteria for determining which position is the more plausible are not however so easily discovered. Exegesis of mystical texts cannot help us here, for such exegesis is itself dependent upon presuppositions as to the relationship of mystical experience and its interpretation.

Discussion of a possible Smartian interpretation of the above passage leads us to a discussion of model two of which two representative proponents are Smart and Radhakrishnan. We have seen earlier in this study that Radhakrishnan's utilisation of this model suffers from being committed to a normative stance, specifically, to the absolutism of the neo-Vedāntin school. Smart certainly adopts a neutral stance with respect to the relationship of mystical experience to religious

doctrines in the sense that while certain forms of religious doctrine (eg. those of Theravāda Buddhism or Sāṅkhya) have a greater claim to congruence with mystical experience than other forms (eg. Judaism or orthodox Islam), such other forms may have a greater claim to congruence with numinous experience. Nevertheless, while Smart's proposal is a plausible alternative to models three and four, there is nothing inexorably persuasive about it unless one deifies the Ockhamistic principle of parsimony.

Therefore, as a theistic variation upon model two, and as an interesting contrast to Owen's analysis, we shall briefly glance at Evelyn Underhill's analysis of mystical experience.⁴⁹ We have already referred to Underhill's claim that there is a subtle interplay between experience and interpretation. Further to this, she maintains that mystics have recourse to two main forms of symbolic expression — the transcendent-metaphysical and the intimate-personal. She writes,

The metaphysical mystic for whom the Absolute is impersonal and transcendent, describes his final attainment of the Absolute as deification, or the utter transmutation of the self in God.... The mystic for whom intimate and personal communion has been the mode under which he best apprehended

⁴⁹ A number of other theistic variations upon model two may be discerned in the current literature. See eg. A.J. Arberry, Sufism (London: Allen & Unwin, 1950), p.5; R.A. Nicholson, The Mystics of Islam (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), p.2: there is also an indication of it in M. Smith, The Way of the Mystics (London: Sheldon Press, 1976), pp.2-8.

Reality, speaks of the consummation of this communion, its perfect and permanent form, as the Spiritual Marriage of his soul with God. Obviously, both these terms are but the self's guesses concerning the intrinsic character of a state which it has felt in its wholeness rather than analysed.⁵⁰

It appears from this passage that Underhill accepts that there is one form of mystical experience⁵¹ and two different ways of describing that experience.⁵² Furthermore, she maintains that both descriptions are valid ones. Of the metaphysical mode of expression, she writes,

Whilst the more clear-sighted are careful to qualify it in a sense which excludes pantheistic interpretations, and rebut the accusation that extreme mystics preach the annihilation of the self and regard themselves as co-equal with the Deity, they leave us in no doubt that it answers to a definite and normal experience of many souls who attain high levels of spiritual vitality. Its terms are chiefly used by those mystics by whom Reality is apprehended as a state or place rather than a person.⁵³

However, Underhill leaves us in no doubt that she

⁵⁰E. Underhill, Mysticism (London: Methuen, 1930), p.415.

⁵¹Cf also ibid., p.96, 78-9, 128-9.

⁵²Annemarie Schimmel also recognises both of these modes of description which she terms the mysticism of Infinity and the mysticism of Personality. Interestingly, in contrast to Underhill, she argues that there are two corresponding forms of experience thereby evincing her commitment to a model four approach. See A. Schimmel, Mystical Dimensions of Islam (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975), pp.5-6.

⁵³E. Underhill, op. cit., p.419.

believes that the intimate-personal description is fuller and more complete as a description of mystical experience. Thus, she claims that

...even the most 'transcendental' mystic is constantly compelled to fall back on the language of love in the endeavour to express the content of his metaphysical raptures: and forced in the end to acknowledge that the perfect union of Lover and Beloved cannot be suggested in the precise and arid terms of religious philosophy.⁵⁴

Ninian Smart wishes to argue that Underhill has failed to give any reasons why one mystic will use a "metaphysical" description and another will use a "personal" description.⁵⁵ In fact, Underhill does give a reason why metaphysical mystics revert to personal terms, a reason which supports one of Smart's central theses and delineates her position quite clearly from that of Owen. She writes,

In the last resort, the doctrine of the Incarnation is the only safeguard of the mystics against the pantheism to which they always tend. The Unconditioned Absolute, so soon as it alone becomes the object of their contemplation, is apt to be merely conceived as Divine Essence; the idea of Personality evaporates. The union of the soul with God is then thought of in terms of absorption. The distinction between Creator and creature is obliterated and loving communion is at an end. This is probably the reason why many of the greatest contemplatives...have found that deliberate meditation upon the humanity of Christ...was a necessity if they were to retain a healthy and well-balanced

⁵⁴ Ibid., p.425.

⁵⁵ N. Smart, Reasons and Faiths (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958), p.143.

inner life.⁵⁶

Underhill, therefore, in agreement with Smart and in contradistinction to Owen, maintains that personalist descriptions of mystical experience are dependent upon extra-experiential factors, that is, in Smartian terms, the necessity for Christian mystics to keep the numinous strand predominant over the mystical strand.

Section VI

In the course of this chapter, we have examined four of the five models of the relationship between mystical experience and its interpretation outlined at its beginning. It has been our contention that none of these models are to be preferred. While arguments may be mounted to the effect that one has a greater degree of plausibility than another, such arguments have been found to be unpersuasive. Thus, models three and four appear to give a better account of the variety of mystical utterance as against models one or two. On the other hand, model two in its Smartian form and in conjunction with its emphasis on the numinous strand is able to both recognise the complexity of religious expressions and combine these with a parsimonious account

⁵⁶E. Underhill, op. cit., pp.120-1. With respect to the Incarnation though, I think it could be plausibly argued that it is the union of the divine and human in Christ which foreshadows the interpretation of mystic union as the commingling of the divine and the human. See eg. V. Lossky, The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church (Cambridge: Clarke & Co., 1957), p.10.

of religious experience. Nevertheless, all these models finally fail to persuade us that they have bridged the 'ineffability gap' between experience and interpretation. Crucial to this whole study therefore is the delineation of a means whereby this gap might be, if not bridged, then at least narrowed and this shall be our concern in the next chapter when we examine model five.

CHAPTER VII

THE VARIETIES OF MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE: A PHILOSOPHICAL PROLEGOMENON

Synopsis

Section I.

The question of theistic mystical experience. N. Pike's attempt to delineate phenomenologically theistic mystical experience. Exemplified in James and van Ruysbroeck's The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage. Criticism of the passage from James as exemplifying theistic mystical experience. The passage from van Ruysbroeck as a good example of the interpretation of a possibly theistic mystical experience. Smart's remarks upon this passage. Although there are problems with Smart's account, the conflict between Smart and Pike is an exegetical one. Pike's methodological points: The recognition that there are phenomenologically theistic mystical experiences does not entail ontological commitment; the nature of mystical experience as determined by prior beliefs. The possible points at which interpretation may occur: Retrospective, reflexive and incorporated interpretation. Outline of model five: that there are as many varieties of mystical experience as

there are incorporated interpretations of it.

Section II.

Model five avoids the circularity of model four: 'Paradigmatic symbols' enter into the structure and content of the experience itself. B. Garside's outline of model five: The distinction of experience and interpretation as nugatory. S. Katz's model five approach: The forms of consciousness brought to the experience set the parameters of the experience. Exemplified in Jewish mystical experience. A note on the role of the teacher in mystical traditions. The advantages of model five. Some exegetical implications.

Section III.

The conflict between models two and five. Smart's recognition of a model five approach. He sees no conflict between models two and five. Smart's medical analogy does not resolve the conflict. Nevertheless, it offers a key towards the resolution of the conflict: The concept of 'experiencing-as'. An outline of Wittgenstein's concept of 'seeing-as'. This leads to the notion that all mystical 'sensations' are the same, but the mystical 'perceptions' due to incorporated interpretations vary. Reflexive interpretation examined: 'seeing' a mystical experience as a union with God. In theistic mystical experience, interpretation of a more basic datum of experience occurs.

Section IV.

The core-datum in the cases of the duck-rabbit etc: The configuration of lines. The core-datum in the dream of the blue ox: A dream-state without content. The core-datum in mystical experience: a contentless state in which there is no subject-object polarity. Four theses are suggested by our discussion. The first thesis: The contentless state is attained by mystics; the state upon which Smart, Stace and Otto base their definitions of mystical experience. Probably attained in the highest stages of contemplation in Theravāda, Sāṅkhya-Yoga and Plotinus. Incorporated interpretation plays a crucial role in those content-filled states prior to the attainment of the contentless state. The necessity of taking into account the stages of mystical experience: The four formless jhānas as an example. The recognition of stages in mystical experience supports thesis two: The contentless state is the limiting case of mystical experience; the Theravādin jhānas considered again: Supports the third thesis; the contemplative path, in some traditions, leads to the transcending of content-filled states, and the attainment of the 'pure' state. The 'pure' state is not attained in all traditions: Eg. Jewish mysticism; Some possible exceptions to this noted; eg. Some forms of Christian mysticism. Examples from St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross necessitate caution with respect to whole-hearted acceptance of model five. Theses one, two and three suggested in St.

John of the Cross. Thesis four: The pure mystical experience is most often attained in the context of the right set of doctrines. Thus, it would not be as evident in theistic traditions: Mysticism does not direct these traditions. The pure state is to be expected in those traditions in which the mystic is the normative figure.

Section V.

The forms of religious experience isolated: Theistic experiences, the varieties of content-filled mystical experiences, the 'pure' contentless mystical experience. Criticism of Radhakrishnan, Stace, Zaehner, Smart and Otto from the perspective of this much more complex phenomenology of religious experience. The resolution of conflicting truth claims is also immeasurably more complex. Further, the results of our study indicate its conceptual impossibility: The notion of incorporated interpretation renders the quest for the essence of mystical experience an impossible one. The notion of 'pure' mystical experience is not an exception to this: 'Pure' intended only in a phenomenological sense; theistic experience would still need to be taken into account. Resolution of conflicting truth claims needs to be conducted on extra-experiential grounds.

CHAPTER VII

THE VARIETIES OF MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE: A PHILOSOPHICAL PROLEGOMENON

Section I

During the course of this study, one particular question has periodically arisen and just as periodically been postponed for later discussion. This has been the question of firstly, the possibility of, and therefore secondly, the question of the occurrence of mystical experience of a theistic kind. The necessity of such a postponement has perhaps been demonstrated by our discussion in the last chapter. In short, rejection of the possibility of and therefore the occurrence of such experience cannot be said to have been persuasively demonstrated by Radhakrishnan, Smart, or Stace. On the other hand, Zaehner and a number of proponents of model four have attempted to demonstrate that such theistic mystical experiences do occur. Nevertheless, because it has been argued that the extrapolation from a particular form of mystical utterance to its being the reflection of a particular form of mystical experience is fraught with a number of problems, it has not been demonstrated that such experiences occur although it must be conceded that such analyses reinforce the possibility of their occurrence.

In this chapter, we shall be particularly concerned with this question. Firstly, we shall be concerned with the possibility of its occurrence, and then, by an analysis of model five, as adumbrated in the first section of the last chapter, with its actual occurrence. By means of a number of criticisms of model five, we shall also hope to demonstrate the possibility of discriminating between different states or levels of mystical experience. We shall begin our discussion by considering a critique of Smart's thesis of the phenomenological identity of mystical experience offered by Nelson Pike.

In an important reply to Ninian Smart's "Mystical Experience"¹ Nelson Pike sets out to argue that it is possible to delineate experiences which are phenomenologically theistic, experiences which may minimally be said to be 'self in contact with another' and maximally 'the union of the soul with God.' In support of his thesis, Pike examines two passages purportedly reporting such mystical experiences, the first from James' Varieties of Religious Experience, the second from Jan van Ruysbroeck's The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage.

The first of these passages reads as follows:

There was not a mere consciousness of something there, but fused in the central happiness of it, a startling awareness of some ineffable good. Not vague either, not like

¹N. Smart, "Mystical Experience" in W.H. Capitan & D.D. Merrill (eds.), Art, Mind and Religion (Pennsylvania: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1965). Smart's paper is substantially the same as that published in Religious Studies, Vol.i, 1965, pp.75-87.

the emotional effect of some poem, or scene or blossom, of music, but the sure knowledge of the close presence of a sort of mighty person, and after it went, the memory persisted as the one perception of reality. Everything else might be a dream, but not that.²

Pike argues that in this passage, the reporter seems to be clearly saying that the experience was (phenomenologically) one in which he was aware of another. Hence, he maintains,

...the description of the experience as 'self in contact with God' mentions nothing other than the explicit content of the experience.³

The crucial problem with utilising the above account as indicative of mystical experience is the fact that the experience of which it is expressive cannot be said to be clearly mystical at all. It may appear from this comment that I have some secret knowledge, hitherto undisclosed, of the necessary features of mystical experience. In order to allay this appearance, a number of points may be apposite. Firstly, therefore, while James remarks that it would not be unnatural to deem it as a theistic experience, it is not delineated by James as a mystical one, nor does the recipient deem it as such.⁴ Secondly, the recipient himself does not interpret the experience theistically.⁵ Thus phenomenologic-

²W. James, The Varieties of Religious Experience (New York: MacMillan, 1961), p.64, quoted by N. Pike, "Comments", in ibid., p.146.

³N. Pike, "Comments", in ibid., p.146.

⁴W. James, op. cit., p.64.

⁵Ibid., p.64.

ally, it ought not to be viewed as 'the union of the soul with God'. Thirdly, it is even phenomenologically a slim candidate for 'self in contact with another.' There is certainly a sense of the self aware of the presence of another but there is no implication of contact with another in the Plotinian sense of 'contact with the One.'⁶ This point is further reinforced by the fact that James reports that the same person has been subject to other experiences of the awareness of another in which the latter assumes an evil, if not demonic form.⁷ Fourthly, if we do consider the experience as a theistic experience, then it bears closer analogies to those experiences which we have delineated earlier in this study as theistic experiences than to those passages putatively expressive of theistic mystical experience. In his reply to Pike, Smart remarks,

I would not deny that, in the William James case cited by Mr. Pike, the sense of 'another' is part of the phenomenology. Indeed it is characteristic of prophetism, bhakti, and their analogues to involve a 'numinous' type of experience in which a gap, so to say, exists between the other and the worshipper.⁸

While therefore the case is dubious with respect to Pike's first example, the passage from The Adornment of

⁶'Contact with the One' is one of Plotinus's favourite metaphors for mystical union with the One. See eg. Enneads 6.9.11, cf also, J.M. Rist, The Road to Reality (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), p.198.

⁷W. James, op. cit., pp.63-4.

⁸N. Smart, "Rejoinders" in W.H. Capitan & D.D. Merrill (eds.), op. cit., p.156.

The Spiritual Marriage is much more clearly a mystical utterance. Pike quotes van Ruysbroeck to this effect:

And the bare uplifted memory feels itself enwrapped and established in an abysmal Absence of Image. And thereby the created image is united above reason in a threefold way with its Eternal Image, which is the origin of its being and its life; and this origin is preserved and possessed, essentially and eternally, through a simple seeing in an imageless void; and so a man is lifted up above reason in a threefold manner into the Unity, and in a onefold manner into the Trinity. Yet the creature does not become God, for the union takes place in God through grace and our homeward-turning love: and therefore the creature in its inward contemplation feels a distinction and an otherness between itself and God.... There [in the mystic state] all is full and overflowing, for the spirit feels itself to be one truth and one richness and one unit with God. Yet even here there is an essential tending toward, and therein is an essential distinction between the being of the soul and the Being of God; and this is the highest and finest distinction which we are able to feel.⁹

I have quoted this passage in extenso because I believe it to be a particularly clear example of a first-order mystical text outlining the nature of a mystical experience. Moreover, there is an overt claim that at the height of mystical union with God, there is nonetheless a recognition of the ultimate separateness of God and the Soul. The assertion that, even in oneness, there is 'tending toward' separateness does appear to be a claim reflecting the experience itself and not necessitated by an extra-experiential doctrine. Indeed, it is clearly stated that the creature feels a distinction between itself and God.

⁹Quoted by N. Pike, "Comments" in Ibid., p.148.

Let us, however, turn to Smart's remarks upon this passage. He argues firstly, that the passage "for the Spirit feels itself to be one truth and one richness and one unit with God" is evidence that Ruysbroeck's experience is one of undifferentiated unity; and secondly, that those passages which speak of the difference of the soul and God do not relate to the pinnacle of mystical experience but are expressive of an immediate awareness of the past, before union eventuated, and an immediate anticipation of the cessation of union. Thus, of the section dealing with the 'tending toward', he writes,

Now it is characteristic of contemplative experience that the 'subject-object' distinction does not apply — it is not like being here and seeing a flower over there, etc. On the other hand, in so far as there is an awareness on the part of the contemplative of where he has come from in arriving at the mystical experience, there is a sense of 'tending toward'.... The point can be paralleled very clearly in the Buddhist jhānas or stages of contemplation, where the sense of achievement in arriving at the higher contemplative state has to be set aside; ie., one has to go on until there is no awareness of 'tending toward', as there is no awareness of the environment, etc.¹⁰

Now I would not wish to deny that in Buddhism at the attainment of the highest mystical state, there is no sense of 'tending toward'. Nor would I deny that the same is applicable in some Christian mystics, eg.

¹⁰N. Smart, "Rejoinders" in ibid., p.157.

St. John of the Cross.¹¹ However, to argue, as Smart appears to do, that because there is no sense of 'tending toward' in Buddhism, there is no sense of 'tending toward' in the experience of van Ruysbroeck is merely to beg the question as to the nature of the experiences, ie. to assume that they are to be treated as phenomenologically identical. Indeed, unless one were to come to the passage from van Ruysbroeck with a predilection in favour of the Smartian thesis, the far more probable exegesis of the passage would be to see it as reflective, not of an experience of undifferentiated unity, but rather of the unity of the soul and God.

To be sure, the conflict between Smart and Pike is very much an exegetical one, and although the passage from van Ruysbroeck is a much better contender as a reflection of theistic mystical experience than the passage from Walter Hilton utilised by Owen, it would be unwise to assert that our exegesis of this text is obviously preferable to Smart's. Nevertheless, Pike does make several methodological points which may lead us towards a clarification, if not a resolution of such conflicts.

¹¹See eg. B. Gibbs, "Mysticism and the Soul" in Monist, Vol.59, 1976, p.537. He writes,

"...St. John thinks the contemplative himself may fail to be aware that he is contemplating and may think that in the time of contemplation he is doing nothing at all.... The purest contemplation is received without the soul's being fully conscious of it."

The first of these is somewhat negative. It is to the effect that the recognition that an experience is phenomenologically one of the soul in union with God does not entail a commitment to a claim about the existence of God. Although, in general, such existence claims may be generated by or reinforced by such experiences, there is nothing contradictory about affirming the experience as one in which the recipient felt himself to be unified with God and then denying the existence of God. Pike claims, quite correctly, that this is to do no more than to acknowledge the experience as hallucinatory. He remarks,

As long as the description is offered as a purely phenomenological account of the content of the experience, it involves no ontological commitment on the part of the one offering the description.¹²

Of course, to the extent that any purely phenomenological account is ramified by extra-experiential doctrines, the truth of which are accepted by the interpreter, then to that extent also ontological commitment may be present. As we have seen clearly in an earlier chapter, Zaehner does tend to slide from phenomenological analysis to ontological commitment. Nevertheless, Pike's point that the recognition that there can be phenomenologically theistic mystical experiences does not necessitate ontological commitment remains an important one. The recognition of such experiences does not thereby invalidate the neutrality of our account.

¹²N. Pike, "Comments", in W.H. Capitan and D.D. Merrill (eds), op. cit., p.147.

Pike's second point is of great significance and I shall therefore quote it in full. Of the reporter of the experience detailed by James, he writes,

Let us suppose that he was a committed Christian prior to his experience. One might hold that the fact that he experienced himself in contact with a good and mighty person was in some way determined by his prior theological beliefs. Had he not believed in the existence of God, he would not have experienced himself in contact with such a person. Let us grant this. The description of the experience as 'self in contact with God' would still be a purely phenomenological description. Prior to his dream, my son believed that Paul Bunyan's ox was blue. As a consequence, he dreamed of himself riding on a blue ox. But that the dream-ox was experienced as blue is part of the phenomenological description of that dream. It is not an item my son incorporated into the description of the dream after waking as a consequence of his belief that the ox was blue.¹³

There are a number of issues implicit within this passage which merit further development. Firstly, there is the question of the possible points at which interpretation may occur. There are three possibilities: After the experience (through reflection upon it); during the experience; and prior to the experience (by shaping the nature of the experience). These may be called 'retrospective', 'reflexive' and 'incorporated' interpretation respectively.¹⁴ With reference therefore to the dream of the young Pike, his prior belief that the ox was blue is incorporated into the dream

¹³Ibid., pp.146-7.

¹⁴I owe the terminology to P.G. Moore, "Recent Studies of Mysticism", in Religion, Vol.3, 1973, pp.147-8.

(incorporated interpretation) such that he sees the ox as a blue ox during the dream (reflexive interpretation) and upon waking describes his dream as that of riding on a blue ox (retrospective interpretation). A theistic mystical experience on this frame of reference is one in which a prior belief in God is incorporated into the mystical experience such that during it the self is aware of contact with another and subsequently describes that experience as one of union with God. We shall return to this anon. For the present, however, and arising from this, we may note the existence of an implicit model of the relationship between mystical experience and its interpretation, namely model five, the view that there are as many varieties of mystical experience as there are incorporated interpretations of it.

Section II

In our earlier analysis of model four, we saw that the central problem was one of circularity. That is to say, the view that there are as many varieties of mystical experience as there are paradigmatic expressions of it assumed that the paradigmatic expressions "pictured" the nature of the experience. Model five avoids this problem since what we may now call "paradigmatic symbols"¹⁵ enter into the structure and content of the experience itself. Thus, the "ineffability gap", the

¹⁵I use the word "symbols" to indicate that not only beliefs and doctrines may be incorporated, but also, the symbolism of art and architecture, social structures and customs, etc.

barrier between interpretation and experience is, to that extent, narrowed.

Model five is mooted in an article by Bruce Garside entitled "Language and the Interpretation of Mystical Experience."¹⁶ According to Garside, experience in general is a product of the interaction between the organism and its environment. He contends that the more we move away from perceptions of physical bodies to perceptions related to other people, to moral and aesthetic judgements, to perceptions of 'inner' states, the more determinative are the peculiarities of especial cultural and conceptual frameworks. Accordingly, mystical experience, being about as far as possible removed from the perception of physical objects, is most likely a highly socialized experience. For Garside then, the phenomenology of the mystical experience is almost totally dependent upon the incorporated interpretation. Indeed, from the perspective of his position the distinction between experience and interpretation is virtually a nugatory one. He writes,

If experience is the product of stimuli and conceptual framework as suggested above, then people of different cultures and different religious traditions would necessarily have different religious experiences. It makes no sense to look for an 'authentic' description of a mystical experience 'undistorted' by any interpretive framework.¹⁷

¹⁶B. Garside, "Language and the Interpretation of Mystical Experience", in International Journal for Philosophy of Religion, Vol.3, 1972, pp.93-102.

¹⁷Ibid., p.99.

Garside's suggestion, that the relationship between mystical experience and its interpretation bears some analogies to the relationship between experience in general and the interpretation of it, is developed much more fully by Steven Katz. His investigation of mystical experience is based upon the single epistemological assumption that there are no pure (ie. unmediated) experiences. Thus, he writes,

This 'mediated' aspect of all our experience seems an inescapable feature of any epistemological enquiry, including the enquiry into mysticism, which has to be properly acknowledged if our investigation of experience, including mystical experience, is to get very far.¹⁸

Katz, in fact, stands quite firmly as the leading proponent of model five. Thus, he contends that in order to understand mysticism we must not merely examine retrospective interpretations but also acknowledge that both the experience and the form in which it is reported are shaped by concepts which the mystic brings to his experience. He writes,

...the forms of consciousness which the mystic brings to experience set structured and limiting parameters on what the experience will be, ie. on what will be experienced, and rule out in advance what is 'inexperientiable' in the particular given, concrete, context. Thus, for example, the nature of the Christian mystic's pre-mystical consciousness informs the mystical consciousness such that he experiences the mystic reality in terms of Jesus, the Trinity, or a personal

¹⁸S. Katz, "Language, Epistemology and Mysticism" in S. Katz (ed.), Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis (London: Sheldon Press, 1978), p.26.

God, etc., rather than in terms of the non-personal, non-everything, to be precise, Buddhist doctrine of nirvāṇa.¹⁹

Quite clearly, the discussion of model five, in these terms, places a quite fresh perspective on our whole discussion of theistic mystical experience. Indeed, not only is the possibility of such experiences delineated, but their actual occurrence appears certain. Thus, with respect to Jewish mystical experience, Katz contends that the entire life of the Jewish mystic is saturated from childhood onwards by images, concepts, symbols, and rituals which define in advance the experience he wishes to have and thereby determine what the experience will be like. Thus, he writes,

...the Jewish conditioning pattern so strongly impresses that tradition's mystics (as all Jews) with the fact that one does not have mystical experiences of God in which one loses one's identity in ecstatic moments of unity, that the Jewish mystic rarely, if ever, has such experiences. What the Jewish mystic experiences is, perhaps, the divine Throne, or the angel Metatron, or aspects of the Sefiroth, or the heavenly court and palaces, or the Hidden Torah, or God's secret Names, but not loss of self in unity with God.²⁰

The determinative effect of the pre-experiential content is also reinforced by considering the role, on the mystic way, of the teacher of a specific way and a specific goal. Thus, in Kabbalism, in Sūfism, in

¹⁹ Ibid., pp.26-7 cf also M. Eliade, The Two and the One (London: Harvill, 1965), p.77.

²⁰ Ibid., p.34.

Buddhism (especially Zen), in Hinduism, and in Christianity, the role of the teacher is crucial, both as the guide to the path, and the judge of the student's progress along it.

If this model is a viable one, then a number of advantages accrue. Firstly, we are able to take into account the plurality of mystical utterances, for it suggests that there are a wide variety of phenomenologically disparate mystical experiences which are due, in the main, to the cultural and conceptual settings in which such experiences have their home. And secondly, therefore, with reference to the exegesis of retrospective interpretations, we avoid the problem of accommodating such interpretations to the demands of an a priori theory of the nature of mystical experience, thereby enabling us to respect the complexity of the experiential data involved. However, in spite of the advantages gained by the adoption of such a model, it would be rash to assert, for example, that we can extrapolate from the details of the earlier-quoted passage from van Ruysbroeck to an assertion of the actual nature of his mystical experience. To be sure, in the light of the fact that it is a first-order mystical expression and as a result of model five, we are on fairly safe ground if we maintain that the experience is theistic in character. Nevertheless, before making a claim about the experienced content of such a theistic mystical experience, a number of tasks would need to be performed. Firstly, an investigation of the cultural and conceptual

setting of van Ruysbroeck's writings would have to be undertaken. In other words, careful study of the paradigmatic symbols of his tradition would be a necessity for full understanding of the possible phenomenological content of the experience. Secondly, attention would also need to be paid to the possibility of ramification of the retrospective interpretation by non-experiential factors, for these may still play a role in such interpretations. Our earlier exegesis of Walter Hilton's "not indeed in nature but in spirit" could be viewed as an example of such a process.

Section III

Model five, as outlined above, is in direct conflict with the Smartian thesis that there is a phenomenological unity in mystical experience. That is to say, if incorporated interpretation does occur, then the Smartian thesis is false, and vice-versa. And yet, surprisingly enough, Smart himself apparently sees no conflict between this notion of incorporated interpretation and his own notion of the unity of mystical experience. Let us recall a passage from Smart which we quoted earlier:

It is to be noted [he writes] that ramifications may enter into the descriptions either because of the intentional nature of the experience or through reflection upon it. Thus a person brought up in a Christian environment and strenuously practising the Christian life may have a contemplative experience which he sees as a union with God. The whole spirit of his quest will enter into the experience. On the other hand, a person might only come to see the experience in this way

after the event, as it were: upon reflection he interprets his experience in theological categories.²¹

Certainly, in this passage, Smart recognises the possibility of both incorporated and retrospective interpretation, and, more significantly, the possibility of theistic incorporated interpretation. Similarly, in his rejoinder to Pike, he writes,

I do not deny that theological notions may enter into the phenomenology of an experience. Theological notions in this way need not be extra-experiential.²²

Again, surprisingly, he continues,

But this does not affect my central thesis [viz. of the phenomenological unity of mystical experience]. Consider feelings in the chest: they can be felt as pangs of indigestion. But a doctor could say: 'These feelings arise from fluid in the lungs.'²³

His rejoinder to Pike reiterates the fact that Smart perceives no conflict between models two and five. But the medical analogy gives a hint as to the reason for this. It is unfortunate that the analogy is not as clear as it might be, and moreover, is not elaborated further in the text of his rejoinder nor is it or a similar analogy to be found in any of Smart's other published writings. Nevertheless, there is the suggestion in this analogy that, just as the individual who

²¹N. Smart, "Interpretation and Mystical Experience", in Religious Studies, Vol.1, 1965, p.79 (my underlining)

²²N. Smart, "Rejoinders" in W.H. Capitan and D.D. Merrill (eds.), op. cit., p.157.

²³Ibid., p.157.

feels pains in his chest incorrectly diagnoses them as pangs of indigestion, so also the theistic mystic who sees his experience as a union with God has made a similar mistake. Only on this interpretation of the medical analogy can we make sense of Smart's claim that the recognition of incorporated interpretation does not affect his central thesis. And yet, quite clearly, if there is incorporated interpretation such that the mystic sees the experience as one of union with God, and reports it as such, then he does not appear to have made a mistake comparable with the mistaken medical analysis. Having registered the fact that the analogy, at least when viewed in this way, does not seem to support Smart's thesis against the recognised possibility of incorporated interpretation, the question remains as to why Smart believes that it does so support it. One feels inclined to say that our disposal of the medical analogy was just a little too simple, and therefore, one ought to look for a deeper level to Smart's apparent non-perceiving of the conflict between models two and five. I shall now attempt to suggest that there are reasons why Smart does not perceive the conflict. And further, I shall argue that these reasons do not support either models two or five. Indeed, from our discussion, we shall hope to generate the outlines of a further model of the relationship between mystical experience and its interpretation.

It is important to recognise that in those pas-

sages in which the notion of incorporated interpretation is adverted to by Smart, and in the medical analogy, there is reference to the concept of "experiencing-as" — specifically, "seeing-as" and "feeling-as". There is no explanation of Smart's intention in using these phrases in his writings. Nevertheless, we shall take these phrases as clues towards the discernment of such an intention.

The notion with which we are about to deal is by now, at least in other contexts, a familiar one, having been brought to not some little clarity by Wittgenstein in his Philosophical Investigations.²⁴ Suffice it to say therefore, that in his discussion of "seeing-as", Wittgenstein pointed to ambiguous diagrams such as the Necker cube, Jastrow's duck-rabbit, and Köhler's goblet-faces. Thus, for example, Köhler's diagram can be seen as the outline of a goblet, or as two faces looking at each other. The duck-rabbit can be seen as a duck's head facing to the right or as a rabbit's head facing to the left, etc. In other words, we may speak of a perception as "seeing-as" when what is received by the senses can be consciously perceived in different ways, as having a different character, nature, significance etc. In short, the received sensations are identical, the perceptions are varied.

Let us assume that Smart is using this notion in

²⁴L. Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations (Oxford: Blackwell, 1972), pp.193.

the sense outlined above. In this case, then, it could be postulated that, on the one hand, all mystical "sensations" are the same in all cases (model two), while, on the other hand, mystical "perceptions" are varied as a result of the incorporated interpretations. In order to explore this suggestion more closely, we may invoke the previously outlined notion of 'reflexive interpretation.' That notion was to the effect that interpretation may take place during the mystical experience itself. Thus, with reference to experience in general, seeing a configuration of lines as, on the one hand, a goblet or, on the other, as a pair of faces looking at each other is a case of reflexive interpretation. So also, 'seeing' a mystical experience as a union with God may also be a case of reflexive interpretation, the reflexivity being determined by the incorporated belief.

In the light of the above suggestion, it may now be apparent why Smart does not perhaps view his thesis of the unity of mystical experience as incompatible with model five. For, granted that there is incorporated interpretation such that there may be phenomenologically theistic mystical experiences, the notion of reflexive interpretation is an indicator that during mystical experience, there may be interpretation of a yet more basic datum of experience, just as, in the cases of the diagrams mentioned above, there is reflexive interpretation placed upon the basic data of certain configurations of lines.

I think that if we understand Smart in this way, then we have done greater justice to his writings than would have been the case had we merely registered the apparent conflict in his writings between models two and five and not proceeded further. Nevertheless, there is implicit within our above discussion another model of the relationship between mystical experience and its interpretation, a model which hopefully takes the insights of both models two and five and develops them in a fresh synthesis. It is to an outline of this model that we shall now turn.

Section IV

From our analysis of model five, we have seen that it is not only possible but is indeed most likely that theistic mystical experiences occur. If a theistic conceptual and symbolic framework is incorporated into the mystical experience then, in spite of the presence of reflexive interpretation, the mystical experience may be phenomenologically one of the union of the soul and God. Nevertheless, this does not necessitate the adoption of model five, for the possibility of reflexive interpretation leads to the notion of extrapolating a core mystical datum from the experience, a datum which may well be experientially realised in some mystical experiences.

Let us now turn to this notion of the core datum of mystical experience and attempt to outline what such a core datum might be like and how we might set

about identifying it. If we turn firstly to the cases of the duck-rabbit etc., the core datum is easily identifiable. In short, the core-datum is the configuration of lines in each case. Indeed, in these cases, there is seeing-as only because it is quite apparent that the seeing of the diagrams as configurations of lines is quite separate from seeing them as a duck or rabbit, a goblet of faces, etc. In other words, there is neither a conceptual nor an actual difficulty in seeing the configuration of lines, qua seeing, as a configuration of lines, and seeing the configuration of lines, qua seeing-as, as duck or rabbit, goblet or faces etc. The case of dreams is somewhat more murky. To revert to the dream of the blue ox, can it be said that reflexive interpretation is taking place? If the answer is yes, then what remains as the basic datum of dream experience if the contents of the dream are "bracketed out" as due to incorporated interpretation. The apparent datum would appear to be a dream-state without content.

To be sure, the abstraction of the content of dreams from the dream-state renders the word 'dream' meaningless in these circumstances for 'a dream without content' appears to have no application. Nevertheless, this does not negate the fact that there is a state equivalent to a contentless dream state, namely, the state of dreamless sleep.

Let us turn to the mystical experience. Taking a

theistic mystical experience as our example, what remains as the basic datum of the mystical experience if the content of the experience, the experience of the self in union with God, is abstracted? The residue is a contentless experience, one in which there is neither awareness of the self nor of 'anything' standing over against the self — a state in which, unlike the waking and the dream state, there is no subject-object polarity. It is, furthermore, a state in which there is neither incorporated paradigmatic beliefs or symbols nor, ergo, reflexive interpretation, for there are no beliefs, thoughts, symbols, dual awareness therein. In other words, it is a state in which the distinctions between the knower, the act of knowing, and what is known are obliterated.

The above theoretical discussion now leads to the presentation of a number of theses. These are as follows:

- (i) The postulated datum of mystical experience is attained by mystics;
- (ii) The limiting case of mystical experience is such a state;
- (iii) The contemplative path, in some traditions, leads to the transcending of content-filled states and the attainment of the 'pure' state;
- (iv) The 'pure' state is most often attained in the context of a set of doctrines appropriate to such attainment.

The full evaluation of the theses presented above is not appropriate within the context of this study. This is for the reason that, as was outlined in our discussion of model five, each thesis would need to be examined in the total context of each mystical tradition and therefore, the evaluation of the theses needs to be carried out by specialists within each tradition. Nevertheless, perhaps it may not be altogether inappropriate to venture forth with a few suggestions as to the sort of evidence which might support these theses.

The first thesis is perhaps the least problematical. In support of this thesis, we may note that this is the state upon which Stace, Smart and Otto base their definitions of mystical experience. That is to say, it is precisely that state which Stace designates as the undifferentiated unity of pure 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.²⁵

Similarly, it is to this state that Smart refers when he says,

In the contemplative state...discursive thought and mental images disappear.... If the contemplative experience is void of images, etc. it is also void of that sense of distinction between subject and object which characterises everyday

²⁵W.T. Stace, Mysticism and Philosophy (London: MacMillan, 1961), p.110.

experience.²⁶

To be sure, the discernment of the attainment of this state of contentlessness through the analysis of mystical texts is fraught with the kinds of exegetical problems we have uncovered during the course of this essay. Nevertheless, in the light of our earlier discussions, it does not seem implausible to suggest that this state is attained in the highest stages of the contemplative path in eg. Theravāda Buddhism, Sāṅkhya-Yoga and in Plotinus. Certainly, the retrospective interpretations of these traditions do vary. Yet, I can see no good reason for arguing, as perhaps Katz would, that the phenomenology of the mystical experience which generates or reinforces the doctrine of non-soul is different from that which generates or reinforces the notion of the individual purusha. Indeed, at this level, it is difficult to see what difference incorporated interpretation could possibly make. Thus, I cannot but agree with Smart that if the doctrine of non-soul is to be preferred to the doctrine of soul, then that preference must be determined on grounds other than the mystical experience for both doctrines gain reinforcement from the contentless state of the mystical experience.

I do not wish to suggest that those stages of mystical experience prior to the attainment of the

²⁶N. Smart, The Yogi and the Devotee (London: Allen & Unwin, 1968), pp.42-3; cf also N. Smart, Reasons and Faiths (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958), p.71.

contentless state do not differ between traditions or even between mystics within the same tradition. For, in mystical states which are generated as a result of following a particular tradition of meditation and which are prior to the attainment of the contentless state, incorporated interpretation will play a crucial role. That is to say, these prior states will be content-filled states, the content being partly determined by the paradigmatic cultural and religious symbols incorporated into these states. Thus, for example, although the contentless and therefore final state in Theravāda Buddhism and in Yoga may be said to be phenomenologically identical, the stages of experience leading to the final state are quite clearly disparate.²⁷ So also in Plotinus, it is evident that the mystical stages on the return to the One are determined by the outgoing of the One from itself in the process of cosmic emanation.²⁸

The recognition that, in an analysis of mystical experience, one needs to give due consideration to the stages of mystical experience which are attained as the mystic proceeds along the contemplative path is

²⁷On the jhānas in Theravāda, see Buddhaghosa's Visuddhimagga, 2.10. Pe Maung Tin (transl.), (London: Luzac and Company, 1971), pp.376-394; and cf also, C.A.F. Rhys Davids, Buddhist Psychology (New Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint Corp, 1975), ch.3. On the stages of samādhi in Yoga, see S.N. Dasgupta, Yoga as Philosophy and Religion (Delhi: Motilal Barnasidass, 1973), pp.150-158.

²⁸See esp. E.R. Dodds, "Tradition and Personal Achievement in the Philosophy of Plotinus" in Journal of Roman Studies, Vol.50, 1960, pp.1-7.

important for a number of reasons. Firstly, while it is recognised by Smart and, to a considerably lesser extent by Stace, that there are stages along the path, neither gives serious place in their respective analyses of mystical experience to the reports of phenomenologically distinct stages of mystical experience along the way to the highest state. For this reason, their delineation of the nature of mystical experience is deficient, for, and this is our second reason, not only are the earlier stages of mystical experience worthy of consideration in themselves, but also, understanding of the higher stages may be facilitated by an appreciation of the preceding stages. Thus, for example, exposition of the fourth formless jhāna in the Theravādin tradition, the sphere of neither perception nor non-perception, cannot but be enriched by consideration of the three preceding jhānas, the spheres of infinite space, infinite consciousness, and nothingness. Indeed, part of the necessary technique for the attainment of the fourth formless jhāna is meditation upon the non-ultimacy of the sphere of nothingness.²⁹

Thirdly, the recognition of the stages of mystical experience gives support to our second and third theses. To advert to the Theravāda tradition again, the fourth formless jhāna is the limiting case of mystical experience in the sense that there is no longer the

²⁹Buddhaghosa, Visuddhimagga, 2.10.4, Pe Maung Tin (transl.), (London: Luzac & Company Ltd., 1971).

awareness that there is perception of eg. symbolic content, nor the awareness that there is no perception. A contentless state has been attained. And moreover, this state is attained in the transcending of the final content-filled state, the sphere of nothingness, however shadowy and elusive that content may appear to be. To quote Buddhaghosa,

Who so has reached mastery over the attainment of the sphere of nothingness in these five ways, and wishes to develop the sphere of neither perception nor non-perception, should first see the evils of the former sphere as, 'This attainment has the sphere of infinite consciousness for a near enemy. It is not calm like the sphere of neither perception nor non-perception....' He should then put an end to hankering after it and, attending to the sphere of neither perception nor non-perception as calm, should repeatedly advert to that attainment of the sphere of nothingness which has proceeded with nothingness as object, should attend to it, reflect upon it, impinge upon it with application and exercise of thought, regarding it as calm! calm! As he repeatedly drives his mind on to the sign, the hindrances are discarded, mindfulness is established, the mind is concentrated through access.³⁰

To put it simply, the contemplative process in the Theravādin tradition consists in progressing through the four jhānas of form and the three formless jhānas, each of which is progressively less content-filled until the fourth formless jhāna of contentlessness is attained.³¹

³⁰Ibid., 2.10.4.

³¹I have avoided the problem of the relationship of the attainment of the jhānas to the attainment of Nirvāna. There is a tradition of interpretation of the Pali canon that Nirvāna can be attained at any point along the path of contemplation, or even before beginning upon the path of contemplation.

In short, the Theravādin tradition appears to be supportive of our third thesis.

I do not however, wish to give the appearance of suggesting that the 'pure' state is attained in all mystical traditions. Indeed, if we are willing to take Steven Katz at his word, and there seems no reason why we shouldn't, such a contentless state is not common in the Jewish tradition of mysticism. Nevertheless, it would be remiss if we did not note that there is certainly one notable exception to this, namely, Martin Buber.

For, at least in his earlier life, and perhaps because of his wide knowledge of the Hasidic tradition of mysticism, he certainly appears to be a recipient of contentless mystical experience which he initially interpreted in a Vedāntin sense and subsequently reinterpreted in a Sāṅkhyin way.³² Furthermore, it cannot be denied that there is a constant tendency in Jewish mysticism to develop a pantheistic or at least a panentheistic theology,³³ although only thoroughgoing contextual analysis could discern the experiential basis of such theology.

With respect to at least some forms of the Christian

³²See M. Buber, Between Man and Man (London: Collins, 1961), pp.42-4.

³³Such panentheism is most pronounced in the Sefer Ha Zohar or "Book of Splendour", written in the late thirteen century probably by the Spanish kabbalist, Moses Le Leon. See esp. G.G. Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism (New York: Schocken, 1961), pp.156-243.

mystical experience also, it seems fairly certain that the contentless state is not attained and that the essence of the mystical experience lies in the experienced union of the soul and God, or at least in an overwhelming experience of loving and being loved. We have noted the probability of the passage from van Ruysbroeck discussed earlier as reflecting just such an experience. Nevertheless, with respect to Christian mysticism, it may be conjectured that the experience does not necessarily contain the expected incorporated paradigmatic symbols. For, it is possible that the content of the experience is at variance with the cultural and conceptual framework of the mystic. It is such variance which necessitated the delineation of criteria for discriminating between divine and satanic experiences. St. Teresa of Avila, for example offers two criteria for such discrimination. The first is that the experience must be generative of religious values — humility, love, trust, etc.³⁴ The second is that the experience must be compatible with the content of scripture. Thus, she writes,

As far as I can see and learn by experience, the soul must be convinced that a thing comes from God only if it is in conformity with Holy Scripture; if it were to diverge from that in the very least, I think I should be incomparably more firmly convinced that it came from the devil than I previously was that it came from God, however sure I might have

³⁴E. Allison Peers (ed.), The Life of St. Teresa of Jesus (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1960), p.237.

felt of this.³⁵

Certainly therefore, the exegete must be wary of too simple an application of model five. Further, however, even within the ambit of the Christian doctrinal framework, it is not impossible that the mystic may attain the contentless state. Thus, for example, in St. John of the Cross, all mystical visions and illuminations are rejected. That is to say, contentful mystical experiences are rejected just because they are specific, clear and distinct. To this extent, therefore, the mystic cannot come into conflict with the teachings of the Church for the aim of the mystic, according to St. John of the Cross, is not to gain knowledge of heavenly things, but rather, to attain to a state of unknowing. Upon this aspect of the mystical theology of St. John, R.J. Zwi Werblowsky remarks.

As a mystic he could not possibly be a heretic, that is, by definition, one who holds deviant opinions, because it is not the mystic's business either to formulate or to defend theological opinions. His business is the emptying of the soul of all discursive contents.³⁶

Thus, there is the suggestion in St. John of the Cross that content-filled mystical states need to be rejected and this rejection is based upon the attainment of a state empty of all discursive contents, that is, a state of contentlessness. To be sure, this rejection of content-filled

³⁵ Ibid., p.239.

³⁶ R.J. Zwi Werblowsky, "On the Mystical Rejection of Mystical Illuminations" in Religious Studies, Vol.1, 1965, pp.179-80.

mystical states may be related to the fact that St. John was influenced by the Rhenish mystics and the Neo-Platonic tradition as mediated through Pseudo-Dionysius in particular. But, if such influence is present, then this supports the notion that St. John is a mystic who has attained contentless states, for, as indicated above, the neo-Platonic tradition is conducive to such attainment.

This point leads us to our fourth thesis, namely, that the pure mystical experience is most often attained in the context of an appropriate set of doctrines. Thus, one would not perhaps expect to find the 'pure' state as evident in those traditions in which there is, so to say, a teaching of the total discontinuity between man and God, and the world and God. We must be wary here of overstating the case, for, during the course of this study, we have examined a variety of passages within theistic contexts which appear to reflect the attainment of a state of contentlessness. Nevertheless, the predominant emphasis in the theistic traditions, and here one is thinking especially of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, is that man only comes into relationship with the deity when the deity turns to man and reveals himself to him. We have suggested earlier in this study that the crucial means of the bridging of this gap between God and man may be seen as the theistic experience, exemplified in the experiences of such as Isaiah, Mohammed and Moses and transmitted through the Scriptures, through worship

prayer, devotion, sacrifice etc. Thus, it may at least be said that what the mystic does and says is not something which directs these traditions, but rather needs to be accommodated by them, or indeed, in some cases, rejected by them.³⁷

By contrast, within those traditions in which the mystic is the normative figure, the doctrines of which are reinforced by, if not ultimately dependent upon mystical experience, it is to be expected that the mystical experience will here reach its zenith. We have suggested that this zenith is the attainment of the contentlessness state and that this is that state attained preeminently in Buddhism, and in Sāṅkhya-Yoga.

Section V

During the course of this study, we have been periodically concerned with the question of the relationship between religious experiences and religious truth. That is to say, it was part of our task to examine the possibility of the resolution of conflicting truth claims between different religions by appeal to the nature of religious experience. By way of conclusion therefore, it may be fruitful to consider this question again in the light of our discussion in this chapter.

According to the results of our study, any formulation of the relationship between religious experience and religious expression must take into consideration

³⁷The classic cases are of course al-Hallāj within the Islamic tradition and Meister Eckhart within the Christian tradition.

the various forms of religious experience which we have attempted to isolate and delineate, namely, theistic experiences, the varieties of content-filled mystical experiences (including theistic mystical experiences), and the 'pure' contentless mystical experience. To this extent therefore, the question of the resolution of conflicting truth claims is immeasurably more complex than is evident in the analyses of those writers examined earlier in our study. Thus, Radhakrishnan's and Stace's resolutions are based only upon the 'pure' contentless mystical experience; Zaehner's attempted normative resolution does not take into account the phenomenology of the theistic experience, nor the possibly large variety of content-filled mystical experiences, even within what might loosely be termed 'theistically-oriented' mystical experiences; Otto's Friesian presuppositions lead him to a neglect of the phenomenological difference between theistic experience and the 'pure' contentless state; and finally, although Smart appears to recognise the possibility of content-filled mystical states, his attempted resolution proceeds upon the basis of the determination of the correct synthesis of theistic and 'pure' contentless experiences. Thus, if a resolution were possible, a much more complex phenomenology of religious experiences would need to be developed.

But further, there is a sense in which the results which have accrued in this study not only indicate the complexity of the actual task, but also raise the

question of its conceptual possibility. In order to illuminate this, let us leave theistic experience out of consideration for the moment, and concentrate upon the mystical experience.

The attempt to resolve conflicting truth claims, or to determine religious truth, by an appeal to the nature of religious experience appears to be a conceptually possible task if at least two presuppositions are made. The first presupposition is that all interpretation of mystical experience occurs retrospectively. The second presupposition, following from this, is that there is an essence of mystical experience which can be discerned if only one can clear away the overlaid subsequent interpretation. Thus, by means of these two presuppositions, it appears to be possible, through the determination of the essence of mystical experience, to ascertain those religious doctrines which most closely reflect it. Our study has negated both of these presuppositions. In the first place, it has been argued that interpretations are incorporated into the experience itself; in the second place, therefore, it does not make sense to look for the essence of mystical experience since there are varieties of mystical experience and these are determined by the incorporated paradigmatic symbols.

It may appear that I have suggested that the essence of mystical experience is the pure contentless state and that, therefore, those doctrines which reflect

it may be more true, in the sense of, more reflective of that state. To be sure, I have attempted to show that there is a limiting case of mystical experience and that the doctrinal frameworks of some religious traditions are both more conducive to the attainment of, and also more reflective of, such experience.

Nevertheless, I have not thereby wished to imply that these doctrinal frameworks are more true than those which may be more closely related to content-filled mystical experiences. The term 'pure' has been solely intended in a phenomenological sense, and not in an evaluative one. Moreover, even if 'pure' were intended in an evaluative sense, and it were argued that the most true mystical doctrines were those which were conducive to the attainment of, and reflective of, the contentless experience, this in itself would not solve the problem of religious truth in general for it would still be necessary to take into account those doctrines reflective of, and probably also conducive to the occurrence of, theistic experiences.

In essence therefore, our analysis of the relationship between religious experience and its interpretation indicates that the attempt to resolve the problem of conflicting religious truth claims is fraught with difficulties, both conceptually and in practice. Indeed, it would appear that the attempt to reconcile conflicting truth claims between different religions needs to be conducted on extra-experiential grounds. Fortunately,

the delineation of extra-experiential criteria for the performance of this task are outside the borders of this particular study.

In this sense, then, the study we have undertaken is a programmatic one. It may be seen both as the closing of one particular means by which the problem of conflicting truth claims between religions has been approached and therefore, as a clearing of the way for a new venture in philosophical thought. In the final outcome, the broadly-based nature of this study may have serious shortcomings. Yet, if it but moves us on the path to a greater understanding of the nature of religious experience, and a higher appreciation of the structure of religious formulations, it will be enough.

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY OF WORKS

REFERRED TO IN THE TEXT

- A. Altmann, Studies in Religious Philosophy and Mysticism (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969).
- A. J. Arberry, Sufism (London: Allen & Unwin, 1950).
- A.H. Armstrong, "Plotinus and India", in Classical Quarterly, Vol.30, 1936, pp.22-38.
- D. Bastow, "Otto and Numinous Experience", in Religious Studies, Vol.12, 1976, pp.159-76.
- R.B. Blakney (ed.), Meister Eckhart (New York: Harper & Row, 1941).
- E. Brehier, The Philosophy of Plotinus (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959).
- D.P. Brewster, "The Study of Sufism" in Religion, Vol.6, 1976, pp.31-47.
- M. Buber, Between Man and Man (London: Collins, 1961).
- R.M. Bucke, Cosmic Consciousness (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1966).
- Dom C. Butler, Western Mysticism (London: Constable, 1967).
- W.H. Capitan & D.D. Merrill (eds.), Art, Mind and Religion (Pennsylvania: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1965).
- H. Corbin, Creative Imagination in the Sūfism of Ibn 'Arabi (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969).
- H. Coward and T. Penelhum (eds.), Mystics and Scholars (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1977).
- S.N. Dasgupta, A History of Indian Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), 5 vols.
- S.N. Dasgupta, Hindu Mysticism (New York: Ungar, 1927).
- S.N. Dasgupta, Yoga as Philosophy and Religion (Delhi: Motilal Barnasidass, 1973).

- R.F. Davidson, Rudolf Otto's Interpretation of Religion (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947).
- P. Deussen, The System of the Vedānta (New York: Dover, 1973).
- E.R. Dodds, "Tradition and Personal Achievement in the Philosophy of Plotinus", in Journal of Roman Studies, Vol.50, 1960, pp.1-7.
- F. Edgerton, "The Meaning of Sāṅkhya and Yoga", in American Journal of Philology, Vol.45, 1924, pp.1-26.
- M. Fakhry, "Three Varieties of Mysticism in Islam", in International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion, Vol.2, 1971, pp.193-207.
- M. Fakhry, A History of Islamic Philosophy (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970).
- B. Garside, "Language and the Interpretation of Mystical Experience", in International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion, Vol.3, 1972, pp.93-102.
- B. Gibbs, "Mysticism and the Soul" in Monist, Vol.59, 1976, pp.532-49.
- H. von Glasenapp, Buddhism, a Non-Theistic Religion (London: Allen & Unwin, 1970).
- F.C. Happold (ed.), Mysticism (U.K. Penguin, 1970).
- S.S. Hawi, Islamic Naturalism and Mysticism (Leiden: Brill, 1974).
- J. Hick, God and the Universe of Faiths (London: Fount, 1977).
- J. Hick (ed.), Truth and Dialogue (London: Sheldon Press, 1974).
- M. Hiriyanna, Outlines of Indian Philosophy (London: Allen & Unwin, 1932).
- W. James, The Varieties of Religious Experience (London: Collins, 1961).
- R. Johansson, The Psychology of Nirvana (London: Allen & Unwin, 1969).
- S. Katz (ed.), Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis (London: Sheldon Press, 1978).
- W.E. Kennick, review of W.T. Stace, Mysticism and Philosophy, in The Philosophical Review, Vol.71, 1962, pp.387-390.

- I. Kesarcodi-Watson, Eastern Spirituality (Delhi: Agam Prakashan, 1976).
- S. Kierkegaard, Philosophical Fragments (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1936).
- H. Kraemer, World Cultures and World Religions: The Coming Dialogue (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1950).
- H. Kraemer, Religion and the Christian Faith (London: Lutterworth, 1956).
- G.J. Larson, "Mystical Man in India", in Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, Vol.12, 1973, pp.1-16.
- G.J. Larson, Classical Sāmkhya (Delhi: Motilal Barnasidass, 1969).
- M. Laski, Ecstasy (London: Cresset, 1961).
- I.M. Lewis, Ecstatic Religion (U.K.: Penguin, 1971).
- T. Ling, "Buddhist Mysticism" in Religious Studies, Vol.1, 1965, pp.163-75.
- V. Lossky, The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church (Cambridge: Clarke & Co., 1958).
- B.K. Matilal, "Mysticism and Reality: Ineffability", in Journal of Indian Philosophy, Vol.3, 1975, pp.217-52.
- Ph. Merlan, Monopsychism, Mysticism, Metaconsciousness (The Hague: Brill, 1963).
- J.M. Moore, Theories of Religious Experience (New York: Round Table Press Inc., 1938).
- P.G. Moore, "Recent Studies of Mysticism", in Religion, Vol.3, 1973, pp.146-56.
- R. Mortley, "Negative Theology and Abstraction in Plotinus", in American Journal of Philology, Vol.96, 1975, pp.363-377.
- T.R.V. Murti, The Central Philosophy of Buddhism (London: Allen & Unwin, 1960).
- J. Neusner, S.J. (ed.), Christian Revelation and World Religions (London: Burns & Oates, 1967).
- R.A. Nicholson, The Mystics of Islam (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963).
- R. Otto, Mysticism East and West (New York: MacMillan, 1932).

- R. Otto, The Philosophy of Religion (London: Norgate & Williams Ltd., 1931).
- R. Otto, The Idea of the Holy (London: Oxford University Press, 1958).
- H.P. Owen, "Christian Mysticism", in Religious Studies, Vol.7, 1971, pp.31-42.
- G.C. Pande, Studies in the Origins of Buddhism (Allahabad: University of Allahabad, 1957).
- H.J. Paton, The Modern Predicament (London: Allen & Unwin, 1955).
- E. Allison Peers, The Life of St. Teresa of Jesus (New York: Image Books, 1960).
- G.K. Pletcher, "Agreement Among Mystics" in Sophia, Vol.11, no.2, 1972, pp.5-15.
- S. Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy (London: Allen & Unwin, 1958), 2 vols.
- S. Radhakrishnan, Eastern Religions and Western Thought (London: Oxford University Press, 1940).
- S. Radhakrishnan, The Principal Upanisads (London: Allen & Unwin, 1953).
- S. Radhakrishnan, East and West in Religion (London: Allen & Unwin, 1933).
- S. Radhakrishnan, The Hindu View of Life (New York: MacMillan, 1975).
- J.M. Rist, Eros and Psyche (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964).
- J.M. Rist, The Road to Reality (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967).
- A. Schimmel, Mystical Dimensions of Islam (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975).
- F. Schleiermacher, On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers (New York: Harper & Row, 1958).
- F. Schleiermacher, The Christian Faith (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1948).
- G.G. Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism (New York: Schocken, 1961).
- F. Schuon, Islam and the Perennial Philosophy (U.K.: World of Islam Publishing Company, 1976).

- P. Sherrard, "The Tradition and the Traditions" in Religious Studies, Vol.10, 1974, pp.407-17.
- N. Smart, "Mystical Experience", in Sophia, Vol.1, no.1, 1962, pp.19-26.
- N. Smart, The Yogi and the Devotee (London: Allen & Unwin, 1968).
- N. Smart, The Religious Experience of Mankind (London: Fontana, 1971).
- N. Smart, Reasons and Faiths (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958).
- N. Smart, "Interpretation and Mystical Experience" in Religious Studies, Vol.1, 1965, pp.75-87.
- N. Smart, Philosophers and Religious Truth (London: S.C.M. Press, 1964).
- N. Smart, Doctrine and Argument in Indian Philosophy (London: Allen & Unwin, 1964).
- M. Smith, The Way of the Mystics (London: Sheldon Press, 1976).
- F. Staal, Exploring Mysticism (U.K.: Penguin, 1975).
- W.T. Stace, Mysticism and Philosophy (London: MacMillan, 1961).
- D.T. Suzuki, Outlines of Mahāyāna Buddhism (New York: Schocken, 1963).
- P. Tillich, Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963).
- E. Underhill, "The Mysticism of Plotinus" in Journal of Studies in Mysticism, Vol.1, 1977, pp.82-113.
- E. Underhill, Mysticism (London: Methuen, 1911).
- J. Varenne, Yoga and the Hindu Tradition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).
- J. Wach, Types of Religious Experience: Christian and Non-Christian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951).
- W.J. Wainwright, "Stace and Mysticism" in Journal of Religion, Vol.50, 1970, pp.139-54.
- A. Waley, The Way and its Power (New York: Grove Press, 1958).

- R.J. Zwi Werblowsky, "On the Mystical Rejection of Mystical Illuminations", in Religious Studies, Vol.1, 1965, pp.177-84.
- L. Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations (Oxford: Blackwell, 1972).
- C.M. Wood, Theory and Understanding (Montana: Scholars Press, 1975).
- R.C. Zaehner, Mysticism, Sacred and Profane (London: Oxford University Press, 1961).
- R.C. Zaehner, Hinduism (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966).
- R.C. Zaehner, "Mysticism Without Love", in Religious Studies, Vol.10, 1974, pp.257-264.
- R.C. Zaehner, Hindu and Muslim Mysticism (New York: Schocken, 1969).
- R.C. Zaehner, Zen, Drugs and Mysticism (New York: Vintage, 1972).
- R.C. Zaehner, Concordant Discord (London: Oxford University Press, 1970).
- H. Zimmer, Philosophies of India (New York: Meridian, 1956).

BARR SMITH LIBRARY.
UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE.

Thesis by: P.C. Almond.

Permission to read this thesis is given by the University of Adelaide on condition that the author's literary rights are respected. A reproduction of all or part of the thesis, or an extensive quotation or close paraphrase, may be made only with the author's consent. If the user obtains any help from the thesis in preparing his own work he must acknowledge it.

Special conditions:

The persons whose signatures appear below accept these conditions.

Signature of reader	Date	Signature of reader	Date
	10/9/88		
	22/6/94		