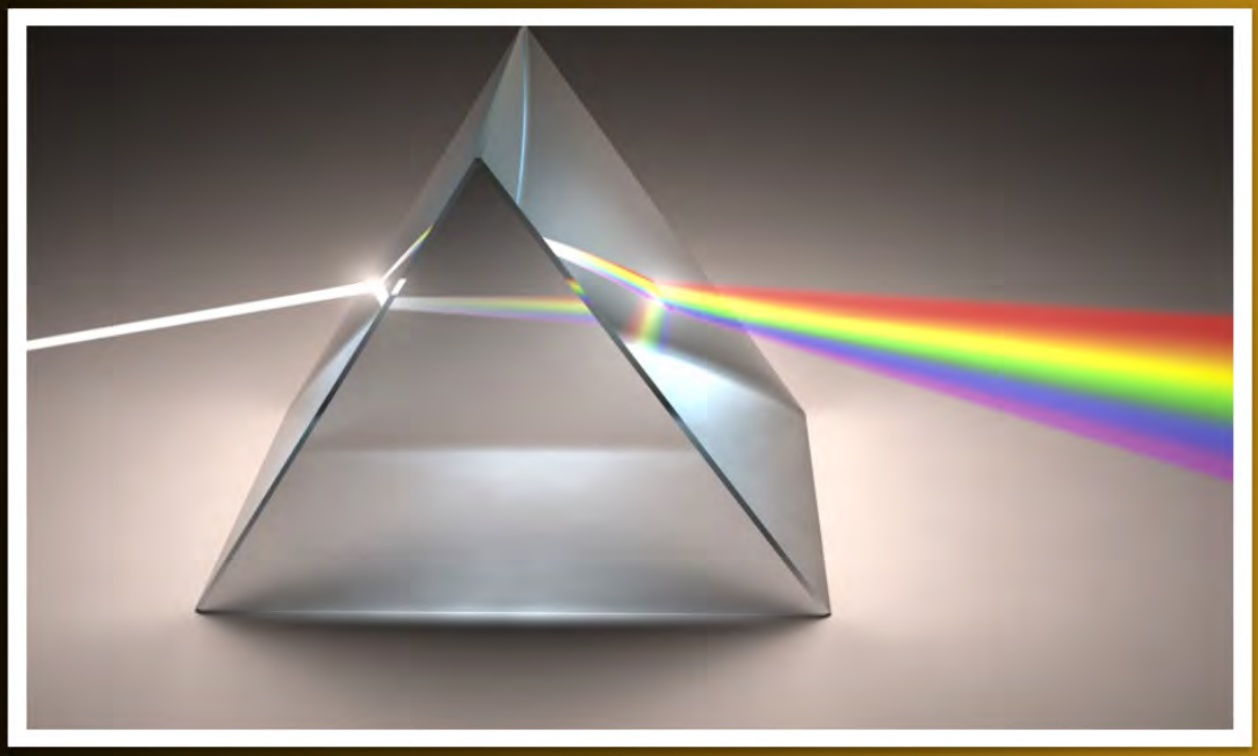
MYSTICISM IN THE WORLD'S MAJOR RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS: A POST-CRITICAL REVIEW



EDITED BY ALI QADIR AND TATIANA TIAYNEN-QADIR

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Mysticism in the world's major religious traditions: A post-critical review
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Maisa Borges

Introduction

Considerable scholarship over the centuries suggested that mystical experiences and traditions have been persistent, if over-shadowed, aspects of all religions. But the nature of mystical experiences – by definition, not fully describable – and the esoteric structure of mystical traditions have always made it challenging to study the topic, notably in a comparative perspective. This challenge was complicated in the mid-20th century by a wave of critical scholarship, stemming from the seminal works by historian Michel de Certeau (1992) on one hand and philosopher Stephen Katz (1979) on the other. Both writers and those that followed them criticized categorization approaches in naïve, early views about mysticism as a common and perennial core of all religions. In brief, de Certeau showed that mysticism *qua* noun was a category constructed by early modern French and then European perennialists, brushing over significant differences between religious traditions and thus mis-characterizing most traditions, not least Christianity. Katz argued that, even to the extent it can be located in other traditions, "mystical experience" is a culturally relative category and that reports by "mystics" tend to be informed by their respective cultural traditions.

Both rigorous works were not just influential but decisive. The study of mysticism was driven either into hagiographical accounts of particular religious traditions, or into a history of ideas, where the travels of "mysticism" as a literary genre could be documented and mapped. Added to that, with the *material turn*, humanities and social sciences soon began to prioritize body and objects in religiosity over the long-emphasized mind and dogma. Welcome though this was, this turn was accompanied by a virtually utter neglect of the spirit, which is where the study of mysticism resided (McDaniel 2018). At the same time, in the face of declining attendance and budget cuts, theology in various religions too began to turn away from spirit and toward practical topics like applied ethics, environmental sustainability, or economics. The comparative study of mysticism almost dropped off the radar into the new millennium. As one scholar quipped, "there is hardly a more beleaguered category than 'mysticism' in the current academic study of religion. Its fall from theoretical grace has been precipitous" (Schmidt 2003, 273).

Such turns and critiques have been useful in correcting naïve, early accounts or comparative approaches to mysticism. However, over the past 15 years or so, renewed attention to comparative mysticism has become apparent. Encyclopedia entries (Parsons 2020), book series (such as the Palgrave Interdisciplinary Studies in Mysticism), journal special issues (as "Mysticism Reloaded" in *Religions*), and annual conferences (such as the Mystical Theology Network) attest to what we term here a *post-critique* approach to the comparative study of mysticism. Some of these scholars point out that the sheer empirical reality of mystics and their accounts cannot simply be brushed aside for methodological ends. This, in itself, is a violence towards what those in religious traditions have long held, especially in the global South.

Others note that the earlier, comparative quests by scholars like William James (1917) or Stace (1961) were certainly naïve, but the criticism has also been heavy-handed and applied inappropriate criteria. That is, early accounts tended to begin with or arrive at a sharp and hard definition of mysticism that could be applied across times and cultures. Critics found these accounts to be universalist and so mistaken, even violent to non-Western traditions (Krech 2021). But they took the absence of a hard definition of commonality as evidence that mysticism was a mistaken category. This itself is philosophically challenging, if not misplaced. Two instances of a category need not share all, or even some essential, features to be classified together (Schilbrack 2018); indeed, most of classification outside ideal types actually works on polythetic or fuzzy

criteria, connoting what Wittgenstein famously referred to as "family resemblances." In other words, close enough might be good enough when it comes to comparing mysticisms (or human rights, Panikkar 1982; or yogis, Hatley 2013; or esotericism, Engler and Gardiner 2023). We need not abandon the entire phenomenon for the sake of not finding an absolute, essential core common to all mysticism. Rather, new scholarship points to the need for painstaking, empirical analyses of different accounts that can be effectively placed side by side and studied. Finally, philosophers have begun to approach the *nothingness* and *ineffability* of mysticism with new analytic tools, emphasizing nonconceptual awareness (Gäb 2021; Wildman 2018).

The new, methodological wherewithal across disciplines allows for a post-critique view on the comparative study of mysticism, defined by rigor, a global outlook, and cultural sensitivity. How would the study of mysticism in a religious tradition look like from this perspective? That is the question motivating the essays in this volume. They have been prepared as part of an exercise at Tampere University to plan for a Program in the Study of Mysticism supported by the philanthropy, Templeton Religion Trust (TRT). TRT has approved its own program strategy to invest in the study of mysticism, informed in part by these essays.

The aim of commissioning these essays was not to offer a comprehensive literature review of mysticism in each tradition, if such an exercise were even possible (it took the contemporary master nine volumes to address the history of Western Christian mysticism alone; see McGinn 1991). Rather, it was to explore what mysticism in the world's five major religious traditions would look like from a post-critique perspective. Instead of looking back, these essays are innovative in looking ahead, identifying new directions for comparative scholarship that can move past the critical elbow-nudge of recent times.

Framework

Of course, knowing the broad outlines of what has been studied and how, is crucial to charting future directions. Therefore each of the essays in this volume attempts to reflect the breadth of knowledge along with general approaches and methods on study of mystical practices and traditions. The emphasis is more on analytical or thematic overviews is more important than comprehensive bibliographies.

The framework guiding the analytic contributions is based in a *critical realist* paradigm. Beginning with the radical work of Roy Bhaskar in the philosophy of natural (Bhaskar 1975), then social sciences (Bhaskar 1979), critical realism (CR) charts a middle path between radical constructionism on one hand (such as in critical theory) and naïve positivism on the other (such as in realist sciences). While Bhaskar's later work developed two further stages, the focus here is on this first stage, or basic CR, which challenged both extreme paradigms. On the one hand, it countered positivism by arguing that social reality, in particular (but also nature) is a fundamentally open system, and thus correlations are not just non-causal but are also non-repeatable. On the other hand, it countered radical constructionism by describing it as an *epistemic fallacy,* i.e., that what we know is determined by how we know it. That is, an extreme form of constructionist philosophy of social sciences tends to deny reality by collapsing ontology onto epistemology. As we saw, this is the basis of the recent challenge to the comparative study of mysticism, whose earlier theorization could have been classified as largely positivist.

Basic CR's challenge to the epistemic fallacy is detailed in three features or principles that constitute a perspective rather than a theory (Bhaskar and Hartwig 2016). First, *ontological realism* claims that phenomena do exist independently of human knowledge about them. It also

postulates a layered ontology, where not all reality of must be actualized or empirically detected to be said to exist. Second, *epistemological relativism* means that there are many, methodologically diverse and mutually compatible approaches to a phenomenon, all of them addressing some aspect of it. Third, *judgmental rationality* means that humans can and do assess competing theories that are falsifiable and so move to better and better understanding of reality. Crucially, these judgments incorporate some form of morality.

This brief description of basic CR immediately lends itself to the post-critique, comparative study of mysticism aimed at here (e.g. Qadir and Tiaynen-Qadir 2025). It allows for the possibility of comparable mysticism, evidenced distinctively and approached broadly. It also allows for the scientific process of gathering evidence and piecing it together to make claims that can be adjudged rationally and can lead over time to a fuller theory of mysticism.

This volume of essays is the first step in this regard. Of course, it does not seek criteria to assess epistemological validity of mystical experiences, but rather seeks to map how they are situated, how people have made sense of them, and what that has meant in the lives of mystics and those around them. The CR perspective toward a post-critique theory of mysticism is translated here into a four-dimensional analytical backbone, covering the nature of mystical experience, methods of inquiry, interfaith aspect, and cultural embeddedness (EMIC). Each dimension is listed here with indicative questions that have guided the essays:

- **Experience:** What changes in consciousness of mystical experiences? What are examples of ecstasy and other altered states in religious traditions, and how are they similar or different? What are the different forms by which religious traditions have engendered altered states of consciousness? Does mystical practice entail psychological transformation? What aspects of ecstasy are objectively measurable and which aren't? Does mystical ecstasy in episodic experience carry into and beyond contemplative practice and how do mystics experience the world? How does mysticism connect with use of psychedelics, including sacred plants, in Western, Indigenous, and non-Western cultures? Are isolated, drug-induced experiences similar to traditional use in mystical practices and how? How do mystics experience rituals?

- **Methods:** How should mysticism be studied? What are some metrics by which mystical dimensions of religions have been assessed and contrasted, i.e., what holds together "types" of mysticism in the tradition? Can the category of "mysticism" be analytically reduced to other categories? How should mysticism be taught? Should mystical language be investigated like other religious language? How can incomprehensibility be comprehended? Is there a symbolic language of mysticism? What kinds of arts have mystics expressed themselves in and where? What is the relation of mysticism to theology in the history of religions? How has recent theorization of material, aspects of religion factored into the study of mysticism? How should the mystical body be located? Is mysticism gender-transcendent and in what way? How has the study of the "mystical" forced social sciences to innovate or collaborate with natural sciences or theology? Are scientists mystics?

- **Interfaith:** What is the inter-tradition aspect of mysticism? Are mystical experiences or practices inherently unitive or can they be divisive and exclusive? Can the study of mysticism lead to understanding the esoteric or symbolic aspects of inter-faith

engagement? How has engagement of mysticisms and mystics in other traditions affected the development of one tradition? Are there intra-tradition differences in mystical paths? What changes and what stays the same across a tradition? Are contemporary mystics "more" interfaith than their historical counterparts and how?

- **Culture:** To what extent is mysticism culturally embedded? To what extent are mystical experiences culturally embedded and interpreted vs. having an a-cultural "common core?" What are mystical chains of transmission and how have they adapted with modern technologies? How does AI affect mystics and the notion of divine union? Did colonization import a category of "mysticism?" How has recent commercialization affected mystical practices? Do mystics contribute to human flourishing and community? What role do cultures expect mystics to play (monastic, critical, pedagogical, etc.)? How does mysticism relate to institutionalized religion? When do religious rites and rituals enable mystics and when do they limit them? How do mystics view the sciences and the science-religion boundary?

Naturally, this makes for a tall order, so not all the essays here address all aspects in each dimension. In each case, the author is an established expert on mysticism in that tradition and has drawn on literature in the field to focus on important elements that can lead to future research. However, the EMIC structure as a whole establishes a space in which to unpack the phenomenon of mysticism in the world rigorously and empirically. Again, these are only indicative questions, but they already show the extent to which more study is needed to revitalize the post-critique study of mysticism in the traditions described here and then in theorizing them comparatively.

The essays

In her coverage of **mysticism in the Hindu tradition**, June McDaniel moves past the recent marginalization of the subject in both religious studies and theology to start with a broad definition of mysticism as a powerful sense of or union with Ultimate Reality. Her essay discusses the major traditions of mysticism in the history of Hindu thought, including Vedic, Vedantic, Yogic, Devotional, Tantric and Folk Hinduism.

Multiple terms in Sanskrit are used to describe "mysticism" by the 1.2 billion Hindus worldwide, mostly referring to styles of mystical union concentrated on wisdom or love. Going back to the Vedas, sacred scriptures compiled some time before 1500 BCE, the Rig Veda hymns state that "ultimate truth is one, the sages give it many names." This sets the stage for various approaches developed by sages to access that ultimate reality, with the Rig Veda highlighting renunciant ascetics possessed by the gods. The Vedas described ultimate reality in both abstract and personal forms, with theology evolving in commentaries over the centuries. The Sat, or true essence, is also Brahman, the cosmic principle underlying all that exists having qualities of pure Being, pure Consciousness, and Bliss (Sat-Chit-Ananda). Some Hindu mystics following nondualistic Advaita Vedanta, famously including Shankara, hold that only Brahman is Ultimately Real, and the world of names and forms is illusion (Maya). It can be "known" only through wisdom of those who attain a state of liberation from illusion (Moksha), a loving unity with all that exists. Dvaita Vedanta, on the other hand, perceives both the worldly illusion (Maya) and the ultimate real (Brahman) as true, allowing worship of and attachment to multiple forms of gods in different relationships.

Already mentioned in the Rig Veda, over time Yoga came to describe the practice of integrating one's soul with the universal consciousness by stilling the mind, gaining insight, and eventually becoming liberated from the realm of illusion. Classical Yoga later branched into different paths, those of wisdom (Jnana), love and devotion (Bhakti), selfless action (Karma) and focus (Raja). Love mysticism and devotion (Bhakti) have been cultural productive in Hindu history, especially in Vaishanavism and Tantra, teaching the mystical flights of soul through deep passion. Techniques to leave the world of illusion even include deliberately violating social norms, while in folk versions, matter is animistically imbued with spiritual power of liberation.

The essay briefly discusses the contribution of mysticism to psychology (seen as a problem of inner, spiritual bodies) and social justice (by way of profound empathy). It underlines also the significant 4,000-year old contributions of Hindu mysticism to universalism, expressed in active interfaith practices, before moving on to new directions for research. These include building on Hindu mystics' detailed mapping of deeper religious states of consciousness, as way to better understand the modern self.

In the next essay, Perry Schmidt-Leukel points out that studying **mysticism in Buddhism** has to face at least four serious challenges: First, the tremendous diversity of the Buddhist tradition, second, the huge variety of phenomena referred to as "mystic(al)," and third the need to correlate both complexities in a meaningful way, keeping in mind that each religious tradition accommodates different types of mysticism and that each type of mysticism can be present in several religious traditions. Fourth, Buddhists had and have mixed feelings about the applicability of the category "mysticism" to their tradition and this has something to do with the fact that the category is not always used in a value-free way.

While today a plethora of different disciplinary and methodological approaches is found in mysticism studies, particularly prominent in relation to Buddhism are currently those approaches which focus on experiences. These mainly include psychological and neurophysiological studies, but also comparative, historical and philological investigations because they have significant implications not only in relation to different Buddhist strands and doctrinal standpoints in past and present but also to hermeneutical questions regarding the correlation of particular experiences with scriptural records. While much of psychological and neurological research explores the impact and efficacy of Buddhist meditation practices (including the question of neuroplasticity), it also relates to the principal question about the fictional or veridical nature of "mystical" experiences, which connects to the broader philosophical issue of the relation between mind and matter. Here, different Buddhist philosophical positions come into play, and implications for Buddhist teachings about rebirth, karma, or nirvana are crucial. Major faultlines run between defenders of traditional and secularized conceptions.

The debate between constructivist, essentialist, and perennialist positions in the general controversy on mysticism is of immediate significance to Buddhist ideas on unmediated and/or nonconceptual experiences, as well as on the inner-Buddhist question whether and to what extent Buddhists are ready to grant that experiences qualified as wholesome or liberative may be available within other Buddhist schools or even within other religious traditions. The latter aspect relates in part to Buddhist qualms about the applicability of the category "mysticism," which is ambiguous in as much as it is on the one hand more at home in theistic religions but on the other hand closely affiliated with their non-theistic or apophatic strands offering thereby a kind of link to some Buddhist views. The ambiguity of "mysticism" regarding its assessment as "irrational" or alternatively as "experience based" and hence, in principle, science-compatible is a further ingredient of Buddhist hesitations and oscillations in relation to the category. The

variety of cultural manifestations and expressions of Buddhist "mysticisms" is huge because Buddhism has spread over a broad range of different and variegated cultural realms. In this respect much work is still to be done in cooperation between social anthropology and the various disciplines involved in the study of mysticism.

Opening the essay on **mysticism in Judaism**, Jonathan Garb states that the major founder of the academic study of Jewish mysticism, Gershom Scholem, defined it as "an attempt to interpret the religious values of Judaism in terms of mystical values". This remains the best one-line definition. Since Scholem, there has been a massive expansion of the field, currently active in dozens of academic institutions (as well as independent scholars). The resultant progress can be summarized with another one-liner: Ever-increasing diversification, in methods of study, as well periods, regions and texts under survey.

Despite this development, one can follow Scholem and characterize the mainstream form of Jewish mysticism – medieval and modern Kabbalah – as providing an esoteric layer of meaning to the sacral texts inherited from antiquity, by elucidating narratives of sacral history, and the detailed laws of the divine commandments. It is debatable to what extent more magical or ecstatic figures and schools deviated from this template. Nonetheless, the ecstatic stream (reaching from the works of the thirteenth-century Spanish kabbalist R. Abraham Abulafia through Eastern and Central European Hasidism in later modernity to the present day) has provided us with the broadest array of techniques and experiences – mysticism in the full/ proper sense. Here one can discern the following major patterns; cultivation of trance states, passivity towards possession-like influx of revelation or empowerment, and the centrality of language (especially divine names and the Hebrew letters) as an object of focus. While the mainstream of Jewish mysticism is strongly tied to particularistic commitments (including supremacist notions), one can find more universalistic tendencies in the ecstatic stream, currently in loose alliance with the New Age movement. Currently, both traditionalistic and innovative forms of Kabbalah are dramatically enhanced, in both creativity and proliferation (also outside the Jewish world), by global digital technology. The paper sketches the outstanding areas of ongoing and future study along both poles in the domains of methods, ecstasy, discourse, interfaith aspects, and culture.

In the context of **Christian mysticism**, Louise Nelstrop sets the stage by quoting Amy Hollywood, who pointed out that "the story of the modern articulation of the category of mysticism is only beginning to be written [and there is] more than one story to be told." In particular, *experience* is a complicated word but nonetheless an important topic, which extends beyond ideas of ineffability. Early taxonomies of Christian mysticism centered on experience have been challenged, leading to the process-oriented formulation by McGinn in his nine-volume series, Presence of God. McGinn's sense that Christian mysticism connects to "lived process," is bound up with "practice" (an "element" of a bigger whole within Christianity), and so leads to "transformation," seems very insightful. The need for new, comparative methodologies in the wake of criticisms of perennialism appears to be a central topic.

Reviewing recent, hard-constructionist research on Christian mysticism, it is notable that the mystical tradition was bound up within Christian theology until well into the Middle Ages. Of course, tensions existed but intensified into the modern period where authority was challenged, including by women mystics. This has led to a central concern over how gender has and continues to shape Christian mysticism, for instance with an emphasis on the body.

The relationship between mysticism and action is crucial. While early modern, Anglophone literature on Christian mysticism tended to emphasize concepts, that trend was countered by some. Since then, the trend is much closer to how Francophone literature evolved regarding

mysticism embedded in practice. In this regard, the contributions of scholars building on vernacular theology and Black Theology are particularly important in correcting a lacuna where action is concerned. Eastern Christian mysticism has been largely overlooked, although there is new interest in seeing how its stresses on deification and apophatic theology can be read in Western Christian traditions as well. In both Christian traditions, many approaches promoting particularity stress Christian religious encounters, underlining deification and grace as well as practices of prayer and praise. That has led to generally strong resistance to the idea that the effects of drugs and Christian mystical experience can be viewed as comparable.

Moving past an exclusive, James-inspired focus on ecstatic experience has opened up new areas of comparative research in ecumenical and interfaith mysticism. One such is deification, which has typically not meant that the mystic disappears entirely into God, even though the Christian mystic may use annihilation language. The Christian mystic is never so lost in God that she does not live as a self in the real world. Another is about mysticism in everyday life, i.e., broadening the category of experience beyond the ineffable to include ordinary sensations experienced in extraordinary ways. Yet another concerns the complex role of imagination in mysticism, about which we find many differing attitudes in the modern period. Such lenses provide new grounds now to unpack the interfaith history of Christian mysticism.

Finally, on **mysticism in the Islam**, Alexander Knysh notes that approaches to Sufism are as diverse as (a) its social, political, moral-ethical, artistic and institutional manifestations and as (b) the backgrounds of those who study and teach it. The author of this essay argues that broad generalizations regarding the "true" essence of Islamic asceticism-mysticism or the behavior and intentions of its followers are not just reductive, but often outright misleading. Sufism and other forms Islamic ascetic-mystical (esoteric) thought and practice should be considered with close attention to the constantly changing contexts in which they operate. This historical-contextual approach to Sufism should not prevent Islamologists from generalizing their observations and drawing broad comparisons between Muslim versions asceticism-mysticism (esotericism) and their non-Muslim counterparts. Both "micro" and "macro" approaches to these phenomena are viable and enrich one another. Due to the efforts of European, American and Russian scholars, as well as their colleagues in the Middle East and Asia, we now have a relatively comprehensive picture of the history and current status of Sufi doctrines, institutions, practices and artistic production not just in the Muslim world, but in societies in which Muslims live as a minority.

As the study of Sufism is increasingly becoming a "native enterprise," some formerly unshakable Eurocentric epistemological certainties begin to crumble and are discarded as unhelpful or outright erroneous. However, the scholarship of insiders is also not immune from biases and prejudices, informed as it is by the scholars' commitment to their own religious and nationalist agendas as well as their personal understanding of what constitutes correct and authentic Islam or correct and authentic Sufism. Because writing history of a given cultural-religious phenomenon is as much about the past as it is about present, Islamologists keep finding new research angles and new issues to explore in the rich legacy of numberless known and unknown ascetics and mystics of Islam.

Contributors

Dr. June McDaniel is Professor Emerita of Religious Studies at College of Charleston, SC, in USA. She obtained her doctorate from the Divinity School at the University of Chicago, and has taught and researched religious experience in the Hindu tradition, Hindu bhakti and tantra, mysticism in general, and women's religious rituals. Aside from numerous papers and chapters, she has published several books, including *Lost Ecstasy: Its Decline and Transformation in Religion* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); *Perceiving the Divine through the Human Body: Mystical Sensuality* (co-edited with Thomas Cattoi, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); and *The Madness of the Saints: Ecstatic Religion in Bengal* (University of Chicago Press, 1989).

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Balouria Rajesh

Chapter 1: Hindu Mysticism

June McDaniel

Introduction- What is Mysticism, and Why Study It?

To understand a phenomenon, we must know what it means to people. To understand mysticism, we begin by looking at how it is understood.

The word 'mysticism' comes from the ancient Greek mysteries, a set of rituals believed to bestow immortality. A mystic was one who had been initiated into the mysteries, and who had thus been transformed. The word is derived from the Greek verb *muo*, to close (usually the lips and eyes), and it implied silence, for the initiates were forbidden to speak of the rituals under threat of death. The term 'mysticism' was first used in Western religion by the early Christian theologians Origen and Clement of Alexandria, to describe a way of knowing and a style of biblical interpretation, and it was popularized by Dionysius the Areopagite in his book *Mystical Theology*, which speaks of union with the Divine Light. It led to the medieval term for special insight into God, *theologia mystica*.

In modern usage, mysticism is found in a broad variety of world religions, referring to the idea that a person can attain a direct experience of or union with Ultimate Reality. It describes an intense experience which transforms the mystic, who realizes that there is a deeper aspect to the world than what he or she perceives through ordinary awareness. It generally involves the vivid presence of a divine reality, usually mediated by the images and symbols of the mystic's culture. However, the term can also be used loosely to refer to a wide range of other events, including esotericism, spiritualism, occultism, necromancy, wizardry and metaphysics.

Mysticism is known and communicated through religious ecstasy. In this paper, we shall define such ecstasy as "a radical alteration of perception, emotion and identity, which brings the person into union with the Infinite." This union may be through wisdom or love, monistic or dualistic, as described by saints and sages of many cultures. Mystical union, whether focusing on awareness or love, is experienced and known through such ecstatic states. Ecstasy can refer to a wide range of experiences- out of body experiences, near death experiences, visions of gods and heavens, knowledge of divine events, and feelings of intense love and compassion which are understood as spiritual gifts. It becomes mystical when there is a powerful sense of union, a transformation of ordinary identity, and a centering of the self in something understood as ultimate or sacred.

Experiences of mystical ecstasy may occur spontaneously or they may be mediated by ritual practice. In many cultures, spontaneously occurring ecstasy is suspect, and must be tested and approved by religious authorities. This is to prove that it is not a result of madness, fraud, or misunderstanding. Ecstasy which occurs in a ritual context is generally more easily legitimated, for it follows the doctrines of the religion, and the person often has a guide or teacher who can determine its authenticity. Ecstatic states allow mystical experiences to be expressed, whether through poetry, songs, visual images, narratives, music, or new interpretation of texts.

One would expect that some of the experts in the topic of mysticism would be people in the academic field of Religion. However, the fields of Religious Studies and Theology have both rejected the study of mysticism. They have chosen to direct their interest to areas they consider to be more relevant. For Religious Studies, this is the study of political religion and competition, with religion as a factor in war and social problems. For Theology, it is the emphasis on practical

ethics, with courses on finance, preaching and leadership; seminaries have largely abolished their specialties in Mystical and Ascetical Theology.[1]

Recent academic writers in religion and theology have referred to mystical experience as "an essentialist illusion," a "category error," as regressive, narcissistic, colonizing, morally inferior, solipsistic and delusional. In his article "The Making of Modern Mysticism," Leigh Eric Schmidt calls mysticism a "beleaguered category," fallen from grace because of the emphasis on the body and the material world in the field of Religious Studies.[2] Mysticism has been called, following Bishop Warburton, the "excremental waste" of reasonable religion"[3]

From the Postmodern and Deconstructionist perspective, all religious understandings are political; belief in any common or universal religious truth is superstition and intellectual colonialism, the imposition of Western religious ideas on non-Western victims. Mysticism is viewed as too close to the heresy of essentialism, implying that there exists something beyond time, change, and the material world. No legitimate comparisons can be made between world religions, as religions are only responses to social history and alien to each other. Seeking mystical states or unity between religions is a waste of time, for religions are all different and what is most important is their conflicts. The dismissal of the legitimacy of mystical claims arises from a philosophical perspective known as Constructivism, which is currently the dominant paradigm in the study of Mysticism today.

The Constructivist approach assumes that all experience is structured by preexisting categories, judgments and thoughts, that we have no access to any "uninterpreted given" or prereflective experience. As Wayne Proudfoot phrases it, "The experience is shaped by a complex pattern of concepts, commitments and expectations which the mystic brings to it… These beliefs and attitudes are formative of, rather than consequent upon, the experience. They define in advance what experiences are possible."[4] Steven Katz also emphasizes how experience is conditioned and interpreted in advance, with assumptions leading directly to experiences. He believes that "one cannot attain nirvana by accident."[5]

The problem in the argument is that mystical and ecstatic states are usually defined and accepted by religions which have doctrinal requirements. The specific experience must fit into doctrine—if it violates the beliefs, it is not then considered to be mysticism. It is illegitimate, and may be called heresy, madness, or simply irrelevant eccentricity. The experiences that are accepted by the tradition must always fit into the preexisting categories, thus it is the preexisting mystical categories that can be said to define the legitimacy of the states. It is only a short step from there to arguing that they create the states. This seemingly unbreakable link between the doctrine and the mystical experience allows many religionists to claim that the doctrine is the cause of the mystical state. But in introducing mystical experiences which do not fit into doctrinal categories, this link is broken, and the causal relationship is shown to be false.

Religions accept experiences of the gods that they recognize. Mystical states without specific institutional affiliation are largely ignored by the field Religious Studies, and not sufficiently sectarian for Theology. The Catholic Church has a long history of evaluating saints

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[1] For further discussion of this topic, see June McDaniel, *Lost Ecstasy: Its Decline and Transformation in Religion.* Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

[2] See the discussion in Leigh Eric Schmidt, "The Making of Modern Mysticism," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 2004, 71, #2, 2003.

[3] Cited in Ibid, p. 279.

[4] Wayne Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985, p. 121.

[5] Ibid, p. 123.

and their experiences to make sure that they are sufficiently doctrinal to be accepted. Heroic virtue will not count toward sainthood if the person's views are deemed heretical. There is a literature of attack from theorists of both perspectives. Non-traditional mystical states are thus rejected by the fields in which one might expect interest.

The Constructivist claim that nobody experiences mystical states outside of the religion which they were taught to believe is clearly false, despite its popularity. Many people have mystical states which do not fit into specific doctrinal molds. If people want their experiences to be accepted and validated by others in their community, they must be changed to fit into the religion's expectations. Such situations are thus like Cinderella's stepsisters in the fairy tale; they want the glass slipper to fit them, so they cut off their heels and toes to be able to fit into the tiny shoe. Experiences must often be altered to be accepted by others.

But many people are not willing to warp their experiences to fit into an institutional category. William James saw enough variety of religious and mystical experiences that he preferred the term 'higher power' to a specific god, and this came to be popular in the later '12 Step' programs. Some people start looking for correlates to their experiences in other religions, with some becoming academics and theologians after this search. Others become New Age seekers, trying to find new religions or develop their own individual religions based on their mystical experiences. Mystics must redefine their experiences in order to avoid conflict with dominant religions, and what was once heresy may now be called imaginative poetry or artistic visions or musical inspiration. All of these violate the assumptions of the Constructivist view, that people can only experience what they have been previously taught to believe.

Modern studies of non-traditional mysticism and spirituality can be seen in Wuthnow's "spirituality of seeking," Forman's "grassroots spirituality," Parson's "unchurched mysticism," Fuller's "unchurched America," Heelas' "inner-life spirituality" and "New Age Romanticism," Partridge's "re-enchantment," and the sort of widespread evangelical sense of presence described in T.R. Luhrmann's "When God Talks Back." We can see the more skeptical, and hostile, view from such Religious Studies writers as Proudfoot, Katz, McCutcheon, Fitzgerald, Penner, and others who interpret mysticism through the Constructivist lens. It is an ongoing debate.

Religious and mystical experiences are still continuing outside of academic circles. The 2009 Pew survey noted that almost 50% of the American population have had such experiences, which were defined on the survey as a "spiritual awakening understood as a mystical or religious experience."[6] The percentage was even larger for those who defined as religiously unaffiliated.

More recently, the 2023 Pew survey notes that 70% of Americans consider themselves to be spiritual, with 22 % who consider themselves "spiritual but not religious." The survey mentions 46% who have monthly or more often "a deep sense of wonder at the universe" and 44% who have "a deep sense of spiritual peace and well-being." Sensing "the presence of something from beyond this world" is less common. Still, about one-fifth of Americans or more say they have such feelings at least once or twice a month. On the question of whether they have ever had mystical or religious experiences, fully 45% say they have had a "sudden feeling of connection with something from beyond this world." Almost half look inwards to find connection to something greater than themselves and to find the "true self." [7]

This is a large number of people to dismiss as delusional or irrelevant. As Craig Miller writes, the mystical aspect of religion is illegitimate and unadmitted, and he compares it with the "black market in a totalitarian country, for it makes up the vast underbelly of the American

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[6] See Mystical Experiences | Pew Research Center .

[7] See Spirituality Among Americans | Pew Research Center

religious economy"[8]. Mysticism is thus widespread, but not an accepted area of study. Even *Rolling Stone* has recently written on the unexpected mystical and religious experiences which occur from people using psychedelics intended to cure psychological problems.[9]

While the academic experts in religion and theology tend to ignore or malign mystical experiences, we see a rising interest in the area on the part of psychiatrists, neurologists, even mathematicians and physicists. As Albert Einstein famously noted, "the most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of true art and science… I maintain that the cosmic religious feeling is the strongest and noblest motive for scientific research.[10] This interest has been continued in modern scientists doing research on the nature of consciousness, especially from the perspectives of neurobiology and transpersonal psychology. In the study of the nature of the mind, we start to see a rapprochement between Eastern and Western ideas.

Some background on Hindu mysticism

In this paper, we shall focus on the East, specifically on Hindu tradition. Hinduism is the third largest religion worldwide, with over 1.2 billion practitioners, including over one billion Hindus in India alone.[11]

Hinduism has contributed several important concepts to world mysticism, including the idea of universalism, inner spiritual healing and the usefulness of yogic meditative practice to evoke mystical states. But first, let us look at some details of history, doctrine and practice.

In India, mystical states are usually described in Sanskrit, the sacred language of Hinduism. There is no single term in Sanskrit that equates to 'mysticism,' but we do see the use of such terms as *moksha, samadhi, darshan, kaivalya, mahabhava,* and *brahmajnana*, as well as *sakshatkara, anubhuti, yogipratyaksha, samavesa, anubhava*, and *jivanmukta.* All of these refer to styles of mystical union, generally focused on wisdom or love. We shall briefly explore some of the major types of Hindu mysticism.

Veda and Vedanta

We begin with the statements of Hindu mysticism in the Vedas, the earliest sacred scriptures of Hinduism. The four Vedic books are usually dated by scholars from 1500 BCE to 2000 BCE. While there are many forms of Hinduism today, and Hindu identity has become an area of modern scholarly debate, belief in the Vedas is generally considered the one necessary qualification for being considered a Hindu. In the *Rig Veda*, the book of sacred hymns, line 1.164.46 states "*Ekam sat vipra bahauda vadanti*" which may be translated as "ultimate truth (or ultimate reality) is one, the sages give it many names." The names of different gods are given as examples of this process. This statement is echoed in *Rig Veda* 10.114.5, which describes how the deity is one in nature, but which "wise singers shape, with songs, into many figures."

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[8] Craig Kennet Miller, *Baby Boomer Spirituality: Ten Essential Values of a Generation*. Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1993, p. 73.

[9] Cassady Rosenblum. "People Are Taking Magic Mushrooms for Depression — and Accidentally Meeting God". *Rolling Stone Magazine*, August 18, 2024.

[10] Nancy Frankenberry, ed. *The Faith of Scientists in their Own Words*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008, p. 151.

[11] For statistics, see Hindu Countries 2024 (worldpopulationreview.com).

The hymns of the *Rig Veda* text are attributed to sages or *rishis.* Some were inspired by the ritual drink *soma,* which gave religious visions to those who drank it. It was made from a plant which was understood to give access to the gods, as the sages of *Rig Veda* 8.48.3 state, "We have drunk the soma; we have become immortal; we have gone to the light; we have found the gods." In *Rig Veda* X.136. 2-3, it states that some sages were renunciants, who travelled spiritually when the gods entered them: "Crazy with asceticism, we have mounted the wind, Our bodies are all you mere mortals can see."

The Vedas described the Ultimate or Divine in both abstract and personal form. For the personal forms as gods, there were rituals in which they were offered gifts of flowers, butter, and other items. This came to be known in English as the Vedic sacrifice. Its goal was immortality, having the soul follow the path of the ancestors or the path of the gods at death. For the abstract form we have the statements of universal truth, which focus on the terms *Sat* and *Brahman*.

Sat is a Sanskrit word which may be translated as "the true essence" or "that which is unchangeable." Vedic commentators describe it as all-pervading, absolute, universal, indestructible, indefinable, the fixed and eternal reality or truth. It is the ultimate and the highest state, which in the Vedas is also called *Brahman*.

Brahman is not a deity or a being in the ordinary sense. The concept of *Brahman* is described in hundreds of hymns in the Vedic literature. There is no single word in modern Western languages that can render the various shades of meaning of the word *Brahman* in the Vedic literature. The Vedic idea of *Brahman* was initially the power immanent in the sound, words, verses and formulas of the Vedas. It later came to be understood as the cosmic principle underlying all that exists. The concept of *Brahman* evolved and expanded from the power of sound, words and rituals to the essence of the universe, the foundation of all phenomena, and the essence of the true Self or *Atman*. It cannot be seen, though it can be experienced and known through the development of self-knowledge (*atma jnana*). Brahman is understood to have the qualities of pure Being, pure Consciousness, and pure Bliss *(sat-chit-ananda).*

The most important commentaries on the Vedas, known as the Upanishads, have many writings on the nature of *Brahman* and the ways that people may experience it. The oldest of these Vedic commentaries range in dates from about the eighth century BCE to the fourth century BCE, and there are Upanishads written later. The Vedic lines which describe mystical states have been interpreted in two major ways. From the perspective of non-dual (and thus non-theistic) Advaita Vedanta philosophy, following Shankara and other writers, they mean that only *Sat,* or *Brahman,* is ultimately true. The world of names and forms is *maya*, it is false or illusory in relation to *Brahman*. Thus, all form and human ways of understanding are false, including the gods, who participate in the realm of *maya*. Only what is eternal is ultimately true. However, the schools of dualistic or theistic Dvaita Vedanta have interpreted "Ekam sat" differently. *Sat* or *Brahman* is ultimately true, but the names and forms described by the sages are also true (as sages are speakers of truth). Thus, *Brahman* may be considered as present in a particular god, or all gods.

In Upanishadic texts, Brahman is equated with person's true Self, the *Atman*. Realization of this creates a special type of mystical experience, as one Upanishad states, "This is my soul in the innermost heart, greater than the earth, greater than the aerial space, greater than these worlds. This soul, this Self of mine is that Brahman." (Chandogya Upanishad 3.14.3 – 3.14.4).

Brahman, the ultimate reality, can be understood as both with and without attributes. *Nirguna Brahman* is its abstract form, without shape, form or quality, beyond limitation by space and time, while *Saguna Brahman* appears as a deity in mythic or symbolic form. The abstract

form of Brahman is most often known through mystical wisdom, especially by the person who attains the state of liberation or *moksha*, while the personified form of Brahman is known through mystical love, as the person attains the state of *mahabhava* or *prema*.

This distinction was later elaborated. In the doctrines of *nirguna* and *saguna brahman*, the first term means absolute existence without form, and the second has *brahman* taking on name and form, or *nama-rupa*. While non-theistic Vedanta emphasizes the *nirguna* aspect, most theistic Vedanta does not accept the lesser nature of the god with form. It may understand both aspects to be of equal value, or it may consider the god with form and personality to be superior to the state of formless being.

The Upanishads give many metaphors for understanding the deeper states of the Self. The person is compared to a chariot, with the Self as charioteer, the body as the chariot, the mind as the reins and the senses as horses; and to a lamp, where the body is the lamp, and the Self is the flame. The person is described as having five inner bodies or sheaths (*koshas*), which encase the deepest layer of Self; and these are like layers of an onion, moving from coarse to subtle. There are also four basic states of consciousness, which include dreaming and deep sleep as forms of awareness. Schools of philosophy that developed based on the Upanishads have described many other layers of bodies, inner senses, vital energies and potentials for awareness. These have created maps to use for meditation.

The orthodox philosophical schools of Hinduism focus on the concept of Brahman and Atman in their discussion of enlightenment or *moksha.* The school of non-dual or Advaita Vedanta states that there is no ultimate distinction between Atman and Brahman. At the deepest level, the Atman within the heart is a divine spark of Brahman, a drop of the cosmic ocean. Mystical union or *moksha* is thus unity with all that exists. The school of dualistic Dvaita Vedanta, on the other hand, follows the idea that individual Self and *Brahman* are distinct, with *moksha* as the loving, eternal union or nearness of the Self with the distinct and separate *Brahman* in deity form. Divine love is considered the highest perfection of existence. Here *Brahman* is the lord deep within the self, the inner controller within the heart, called Ishvara or Isha. This approach is usually monotheistic, though sometimes it may be broader, including all gods. Mysticism is a union with the god through love.

The Upanishads are primarily philosophical texts, and they do not give detailed instructions on how to attain these ultimate states. For this, we have the development of the various Yoga schools. The word ‘yoga’ is usually translated as ‘union’ (in the sense of mystical union), or as ‘discipline.’ While it has become associated with exercise in the West, in India the Yoga schools are ways of gaining access to deeper states of awareness, elaborating the Upanishadic instructions on attaining mystical states.

Yoga

The term *yoga* was used in hymn 5.81.1 of the *Rig Veda*, in harnessing thoughts to focus on the sun-god, and also in the Upanishads, as restraint of the senses (ie Katha Upanishad 6.10). Techniques for controlling breath and vital energies are mentioned in the *Atharva Veda.* Over time, yoga came to imply union or integration of one’s soul with the universal consciousness. The mystical goals of yoga require the process of stilling the mind, gaining insight and detached awareness, and eventual liberation from the changing realm of illusion or *samsara*.

Yoga is thus a process leading to unity with *Brahman* through realization of the true nature of self (*atman*). This goal varies by philosophical or theological system, as there are many schools of yoga. The person who becomes enlightened while still alive is called *jivanmukti.*

Classical yoga emerged around 200 CE, through various texts containing yoga-related discussions, especially the Yoga Sutra of Patanjali. Some of the most well-known branches of yoga were described in the Bhagavad Gita section of the Mahabharata. These paths are the path of wisdom (*Jnana yoga*), the path of love and devotion (*Bhakti yoga*), and the path of selfless action (*Karma yoga*). Patanjali gives us the royal path (*Raja yoga*).

Jnana, meaning wisdom or knowledge, is the way to mystical union through spiritual knowledge. This is experiential knowledge that is gained by "knowing" the deeper Self. In order to achieve this knowledge, one must silence the mind and go beyond deceptive appearances (*maya*). Jnana yoga is sometimes described as a process of elimination, getting rid of what is unreal in order to find what is ultimately real.

The path of Bhakti yoga emphasizes the mystical goal of divine love, and it focuses the mind and heart on a specific deity or deity couple. Such yoga often involves prayers and visualizations, seeking a state of pure selfless love and salvation from worldly attachments and sorrows. In some traditions, the person can enter the paradise of the deity while still alive through yogic practice.

The path of Karma yoga has an immanent mystical goal, for followers to find joy in their *dharma,* the worldly obligations and responsibilities into which people are born. Detachment from the fruits of one's labors begins with the sense of duty, acting in harmony with the cosmos. Performing one's *dharma* voluntarily in full awareness ideally leads to a joyous and honorable life of unattached action.

Raja Yoga is often known as Ashtanga yoga, or the eightfold path as described in Patanjali's Yoga Sutra. Raja, meaning royal, includes the *ashta*, meaning eight, *anga*, meaning limbs, paths of yoga. The eighth limb in the eightfold path is *samadhi,* the last stage of Raja yoga. *Samadhi* is a stage of total focus, when the seeker and the object sought become one. Depending on the interpretation, *samadhi* may refer to a deep absorption of the mind in specific objects, or in the transcendental *atman*. In many Hindu traditions, *samadhi* plays a crucial role as means to reach the experiential knowledge of Self and thus ultimate goal of liberation (*mokṣha*).

Patanjali defines Yoga is as "the cessation of mental fluctuations." The lines which follow add: "Then the seer abides in himself." As a process, the cessation of mental fluctuations describes the gradual quieting that occurs with yoga meditation. As an end result, this cessation evokes a state of consciousness in which the infinite Self is experienced as the seer abiding in its pure consciousness, free from any content, boundaries, and suffering. Eventually, this experience becomes permanent, present in the midst of daily activities, and the person enters the state of full liberation (*kaivalya*).

Samadhi can occur in different ways. When an object or an idea on which the person meditates acts to induce the state, it is called *samprajnata,* the *samadhi* 'with support.' This state includes the object of concentration in the *samadhi* state. When the state occurs without such a focus, it is called 'unprovoked' or 'contentless' *samadhi* (*asamprajnata*). In this type of concentration, all mental activity comes to a stop, and any sense of personal awareness, perceived object, or means of perception dissolves completely. This experience is also called seedless or formless concentration in Advaita Vedānta. These styles might be compared to the Western categories of extrovertive and introvertive mystical experiences.

The mysticism of Raja yoga and Advaita Vedanta tends to focus on wisdom. Gaining this state also includes an alternative understanding of perception. Altered perception may occur through the senses, or through the mind (*manas*) without the use of the sense organs. The wisdom gained may include revelatory intuitions (*pratibhajnana, yogipratyaksha*), the sage's knowledge of past, present and future events (*arsajnana*), and supernatural perceptions (*siddhadarshana*). These are situations of partial mysticism. In full mystical states, there is no dualistic self that remains to observe these events.

Bhakti devotion

With the rise of devotion in the medieval period, universalist ideas tended to wane. The puranas emphasized the adventures of the gods, and often gave arguments for sectarian belief and practice. We find the concept of the *ishtadevata*, the personal god who is individually chosen, becoming more popular. This means that people can choose which gods to worship. We also have the notion of *avatar*, in which deities can take on different forms. This implies that the deities of other religions can be true, because they could really be Hindu gods in disguise (thus, the historical Buddha has been called one of the Hindu god Vishnu's avatars).

The major form of mysticism that we see in the *bhakti* or devotional tradition is that of love mysticism. In Vaishnava bhakti, devotees unite with the god through many forms of love, and some major types depend on the relationship of the deity and the worshipper. The deity may be master, while the worshipper is the servant. The deity may be a beloved, while the worshipper is the lover. The deity may be a friend, and the worshipper is also a friend. The deity may be a parent, while the worshipper is a child (though this is sometimes reversed, where worshippers may act as parents to the baby Krishna). The deity may also be joined to the worshipper as a shared deeper Self. However, this last is least valued in the Vaishnava bhakti tradition, as it is hard to love yourself passionately. All of these are ways to unite with the god- through love as obedience, as passion, as trust, as caring and dependence, and as shared identity.

In Vaishnavism, mystical flights of soul can lead to several heavens, where worshippers can take on spiritual bodies. These are attainable through devotional meditation (*bhakti yoga*) or simply by loving surrender to the Lord (*prapatti* or *saraṇagati*). The Gauḍiya Vaiṣhṇavas of Bengal allow for the yogic creation of a divine body which participates in the love relationship of the god Krishna and his consort Radha. The love of this divine couple is understood to create many ecstatic states of love: there is pure love (*prema)* which melts the mind and heart, and which can be shaped into an eternal heavenly body. There is deep sharing, passionate attachment, a love which is eternally new and fresh, visionary experiences of intense sweetness, and the highest state of *mahabhava.* In this state, one can feel all possible emotions at once, including love and separation from the god, and a mystical union with nature in which the divine love is shared by the world and the universe.

In South India, the god Shiva is worshipped with love as "the lord white as jasmine." He is personified as the god of creation and destruction, a renunciant sage, and a yogi immersed in constant meditation. He also dances the universe into and out of existence. The traditions of Shaivism were divided into dualistic and monistic ontologies. In the first, the Self was eternally distinct from Shiva, we see this in the devotional poetry to Shiva as god and beloved. The *pratyabhijna* school of Kashmir Shaivism was monistic: the individual Self was a manifestation of Shiva, who is pure consciousness, and liberation was merging one's individual awareness back into the Supreme, into the state of *anuttara*, a perfect union of Shiva and Shakti. Thus, in

Shaiva mysticism, the devotee may merge into the infinite mind of the Lord of Yogis or worship him with infinite love in his heavenly home on Mount Kailash. There is also *Nirguna bhakti*, in which the one god is worshipped in his infinite aspect as Bhagavan. We see elements of Nirguna bhakti in some Sant and Sufi writers, such as the mystic poet Kabir.

We also see devotion towards the goddess, usually in the form of Shakti or Kali. In this approach, the goddess is most often portrayed as the Mother, with the worshipper as the child. It is a union of mystical love, as the worshipper's soul rests in the Mother's arms into eternity. Kali is seen in other areas of India as a force of destruction and death, but in Bengali tradition she is simply powerful, the force of life and death, and she guides the soul after death into its next life or into bliss in her paradise. She may also be worshipped as a sister and friend, and even as child Kali, but she is rarely seen as a lover. That role is occasionally seen is Shakta tantra.

Mysticism in Tantra

In Hindu tantric traditions, especially Tantric Shaivism and Shaktism, meditation can bring intense mystical experiences, especially the revelations of Shakti in the form of Kundalini. This term refers to both the power (*shakti)* of the divine both as primordial, creative energy and as a spiritual potency latent within the human person. In cosmological terms, *kundalini* is the power stimulating creation, an active feminine force that acts through matter, motivated by the masculine potential energy of spirit. It normally lies latent in people, but when it is aroused through yoga, *kundalini* rises through the body, bringing mystical experiences, supernatural powers (*siddhis*), and, ultimately, freedom from the cycles of birth and death. Ascending through the six chakras, Kundalini Shakti unites with the god Shiva in the thousand petaled lotus (*sahasrara*) at the top of the head, bringing the highest ecstasy to the practitioner. In some schools, as kundalini later returns to the lowest chakra, she releases a flood of divine nectar. When the yogi is able to control this process, he or she may attain spiritual liberation. There are many descriptions and maps which show how this process occurs.

Some tantric traditions have a stage in which practitioners deliberately violate social norms, as a way to overcome bondage to social conditioning. Tantras divide people into the animal stage, in which the person follows social rules like a member of a herd of beasts; the heroic stage, in which the Tantrika will act against social rules to develop individuality; and the divine state, in which Tantrika will be merged with the mind of Shiva and Shakti in the state of *brahmajnana*. In this last state, ordinary rules of living are irrelevant, as a permanent mystical union brings the Tantrika into the role of guru, helping others out of their limited states of ignorance into universal awareness. The stage of ritual rebellion, the *vira* or heroic stage, is understood to be temporary. The rituals only occur at specific, limited times, and the practices may be understood either literally or figuratively. The figurative or symbolic understanding shows a more Brahmanical interpretation, while the literal practice reflects the folk tradition, in which matter itself has spiritual power.

Tantra is usually a secret tradition, and its literature was hard to find for many centuries. Today some tantric texts are published in India, mostly in Sanskrit with translations into regional languages. However, Hinduism in Bali has the high priests pass down maps of the inner worlds in an unusual way. They are never printed or published. The priest (*pedanda*) will scratch the mandala, which is map of the inner worlds, onto the ground during the initiation process. Then he will brush it away with a leafy branch when the initiation is finished. There is thus no record

that non-initiates may see. Such maps help the priest determine the locale of souls, to learn which souls are incarnating in a family, and where a given soul may go at death.

Another form of Hindu mysticism is the trance and possession style of folk or village Hinduism. This sort has generally been ignored by scholars of mysticism, who prefer the textual commentaries of the classical Vedanta and bhakti traditions. However, folk mysticism is widespread and ancient, and deserves some space. It has been linked with animism, the belief that objects, places, and creatures possess a potential for conscious awareness; this has also been called panpsychism by philosophers. From this perspective, all matter can have agency and they will.

Animism accepts the idea of levels and degrees of consciousness, some of which are bound to the brain and body, but others which are more mobile, able to move from one body to another, or one object to another. The term 'animism' has recently been readopted by various scholars, who began using the term in a different way. The 'new animism' focuses on different ideas of personhood, avoiding the dualism of body and soul.

In folk Hinduism, matter has the potential to become conscious. Local priests or *ojhas* can distinguish between mountains that do possess consciousness, and those which do not. In a state of possession trance, a person's awareness may become latent or leave the body, as a different awareness enters. Such a trance may be partial (*anga*) or full (*purna*), depending on how much of the original consciousness remains. If the possessing spirit is an ancestor, the entranced person may gain useful knowledge. However, if it is a god that comes down to the person, he or she may enter the state of *devavesa*, which grants both wisdom and love. There is no limit to which deities can appear, and often such mysticism includes new gods that were previously unknown to the community.

In full trance, there is generally no memory of the state remaining afterwards. The trance medium must learn about what happened by asking devotees and observers. In partial trance, there may be memory remaining, depending on the control of consciousness by the medium. In full trance, memory depends upon the meditative skill of the medium. More specifically, in the state of *bhar*, there is little or no memory; this state is usually found in people who have had little or no training in meditation, and possession trance has come upon them suddenly.

In the more advanced state of *bhava* or *mahabhava*, the person generally has some meditative training and is able to co-exist with the deity, in either a union of fused awareness or a double awareness. This fused awareness of *ekatmika bhava*, which involves a shared soul or *atma*, is a mystical state outside of the Brahmanical orthodoxy of Hinduism (though it includes the Sanskrit concept of *atma).* The state of souls co-existing is rare, but we hear of it in bhakti saints like Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, who shared his own personality and body with both the god Krishna and his consort Radha, taking turns during possession states. Such states are usually associated with saints and sages. There is a literature on how to examine and analyze such mystical states, and how to tell them from false mystical claims, and how to distinguish them from mental confusion, pathologies and deliberate simulations.[12]

[12] For more data on trance and possession, see June McDaniel, *The Madness of the Saints: Ecstatic Religion in Bengal*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.

Thus, we can see that, over time, the field of Hindu mysticism has encompassed a wide variety of states. The various types work from the assumption that there exist deeper areas of consciousness to which people do not normally have access, and that these can be reached and used fruitfully by skilled practitioners. The assumptions of Vedanta, which are widespread even in modern India, accept that religions are symbol systems which can work together to open and explore these deeper states.

Mystical psychology and Hindu ideas of self: Discernment and Trauma

In the modern West, psychology has many models of the mind, but few deal with the deeper states that are described in Hindu mystical literature. There is much overlap between Western and Eastern models of the mind, and Hindu psychology includes treatment of disorders of perception, thought and memory, as well as emotional and behavior problems. It recognizes hallucination, obsession, amnesia, anxiety, elation and depression, from both exogenous and endogenous causes. It includes many physical ways to deal with physical problems.

However, from the Hindu perspective, psychological problems may also come from difficulties in the deeper layers of the self. This would be a problem in the West, where these deeper aspects of the self are not understood to exist (or if they do, they are not relevant or important). There are problems of the inner, spiritual bodies which need cures specific to them- in Hindu psychology, this often involves the development of yogic discernment, so that the patient may understand his or her own mind and emotions and find the origins of these problems.

People who have gone through the often-chaotic early stages of mystical development can help others entering these states, and they may become healers for problems that many others do not recognize as existing. This is an area which has recently been called ‘spiritual emergency’, when sudden intense and vivid psychic and religious experiences for which the person is unprepared can create states of confusion and disharmony. Having a guide, or even a clear way to interpret such events, can be very helpful.

In Hindu psychology, the knowledge that arises from mystical states can help to identify, confront, and heal psychological wounds, ideally leading to profound personal transformations and a renewed sense of purpose and well-being. This allows distance from traumatic memories and a sense of detachment from a usual self-referential perspective. Traumatic events can be revisited with less emotional intensity, providing a safer space to process difficult emotions and deal with alienation and fear. This distance can also help diminish the power these memories hold, reducing the symptoms of anxiety and depression. In addition, they may lead to significant cathartic releases, breaking the emotional numbness that often accompanies trauma. With a mystical perspective, the context expands, and individual suffering can seem less overwhelming.

Mystical insight can also help society, for the deep sense of unity and interconnectedness that mystical union is understood to evoke can give people a feeling of profound empathy for the struggles and joys of others. This can lead to more empathetic societies that emphasize collective well-being and inspire shifts in values from materialism and competition towards cooperation and sustainability. By transcending normal limited perspectives, people experiencing these states can develop new ways of understanding and interacting, breaking down the barriers of ego and fostering a sense of universal connectivity. Experiencing the profound unity of all life in the state of *brahman,* or the pure state of spiritual love of *prema*, can ideally help individuals and groups move beyond entrenched positions and view conflicts from a more compassionate and comprehensive perspective. Such experiences give people a glimpse beyond the veil of

conditioned reality, revealing the profound interconnectedness of all things. The heightened empathy and creativity fostered by these experiences are qualities that can help societies to address complex local and global issues, and lead to emotional maturity.

Hindu mystical exploration is thus not an escape from reality, but a deeper engagement with it. It encourages people to grow beyond limited perspectives, and to actively participate in the creation of a more compassionate and harmonious world.

Another area in which this approach can be useful is the area of death and dying. Mystical experiences give insight into deeper forms of existence, and the paralyzing fear and pain often associated with death can be limited. The dying person can see death with an outlook of hope and compassion. This change has been experimentally associated with psychedelic mysticism, in which dying people have had peaceful and even joyous deaths. Mysticism can lead to a 'good death,' viewed as a valuable journey rather than a fight.

Interfaith Unity and Mystical Universalism

Another important contribution of Hindu mysticism to world understanding is the concept of mystical universalism. This is the belief in one universal religious truth, which can be reached or understood in many ways. We return to the ancient Vedic line: 'Ultimate Truth is one, the sages call it by many names." This is an approach which allows for a wide understanding of ideals, from the 'scientists' god' of pure energy and emptiness to the compassionate religious god of love and the priestly god of form and personality. This approach has promoted a sympathetic and tolerant attitude towards the world's cultures and religions, and it emphasized the values common to different perspectives. When applied to the area of world mysticism today, it is sometimes called the perennialist perspective.

While it is widely believed that universalism is a philosophy originating with Plato and Greek philosophy in the fourth century BCE, the concept is much older. We see universalism in the four-thousand-year-old Vedas and Upanishads, and it has continued to be an important concept in Indian philosophy to the present day.

We may also note that there is a range of understandings of this statement, from a metaphysical statement (all is one), to a pan-Hindu statement (the various Hindu gods represent the same reality), to a pan-religious statement (all religions follow one truth, though their prophets use different names and forms to represent that truth), the latter sometimes called Neo-Vedanta when used in the field of comparative religion. There are several different ways to interpret the term 'universalism'.

Symbolism is important here. As the theologian Paul Tillich has noted, human beings may understand the revelatory aspect of God, "God for Us,'" but God's deepest aspect is a mystery, "God in Himself." God's revelations in the Bible and other sacred texts give us different religions, but God as Divine Mystery is beyond the claims of any one religion. Thus, we have God, and then the 'God Above God', the Ground of Being Itself, contrasting the deity of religion with the deity of mystical union (which are ultimately the same God).

Sometimes the concept of mystical universalism is combined with a developmental model. The Hindu monk Vivekananda espoused what we might call evolutionary universalism- that all religions are true, but that they are evolving towards an ideal form. In his case, it was the divine *Sat* of the Vedas. We see this approach today in the West in Teilhard de Chardin's theory of the Omega Point, in which the universe evolves towards divine union with Christ, and it was echoed

to some extent in the work of the psychologist Abraham Maslow (whose final stage of human development went beyond peak experiences to transcendent ones).

We also see the idea of universalism in some of the Hindu mystical groups that have syncretistic elements. Thus, we have Sikhism merging Hindu and Muslim thought, and following the mysticism of *surat shabda yoga*, the sound current which creates the universe, and in whose practice celestial light and music become a pathway to the Supreme Being. Then we have the poems of the Baul singers, who combine Vaishnava Hindu, Sahajiya Buddhist and Sufi Muslim thought, and who meditate upon the bird of the soul trapped in cage of the body, and the mysterious Man of the Heart who is sought by the mystical seeker. Their practices of bodily worship (*deha sadhana*) involve ritual secrecy, and many layers of symbolism. The Kabir *panthis* of Sant Mat also avoid sectarianism and emphasize the importance of devotion to the guru and god, non-violence, compassion, and accepting the legitimacy of many religious points of view (the doctrine of *anekantvada*, also found in Jainism). They accept the universal brotherhood of all beings, and a mysticism of love. Among the Radhasoamis, the formless Absolute is united with the soul through the divine inner sound and the mediation of the living master or Satguru, thus allowing people to become spiritually liberated while alive.

Famous mystical writers like Kabir and Lalan Shah were claimed by both Hinduism and Islam. As Kabir wrote, God is beyond religious limitations:

> *If God be within the mosque, then to whom does this world belong?*
> *If Ram be within the image which you find upon your pilgrimage, then who is there to know what happens without?*
> *Hari is in the East: Allah is in the West.*
> *Look within your heart, for there you will find both Karim and Ram;*
> *All the men and women of the world are His living forms.*
> *Kabir is the child of Allah and of Ram: He is my Guru, He is my Pir.*[13]

Mystical universalism can contribute many ideas that are useful for societies. Most importantly, it can help to avoid war, for when religions are understood to be in ultimate harmony, there is no absolute command for cultural competition and dominance.

New Directions for Research

Hinduism long ago did explorations in areas that modern scientists are just beginning to investigate, on the dynamics, origins and boundaries of mystical consciousness. Scientists today should not have to reinvent the wheel. The work of Hindu yogis, sages and renunciants is important for the study of mysticism today because they have spent millennia exploring inner states, and their traditions have maps and directions.

In a way, the study of deeper consciousness that we need is like going back to the days of the early explorers of the world, when each trading ship had its own map. Eventually these were consolidated into a single understanding of world geography. This has yet to be done with mystical exploration. Each ship goes out on its own, and some maps are shared, and others are rejected. The task of creating a composite spiritual geography remains to be done.

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[13] *One hundred poems of Kabir,* trans. Rabindranath **Tagore**. New Delhi: Pan Macmillan Publishing, 1915, poem 69.

In the past, making maps was done by geographers who collected data from sea captains, explorers and others. In the second century CE, Ptolemy gathered documents detailing the locations of towns, adding tales of many travelers. He devised a system of lines of latitude and longitude, and he plotted some 10,000 locations—from Britain to Europe, Asia and North Africa. But after the Roman Empire fell, Ptolemy's researched geography was lost to the West for almost a thousand years. Maps became concerned more with storytelling, and they came to express the importance of their royal patrons. Such patronage distorted maps, for those paying for the maps wanted their own countries to be shown as the center of the world (and we saw a similar phenomenon with some religious maps whose own gods are the center of the cosmos). Such distortion in maps may be practical- spices came to be very expensive as Near Eastern traders inflated their prices by showing maps warning of dragons and other dangers in the waters.[14]

In contrast, the sixteenth century scholar Gerardus Mercator spent the last thirty years of his life working on the *Cosmographia*; a description of the universe including the topography, history and institutions of all countries. His knowledge of geography came from his library of over a thousand books and maps, from his visitors and from his correspondence (in six languages) with other scholars, statesmen, travelers, merchants and seamen. Mercator wrote on geography, theology, philosophy, and he included various stories of the creation of the universe. To understand the cosmos, he believed that one needed symbolic as well as worldly knowledge.

These are like the maps that we need of the deeper states of mind. As the early maps disagreed with each other, so do modern psychological and religious mappings of the mind. It takes much effort to find a central truth amid the disconnected facts, descriptions, and psychological and religious symbols, and expertise in many fields to find ways to relate them without conflict.

There has been some research on the techniques of inner navigation with a different set of modern maps. In recent work with psychedelics, the emphasis has been on passivity, waiting upon the body's "inner healing intelligence" to give information about both trauma and transcendence. But psychedelics can be used for yogic knowledge as well. Including both the traditional meditative techniques of India, and the voices of Hinduism's marginalized voices, the folk and shamanic traditions, can give information about trance states and alternative ideas of identity, and study the origins and dynamics of mystical consciousness.

When people forget their deeper origins, their shared humanity is obscured, leading to dangerous competition. As the naturalist E.O. Wilson said, "The real problem of humanity is the following: We have Paleolithic emotions, medieval institutions, and godlike technology." If we wish our hearts to catch up with our tools, mystical awareness needs to be better understood.

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[14] The phrase 'Here be dragons' is still found on maps to indicate uncharted areas. See History of cartography - Wikipedia

Sarbajit Sen

Chapter 2: Mysticism in Buddhism

Perry Schmidt-Leukel

Preliminary Considerations

Buddhism, as all major religious traditions, is *internally highly diverse*—so much so that various scholars suggest to speak of "Buddhisms" instead of "Buddhism" (from Rupert Gethin in 1998 to Powers 2018b). Yet too often, scholars dealing with "mysticism in Buddhism" do not pay adequate attention to this fact. Research frequently focusses on one particular form or school of Buddhism but then (mis)takes or (mis)represents this as characteristic of Buddhism or "the Buddhist position" in general. Other investigations speak about Buddhism at large and simply ignore its internal diversity by treating it as a more or less homogenous entity. This leaves us with the open and serious question of whether something meaningful can be said (or not) about mysticism that applies to the Buddhist tradition as a whole in all its variants (or to other religious traditions as well).

Research has increasingly become conscious of the fact that the term *mysticism* is, and has been, used for a *variety of different phenomena*. Therefore, one now often finds talk about "mysticisms." However, there is an unsettled dispute about the usefulness (and the defining features) of the cover-concept "mysticism," even if it is used in the plural. Is it possible to define "mysticism" in such a way that it includes the rich diversity of different "mysticisms" but remains sufficiently distinct to distinguish between mystical and non-mystical forms of religious experience or of being religious? Or should one better drop the term altogether? In framing the question this way, one inevitably borders at the even larger, yet structurally similar debate about defining "religion." A middle-way between the alternatives of abandoning or essentializing the concepts of "mysticism" and "religion" is their use as polyvalent cluster-concepts following Wittgenstein's well-known "family resemblance." Not all versions of "mysticism" must instantiate all features spread over the whole class (as suggested by King 1988, 257, and, much more cautiously, already by Stace 1960, 45-7). Yet this would still leave us with the questions of what distinguishes "mysticisms" from other forms of religion and of how it relates to these. In the context of Buddhism, a good example of such a borderline case is the question of whether the practice and experience of "mindfulness" would fall under the category of "mysticism" or not.

When looking at "mysticism in Buddhism," the *two difficulties* just mentioned *need to be correlated*. Earlier writings show a tendency to associate specific types of mysticism with specific religions—religions 1,2,3 corresponding to mysticism type *A*, religions 4,5,6 to mysticism *B*, and religions 7,8,9 to mysticism *C*. However, already Steven Katz (among others) pointed to "the plurality of experience found in Hindu, Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist mystical traditions. … Thus we find, for example, in Hinduism monistic, pantheistic, and theistic trends, while Christianity knows both absorptive and non-absorptive forms of mysticism" (Katz 1978, 27). The debates about essentialism vs. (Katz's version of) constructivism hardly considered that this notice might relativize Katz's overall view that the essential differences between mystical experiences correspond to the doctrinal differences between the major religious traditions ("beliefs shape experiences," ibid. 30). For in the above quotation Katz implicitly admits that certain types of mystical experiences exist across different religious traditions despite the overall differences of their doctrinal frameworks. This can still be reconciled with Katz's constructivist epistemology, but only if one takes into account that on the one hand even at the doctrinal level religions are internally quite diverse, while on the other hand similar doctrinal or

typological differences are found across the intrareligious diversity of all major religious traditions. This contradicts any simple correlation of particular types of mysticism with specific religions.

In addition, as William Wainwright (2021, 1-4) emphasized, characteristics defining a specific form of mystical experience do not always apply exclusively. That is, the monistic feeling of utter unity or the experience of pure consciousness can be part of extrovertive as well as introvertive forms of mystical experiences within theistic as well as non-theistic settings. Such observations are in line with my theses that religious diversity displays fractal patterns, that is, typological difference between religions replicate at the level of intra-religious diversity and even at the level of intra-subjective religious diversity (Schmidt-Leukel 2017, 222-45; 2019; 2023a, 2024). Hence, the fact that mystics belong to different religious traditions does not entail an essential and inevitable difference regarding the type of their experiences. Presumably every religious tradition accommodates similar sets of different types of mystical experiences (Jones 2021, 13-16), so that individual mystics from different religious traditions can nevertheless have similar types of mystical experiences. And in various cases the borderlines between different types of mystical experiences may often seem fuzzy, so that the same mystic may combine different types of experiences which would still fall under a polyvalent concept of "mysticism."

In principle, the study of mysticism in Buddhism can be undertaken by Buddhists and non-Buddhists. It could be part of an exercise in "Buddhist theology" (Jackson & Makransky 2003) or "Buddhist Critical-Constructive Reflection" (as "Buddhist theology" it is now called within the American Academy of Religion). However, so far, there is not that much research done by Buddhist scholars under the explicit rubric of "mysticism." To a significant extent, this is due to the fact that not a few Buddhists have reservations in referring to certain experiences, teachings, practices or features connected to their own tradition as "mystical" or "mysticism." Not only because the term was coined in the West. A concept such as "meditation" is also of Western origin but used without too serious qualms by many Buddhist scholars and practitioners. So, what is it that makes the concept of "mysticism" suspicious to some and acceptable to others among Buddhist scholars? And what does this disagreement among Buddhist scholars (and the reasons behind it) imply for non-Buddhist scholars who nevertheless study specific phenomena within Buddhism or certain strands of Buddhism or even Buddhism as a whole[15] under the rubric of "mysticism"?

Methods

Opting for a polyvalent use of the category "mysticism" (which then includes different types of experiences, corresponding beliefs, philosophies, practices, rituals, codes of conduct, life-styles, institutions, socio-cultural settings, etc.) naturally opens the door for a *plethora of different disciplinary and methodological approaches.* Richard H. Jones, one of the doyens in mysticism studies, has distinguished no less than seventeen approaches: historical studies, comparative studies, examinations from the perspective of analytic philosophy, the debate between essentialist and constructivist interpretations, psychological studies of mystics, psychological studies of mystical means (meditation, use of drugs), sociological studies, gender studies, medical and especially neurophysiological investigations of mystical experiences, phenomenological studies, discussion in religious studies, biographical and cultural studies,

[15] Influential pioneers of Religious Studies like Nathan Söderblom and Friedrich Heiler had characterized Buddhism and Hinduism as "mystical religions" in contrast the "prophetical religions" of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

studies of esotericism, theological (including comparative theological) studies, studies of aesthetics in mysticism (symbolism, art, music, ritual, literature), philological studies (Jones 2021). This list comprises what can be discerned in the current methodological spectrum of investigations, while some approaches clearly overlap: phenomenological studies overlap with comparative and theological studies and have their impact on the debate between essentialist and constructivist approaches. Debates in analytic philosophy are by no means free from questions of theological or ideological implications, cultural studies overlap with sociological approaches and some current strands in religious studies, biographical studies with psychological ones, psychological studies with neurophysiological ones, studies in the aesthetics and semiotics of mysticism with cultural and religious studies, philological studies with historical investigations and both provide a basis for many of the other approaches. Such methodological intersections may create further complications, but they are inevitable and it is mandatory to remain aware of their interconnectedness (the latter being somewhat of a Buddhist virtue). I agree with Fabian Völker (2022, 1) that today, the study of mysticism needs a "holistic approach," which "requires, as its constitutive basis, an integrative methodology, one that is in principle able to combine all fruitful lines of inquiry in a methodically differentiated and reflexively judicious manner."

Jones's long list of different approaches, although related to mysticism studies in general, is equally applicable to the study of mysticism in Buddhism, even if here not all approaches have been used so far to the same extent. Subsequently, I refer to approaches most relevant in light of my four preliminary considerations or most promising in terms of emerging perspectives in the ongoing pursuit of mysticism studies. As Jones (2021, 64) rightly remarks, some approaches are closer to a religious interpretation of mysticism, while others offer secular alternatives. This, I suggest, is indicative of the perhaps most interesting question underlying any study of mysticism, whether in Buddhism or elsewhere: Is it a rational option to understand mystical or, more broadly, religious experience in terms of a perceptive openness of the human mind to the immanent presence of a transcendent reality (transcending the limits and boundaries of space and time)? The question is closely connected to a second crucial issue for which studies in mysticism may have some significance: the nature of mind. I am deliberately not saying "human mind" because the question here is about a possibly cosmic dimension of mind. In this respect, not only current empirical research and philosophical debate but also traditional Buddhist theories might have something to contribute.

In the Buddhist tradition, experiences often subsumed under the category "mysticism" are documented in the vast amount of Buddhist canonical literature (*sūtra*s), commentarial works (*bhāṣya*s), religious-philosophical texts (*śāstra*s), manuals, teachings of particular masters, collection of narratives, etc. There is, however, very little textual material of an autobiographical nature being usually of a rather young age (such as the material in Kapleau 1967). This fact makes *historical-philological studies* indispensable, even if the focus is on contemporary practices. For example, a study on neuroscientific observations regarding different mental states during the meditative practice by contemporary (mostly lay-) Buddhists identifying these states as the *jhāna*s (Skr. *dhyāna*s) of a specific Buddhist absorption technique recorded in the canonical scriptures (as in Dennison 2022 or in some of the studies cited in Yamashiro 2015) needs to be critically read against the background of the substantial debates about the meaning and practice of those *jhāna*s in the canonical texts (Bronkhorst 1986; 1993; Griffiths 1986; Vetter 1988; Stuart 2013). This raises the serious question to what extent such samples of contemporary practice can really be taken (rather uncritically) as identical to what is mentioned in classic texts as is implied by using the same label ("*jhāna* practice").

The example of absorptive meditation has *doctrinal implications* requiring additional methodological approaches. Some canonical texts present the *arūpa jhāna*s as a meditative path to the experience of *nirvāṇa* (*nibbāna*) equating this experience with the "cessation of perception and feeling" (*saññāvedayitanirodha*). Yet this equation is in conflict with other canonical material that associates the experience of *nirvāṇa* with "awakening" (*bodhi*), that is, the attainment of a specific insight with cognitive content. Some historians have therefore suggested that already in the earliest strata of Buddhism there was a tension between a more doctrinally oriented understanding of the Buddhist goal and a more "mystically" (non-conceptual) oriented understanding relating the latter to a radically apophatic realization connected to a seemingly cataleptic physiological state (e.g., Vallée Poussin 1936/7; Schmithausen 1981).

This issue has further implications on the understanding of *nirvāṇa* in the various branches of Mahāyāna Buddhism because there is evidence that the extremely influential writings of Nāgārjuna (2.-3. ct. CE) are related to the practice of the *arūpa jhāna*s. His radically deconstructive logical critiques would then emulate (or transfer to the cognitive realm) the gradual overcoming of all mental activities during this type of absorptive practice (see Schmidt-Leukel 1993; 2006, 118-24). Closely related is the question of whether *nirvāṇa* is understood as a particular state of mind, conditioned by the successful completion of certain trainings, or as an independent, unconditioned reality being experienced via a particular state of mind. The critical investigation of such doctrinal issues involves *philological*, *historical* and *philosophical*/*theological approaches*. Although not identical with, this ontological or metaphysical question corresponds to some extent to the more recent debates (shaped by Western analytical philosophy) on whether the distinction between "veiled truth/reality" (*saṃvṛti-satya*) and "ultimate truth/reality" (*paramārtha-satya*) in Mahāyāna philosophy should be understood as a denial of phenomenal reality in favor of ultimate reality or *vice versa*, that is, as the affirmation that the one and only ultimate truth/reality consists in the affirmation that there is no ultimate truth/reality (see Duckworth 2022, 28-39). It will be immediately evident that this alternative has crucial implications for the interpretation of corresponding "mystical" experiences or "realizations." While the denial of phenomenal reality as ontologically ultimate may be taken as falling under "mysticism," the reverse denial of any ultimate reality may hardly do so—except perhaps as a kind of radically secularized form of "mysticism."

In ancient India inner-Buddhist debates about the nature of ultimate reality were located in a *cultural context* marked by severe tensions (and at times violent clashes) between, on the one hand, the various Vedic traditions, especially in their theistic forms, and, on the other hand, the Buddhists who by and large (with few exceptions) rejected the authority of the Vedas. However, the widespread Buddhist philosophical critique of the allegedly logical weaknesses of Indian (Vedic and post-Vedic) theisms should not blind one to the fact that inner-Buddhist doctrinal developments at times led to analogous intellectual difficulties (see Schmidt-Leukel 2016, 143-64). The later spread of Buddhism to the larger Chinese cultural realm (Tibet, China, Korea, Japan, Vietnam) involved the confrontation with very different religious environments. These had their own impact on Buddhist self-understanding and on the ways how Buddhists understood, expressed and trained for "mystical" experiences. Particularly strong influences came from Shamanistic (e.g., Lopez 1997) and Daoist traditions (e.g., Lopez 1996). This is also visible in Buddhist ritual and art as it developed in Tibet, China, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam, but also in, for example, Cambodia, Indonesia, Bali etc. where the main influences came from non-Indian versions of Hinduism. In this respect, there is still much to explore for *historical socio-cultural studies*, *social anthropology*, and *art history*.

While in 1975 Ralph Hood complained about the lack of empirical research regarding mystical or religious experience (Hood 1975, 29), the situation has changed strongly since then. There is not only a significant increase in *psychological studies*. It is primarily *neuroscience* that has become a major line of empirical research on altered states of consciousness including states occurring during different types of meditational practices, which are related to what may be called "mystical experience." Regarding Buddhism, studies are mostly on Zen and Tibetan forms of meditation plus, of course, modern forms of mindfulness training (for good overviews see Austin 1998; Lutz, Dunne & Davidson 2007, 530-43; Ricard & Singer 2018, 1-71). More recently, also Theravāda absorption practices (Yamashiro 2015; Dennison 2022) or Mahāyāna forms of chanting (Perry, Polito & Thompson 2021) have come under investigation.

Various neuroscientific studies relate to the phenomenon of neuroplasticity. More precisely, they inquire about the possible impact of long-term meditation practice on identifiable physiological changes in the brain—an interest shared by some Buddhist scholars who hope for an empirical confirmation of the efficacy of Buddhist methods in training and forming the mind towards spiritually and morally desirable goals (e.g. Lutz, Dunne & Davidson 2007, 521-3; Wallace 2009, 27-36; Dorjee 2014; Yamashiro 2015; Hanson 2017; Verhaeghen 2017; Ricard & Singer 2018, 11-32). Further interests concern possible beneficial effects of meditation (via alterations in the brain) on physical health and/or psychological wellbeing (Lutz, Dunne & Davidson 2007, 523-5).

Far more problematic and contested are questions on the relationship between neurophysiological processes and corresponding conscious experiences (Lutz, Dunne & Davidson 2007, 530-43). These issues, especially the question of mind-brain reciprocal causation, have strong implications for Buddhist metaphysical beliefs (Wallace 2007, 152-5; Ricard & Singer 2018, 161-261) and are subject to serious controversies among contemporary Buddhists (see below).

Effects of Buddhist meditative practices and corresponding experiences are also at the center of most *psychological studies*. One question of special interest is to what extent Buddhist meditative practices lead to changes in people's self-concept and corresponding behavior whether for better or worse (Farias & Wilkholm 2015). This interest is partly triggered by the Buddhist teachings of "not-self" (*anātman*, *anattā*) and "emptiness" (*śūnyatā*) and the fact that some kinds of not-self experiences are often reported by Buddhists as part of meditative peak experiences (e.g. Haimerl & Valentine 2001; Gleig 2018; Young-Eisendrath 2018; Van Gordon et al. 2019). Further studies concern Buddhist meditation techniques that intend to foster compassionate and sympathetic mental attitudes (Lutz, Dunne & Davidson 2007, 542-3; Condon & Makransky 2020). Other scholars (e.g., Rothberg 2008) ask to what extent psychological changes induced by Buddhist practice may contribute to a new spirituality being better up to the contemporary challenges of a globalized world. Such well-meaning intensions sometimes echo the often-repeated conviction that mystics would be in a better position to contribute to global peaceful and fruitful exchange than their non-religious counterparts (for a recent example see Portilla 2022). From a historical perspective, however, one will probably have to consent to Richard Jones's more sober statement that mystics "may be pacifists or warriors" (Jones 2021, 234).

Finally, there are studies comparing specific experiences in Buddhist and other religious traditions under the rubric of "mysticism." This *comparative approach* has the longest history among the various methodologies going back to some of the earliest Western works on Buddhism which in categorizing Buddhism alternated between nihilism and mysticism (see

Welbon 1968). While there are still voluminous investigations of similarities and differences between Buddhist and non-Buddhist mystical philosophies/metaphysics (e.g., Angel 1994; Steineck 2000; Ceming 2004), most among more recent comparative studies focus on specific experiences and the mechanisms promoting or enabling these. In this way, such studies try to go beyond—or even solve—the essentialist-constructivist debate. Some also inquire into the contribution of empirical studies (especially from neuroscience) to this debate and an improved understanding of mystical experience as a cross-cultural and cross-religious phenomenon.

Jason Blum (2015), in his comparison of Ibn al-'Arabi, Meister Eckhart and Hui-neng, typically demands that studies give full weight to the auto-interpretation of the mystics' experiences.[16] Comparisons along those lines would suggest that "human consciousness is, *for the most part*, mediated, linguistic, and conceptual in nature, but *it may also take forms which are unmediated, nonlinguistic, and nonconceptual*" (Blum 2015, 162; emphasis in the original). According to Blum, making sense of this finding "will require the development of theories of consciousness, most especially to account for those pesky types of experience that escape our current theoretical categories" (ibid.). Like other recent comparisons (Studstill 2005 [Dzogchen and German mysticism]; Davis 2010 [Zen and Advaita]; Rose 2016 [Theravāda, Yoga and Catholicism]; Komarovski 2015 [Geluk and Sakya traditions]; Millet Gil 2019 [Theravāda and Catholicism]), Blum refers especially to the mystics' reports of non-conceptual awareness, hoping that further neuroscientific research may demonstrate the neurophysiological possibility of such states, contrary to their denial by some constructivists (Blum 2015, 161). Comparative studies of this type tend to treat mystical traditions as functional equivalents. Randall Studstill cites as "a general principle of mystical pluralism … the claim that different doctrines and practices may provoke common transformative effects" (Studstill 2005, 245; see also Millet Gill 2019, 429). More specifically, different doctrinal settings and practices may nevertheless converge in the joint aim of deconstructing the mind's usual conceptual working, that is, the dualistically structured experience centered on self and objects.

Drawing on neuroscience in support of this view is an important aspect of Kenneth Rose's comparative investigation of Buddhaghosa, Pātañjali and A.-F. Poulain. Rose identifies a common mystical "itinerary," i.e., specific states of mental concentration climaxing in a pure, concept-free realization ("quiescence") preparing for the final experience of "beatitude" (Rose 2016, 51-5). Rose sees his identification of such cross-religious contemplative "landmarks" substantiated by Andrew Newberg and Eugene D'Aquili's (1999; 2002) theory that the mystical experience of a dissolution of the boundaries of the self in an awareness of universal unity has its neurophysiological basis in the deafferentation of the posterior superior parietal lobe (Rose 2016, 45; Newberg & D'Aquili 2002, 1-10). Newberg and D'Aquili (2002, 7) base their theory on observations of neurophysiological processes during the meditation of Tibetan Buddhist practitioners and contemplative prayer of Franciscan nuns. Though the Buddhist monks and Franciscan nuns differed significantly in the religious interpretations of their mental states, the neurological profile of the events in their brains was similar. Rose, like Newberg & D'Aquili (2002, 122-3) themselves, takes this as evidence of a distinct "neurophysiological signature" specifying a typical form of mystical experience as independent of the respective religious

[16] It is, however, not without serious problems to distil the mystics' own testimonies from texts which are not their own writings, especially in relation to figures such as Hui-neng whose existence might even be fictive (on legitimate questions regarding the historicity of Hui-neng see Nagashima 1978). The same problem applies to figures such as "the Buddha" (Siddhārtha Gautama) or "the Prophet" Muḥammad (as in the case of Galadari 2019, who tries to reconstruct and compare their experience) even if one may be more confident about their actual existence.

contexts. Provided the universal anatomy of the human brain, Rose concludes that mystical experience is sui generis but capable of being combined with various religious or non-religious beliefs (Rose 2016, 44-6). A similar opinion has been expressed by Ralph Hood (2005, 135) who asserts that "mysticism has emerged independent of religion and can exist without it." While Newberg and D'Aquili's theories have attracted a rather broad attention and also some confirmation by other studies (cited in Yamashiro 2015), the reactions within the neuroscientific community in general have been more cautious (for example, Lutz, Dunne & Davidson, 541-2; Vaitl 2012, 197; McNamara 2014, 107, 129-30).

Most of current mysticism studies related to Buddhism focus on those Buddhist traditions which practice sitting forms of meditation. Thus far, there is only little research on mystical aspects (in teaching and practice) of Buddhist schools whose practice is dominated by rituals, chanting, mantra-recitation, praying/veneration or "saying the name" (*nembutsu*). This is another desideratum for future studies.

Experience

Stephen Katz (1978, 52) helpfully distinguished between the *what* and the *how* of mystical experience. What is the connection between the two? As John Hick in his study on neuroscience and religious experience has emphasized, neuroscientific observations such as those of Newberg, D'Aquili and many others can easily be taken as support for "the materialist dogma that nothing exists but matter" so that "any non-material ultimate reality" could only exist "as a figment of the human imagination" (Hick 2006, 58), which itself would be nothing but an epiphenomenon of material processes. In that case, the neurophysiological *how* of religious experience would fully explain its *what*, namely as a fiction or hallucination. Under such premises, neuroscience would decode religious experience as hallucinatory being entirely the product of neurophysiological events in the human brain, instead of viewing such events as the physiological correlate of a genuine perception of a non-material reality.[17] In principle, however, the latter is still an open option. That is, the respective neurological processes can also be interpreted as enabling experiences of a veridical cognitive nature instead of causing hallucinatory impressions. Newberg and D'Aquili (2002, 140-1) are fully aware of this ambiguity:

> Are these unitary experiences merely the result of neurological function—which would reduce mystical experience to a flurry or neural blips and flashes—or are they genuine experiences which the brain is able to perceive? Could it be that the brain has evolved the ability to transcend material, and experience a higher plane of being that actually exists? […]
> Science and common sense … tell us that such a thing is not possible: Nothing can be more real than the material universe within which all real things are contained. … But science has surprised us, and our research has left us no choice but to conclude that the mystics may be on to something, that the mind's machinery of transcendence may in fact be a

[17] See, for example, Flanagan 2011, 90: "There is no longer any need for bewilderment, befuddlement, or mysterianism from Buddhism or any other great spiritual tradition in the face of the overwhelming evidence that all experience takes place in our embodied nervous systems in the world, the natural world, the only world there is." Yet it is not at all clear whether the fact that experiences have their neurological correlates in the brain implies that there cannot be any experiential contact with transcendent reality. Flanagan admits that his naturalist view contradicts traditions Buddhist ideas but claims that this is the only way for Buddhism "to make sense for us now" (ibid. 131).

window through which we can glimpse the ultimate reality of something that is truly divine.

When asked about *what* Buddhist practitioners experience at the peak of their spiritual path, most of them would probably hesitate to describe this as a glimpse into an ultimate reality "that is truly divine"—given the long history of anti-theistic arguments in the Buddhist tradition. Moreover, if the practitioners are still shaped by Asian traditions (this can be typically different with Western converts), they may be very reluctant to refer to their own personal experiences. First, they may not wish to be understood as claiming the achievement of higher abilities supposed to come along with certain meditational realizations.[18] And second, they may not wish to be seen as competing with the teachings of the recognized masters of their tradition (Komarovski 2015, 243-4). In response to the *what* question, Asian Buddhists will therefore most likely refer to what their relevant scriptures or masters have to say.[19] And these differ significantly. Some Buddhists might refer to an experience of *nirvāṇa* (Pāli: *nibbāna*), or, more likely, to its "foretaste" as, for example, in the form of overcoming the "five hindrances" (greed, hate, sloth and torpor, restlessness/remorse, doubt), which the tradition considers as a temporary byproduct of deeper forms of meditation (see Schmidt-Leukel 2006, 61-2). Yet as has been said above, in the canonical texts themselves we find different understandings of the nature of the full experience of *nirvāṇa*. And while *nirvāṇa* is traditionally said to be an unconditioned reality beyond time and space (Schmidt-Leukel 2023b) existing independently of someone "plunging into it" (for this canonical metaphor see Collins 1998, 222), some contemporary secular Buddhists abandon such views and reduce *nirvāṇa* to a specific mental state of inner peace and ease (e.g., Batchelor 2011, 130-5, 160). As Bernard Faure (2012; 2017) has pointed out, such modern reductionist conceptions of Buddhist contemplative experiences can easily draw on neuroscience for justification (as, for example, in Flanagan 2011) but are not in line with the testimony of tradition.

Buddhists shaped by certain strands of Mahāyāna or Tantric Buddhism may answer the *what* question by using different terms. They may designate peak experiences positively as experiences of the universal Buddha-nature (*tathagatagarbha*, *dharmadhātu*) or of the Buddha's ultimate cosmic "body/reality" (*dharmakāya*). Or they may designate such states as a realization of the emptiness (*śūnyatā*) of everything including one's self, or as the non-conceptual suchness (*tathatā*) of everything. In addition, and especially in the Chinese cultural realm, the language of "unity" became rather widespread because influential schools of Chinese Buddhism, such as Huayan (Hua-yen) and Tiantai (T'ien-t'ai), have spoken of emptiness as a unity—either in terms of mutual interpenetration or in terms of everything being one in being equally empty. Such language may suggest both, experiences of extrovertive or introvertive unity. Depending on whether the sources of reference display more of a Madhyamaka or more of a Yogācāra influence, answers to the *what*-question may also differ to the extent to which this is called an experience of the universal mind. And as Alan Wallace (2007, 99-108) has rightly reminded his readers, in some forms of Buddhism ultimate reality has become personified in ways that get

[18] Buddhist monastic discipline warns strongly not only against the false pretension of higher supernatural achievements (which counts as one of the four major offenses) but also against their idle and unwise display even if one actually does possess them (*Vinaya Piṭaka Culavagga* 5:8).

[19] When Chen et al. (2011) gave their interviewees the option to modify the items of the Hood Mysticism Scale and opened the inquiry to the format of semi-structured interviews, the explanations received from Chinese Buddhist monks and nuns reflected rather standard Buddhist doctrinal positions and terminology.

close to monotheism, so that the experience will be understood and rendered as that of a luminous mind or space, "which causes the phenomenal world to be" and is not essentially different from the foundation of one's own mind (ibid. 101).

"Realization of ultimate reality" is a parlance probably acceptable to many a Buddhist—while its specific meaning varies along the indicated lines. Yet apart from openly secularized Buddhists, most traditionally minded Buddhists will reject the idea that such realization is nothing but a state caused by the brain. For them, neurophysiological mechanisms are more likely to be understood as those of "a biological machine that *receives* or *translates* consciousness rather than creating it" (Saywer 2022, 7), combined with the implication that such consciousness or mind is ultimate because it is one with the bottom creative ground of all reality. However, one should keep in mind that there are also forms of Buddhism that do not make insight into the ultimate nature of reality contingent on specific forms of meditative practice or altered states of consciousness connected to these. For them, such realization may equally well—if not even better—come along with a miraculous confidence in the ultimate goodness of reality. Would they fall inside or outside the boundaries of Buddhist "mysticism"?

Is such inquiry about the possible *what* of Buddhist "mystical" experience perhaps a false question? If the *how* of mystical experience is described in terms of non-duality, there will be neither subject nor object, though perhaps something encompassing (or replacing?) both. But if the *how* is said to be ineffable, there seems to be no room for any conceptual answer to the question of *what* that might be. Or are such negative caveats themselves illegitimate because they presuppose something like an "unmediated experience" which according to Katz's famous dictum does not and cannot exist (Katz 1978, 26)?

So what does "*unmediated*" mean in the arguments of those who deny and those who defend the possibility of "unmediated experience"? This depends on the meaning of "mediation." In a very broad sense, it might mean, as Katz says in one place, that "the mystical experience must be mediated by the kind of beings we are" (Katz 1978, 59). In as much as the subject of all conscious[20] human experience is an embodied mind, Katz's statement seems to be trivial and uncontroversial. Conscious human experience is always mediated by the mind's nature and correlated with the brain's neurological events. But does this admission involve an inevitable conceptual structure of all conscious experience? In other words, will it exclude the possibility of non-conceptual conscious experiences?

It is safe to say that such exclusion would contradict the conviction of the "mystical" traditions in various religions including Buddhism (King 1988, 263). Hence it is no surprise that several arguments have been produced to show the possibility of "pure experience" in the sense of "non-conceptual experience" (for a good overview see Studstill 2005, 35-86). However, if one construes non-conceptual experience as contentless, as does Robert Forman (e.g., 1997, 19), such states—if they are possible—would derive their meaning only from the accompanying interpretation (see Short 1995, 670; Studstill 2005, 26-7). Randall Studstill (2005, 29), however, has rightly emphasized that mystical traditions tend to give such non-conceptual states a rather extraordinary meaning by understanding them not as contentless but as manifestation or realization of ultimate reality though they differ in their conceptual indication and ontological explication of this reality. Thus, the *what*-question regarding mystical experience cannot be dismissed by simply pointing to the unmediated or non-conceptual nature of such experiences.

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[20] Again, it will be a matter of definition whether unconscious and subconscious activities in the brain that have their impact on conscious states may be regarded as "experiences" or not.

As both King and Studstill hold, there is no need to construe non-conceptual experience as contentless. Understood as direct experience, non-conceptual experience may even be a feature of many ordinary experiences (King 1988, 277; Studstill 2005, 69). Knowing coffee conceptually is not the same as the direct experience of tasting coffee. In some sense, one may even agree with Sallie King in "that the taste of coffee is ineffable: in all the words, lifestyles, and art forms associated with the cult of coffee, there is nowhere even an approximation of an adequate description of the taste of coffee" (King 1988, 264). To be sure, the experience as a whole *is* conceptually mediated—one will experience oneself as drinking coffee and not, for example, tea or muddy water. Yet even conceptually mediated and hence interpreted experiences may have a non-conceptual and ineffable component or dimension as in the case of "tasting." Is it surprising that the metaphor of "taste" is used frequently in mystical traditions? As Svevo D'Onofrio (2016, 35) notes, "taste creates a kind of symbiosis between the subject and the object of sense perception."

If King and Studstill are right, the ineffability of an experience—as much as its non-conceptual nature—will not be sufficient reason to abstain from an inquiry about its object. But what *if the object is ineffable*? The ineffability of its experience would then be a reflection of the direct experiential contact with the ineffable object. In that case the question of the experience's ineffability becomes dependent on the reasons for the ineffability of the object. If the ineffable object is deemed to be ultimate reality, the question will be: Why and in what sense is ultimate reality held to be ineffable?

Throughout the Buddhist tradition in, as much as I can see, almost all its variants (except some modern rationalized forms), ultimate reality is designated as ineffable because it is beyond the range of concepts (Pāli: *atakkāvacara*). Concepts cannot capture *nirvāṇa*, as is traditionally expressed in the famous tetralemma (*catuṣkoṭi*), the fourfold negation of the applicability all logical options (*a*, *non-a*, *a* and *non-a*, neither *a* nor *non-a*). "When all phenomena have been uprooted, all pathways of speech are also uprooted" (Sutta Nipāta 1076b; Bodhi 2017, 335). Nāgārjuna's statement that there is no difference between *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* entails that *saṃsāra*, the conventional reality of dependent origination, is as ineffable as *nirvāṇa*. To him, logical analysis demonstrates that all concepts are in the end empty of substantial essence ("own-being," *svabhāva*). No concept can grasp the true or ultimate reality of anything. Conventional or conceptual reality is a "worldly veiled reality" (*lokasaṃvṛtisatya*) which does not represent "reality in the highest sense" (*paramārthasatya*), that is, ultimate reality. Buddhist terms like *dharmakāya* or *tathāgatagarbha* refer to this ultimate reality as the source of awakening and hence as the deepest reality of Buddhahood. Such reference provides ultimate reality with some kind of "visibility" or "conceivability" through its manifestation and meditation in awakened beings, yet without depriving it of its in principle ineffable, non-conceptual nature. All Buddhas and their teachings are therefore to be taken as pointers to an ineffable, inconceivable but nevertheless present and experienceable reality.

From a Buddhist perspective, not every ineffable or non-conceptual experience would automatically count as a valid experience of ultimate reality. It would have to qualify as an experience of ultimate reality *in a Buddhist sense*. The required evidence will inevitably be at the level of conventional reality; it will be conceptual and spiritual/ethical. That is, the experience and its interpretation will have to be conducive to a spiritual and ethical perfection by Buddhist standards (i.e., the liberation from greed and hate, the perfection of compassion) and, at least for Mahāyāna Buddhists, it will have to point to the ultimate nature of *all* reality and not merely some part of it. From a Buddhist perspective, an essentialist position that declares a non-

conceptual, ineffable experience as such as the essential core of religious traditions will be underdetermined because such experience in itself is not sufficient evidence for being a genuine experience of ultimate reality. As Yaroslav Komarovski (2015) has shown, even within the scope of different Buddhist schools, experiences of ultimate reality claimed by different Buddhist schools are mutually recognized only according to highly specified cognitive and existential criteria. The idea that different identifications of ultimate reality and corresponding practices lead to the same valid experience of ultimate reality would be acceptable only if they involve similar deconstructions of conceptual representations and produce similar existential results (Komarovski 2015, 73-7, 82-83, 143-60). Beliefs in an eternal soul or a creator God, withstanding such deconstruction, are usually considered as inacceptable obstacles (ibid. 31-2, 68, 76).

Perennialist essentialists are convinced first that different religious traditions relate to the same divine or ultimate reality. This includes the second conviction that ultimate reality can validly (and in a soteriological significant manner) be experienced within the different religions. Perennialists (though not all of them) tend to assume that these two basic convictions need to be substantiated by the demonstration of a close similarity or even phenomenological sameness of certain religious experiences across the different religions. These experiences are designated as "mystical" and their similarity or identity is taken as the "common core" of the otherwise rather diverse traditions. Yet one can reasonably hold the two basic convictions without sharing the assumption that they need to be justified by this type of common core. John Hick has developed a religious epistemology which on the basis of critical realism (Schmidt-Leukel 2023c) suggests that the same ultimate reality can be experienced in rather different but equally valid ways. According to Hick, this is possible because ultimate reality is essentially ineffable or, in his words, "transcategorial," while all human experiences of it are inevitably influenced by the categories and different conceptualities of the human mind. This hypothesis makes the common core theory redundant in as much as the two basic convictions of perennialism can still be retained without it. Hick's theory would not exclude that essentially analogous or even phenomenologically identical experiences may exist across different religious traditions. But in as much as such experiences are marked as non-conceptual, Hick's theory emphasizes that their religious significance hinges on the different conceptual interpretations attached to them within the different traditions (Hick 1989, 165-9; 1999, 99-170; 2006, 14-26).

Hick's theory does also not exclude the possibility of a "direct" experience of ultimate reality. He explicitly points out that the presence of ultimate reality within the human mind may very well be seen as the ontological foundation of such direct experience (Hick 2006, 164). What he disputes is that non-conceptual experiences of "unitive mysticism" are cognitively superior to other forms of religious experience, because their cognitive significance can only consist in their conceptual interpretation. But are they epistemologically privileged in as much as through them ultimate reality is seen without the veil of conceptual construction? This would certainly be the position of some Buddhist masters. But on the basis of Hick's hypothesis, one may hold that different types of religious experience have different significance in that they reveal different but equally valid aspects of the meaning of ultimate reality for human existence with all its various challenges and potentials. Conventional reality would thus not only have the nature of a veil but also that of a filter or prism. Conceptually structured experiences would highlight some important aspects which are possibly missed by non-conceptual experiences who have different benefits. The particular value of non-conceptual experiences may consist in the experiential confirmation of the ultimate's ineffability and of its intrinsic connection to the human mind in

making such experience possible. The reflection on religious or "mystical" experience—if it is not regarded as illusory—is thus deeply intertwined with questions about the nature of the mind.

If unmediated, non-conceptual and ineffable experience is not construed as contentless and if its content is assumed to be ultimate reality, some kind of direct link between the mind embodied in a human brain and ultimate reality must be presupposed. If ultimate reality is thought to be the ultimate ground and nature of all reality, the presupposed link must be of cosmic dimensions. And if a hallmark of such experiences is the transcending of any subject-object distinction, the link needs to be intrinsic to the *nature of mind*. Hence the conclusion seems to be natural that mind is more than what appears of it to itself in ordinary conscious states. The anyway mysterious relation between consciousness and brain or, more fundamentally, between mind and matter assumes a cosmic dimension if "mystical" experience is indeed an experience of the ultimate reality of/within/beyond everything. If matter turns out to be less material than its nineteenth century mechanistic understanding suggested (see, for example, Davies & Gribbin 2007), the interwovenness of conscious, subconscious and electrochemical events may only be the special manifestation of some deeper form of mind-material non-duality.

Along such lines, William James held both, that there is a "wider self" or "cosmic consciousness," in which the individual mind participates (see Weed 2023a; 2023b), and that "matter and mind are but *functional* distinctions" of a non-dual reality that he termed "pure experience" (Holder 2013, 6-7, emphasis in the original). According to John Holder, James's "radical empiricism" is consistent with the early Buddhist analysis of experience. However, from a traditional Buddhist perspective, mental events seem to have some features that imply a certain independence from their material manifestation, as, for example, the possibility of free (not causally determinate) mental causation or the continuation of karmic streams across different rebirths (see the discussions in Ricard & Singer 2017, 161-210, 253-261). Whitehead's Process Philosophy can be seen as a continuation of James' ideas (Griffin 2001, 5, 73, 197-8). Some philosophers, such as David Griffin, claim that the "panexperientialism" of Process Philosophy can accommodate the idea of such capacities of the mind, including the possibility of reincarnation (Griffin 1997; 2001). Support for this possibility would come from the process concept of God as the world-soul. The nature of God "may establish with the [individual] soul a peculiarly intense relationship of mutual immanence," which would liberate the human mind from its dependence on the brain (Griffin 2001, 238, quoting Whitehead; brackets mine). Mystical experience would reflect such mutual immanence in an extraordinary way. The "all-pervasiveness of God" would allow for both, the possibility of God's continuous but unconscious direct presence to the human mind and the "very rare experiences in which we have a religious experience in the strong sense," during which such unconscious presence rises to consciousness (Griffin 1997, 286). According to Process Philosophy, theistic and non-theistic forms of such specific experiences reflect the two ultimates (or two aspects of the ultimate) of the "ultimate agent" (God) and "ultimate agency as such (Griffin 2001, 251).

An analysis of mysticism from the perspective of Process Philosophy has been published quite recently (Dombrowski 20023), but unfortunately does not deal much with Buddhist religious experiences. Despite the foundational work done by John Cobb (for an overview see Griffin 2005) and David Griffin, a process study of Buddhist mysticism remains a further desideratum of future research. It would be of particular interest to compare the understanding of mind in Process Philosophy with the Buddhist philosophical schools of the so-called "mind-only" persuasion (see Duckworth 2019). However, it should not be ignored that other schools of Buddhist philosophy, especially of the Madhyamaka persuasion, have abstained from such

speculations abiding by a radically apophatic stance and critically pointing out the logical aporias into which all attempts of positively describing the ultimate sooner or later will run.

This difference is to some extent also reflected in the writings of Matthieu Ricard and Bruce Alan Wallace, two contemporary Western Buddhists following Tibetan traditions and both involved with neuroscientific research on meditation. They agree that mind must not be reduced to matter nor matter to mind and ascribe different attributes to both. Although they defend some limited independence of mind and matter (as for example in relation to issues of free will and reincarnation), they also emphasize their interdependence and seek to overcome an essential dualism. According to Ricard, contemplative experience and Buddhist deconstructive philosophy reveal that mind and matter are "devoid of true existence" or "intrinsic reality" (Ricard 2003, 273-4). He sees some empirical support for this view in modern quantum physics which "question(s) the solidity of the physical world at the microscopic level" (ibid. 274). Wallace goes further. He connects to James' "radical empiricism" (Wallace 2007, 19), and seeks to overcome a strict dualism by postulating a primordial consciousness as the ground of matter and mind. To Wallace the "absolute vacuum" or "space" of modern sub-molecular physics forms an "intrinsic unity" with "primordial consciousness." "While absolute space is the fundamental nature of the experienced world, primordial consciousness is the fundamental nature of the mind that experiences the world. But … the two have always been of the same nature" (ibid. 20). According to Wallace, Buddhist contemplative practices as well as Christian mystical experiences can be understood as realizations of this deepest level or ultimate nature of reality. Christian language, says Wallace, would refer to this as "the divine presence that is within each natural phenomenon and at the same time transcends it" (ibid. 24). Insight into the nature of the mind—as disclosed in contemplative practice—is thus "the key to understanding the nature of reality as a whole" (ibid. 60).

Discourses most relevant to "Buddhist mysticism" concern first the debate about the usefulness or adequacy of the concept of "mysticism" in relation Buddhism and second the interfaith dimensions connected to the acceptance or rejection of the term/concept of "mysticism." Some spotlights on this are provided in the next two chapters.

Discourses (on the Concept of "Mysticism")

From the 18th to the 20th century, "mysticism" has often been used *not as a neutral category* but in either positive or pejorative ways. Pejoratively, "mystical" was frequently associated with something obscure, superstitious, irrational, emotional, in contrast to opposite, positively connotated qualities such as clear, scientific, or rational. Positively, "mystical" was associated with experience-based religiosity or reliance on one's own insight, in contrast to dogmatism, mere believing, or uncritical acceptance of authority. "Mystical" could stand for a non-sectarian universal spirituality in contrast to the divisive demands of institutionalized religions. But again, pejoratively, "mystical" could signify "a-social" individualism and escapism in contrast to social and ethical responsibility (as, for example, in Max Weber's writings). Positively it could serve to distinguish a deeper, non-anthropomorphic form of theism in contrast to atheism or nihilism. As Timon Reichl (2021) has convincingly shown, the inner-Buddhist debates about the designation of Buddhism—or parts of it—as "mystical" have been decisively shaped by such opposing biases of Western origin. The ambivalence observable in the affirmation or rejection of this designation was inherited from the West. And it documents the positioning—or struggle with

it—by Asian Buddhist and Western converts towards the heterogenous values attached to the term "mysticism."

Some Buddhists like the Japanese Zen-Master Shaku Sōen (1860-1919), the teacher of Daisetz T. Suzuki (1870-1966), and the US-American convert Paul Carus (1852-1919) rejected the mystical character of Buddhism because they presented Buddhism as rational, experience-based and compatible to science, whereas other Buddhists, such as the Sri Lankan Theravāda reformer Anagarika Dharmapāla (1864-1933) and the German convert Anagarika Govinda (1895-1985), affirmed Buddhism as "mystical" or even as "mystic science" (Dharmapāla) precisely because of its experiential nature, its emphasis on personal insight and its rejection of blind belief (Reichl 2021). The difference between these positions is characteristic for much of the inner-Buddhist discourse about "mysticism." It shows, as Reichl (2021, 336-9) rightly concludes, that this discourse needs to be located within a larger framework of the tension between science and religion as it arose in Western modernity (see also McMahan 2008, 89-116; Lopez 2012).

The early form of the discourse continues into the present, but with some new variants. One is the attempt to establish Buddhist meditation including its forms of "mystical" experiences as a "contemplative science," which would deserve its legitimate place alongside Western sciences such as psychology or neuroscience (Ricard 2003; Wallace 2007). The effort to secure Buddhism a rational and scientific recognition is obvious. Another, though quite different example is the decidedly anti-mystic reading of the Buddha's teachings by defenders of secular Buddhism like Stephen Batchelor. When Batchelor emphatically claims: "The Buddha was not a mystic" (Batchelor 1997, 5), he turns against a religious interpretation of Buddhism, which he regards as obscure and rationally unfounded (see ibid. 4-5, 81, 102, 106-7). Batchelor admits that in the course of its history "Buddhism became more and more of a religion" (ibid. 5) and developed "a tendency to mysticism" (ibid. 107), but sees this as an aberration from the Buddha's original intention which should, ideally, be revised.

Despite the continuation of the debate along the lines of these parameters, there are also *signs of a shift*. In part, these are sparked by a better awareness of the hermeneutical implications and complications of the concept of "mysticism," but partly also by a new skepticism about the range and benefit of scientific knowledge combined with a positive revaluation of "mystic" wisdom as something beyond the reach of natural sciences.

A typical example of many Buddhists' qualms about the concept "mysticism" is D. T. Suzuki, the well-known Japanese proponent of Zen Buddhism in the West. In his early writings (1906), he classified Buddhism in general and Zen in particular as variants of mysticism, even claiming that the East is more mystical than the West (Suzuki 1955, 11, 21, 41). In 1916 (*Zen no tachiba kara* = "From the Standpoint of Zen") he still interpreted some forms of Buddhism as mystic, but presented Zen as a distinct type of mysticism that would not really fit into any of its usual variants (see Hiroshi 1977, 56-7). In 1939 Suzuki rejected the qualification of Zen-Buddhism as a form of mysticism (Suzuki 1955, 76), but still acknowledged some affinity between experience in Zen and in mysticism (ibid. 81-2). In his famous book from 1957 "Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist," Suzuki affirmed a close proximity between Meister Eckhart and Mahāyāna-Buddhism (in its two versions as Zen- and Shin-Buddhism), arguing that all three "can be grouped together as belonging to the great school of mysticism" (Suzuki 2007, Preface). But just eight years later he criticized Heinrich Dumoulin's categorization of Zen as "a form of mysticism" and "regretted" his previous own similar judgement as "highly misleading," now stating that "Zen has nothing 'mystical' about it or in it. It is most plain, clear as the

daylight, all out in the open with nothing dark, obscure, secret or mystifying in it" (all citations in Suzuki 1965, 124).

It is evident that Suzuki's staggering is on the one hand caused by the polyvalent and ambivalent connotations of the concept itself. However, as Reichl has pointed out, Suzuki's final refusal to put Zen under the "mysticism" rubric may also be interpreted as an expression of a Zen critique of any kind of categorization (see Reichl 2021, 319-21; similarly, van der Braak 2020, 115). Other Zen-Buddhists have continued the debate, some of them (e.g., Shizuteru Ueda and Bret Davis) concluding that Zen-Buddhism takes mysticism to its logical end by transcending the category itself, thus being mysticism as "non-mysticism" (Shizuteru Ueda) or "de-mysticism" (Bret Davis) (van der Braak 2020, 108-9).

Not only Zen-Buddhists but also scholars from other Buddhist traditions have expressed their uncomfortableness with the category. According to Yaroslav Komarovski "'mysticism' and 'mystical experience' do not match the Buddhist views" (Komarovski 2015, 20). His assertion that "'mysticism' has never been meaningfully used for translating or clarifying any Buddhist categories or concepts," may, however, be treated with some caution. Contemporary Nichiren-Buddhists, for example, translate the word "*myō*" in their central mantra "*namu myōhō renge kyō*" as "mystic": "the word mystic is a translation of myō" (Soka Gakkai, no date). "*Myō*" stands for Sanskrit "*sad*" in the composite "*sad-dharma*" as used in the title of the Lotus-Sūtra (*Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra*) and may be rendered as "true" or "wonderful." Although *myō* or *sad* are not similar to the original Greek word "*myein*" ("closing one's eyes or lips"), its interpretation as "wonderful" in the sense of going beyond ordinary reason clearly carries connotations which overlap with some aspects of "mystic." In Shingon-Buddhism, the Japanese word "*mitsu*" (密) (Skr. *guhya*), plays a crucial role in the designation of their most central teachings and is usually translated by Shingon-Buddhists as "mystery." Traditionally *guhya* refers to esoteric teachings and practices in Buddhism, which is not the same as "mystic" but overlaps with parts of what the concept can cover. Recently, Dennis Hirota (2024) has compared Shinran Shōnin (1173–1263), the founding figure of Japanese *Jōdo-Shinshū*, with Meister Eckhart and assessed the concept of "mysticism" as less suitable to determine their commonalities and differences.

Given the ambivalences of term "mysticism" and its predominant use in the context of theistic religions, it might be advisable to leave key Buddhist terminology untranslated. At least in relation to certain mental states and peak experiences connected to Buddhist meditative practices, Laura Weed has "recommend a scholarly change in nomenclature. (…) Asian terminology, such as satori, nirvana, or samadhi might be both more accurate and more useful" than the term "mystical" (Weed 2023b, 259). There are indeed no few occasions where it makes good sense to use central Buddhist terminology untranslated, as it has already become general practice with words like *karma*, *dharma*, *bodhisattva*, *buddha* or *nirvāṇa*. But as especially the term *nirvāṇa* shows, such concepts have their own inner Buddhist ambiguities. Taking *nirvāṇa* as a designation of a mental state, as in Weed's recommendation, would imply to contradict a dominant strand of canonical Buddhism and take sides with its rather modern and secular reinterpretation.

If the ambivalences of the term "mysticism" are to a significant extent due to its diverse and contradictory value-connotations, could it be rescued by establishing a largely *value-free usage for academic purposes*? Trevor Ling (1966, 167) acknowledges the difficulties in categorizing Buddhism as "mysticism," but still defends the term for comparative purposes. It would be "difficult to find a really satisfactory substitute" for designating "certain similarities in

religious experience in both Western and Eastern religion" (ibid. 163). What "Buddhist mysticism" has in common with its Western forms is the idea and alleged experience of an "entry here and now into a transcendent world" (ibid. 174, also 170). But referring to Buddhism as "mysticism" should not imply Max Weber's error of regarding it as "a-social" (ibid. 170-4). Learning by comparison that there are very different forms of mysticism "could considerably enrich the meaning to be attached to the word mysticism in general" (ibid. 175). Similar argumentations are still pursued by some current scholars. According to Volkhard Krech (2021), for example, "the concept of mysticism might function as a frame of reference to compare different religious phenomena," and "therefore it must be different from the compared phenomena" (ibid. 209). Its different facets regarding mystical experience, knowledge, techniques, and conduct can serve as *tertia comparationis* and help to identify specific differences in the act of comparison itself. Following a similar strategy, Hajime Nakamura (1985) has presented the noteworthy argument that the different facets of concept of mysticism reflect the real differences that one finds within the inner-Buddhist diversity of mystical strands. But all this still leaves us with the open question aptly phrased by Yaroslav Komarovski (2015, 248):

> But even if it [comparative research] results in demonstrating more diversity than similarities, more plurality than commonality between mystical experiences of different traditions, that in itself might be significant and serve its purpose. Perhaps we will end by concluding that the diversity and plurality of mystical experiences are their shared features. Or—and this is not an unlikely outcome either—we might decide to finally part ways with the very notion of mystical experience, questioning its applicability as a useful interpretive and comparative category. These and other possibilities will have to await further research.

Yet what are the implications of this open question for the interpretation of religious diversity with its differences and commonalities in general?

Interfaith Dimensions (of the Discourses)

The role of the concept of mysticism in *Buddhist-Christian encounter* has been somewhat different for the two traditions. *Within Christianity* identification of Buddhism as "mysticism"—or of certain features of it as "mystic"—served, *first*, as a conceptual tool to reject its interpretation as atheism or nihilism (which was widespread in the 19th century, see Droit 2003) and, *second*, to legitimate the Christian theological study of, and dialogue with, Buddhism as theologically beneficial.

A good example of the *first way* in which the characterization of Buddhism was used within Christian circles can be seen in Rudolf Otto's (a pioneer of Religious Studies and a Protestant Theologian) extremely influential book *The Idea of the Holy* ("Das Heilige", 1st edn. 1917). According to Otto, "the Buddhist Nirvāna … is negative only in appearance" (Otto 1936, 170). "But in fact the void of the eastern, like the nothing of the western, mystic is a numinous ideogram of the wholly other" (ibid. 30). Buddhism will appear as "a morbid sort of pessimism" only to the one "who has no inner sympathy for the esoteric language and ideograms of Mysticism" (ibid. 30). In rejecting a nihilist interpretation of Buddhism by categorizing it as mysticism Christians were able to give Buddhism theological relevance while at the same time retaining the Christian claim to be the superior and fullest version of true religion (ibid. 146).

An example of the *second strand* is the fairly broad reception of Buddhist meditation practices by Christians (especially, but not exclusively, by Christian monastics), which was supported and justified by the argument that such practices fall within the range of mystical contemplation and will help in the revival of Christian spiritual and monastic traditions (with figures like Thomas Merton, Hugo M. Enomiya-Lassalle, William Johnston, and others playing a key role). This opened the way for a theological exchange and practical cooperation in a number of other fields (e.g., Spae 1980, Lai & von Brück 2001; Ingram 2009; see also the more recent Christian exploration of Shingon-Buddhism which also draws heavily on the category of mysticism in Baekelmans 2022). Despite his awareness of Buddhist concerns, Paul Mommaers has expressed the hope that a comparison of lived religious practice under the rubric of "mysticism" can alert Buddhists and Christians to some close experiential affinities that opens for both a "liberating space" for further explorations of their rather different doctrines (Mommaers & van Braght 1995, 291).

On the Buddhist side of Christian-Buddhist encounter, the category of mysticism often functions to support Buddhist superiority claims. Not necessarily in the sense of presenting Buddhism as the higher or highest form of mysticism (although this is not absent), but in rating Christian mysticism as a right, but incomplete step into a direction that finds its best manifestation in some (i.e., one's own) form of Buddhism. This view can often be seen in the interpretation of Christian mysticism by some representatives of the so-called Kyoto-School of Buddhist philosophy. Kyoto Philosophers such as Keiji Nishitani, Shin'ichi Hisamatsu, or Masao Abe, look at Christian mystics in light of the contemporary challenge of nihilism. According to Nishitani, modern science has irreversibly destroyed the teleological world-view that accompanied traditional theism. The "Death of God" implied the loss of meaning as it had been rooted in Christian theism and the result is a nihilism which denies any meaning to the external and the internal world, to matter and mind alike (e.g., Nishitani 2004). According to Nishitani, Zen-Buddhism has its roots in negation more radical than nihilism because the negation encompasses both being and non-being, establishing "a nothingness altogether beyond the field of the relativity of being and nothingness" (Nishitani 1983, 126). Western nihilism is now affecting the whole world. But because Zen is more radical than nihilism, it is in a position to establish existential meaning on grounds, which, in principle, cannot be destroyed by nihilism. Christian mysticism, especially in its tendencies to overcome an anthropomorphic theism by understand the divine as "nothingness" and to locate the realization of the divine nothingness in an existential transcending of the self, is much nearer to the standpoint of Zen and thus less susceptible to the danger of nihilism. Mysticism could thus lead the way for Christianity to overcome the ultimate danger of nihilism (Nishitani 1983). Buddhism has its own resources to this end: "Zen … seems capable of giving an answer to the problem of 'science and religion' and … thus seems to point to the future direction that religions ought to take in our time" (Nishitani 2004, 134). As in this quotation, the understanding of several Kyoto-Philosophers suggests that Buddhism, at least in its Zen variant, is more advanced than traditional Christianity, apart from its mystical strands. According to Masao Abe, "Christian mysticism … is strikingly similar to the Buddhist understanding of ultimate Reality" (Abe 1985, 133). But is it fully equivalent?

The Vietnamese Zen (*thiền*)-Buddhist, Thich Nhat Hanh, similarly emphasizes the proximity of Zen and "mystical" Christianity. He suggests that Zen-Buddhists and Christian mystics are likely to recognize the truth in their respective ways because of the profound similarity of their experiences (e.g., Nath Hanh 1996, 158-195). His writings come close to full acceptance of Christian "mystical" experiences as profound and equally valid to Buddhist ones.

In *Buddhist-Jewish relations* (see Schmidt-Leukel 2013, vol. 3, 162-361) one can make analogous observations. Jewish theologians have justified the strong interest of many contemporary Jews in Buddhist teachings and its meditative practices by highlighting its proximity to traditional Jewish mysticism (see examples in Linzer 1996). Today, learning from Buddhism, especially in the field of contemplation, has become an important ingredient of the "Jewish Renewal movement" in the USA (Sigalow 2019, 81-147).

In contrast, Buddhist interest in Jewish mysticism has been comparatively small. Since the first official Buddhist-Jewish dialogue in Dharamsala in 1990, the 14th Dalai Lama has—with admitted surprise—acknowledged "striking similarities" between Jewish mysticism and some Buddhist beliefs and practices (Dalai Lama 2010, 98-101; Kamenetz 1994, 72-90). However, the personalism still at work even in Jewish mystical traditions has been met with different Buddhist reactions. While Masao Abe has suggested that one should overcome the idea of "God as Thou" (Abe 2013), the Jewish Zen-Buddhist Norman Fischer feels that this personalism is precisely something where Buddhism could learn from Judaism (Fischer 2013).

Buddhist-Muslim relations (for an overview and samples see Schmidt-Leukel 2010 & 2013, vol. 3, 1-161) are somewhat different, yet here too one can notice a certain imbalance in that Muslim interest in Buddhism is obviously stronger than *vice versa*. Again, mysticism functions as an important bridge. Buddhism, especially in its forms of Tantric and Shin Buddhism, plays some role in the so-called "Traditional School," particularly in the writings of Frithjof Schuon (e.g., Schuon 1993). The interest is primarily in rendering Buddhism as an authentic form of true religion by comparing it with Sufism as understood in Schuon's version of perennialism. A more refined version of the same approach can be seen in the noteworthy Muslim declaration *Common Ground Between Islam and Buddhism* from 2010, drafted by Reza Shah Kazemi. As the document itself states, it is "not scholastic but mystical theology" that helps to discover common ground between the two traditions (Shah Kazemi 2010, 3).

The most notable interest in Islamic mysticism from the Buddhist side is found in the rich work of Toshihiko Izutsu, a Japanese Zen-Buddhist scholar and expert in Sufism. He identifies close affinities especially between Mahāyāna Buddha-Nature teachings and the Sufi teaching of the "unity of existence" (*wahdat al-wujúd*), which according to him largely correspond in their understanding of ultimate reality (e.g., Izutsu 2013).

As has been mentioned above, the *relations between Buddhist and Hindu traditions* have been extremely strained in the past and in part continue to be so. Rather conflictual have also been the relations between *Buddhists and Daoists* during the early centuries of the Buddhist spread to China. Nevertheless, there have been considerable reciprocal influences between Hinduism and Buddhism as well as between Daoism and Buddhism. The development of Buddha-Nature thought in India emerged in significant respects from the creative engagement with various Hindu reflections about the "self" (*ātman*), as has been confirmed in the thorough study of Christopher V. Jones (2021). Buddha-Nature thought could "compete with the wider Indian discourse about something that is superlatively valuable in all beings: transcendently powerful, enduringly present, and an object of reverence hidden in each one of them" (Jones 2021, 261). The reciprocal influences between Daoism and Ch'an (Zen) Buddhism on various levels of teachings, practices and monastic institutions have often been noted (e.g., Ch'en 1964, 361-3; Freiberger & Kleine 2011, 454-7). In the second millennium CE, the idea of "the harmony between the three teachings" (*sanjiao heyi*) increasingly dominated the exchange between Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism in China. The idea that all three are different but consonant approaches to the same truth became widespread (Gentz 2013). But it was not based

on the idea that all three provide different, but complementary approaches to and insights in ultimate reality. But this idea was not expressed in terms of "mysticism."

Today, the US-American Zen-Buddhist David Loy (1997) has tried to show the philosophical possibility that the non-dual ("mystical") traditions of Advaita-Vedānta, Daoism, and Buddhism are based on the same non-dual experience despite their different and partly conflicting ontologies. He even includes "theistic mystical experience" but assesses this as an "incomplete" version of non-dual experience (Loy 1997, 295). Whether Loy's attempt has been successful may be subject to further dispute (compare the detailed and finally skeptical discussion in Völker 2020, 363-450). In any case, Loy has started a new round of constructive debate among the Eastern religions. Unfortunately, however, so far this has not been taken up and continued by Hindus, Daoists or Buddhists.

In modern reflections of Buddhists about other religious traditions the concept of "mysticism" plays some role as a constructive bridge to (primarily) the Abrahamic religions; but it seems fair to say that it does not play the decisive role. It functions—at times, not always—as an element in the *Buddhist assessment of other religions* (for overviews see Duckworth, Vélez de Cea & Harris 2020; Schmidt-Leukel 2021, for some illuminating case studies see Jones 2022). The concept is likely to kindle among Buddhists some interest in other religions. But there are variations in their assessment of teaching, practices, or experiences branded as "mystic." Whether Buddhists regard other religious paths as false and misleading, or as containing some elements of liberating truth, or even as different but equally valid does not seem to depend on their qualification as "mystic." It is rather the other way around, in as much as such different assessments are reflected in the different ways the term "mystic" is used (if at all).

In mysticism studies, interreligious assessment has often been tied to the question of whether the experiences of mystics are the same despite the fact that they belong to different religious traditions and express their experiences by diverging and even contradictory doctrines. Stating the identity of the experiences would then automatically imply their equal validity. Conversely, denying their identity would imply that at best one of them is genuine, while the others are delusive or insufficient. I guess it is this issue that continues to make the debate between constructivism and essentialism or perennialism rather fierce.

The said premises, however, are questionable, because it is possible to interpret religious experiences (including those belonging to the broad family of "mystical" experiences) as different, though nevertheless as equally beneficial experiences of the same ultimate reality as has been stated above in light of John Hick's epistemology. In order to assume the authenticity of different religious experiences as an experience of the same ultimate reality it would not be necessary to establish their phenomenological identity. Nor would it be necessary to base the validity of different religious traditions on the premise that they share a common core of identical beliefs or doctrines. Richard Jones (2022) has, I think rightly, stated that in this sense a common core cannot be found. However, not all perennialists understand the "common core" as a cross-religious identical set of esoteric doctrines. Frithjof Schuon, for example, describes the commonality as a functional equivalence of the different teachings, not as their material congruence.[21] In this respect, his approach is quite similar to Randall Studstill's "mystical pluralism."

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[21] In various places Schuon uses the analogy of different geometrical figures which despite their irreducible differences nevertheless all convey the nature of space (e.g. Schuon 1981, 28, 117). He explicitly notes that his functionalist understanding of esoteric unity is a parallel to the Buddhist concept of "skillful means" (upāya) (Schuon 1985, 170).

However, a pluralistic scenario in this sense does not necessarily entail that there are no cross-religious commonalities. Different types of being religious and different types of mysticism seem to exist within each of the major religious traditions, although with varying emphases, different designations, and in different constellations. To quote Keith Ward (1991, 195): religious people live "with different scriptures and with different paradigm symbols of faith." But they take "a whole range of different attitudes to those symbols which are paralleled within each tradition in various ways." "Mysticism"—if seen as a family of similar phenomena—may be understood as one type among such different attitudes. And it is part of religious diversity that religious people, including Buddhists, assess this fact in rather different ways and ascribe to it rather different degrees of significance.

6. Culture

Geographically, culturally, and socially (including its institutions) "The Buddhist World" (Powers 2018a) is far too large and diverse to give an account of the various forms of transmission, cultural expression, and institutional setting of what (with all reservations) one might call "Buddhist mysticism." Even Buddhism's most prominent institutional structure, the bifurcation into monastic and lay Buddhism, has undergone numerous changes and local diversification including the complete disappearance of the monastic order in some regions and some Buddhist schools and its replacement by a married clergy.

What one would need is a range of specified and localized studies of the nature, cultivation and institutional frameworks of contemplative practices together with further studies regarding the cultural expression of "mystical" sentiments and symbolism through various arts (such as calligraphy, painting, gardening, ikebana, martial arts, gymnastics, architecture, etc.), literary genres, rituals (including performances such as the so-called "tea-ceremony" or the construction and subsequent destruction of sand-mandalas, etc.), music and dance and so forth. One example of such a study from an emic perspective is D.T. Suzuki's book "Zen and Japanese Culture" (Suzuki 1973) which looks at the cultural impact of only one of Japan's many Buddhist schools. For sociological studies within the world of Theravāda one can point to the examples of Spiro 1984, Gombridge & Obeyesekere 1988; Gombrich 2006, Tambiah 2007, and Crosby 2014.

More relevant material will be found among the vast literature of regional studies in social anthropology related to the different cultures to which Buddhism spread and where it left its unmistakable traces. Such studies certainly touch upon important issues raising interesting questions such as why Buddhist teaching of non-duality has sustained a rather strict gender dualism and hierarchy (e.g., Gross 1993), or how Buddhist not-self teaching can support xenophobic nationalist politics (e.g., Lehr 2019, Schmidt-Leukel 2023d). But as has been said, this exceeds by far the range of what could be covered in the current paper.

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Cottonbro Studio

Chapter 3: Jewish Mysticisms

Jonathan Garb

Introduction

The first clear formulation of the historical scope and nature of Jewish mysticism is found in a classic of the field (Scholem 1941).[22] For Gershom Scholem, this term included the *Heichalot/Merkavah* literature of late antiquity, German Pietism, Kabbalah (focusing on only four corpuses, two medieval and two modern: The writings of Abraham Abulafia, the *Zohar,* Lurianic Kabbalah, Sabbateanism) and Hasidism, tellingly defined by Scholem as "the latest phase". Scholem relied on some existing definitions of mysticism, such as: Immediate/intimate awareness of one's relation with God and the aspiration to *unio mystica*. Yet he stressed that "there is no mysticism as such, there is only the mysticism of a particular religious system". Thus, it is "a definite stage in the historical development of [a specific] religion".[23] Following from these claims, he defined Jewish mysticism as "an attempt to interpret the religious values of Judaism in terms of mystical values". In attempting to define the commonality and distinctiveness of Kabbalah within the totality of Jewish mysticism, he stressed the doctrine of the *Sefirot*, or realm of divinity underlying the world of sense-date, and active in all that exists, as "a problem common to all Kabbalists". Yet, immediately widening his scope, he added that all Jewish mystics (including the Therapeutae described by Philo of Alexandria), "are at one in giving a mystical interpretation to the Torah".[24] Without losing sight of the larger framework of Jewish mysticism, our discussion shall focus on the Kabbalah, as the only world which has persisted (in increasing force) to this day.

This framing dominated the field until the 1980's, when Paul Fenton's work led to the inclusion of medieval Egyptian Pietism, and Yehudah Liebes added "rabbinic mysticism", later adding *Sefer Yetsira* (Book of Formation), also from late antiquity, as a core focus of Jewish mystical discourse. The pressure to include Christian Kabbalah in the core definition of the field grew (as in Idel 1988), and likewise for kabbalistic *Musar* (self-cultivation) literature. Towards the end of the decade, Idel suggested reframing the general structure of Kabbalah: while the doctrine of the *Sefirot* (as divine realm) was now seen as the province of theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah, individual mystical experience was regarded as that of ecstatic Kabbalah (largely identified with the school of Abulafia). At the same time (here also addressing earlier forms of Jewish mysticism), Idel critiqued the Scholemian focus on theoretical issues (such as the doctrine of the *Sefirot*), foregrounding instead practical and experiential aspects, especially mystical experience.[25] Shortly after, Mopsik (1993), regarded theurgy (in the sense of human action effecting the divine realm), rather than mysticism, as the organizing category for the study of Kabbalah. Without denying the existence of mystical experiences and such in Kabbalah, Mopsik regarded these as only one important aspect, thus precluding the use of the term Jewish mysticism as an equivalent of the Hebrew "Kabbalah".[26]

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[22] Though the roots of the academic study of Jewish mysticism go back to the nineteenth century, it is widely accepted that the formation of the field as such commenced with Gershom Scholem, and this is certainly true for its framing as the study of Jewish mysticism.

[23] Scholem 1941, 6-7.

[24] Scholem 1941, 10-14.

[25] Idel 1988, 27-29.

[26] Mopsik 1993, 15.

Around the same time Wolfson (1994), posited that a true appreciation of Jewish mysticism necessitates a focus on the visualization of the divine. While Wolfson stressed that he is not reducing its diverse manifestations to this issue, nonetheless the very tension of aniconism and visualization is an essential component of "the relevant varieties" (including the *Heichalot* literature and German Pietism). For him, the religious texture of the various streams "is in a central way colored" by this concern.[27] These various revisionary moves, in tandem, effected a dramatic re-organization of the field, whose influence persists to this day.

Another major shift took place at the beginning of the present century, when Jonathan Garb and Boaz Huss inserted twentieth century Kabbalah as a core focus of research, while Pinchas Giller expanded the Eurocentric horizons of the study of modern Kabbalah by including modern Near Eastern/Sephardic literature and institutions. Huss (2020) also challenged the use of the term mysticism in general (here joining other voices in religious studies), and that of Jewish mysticism in particular, as the projection of a generalized, Christian-Western construct. Some of Huss' sources of inspiration have a similar critique of the term religion. Very recent voices have moved further towards deconstructing the term Kabbalah, seen as an over-generalizing, favoring terms such as sefirotic theology when addressing the mainstream theosophic strand. On the one hand, these critiques have contributed to greater terminological exactitude in the field. For example, there is greater caution in using the term "mystical" in contexts better described as scholastic, pietistic or magical, while it is best reserved for more experiential settings. On the other hand, as far as I can determine, there is still a broad consensus in the field as to the necessity of general terms such as mysticism or Kabbalah (reflected also in recent book titles, some cited here, or in the sub-title of *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts*, a major venue for discussion and development in the field). One should uphold this consensus for two reasons: One is the need for a scholarly language that enables comparison with similar phenomena, even if they only share a "family resemblance". The alternative is seclusion and isolation of the field and an undesirable disassociation from the broader arena of religious studies. The second rationale is the need for terminology that enables long-terms analysis, cutting across regions, approaches and periods, comparing e.g. Kabbalah (premodern and modern), German and Egyptian Pietism and Hasidism. For all of the attendant pitfalls, this is infinitely preferable to a situation in which one can only speak, e.g., of Safedian Kabbalah or Israeli Kabbalah in isolation.

It must be stressed that from Scholem onwards, the field progressed through a two-barreled approach: Phenomenological-thematic and historical-textual study. The main focus in the next sections shall be on the first (following the terms of reference). At the same time, one must emphasize that especially due to the advances made in turn-of-the-century scholarship, Kabbalah is currently recognized to be a vast and historically-geographically diverse corpus.

Methods

As described above, there is a scholarly tradition (going back to Scholem and later developed by Idel), assuming two major forms of Jewish mysticism. The majority theosophical-theurgical

[27] Wolfson 1994, 5-6.

Kabbalah stream, focusing on the structure of the *Sefirot* and other divine emanations, and the ecstatic stream, that is more focused on mystical technique and experience. This division was subsequently contested by leading scholars (especially Wolfson and Pedaya). In a later work (1995), Idel added a third major stream: the magical one. Magically-oriented kabbalists shared the theurgical focus on the trans-natural potency of human action, yet directed it towards the material world, rather than the supernal realm. In recent years, in part due to withdrawal from a Lovejoyesque History of Ideas, scholarship is shifting away from the notion of streams over broad periods, and is zooming in on particular periods, regions, schools and corpora (this approach is especially represented in Garb 2020).

As noted above, Idel has assigned the highly intricate symbolic system, based on the *Sefirot* or later developments (especially the Lurianic scheme of anthropomorphic *Partsufim*, or facial countenances) to the mainstream theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah. This argument responds to Scholem's foregrounding of symbolism. According to Scholem, the uniqueness of Jewish mysticism lies in its "very special" symbolic system, that brings together the spiritual experience of the mystics with the historical experience of the Jewish people.[28] One can expand Scholem's argument as follows: the kabbalistic symbolic system had three goals. One was to provide an esoteric layer of meaning to the sacral texts inherited from antiquity, especially the Bible, the Talmudic-Midrashic corpus, and the enigmatic *Sefer Yetsira*. Here I am widening the following definition of Scholem's: "Jewish mysticism is the sum of the attempts to put a mystical interpretation on the content of Rabbinical Judaism as it crystallized in the period of the Second Temple and later".[29] Yet this goal splits into three further endeavors, each possessing a certain autonomy from the hermeneutical framework. The Jewish canon is largely devoted to the narratives of sacral history, on the one hand, and the detailed laws of what came to be regarded as a set of divine commandments (*mitzvot*), on the other. Hence, *Kabbalah*, whose large-scale emergence is dated to the later medieval period, devoted itself to these two themes. However, neither is found in any meaningful way in *Sefer Yetsira*. Rather this terse and enigmatic work – its dating and placing still highly debated due to its singularity – is concerned with cosmology (including the dimension of time), blended with a psycho-physical structure.

It is not a coincidence that the ecstatic stream heralded by Abulafia, displaying significantly less interest in the commandments, emerged largely through commentaries on *Sefer Yetsira*. Debates on terminology and demarcation aside, it is clear that the largest body of documentation of mystical techniques leading to ecstatic experience (see below) is found in the works penned by Abulafia and subsequent generations of his school.[30] These include explicit observation of, and engagement with, the Sufi world, due to a shared interest in the psycho-physical dimensions of the individual human condition. It is mostly these testimonies that have been the focus of comparison with models derived from neuroscience.[31] To date, the later investigation has been the most significant engagement of the study of Jewish mysticism with the natural sciences. However, as part of the growing engagement of the Kabbalah with the academic world in the twentieth century, there is now an entire popular literature on parallels between Kabbalah and modern physics, in which kabbalists, scholars of Kabbalah and physicists have engaged.[32]

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[28] Scholem 1974, 2.
[29] *Ibid.*, 32.
[30] The one possible exception, Hasidism, was influenced by Abulafian texts.
[31] See Idel and Arzy 2015.
[32] See, e.g., Matt 2016.

While the mainstream's concern with Jewish law and sacral history led to a ethnocentric, at times xenophobic, discourse (whose imprint is still with us), the Abulafian school, especially in its Italian reception, opted for more universalistic concerns focused on individual makeup and experience.[33] One upshot of this difference pertains to the sacral Land of Israel (with the Temple in its center), a focus of both Jewish law and Jewish history, valorized in the mainstream and re-interpreted as a mental or spiritual level in the Abulafian discourse. Towards conclusion, we shall briefly follow the modern development of these processes. Starting with the golden age of Kabbalah in sixteenth-century Ottoman Galilee, the Lurianic theosophical-theurgical system (based on the *Partsufim*), became far more intricate, enabling a much greater saturation of both sacral history (leading towards the messianic outcome) and minute details of law and liturgy with both symbolic and theurgical meaning. This approach was the foundation of the even more complex systems that developed in the eighteenth century in Italy, the Near East and Lithuania. However, the residual presence of the Abulafian approach, joined with magical concerns, informed much of the discourse and social structure of the Hasidic world in Eastern and Central Europe. As noted, Hasidism provides the main modern repository of mystical techniques and testimonies. These four late modern streams remain the central canons of Kabbalah to this day. However, while the first three are cultivated mostly in the "professional" world of the Yeshiva (rabbinic academy), Hasidism is a powerful socio-economic and political movement. This being said, its spread and popularization entailed a certain dilution of mystical intensity.[34]

At the same time, the study of Hasidism has been the arena for the most sustained sociological investigation of Jewish mysticism. While in the case of medieval Kabbalah the existence of "circles" is often debatable, with major texts being of nebulous authorship or even locale, in the case of modern Kabbalah we already have firm documentation, such as "contracts" guiding the conduct of fraternities such as that of Luria – and subsequent emulations in Italy and the Near East. The parallels to Sufi *tariqat* is far from coincidental. However, it is only in the case of Hasidism that we have massive economic structures, and even parliamentary representation.[35] While the theory associating Hasidism with class-based social unrest has been weakened by scholars such as Glen Dynner, the question of the relationship between Hasidism and other forms of class struggle (or social movements in general) occasioned by the industrial revolution still remains open.[36] A major exception to the overall neglect of sociological/anthropological study of Jewish mysticism is found in the works of Yoram Bilu. Utilizing diverse methodologies, such as oral history and participant observation, Bilu delved into the social structures and social psychology accompanying popular religion and its interface with mysticism, mainly in the context of Moroccan Jewry (including immigrants from Morocco to Israel) and contemporary Habad Hassidism.[37] There is room to expand his work in the direction of examining the role of Kabbalah in processes of identity formation and social change amongst Sephardic Jews in Israel, especially in its under-researched periphery (see conclusion).

While the study of the psychology of Jewish mysticism covers all periods and includes neurological, psycho-somatic, cognitive, motivational and imaginal dimensions, the increasing trend is towards focus on the rich emotive discourse in the Hasidic world, that tallied well with

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[33] On this issue, see Wolfson 2006b.

[34] See David Biale et al 2018.

[35] Out of a host of studies, see Baumgarten 2006; Wexler 2013; Wodziński 2013.

[36] See Dynner 2006.

[37] See Bilu 2000, 2010, 2020.

its aspiration to reach broad sectors of society.[38] It must be especially said that the study of the somatics of Jewish mysticism has yet to catch up with the "corporeal turn" in Jewish studies as a whole, not to mention work on other mystical traditions. The exception is sexuality, that has enjoyed extensive attention, in all periods and most regions.[39] It is true that there are localized studies of the role of eating, medical imagery, symbolism of various body parts etc. in specific schools or texts, yet there is a substantial gap between these forays and the level of theorization and general narrative in the study of Jewish mystical psychology and philosophy. The major exception that proves the rule is the sophisticated discussion of the semiotics of bodily ritual in medieval and early modern Kabbalah, as found in the works of Maurizio Mottolese (including categories such as mnemonics of the body, gesture analysis and motion).[40] One should also note Wolfson's earlier discussion (with a semiotic overlay) of textual embodiment in medieval Kabbalah as alternative to incarnational theology. This discussion also includes Sufi parallels.[41]

Ecstasy/ experience

In the absence of a systematic scholarly presentation, I largely depart here from surveying and assessing scholarly achievements, and rather offer my own direct observation of the testimony of the sources.

There is no good equivalent to the term "consciousness" in Jewish mystical vocabulary. However, already in mainstream medieval Kabbalah, the imagery and symbolism around the three supernal *Sefirot* (translatable as Wisdom, Understanding and Knowledge), merged with discussions of profound cognitive transformations. In other words, the assumption seems to be that changes in states of consciousness theurgically activate the corresponding layers or dimensions of the divine world. As we have seen, these were often allied with visualization, and hence with activation of the imaginal capacity (in a manner that has been compared to Henry Corbin's understanding of central Sufi and Shi'ite texts). However, this literature is sparse in first-person testimonials of techniques and experiences.

These can be found abundantly in the Abulafian school. One testimony (translated and discussed already in Scholem's *Major Trends*), explicitly compares kabbalistic technique to the author's observation of Sufi practice. The Sufis engage in the effacement of any natural forms from the soul, enabling them to be absorbed, in a trance-like manner, in the pronunciation of the name Allah. The author, on the other hand, moved through a similar practice (using Hebrew letters), yet his teacher (Abulafia himself) directed him onwards, towards combinations of the names of God, until he experienced a form of automatic speech. However, the ultimate goal was moving completely beyond self-control, until one is unable to speak.[42] In other words, we are dealing with a passive form of experience, that can be described in possessive terms. Yet already here, one can discern a characteristic absence of suspicion towards mystical experiences (as one can find, e.g. in the Christian tradition of discernment of spirits). A second significant testimony

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[38] See Pedaya 2015 and cf. Garb 2015.

[39] See, esp. Wolfson 2006a.

[40] See most recently Mottolese 2022.

[41] See Wolfson 2006a, esp. 205–207. Compare to Magid 2014, for application and development in the Hasidic context.

[42] Scholem 1941, 147–155.

was penned by a student of the first writer. Here, we have a passive experience in which the mystic (R. Isaac of Acre) is instructed, in a sleep-like state, by "voices", to constantly visualize a name of power, accompanied by *mandala*-like circles.[43]

When we move to the modern period, we find a far wider reservoir of testimonials, exhibiting a Jewish variant of the general modern concern with the self. Lurianic Kabbalah seemingly continued the theurgical approach of the *Zohar*, yet we can locate several major shifts. Firstly, the sefirotic system was rendered far more complex, and a third dimension, of depth, at times enters the cosmic mapping. Hence, the requirements of visualization are greatly intensified, leading, inter alia, to the creation of highly-complex Kabbalistic diagrams called *Ilanot* (lit. trees).[44] Secondly, language dramatically re-entered the mainstream scene, as many Lurianic techniques involve "unifications" of the divine names. Indeed, linguistic elements, including vowels and musical cantillation, were interwoven in the highest reaches of the cosmic scheme. Yet this cosmic array is highly personalized. The nucleus of the techniques, that themselves are generators of knowledge, was the "rectifications" of the soul given by Luria to the members of his fellowship. These were mostly geared at amending the residual effects of previous incarnations. Here, the theory of reincarnation found in medieval Kabbalah (almost certainly derived from outside the Jewish world), was rendered into practice.[45] This approach dominated some later circles influenced to various degrees by Sabbateanism (especially that of Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto in eighteenth-century Italy).

The major subsequent development of Lurianic practice, namely the school established by R. Shalom Shar'abi in Jerusalem in the eighteenth century, greatly increased the level of cosmic and especially linguistic complexity but is very sparse in descriptions of states of consciousness.[46] However, later generations of the school, as in Baghdad, provide us with detailed descriptions of experiences, including those related to the identification of reincarnations and related rectifications. In the Hasidic world, alongside with a deflection of focus away from the Lurianic array, we find a wealth of experiential testimonies and guidelines for technique. In the focus on trance states, passive orientation and the centrality of the letters, these are phenomenologically similar to the Abulafian approach, even if one does not completely accept Idel's argument as to indirect or even direct historical influences.[47] To the extent that Kabbalistic texts and themes influenced the late modern *Musar* movement in Lithuania that partly arose in response to Hasidism, it can be said to have informed the shared focus on psychological transformation in both movements. One should add that after the Holocaust, the *Musar* movement continued in Israel, France and the United States. One should also note here the complex relationship (debated in scholarship) of *Musar* to the language-centered and often highly somatic kabbalistic discourse generated in the first four generations of the circle of R. Elijah of Vilna (the arch-foe of Hasidism).

The term "ecstasy" is used, in the study of Hasidism and elsewhere, vaguely and broadly, in ways that overlap with mysticism or even shamanism. Yet *sensu stricto*, it refers to out-of-body experiences. These have attracted some attention, and the most interesting suggestion is the following (by Pedaya). In experiences of ascent, some Jewish mystics projected aspects of their

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[43] Fishbane 2009, 246–247.
44 Chajes 2022.
[45] See Liebes 1995; Fine 2003.
[46] For this school, see Giller 2008.
[47] See Idel 1995; Garb 2011.

self (that one could describe as avatars) in order to transcend the body and material existence and travel within supernal realms.[48]

It cannot be said that there are serious discussions of psychedelics and Jewish mysticism. The strongest case for the use of substances in cultivating experience has been made for the role played by coffee in the cultivation of nightly rituals and vigils in the Near East, starting in the sixteenth century, and reflecting Sufi practice.[49]

Discourse

In a foundational discussion, Scholem described mysticism, as such, as embedded within a given, authoritative tradition, and hence conservative, as well as revolutionary in its aspiration towards transformation of tradition through direct experience. Through this combined stance, mystics themselves have constituted a new form of religious authority.[50] In the specific context of Kabbalah, Scholem focused on hermeneutics. Here too, the concept of transformation is crucial: "The mystic transforms the holy text, the crux of this metamorphosis being that the hard, clear, unmistakable word of revelation is filled with infinite meaning. The word which claims the highest authority is opened up, as it were, to receive the mystic's experience".[51]

Yet for all of their lucidity and value in introducing the discussion, Scholem's formulations need to be reevaluated in light of the scholarly findings of recent decades. Firstly, the multi-adjectival description of the word of revelation as being hard, clear and unmistakable runs counter not only to the Midrashic impetus that characterizes rabbinic culture, but to the strong proto-Midrashic tendencies within the Hebrew Bible itself. In other words, for all of their daring hermeneutic moves (often related to breaking the text down to its bare letters), the kabbalists rested on a tradition of "opening up" the text to multiplicity of meaning. Therefore, the conservative-revolutionary divide falters in the very domain in which Scholem erected it.

This critique leads into an observation related to an area largely ignored in the Scholemian epoch – that of the inter-relationship of Kabbalah and *Halakhah* (Jewish Law). It is a simple fact that many of the most influential kabbalists, both medieval and modern, were also prominent halakhic authorities, or at the least were very-well-versed in halakhic literature. One relatively recent example should suffice. Some of the most eloquent and radical mystical testimonies were penned by the first (Ashkenazi) chief Rabbi of mandatory Palestine – R. Abraham Isaac Kook. It is true that this assessment largely does not hold true for the Abulafian school, yet it is still quite appropriate for Hasidic figures (as well as some of the leaders of the *Musar* movement). Here one famous recent example is R. Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the last leader of Habad-Lubavitch. Generally speaking, one of the major manifestations of kabbalistic creativity was innovation in both *Halakhah* and the closely related realm of custom (*Minhag*), as well as lengthy discussions of halakhic methodology. The fact that this corpus has largely been ignored in academic writing (especially in languages other than Hebrew), should not occlude its import. Even when kabbalistic figures (especially Sabbatean and Hasidic) ventured into antinomianism, this itself was almost invariably couched in halakhic language.

The relationship of Kabbalah and *Halakhah* must inform our consideration of gender roles and images – perhaps the most contested issue in contemporary scholarship. Here too, it is best

[48] Pedaya 2002.
[49] See Horowitz 1989.
[50] Scholem 1974, 6–11.
[51] Scholem 1974, 12.

to anchor oneself in simple facts, even if they offend contemporary values. Traditionally, and until very recently, Talmudic-Halakhic learning was the sole provenance of men. Hence, it is only in the twenty-first century that we encounter female halakhic authorities, whose wider impact is yet to be determined. Likewise, a large part of everyday ritual was assigned only to men. As part of this rigidity of gender roles, homosexuality was forbidden. The situation with regards to Kabbalah forms a perfect parallel: it is only in very recent years (largely as result of academic learning) that we have any kabbalistic writing or teaching by women. I do not know of any women who practices the Lurianic meditations on ritual that are the mainstay of practicing kabbalists for centuries. And even relatively open figures such as R. Kook saw homosexuality as a deviation from the cosmic order of things. To the extent that we find positive or even privileged images of the female *Sefirot*, these were imagined, visualized, drawn and textually described by and for men.[52] Hence, explaining their presence, perhaps as a compensatory discourse, must consider this wider background.[53] Yet in the contemporary context, one should note the recent development of *Batei Midrash* (study houses), in which women, usually with academic background, teach *Zohar* and Hasidism to female or mixed groups). This development parallels the entrenchment of feminism within so-called Orthodox Judaism, one expression of which is the launching of police investigations around sexual harassment against kabbalistic and semi-kabbalistic figures (in Safed and Jerusalem).

These comments are closely related to one of the most significant developments in the institutional history of modern Judaism – the transformation of the Yeshiva from an elite (as in the medieval and early modern periods) to a far wider "world", aspiring to hegemony. Since the eighteenth century, Sephardic kabbalistic discourse and practice were both transmitted in and remarkably galvanized by its Yeshivas (often with a dynastic structure). By the early twentieth century this model was largely adopted by Hasidism and the *Musar* movement, both of which have also adopted (to differing degrees) dynastic modes of transmission. As a result, even at the level of mere printing, one cannot understand the massive expansion and increasing scholastic sophistication of kabbalistic literature without the context of the Yeshiva as a total institution devoted to intense learning and devotion. As Yeshivas open to women are still extremely rare, the interrelationship of gender and institutional structure is profound. Again, it is against this background that one can appreciate the revolutionary impact of full-scale academic research and teaching on Kabbalah, that has attracted female scholars since the mid-twentieth century.

The centrality of *Halakhah* and practice leads in to the question of theology. Medieval Kabbalah was clearly characterized by sustained engagement with Jewish philosophy, and its mediation of Aristotelean and neo-Platonic models. There was also a shared interest in contemplative and other mystical forms of cultivation, at times reflecting Sufi influences. Here too, one must stress a shared engagement with biblical hermeneutics and with the rationales for the commandments. As a result, alongside with its own indigenous theurgical interests, Kabbalah at this stage can be viewed through the theological lens employed by scholars such as Scholem or Alexander Altmann. However, part of the process of Kabbalah coming into its own, as an increasingly influential world, with its own institutions, was an increased self-concern. One example is the manner in which the *Zohar* and later the Lurianic corpus themselves became the subject of ever-growing hermeneutical corpora. Together with the sharpening of xenophobic (and

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[52] Contrary to some scholarly views, the representation of concrete women as embodiments of the *Shekhina*, or divine presence, is not an invention of the kabbalists, but rather goes back to the Talmud (see Bavli, *Qiddushin*, 31B).

[53] As in Wolfson, 2006a.

in the later Zionist context – nationalistic) discourse, one can discern a distinct move away from philosophy, especially in Sephardic kabbalah, that is not at all factored in to academic discussions of this process. One of the many products of this development was the strong move away from explicit theological language, with Italian Kabbalah (also in its Sabbatean form) being an exception that proves the rule.

Interfaith dimensions

We have seen that the mainstream of Jewish mysticism is strongly tied to particularistic commitments, closely related to the history of the Jewish people and messianic expectations. Frequently, these fostered xenophobic views, such as the assertion of the innate superiority of the Jewish soul and demonized portrayals of both Islam and Christianity. Against the background of modern nationalism, these foundations crystalized into explicit formulations on the unique and separate destiny of the Jewish nation, depicted as part of a cosmic order. Despite the structural similarities between the more universalistic Abulafian school and Hasidism, the latter movement usually cultivated such separatist tendencies. With the advent of Zionism, writers such as R. Kook and his followers transformed kabbalistic symbols and notions into a variant of nationalist ideology, that can fruitfully be compared to other twentieth century developments, such as *Hindutva* in India. It is true that there are pronounced kabbalistic elements informing the religious critique of Zionism in Haredi (so-called ultra-Orthodox) circles. However, here thinkers such as R. Eliyahu Weintraub actually internalized the division between Jews and non-Jews, so that secular Jews were accorded the same negative casting as Gentiles. The main exception was R. Yehuda Leib Ashlag, who developed a socialist-universalist interpretation of Kabbalah, that through some of his more radical followers has greatly enhanced the reception of Jewish mysticism in the current New Age scene.

More generally speaking, the globalization of spirituality, accelerating in the second part of the twentieth century, introduced new players onto this scene. Increasingly, Jewish mystics such as R. Schneerson (or R. Aryeh Kaplan, to mention a lesser known but nonetheless important American figure) engaged with meditative techniques of Far Eastern origin. Furthermore, already in the first part of the century we have the Neo-Hasidic genre, namely the implanting of Hasidic ideas in secular or at least non-traditional contexts. Though there is no direct line of influence from Martin Buber, he is nonetheless a constant presence in this discourse. Neo-Hasidism plays an important role in the current evolution of non-Orthodox streams in North America, as epitomized by R. Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, originally a follower of Habad-Lubavitch.[54] These intra-Jewish phenomena join the increasing presence of Kabbalah in the New Age movement, closely related to the former's effect on popular culture, as described below (5.).

Academic scholarship on Kabbalah, that also became a strong international presence in the second part of the twentieth century, has pointed at the cross-influence between Kabbalah and other mystical systems. Firstly, one needs to differentiate between Islam and Christianity in this regard. We have already noted the direct encounter between Abulafian kabbalists and Sufi practitioners. In view of the proliferation of Arabic translations of Yoga treatises, it is plausible that the Sufi world also served as a conduit for South Asian traditions. Scholarship is also beginning to investigate the possible influence of Shi'ite cosmology on medieval Kabbalah. Similar direct encounters took place in Ottoman-ruled Galilee in the sixteenth century. In this

[54] See Magid 2013.

context, Fenton has pointed at the impact of Sufi practices of visualization of the teacher in Safedian Kabbalah. These later impacted Hasidism, that shares the Sufi (and Tantric) insistence on the indispensability of mediation by spiritual illuminati.[55] As magic is a constant companion to the evolution of kabbalistic practice, it is not surprising that Safedian kabbalists engaged with Muslim magical practitioners, including women.[56] This path of interchange continued in later periods, as in Morocco.[57] However, it is very difficult to locate any reverse influence of Kabbalah on the Islamic world. The situation with Christianity in medieval period is more nebulous. Research is currently raising promising hypotheses on kabbalistic influences on luminaries such as Meister Eckhart, Ramon Llull and Joachim of Fiore, yet direct testimonials are lacking.[58] It is possible that here too, a fruitful direction is to investigate the influence of kabbalistic magic, specifically on the more easterly branches of the Christian world.[59]

In modernity, the situation is transposed. In modern Middle Eastern Kabbalah, one can barely locate any Islamic influence. The one exception was the Sabbatean movement, that was influenced by both Abrahamic religions. However, both in Turkey and in Poland, the end result was conversion. Hence, the influence of these post-Sabbatean groups on the host religions was at best sectarian. In contradistinction, with modern European Kabbalah we at last can trace two-way influence. Already in Renaissance Italy, we can find extensive translations of kabbalistic texts into European languages. One can especially discern an influence of kabbalistic messianism on the formulation of eschatological hopes in the Christian world. While it is debatable if this extensive literature should be described as Christian Kabbalah or kabbalistic Christianity (as suggested by Judith Weiss), its cultural, intellectual and at times political impact is undeniable.[60] This phenomenon gradually widened in modernity. Major Western philosophers, such as Spinoza, Hegel and Schelling, incorporated kabbalistic themes to various degrees.

On the other hand, Renaissance and early modern Italian kabbalists profoundly absorbed Christian scholasticism, and indeed some of these were university-educated. This trend continued quite late, as demonstrated by R. Elia Benamozegh. In the works of the latter figure, one can also find an interest in Asian religions.[61] In the twentieth century, we find kabbalists, for example in the Kook circle, who worked extensively with the Western philosophical tradition, thus absorbing indirect influences of Christianity (through figures such as Hegel). Interestingly, Nietzschean critiques of Christianity also played a significant role here.

Culture

[55] Fenton 2019.
[56] See Chajes 2003.
[57] See Bilu 2000.
[58] See, e.g. Hames 2000.
[59] See Izmirlieva 2008.
[60] For an overview, see Schmidt-Biggemann 2012–2014.
[61] See Boulouque 2020.

The Scholemian emphasis on the close interaction of Kabbalah with its host religious culture led into his above-noted stress on the cultural construction of Jewish mystical experience. It is not surprising that scholars of Jewish mysticism joined in the collections edited by Steven T. Katz, famously championing this approach. To the extent that more perineal approaches are extant, they are expressed in the psychoanalytical exposition of Kabbalistic themes, that has comparative dimensions (as in Pedaya's comparisons to Far Eastern imagery). One should also mention a major theoretical formulation by Ron Margolin, who views Jewish mysticism in the broader context of the internalization of religious life, that he locates throughout world religions. For him, "the identification of Kabbalah as the most fertile ground for religious and mystical experiences… limited the exploration of Jewish inner life expressed in other corpora".[62] Conversely, he establishes an opposition between the more mythical elements of the kabbalistic world, that tend to externalize religious contexts, and the internalizing approach, that shift the focus in ritual towards the subjective realm. In his telling example: "despite the vast disparities between, for example, the types of rites in Hinduism and Judaism, for example [sic.], they both demonstrate interiorization: the attention of people performing Hindu and Jewish rites shifts from the ("objective") world to the ("subjective") mind and soul."[63]

Returning to the mainstream Scholemian approach, the traditionalist nature of Kabbalah can be located in the very term, signifying reception. However, although recent scholarship recognizes the indebtedness of medieval Kabbalah to traditions from late antiquity, there was no direct line of transmission. Furthermore, the more creative and influential corpora of medieval Kabbalah (such as the *Zohar* or the earlier *Bahir*), were pseudo-epigraphic or anonymous. In other words, they reflected, if anything, a shift away from close adherence to personally transmitted (and hence more tightly controlled) lore (as found in the powerful but relatively short-lived school of Nahmanides) towards the espousal of individual creativity, whether experimental-experiential or hermeneutical. As indicated above, the modern period brought with it a shift towards the social model of closely-knit, intensive fellowships. The proliferation of the literary products of these groups, ranging from Safed through Italy to Eastern Europe, was greatly accelerated by the invention and adoption of print, that reached the Near East later (and to a lesser extent). It was also print technology that galvanized the sacralization of the zoharic corpus, while stabilizing its contents.

At the same time, the Near Eastern Shar'abian school, reticent towards print (and hence reluctant to stabilize central texts, such as the meditative intentions of the prayer-book), was the first to establish a chain of succession that has persisted to this day (although in recent decades the dynastic structure has been significantly weakened, and even ex-secular figures have risen to prominence). In this mystical culture, practice, in the sense of theurgical intention of ritual and liturgy, plays a central role in legitimation and authority. It was followed by the Hasidic world, which by the mid-nineteenth century has moved from fraternities to dynasties. Here too, many of the chains established then reach to this day. The major exception to this pronounced continuity (resting on the twin pillars of the Yeshiva and the dynasty), is the Lithuanian world, where the study of the Kabbalah of R. Elijah of Vilna has been practically re-invented (outside of Lithuania) over the last century, after the direct chain of discipleship ceased. One reason for this disruption is the absence of Kabbalah in the curriculum of the Lithuanian Yeshiva (the lodestar

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[62] Margolin 2021, 30.

[63] Margolin 2021, 49. One should add that as seen here, Margolin's work corrects the above-mentioned imbalance of emotive and cognitive psychological analysis.

and model of Talmudic learning since the nineteenth century, as also reflected in literary treatments by American-based figures such as Chaim Grade and Chaim Potok). Until very recently, this absence also characterized the younger Yeshiva world of modern Orthodoxy/religious Zionism, in Israel and the United States respectively.

One cannot explain the remarkable proliferation of kabbalistic writing and practice in recent decades, nor the productive and constantly accelerating cross-fertilization between its different streams, without the onset of late twentieth century information technology, first in recordings and then online. Global digital technology has greatly enhanced the effect of kabbalistic images and symbols on popular culture, specially the cinema and literary works (such as those of Umberto Eco). This joins an increased interest in Kabbalah within the artistic world.[64] The importance of the latter development can be appreciated against the backdrop of the an-iconic approach shared by traditional Judaism and Islam, compared to the wealth of pictorial representation of the human-divine interaction in the Christian world. As noted above, a recent domain of research is the study of diagrammatic representation of the *Sefirot* and similar structures, that also greatly accelerated in the modern era and further in the digital age. Already in the early modern period, this genre attracted the attention of kabbalistic Christians, who naturally found interest in images of the macro-Anthropos, that run counter to the prevalent an-iconic approach.[65]

If one further widens our definition of art to include ritual objects, then one can find a wealth of material already in the Hasidic world.[66] The cultivation of ritual objects, including, e.g. pipes and chairs, is closely related to the Hasidic ideal of everyday mysticism, or "worship through corporeality". Another Hasidic expression of everyday mysticism was in the economic realm. Especially in the Chabad-Lubavitch dynasty, theurgical-magical language was enlisted in order to raise funds for charity. The manner in which such drives maintained the apparatus of the courts of the Hasidic leaders became a frequent topic in the anti-Hasidic rhetoric found in *Haskalah* (Jewish Enlightenment). Such critiques (researched today especially by Jonatan Meir) are an important part of the history of Kabbalah, as they balance tendencies in recent scholarship to romanticize it. A more nationalized version of everyday mysticism was cultivated in the Zionist Kook circle, that at times expressed sanctification of the weaponry of the Israel Defense Forces. The saturation of the Jewish ritual calendar with kabbalistic themes provides several opportunities for interactions between kabbalistic figures and contents and much wider audiences. The annual mass gatherings at the gravesite of the founder of Bratzlav Hasidism in the Ukraine, R. Nahman, are eclipsed only by those celebrating the anniversary of the departure and ascension of the mythic author of the *Zohar* (Rabbi Shimeon Bar Yohai) in the Galilee, the largest public events in Israeli history. Recently, this crowding has had tragic results.

For all of the importance of visual imagery and visualization, Kabbalah expresses the religious context in which it is embedded in terms of the sanctification of language, comparable to Islamic and Hindu structures.[67] Here one should differentiate between two main levels of analysis. On the basic level, the great majority of Jewish kabbalistic texts are in Hebrew (with the exception of the zoharic corpus and its later imitations, comprised mostly in Aramaic), while Christian texts are found in a variety of European languages. However, there is both explicit and implicit presence of Yiddish, as well as some writing in Ladino (joining Arabic texts from

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[64] See volume 20 (2020) of the journal *Images*, and especially the editorial introduction.
[65] See Chajes 2022.
[66] See Goldman-Ida 2018.
[67] See e.g. Holdredge 1996.

Egyptian Pietism). With the current proliferation of Kabbalah, linguistic variety is constantly increasing, though English is dominant in this process (we already have many English-language works of traditionalist Kabbalah in the original or in translation). More important are conceptions of language. These tend to stress the sanctity and cosmic dimensions of the Hebrew alphabet (used also in Aramaic), extending to the letters and their visual shape and numerical values ascribed to them, vowels, etc. The heart of this system, also in terms of meditative practice, is the divine names, especially the Tetragrammaton. These were identified already in the medieval period with the text of the Torah. At times one can find radical deconstruction of language to its core elements and subsequent re-composition in new forms, enabling remarkable hermeneutical freedom reminiscent of and perhaps influencing Derrida's deconstructionism.

Conclusion

It is best to conclude by briefly collating the outstanding questions that may be identified and addressed in future research. In my view the major area for future development of the field is the role of *Halakhah* as a discourse and practice in the formation of Kabbalah and the accompanying question of the role of the Yeshiva. This umbrella incorporates the triangulation of *Halakhah*, Kabbalah and *Musar*. This leads into the question of the massive, largely unresearched proliferation of kabbalistic printing in the modern period, undergoing constant acceleration today. This is not merely a question of the modern mode of print (and now digital technologies) versus medieval manuscript culture.[68] Rather it pertains to the manner in which the availability of books from various regions and periods enabled ever-widening syntheses and fueled new modes of scholastic creativity. A further development, galvanized by digital media, is the transformation of modes of transmission. The classical model of a fellowship or circle of students focused on one teacher, as well as the slightly more diffuse model of the Yeshiva, have given way to digital communities, often international. These center on web-based classes (uploaded recordings, direct broadcasts or zoom classes), that are attended by fluid groups, often with no personal or institutional connection to the teachers. Increasingly, books are based on transcripts of such classes. The loosening of structures of textual/scholastic authority has contributed to the impact of kabbalists or Hasidic leaders (often without any dynastic continuity) on society in Israel (and North American Jewry).

Yet more generally, the core issue is the still dominant academic perception of Kabbalah as a stable phenomenon, anchored largely in the medieval context, as opposed to an appreciation of a living and ever-growing phenomena still largely rooted in traditional Jewish life forms. The relative place of universally recognizable mystical experience follows from this bifurcation. At the same time, there was breathtaking room for comparison between kabbalistic modes of transmission, scholasticism, authority, institutionalization etc., with Sufi *tariqat* and monastic orders, whether Christian, Buddhist or Daoist.

In this comparative context, one must stress the need to overcome various blocks and apologetic agenda and take up the comparisons between late modern Kabbalah and national-religious movements, in the Indian sub-continent and elsewhere. This more structural analysis can join Jeremy Brown's ongoing investigation of the role of Kabbalah (and its academic study) in the development of *nacionalista* in South America. Yet this move should be balanced by a recent comparative research direction, found in Daniel Reiser's study of imagery techniques in

[68] Cf. Abrams 2013, and compare to the wider and more print-oriented frame in Gries 2007.

modern Jewish mysticism. Reiser has noted, in programmatic fashion, the expansion of relatively universalistic (not language-based) practices of creative imagination (to use Corbin's terminology), active imagination (if one employs Jungian terminology) in both *Musar* and Hasidism against the backdrop of global developments in twentieth century mysticism and spirituality. Reiser has noted that such universalistic practices, as found, e.g., in the works of one popular Hasidic writer (Menahem Mendel Ekstein, 1884–1943?), "do not have strong precedents in kabbalistic and Hasidic literature and there is no doubt that they are slightly more similar to exercises of Far-Eastern origin like… the exercises of Paramahansa Yogananda (1893–1952) who immigrated in the '20s to the United States and there spread Yoga teachings".[69]

These two poles relate to the room for class-based analysis of the current proliferation of Kabbalah. Westernized elites in Israel join their peers abroad, especially in North America in the cultivation of more universal, less language-based forms of Kabbalah, stressing experiential and psychological dimensions. These discourses are usually more oriented towards gender equality. One arena for such activity is within the Jewish Renewal movement. However, in Israel, one can note the increasing dominance of particularistic forms of Kabbalah, that in many ways join the current ascendancy of what some observers describe as "Jewish supremacy" (*'eliyonut Yehudit*). The popular writings and websites of R. Yitzhak Ginsburgh (b. 1944), supporting or justifying inter alia separate medical and legal systems for Jews and non-Jews in Israel, mass murder of civilians in reprisals against terror etc. are only the tip of this proverbial iceberg. While the religious Zionist followers of R. Kook belong to the new elites flourishing under this umbrella (e.g. in the military, legal world and media), it remains to be determined to what extent the more kabbalistically-inclined figures fit this profile (as they tend to occupy mid-level teaching or rabbinical positions). And while the overlap between class and ethnicity has somewhat diminished in recent decades, one must still note the appeal of popularized forms of Sephardic Kabbalah in the periphery and working class (see above).

[69] Reiser 2018, esp.

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Chapter 4: Mysticism in Christianity

Louise Nelstrop

> The story of the modern articulation of the category of mysticism is only beginning to be written [and there is] more than one story to be told.[70]

Introduction

In her introduction to *the Cambridge Companion to Christian Mysticism*, Amy Hollywood stresses that there is much about 'the modern articulation of the category of Christian mysticism' that we do not know, and there is 'more than one story to be told'. New theoretical lenses are helping us to see its history and taxonomies afresh. Interdisciplinary perspectives and interactions with other religious traditions are likewise extending to our appreciation of Christian mysticism. Bernard McGinn has called for a new generation of scholars to complete his monumental overview of the Christian mystical tradition (currently exploring the tradition from its inception into the early modern period).[71] The PRISM project is making a modest but important contribution, seeking to extend McGinn's sense of mysticism in an interdisciplinary, interfaith manner.

For McGinn, mysticism is 'that part, or element, of Christian belief and practice that concerns the preparation for, the consciousness of, and the effects of what the mystics themselves have described as a direct and transformative encounter with the presence of God'.[72] McGinn is clear that this is an heuristic lens, not a definition, and he largely has the Christian tradition in mind – the focus of this paper. Indeed, as McGinn's hesitancy to offer a definition suggestions, the question of exactly what 'mysticism' constitutes in the Christian tradition remains fluid. Yet McGinn sees this as a strength: 'if there is one thing I have learned it is that the complexity and the richness of Christian mysticism undercuts all simple attempts at facile interpretations and brief presentations.'[73] The terms 'mystic' and 'mystical' are sometimes found in pre-modern Christian texts,[74] but these terms are rarely employed in ways synonymous with the psychological and phenomenological understandings of mysticism that were solidified and popularised in the early twentieth century by scholars such as William James, Rudolf Otto and Evelyn Underhill.[75] Where term 'mysticism' is concerned, Mark McIntosh reminds us that in

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[70] A. Hollywood, 'introduction', *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Mysticism* (ed.) A. Hollywood and P.Z. Beckwith (Cambridge: CUP, 2013), pp. 1-36 at 6.

[71] Bernard McGinn, *Modern Mystics: An Introduction* (NY Crossroads, 2023). McGinn has published 7 volumes in his *Presence of God Series*.

[72] Bernard McGinn, 'Re-Presencing the Presence of God', *Theological Studies* 82/4 (2021), 687-690 at 688.

[73] Bernard McGinn, 'Re-Presencing the Presence of God', *Theological Studies* 82/4 (2021), 687-690 at 688.

[74] Hollywood, 'introduction', *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Mysticism*, p. 5

[75] On this see William Harmless, *Mystics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), esp. pp. 3-18. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature: Being the Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion Delivered at Edinburgh 1901–2*, chapters XVI and XVII: https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/621

Christianity it is a neologism; the vast majority of those texts that form the Christian mystical canon significantly predate its use.[76] This does not mean that the term is without utility when interrogating interconnected experiences, texts and ideas within the Christian tradition (including those from its earliest periods). The same holds for those philosophical discussions of 'mysticism' that draw extensively on Christian mystics (and therefore also contribute to considerations of Christian mysticism). This working paper reflects on Christian mysticism and the use of this term within contexts that employ it through a brief exploration of the five central themes of the PRISM project:

I) Methods
II) Ecstasy/experience
III) Discourse
IV) Interfaith dimensions
V) Culture

Methods: Major Methodological Approaches pertinent to Christian Mysticism

Methodological research into Christian mysticism began to flourished in the early twentieth century. In Anglophone circles the motivation often concerns religious faith or practice. Eric Leigh Schmidt points to psychologist and philosopher William James' desire to uncover connectivity across the proliferation of Protestant denominations emerging in the US in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.[77] James sought an arena that transcended their particularities of belief, such that Christianity's social energies could be put to positive rather than divisive use.[78] As Schmidt puts it: 'James imagined mystical experience as a way to unleash energy, to find the

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Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational*, trans. by John W. Harvey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1917). Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness* (E.P. Dutton: New York, 1911); Idem, *Development of Spiritual Consciousness Practical Mysticism: A Little Book for Normal People* (E.P. Dutton & Company: New York, 2015) (Underhill composed the introduction to a number of work on mysticism, including individual of her favourite mystic, Ruusbroec but these two volumes offer a clear overview of her thought and have been extremely widely read: Charles Antoine Wynschenk Dom, *John of Ruysbroek: The Adornment of Spiritual Marriage, The Sparkling Stone, The Book of Supreme Truth* (London: Dent, 1916). Her own studies of mysticism have been very popular, *Mysticism* has never been out of print since it was first published in 1911). Underhill's contribution to early modern approaches to mysticism (and so to Christian mysticism) has been overlooked (as have those of other female authors): Bernard McGinn, "'The Violent Are Taking It by Storm" (Mt. 11:12): Reflections on a Century of Women's Contributions to the Study of Mystical Spirituality', *Spiritus* 13 (2013), 17-35.

[76] Mark McIntosh, *Mystical Theology: The Integrity of Spirituality and Theology* (Blackwells: Oxford, 1998), p. 11.There is not an agree canon but many texts are consider to be mystical. The shape of the canon has in many ways been defined by the *Classical of Western Spirituality Series* (published by Paulist Press), which has chosen Early Church and Medieval/Early Modern texts for translation into English, suggesting in the introductions to these volumes that the authors can be considered as Christian mystics: https://www.paulistpress.com/Products/CategoryCenter/COWS/all-titles.aspx (At the time of writing the series included 142 volumes, some containing multiple ancient/medieval authors).

[77] Eric Leigh Schmidt, '*The Making of "Mysticism" in the Anglo-American World: From Henry Conventry to William James*', in Julia A. Lamm, *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Christian Mysticism* (John Wiley & Sons: Oxford, 2012), pp. 502–525.

[78] Ibid.

hot place of human initiative and endeavor, and to encourage the heroic, the strenuous, and the vital.'[79] It is notable in this respect that James' discussion of mysticism sits adjacent to his account of saintliness in his *Varieties of Religious Experience* – his seminal work on mysticism, a published version of his 1901-1902 Gifford Lectures.[80] Yet although James comments positively on mystics who combine mysticism and action (e.g. Ignatius of Loyola), of whom he writes 'Saint Ignatius was a mystic, but his mysticism made him assuredly one of the most powerfully practical human engines that ever lived'; or of Catherine of Siena, of whom he states, 'Where in literature is a more evidently veracious account of the formation of a new centre of spiritual energy, than is given in her description of the effects of certain ecstasies',[81] James' four marks mysticism are individualistic in focus.[82] Mysticism, for James, amounts to mystical states of consciousness that differ from Kantian rationalism. They are *ineffable* but nonetheless leave a *noetic* imprint on the experiencer (for whom alone they are authoritative). Most are *transient* (lasting no more than a few hours), with the experiencer feeling *passive* in the encounter (even if breathing exercises, drugs, or other means of stimulation are employed). His approach can be classified as perennialism (also termed essentialism or experientialism in the wider literature), since, for James, such encounters are independent of religious or cultural beliefs.[83] Andrew Prevot, who see links with James and Kant despite James' opposition to rationalism, argues that James' definition poses problems for many Christian practitioners and theologians, as well as postmodern philosophers, all of whom stress particularity: '[t]o the extent that [James' approach to mysticism] invests in a modern form of transcendental idealism, this way of defining mysticism risks alienating postliberal or *ressourcement* theologians who focus on Christian distinctiveness, as well as postmodern philosophers who associate mysticism with the body, the unconscious, and the historical subversion of oppressive powers'.[84]

The Anglophone author Evelyn Underhill, who popularised Christian mysticism beyond the academy, particular in England, in the early twentieth century, likewise stresses practice.[85] A contemporary of Dean Inge (who also wrote on mysticism and with whom see publically discussed the idea),[86] Underhill is fascinated by the capacity of mystical texts, particularly

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[79] Schmidt, '*The Making of "Mysticism"*, 513.

[80] James dedicates lectures 11-15 to the topic of saintliness and these stand just prior to his two lectures on mysticism. William James, *Varieties*.

[81] James, *Varieties*, pp. 413-414.

[82] A point over which Grace Jantzen heavily criticised him: G. M. Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: CUP, 1995), 278-321 . For another critical reading see: James E. Smith, 'William James's Account of Mysticism; A Critical Appraisal', in S.T. Katz (ed.), *Mysticism and Religious Traditions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 247–79.

[83] For a discussion of this 'experientialist' approach: Howells, E., 'Mysticism and the Mystical: The Current Debate', in *The Way Supplement*, 102 (2001), 15–27.

[84] Andrew Prevot, *Mysticism and Ordinary Life: Theology, Philosophy and Feminism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), p. 6. There are more recent approaches to interreligious dialogue that takes particularly more serious, for example, Sumner, George R., *The First and the Last: the Claim of Jesus Christ and the Claims of Other Religious Traditions* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2004); Catherine Cornille, *Meaning and Method in Comparative Theology* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2019).

[85] See Underhill, *Practical Mysticism*.

[86] W. R. Inge, *Mysticism in Religion* (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1947). Other notable related contributions include: C. Butler, *Western Mysticism* (London: Constable, 2nd edn, 1927); Baron F. von Hügel, *The Mystical Element of Religion As Studied in Saint Catherine of Genoa and Her Friends*, 2 vols. (London: J.M. Dent and Songs, 1908). For another early perennialist reading: David Knowles, *What is Mysticism?* (London: Burns and Oates, 1967).

Christian mystical texts, to act as contemporary spiritual guides (even prior to her formal conversion to Christianity).[87] Yet Underhill criticises James for failing to appreciate the centrality within mysticism of the cultivation of love for God (or 'the Absolute', as she often puts it).[88] In this sense, Underhill argues that mystical experience is no mere feeling (even though she does privilege musicians and poets as those who have access to this form of knowing, and in this sense echoes James in his suggestion that mystical states of consciousness correlate with an appreciation of music).[89] In contrast to James, Underhill points to the sacrificial element in Christian mystical encounters, which involve both self-discipline and a letting go of self, and in this way lead to personal transformation.[90] Underhill's does not accept that taking drugs can accomplish this. Although often classified as perennialism, Underhill's approach to mysticism has more Christian specificity than James'. (Where other religious traditions are invoked, Underhill largely fits these into a methodological framework derived from Christian mysticism.) In so doing, Underhill arguably proves the better reader of Christian mystical texts, since from the founding Fathers of the Christian mystical tradition (Augustine, Origen, Pseudo-Dionysius) onwards, we find emphasis placed on the particularity of Christian mystical encounters, that is, it is held that they must occur inside the context of Christian practice if they are to count as *Christian*.[91] A case in point are Augustine's discussions of mysticism in his *Confessions*. Of the three mystical encounters he reports in this text, he considers only one (which occurs after his baptism and so his entry into the Christian Church) to be *Christian*. This experience occurs in dialogue with his Christian mother (clearly raising questions about the relative value of individual experiences outside of Christian community), and is intended as a critique of, and in contrast to, his early Plotinian/philosophical experiences, which he describes as disappointments, in the sense that they only enabled him to 'smell' but not 'taste', God. While are not bad in and of themselves (after all they were his stepping stones to faith), for Augustine, they ultimately fail to deliver the unitive endpoint of love for God and deification.[92].Thus Christian distinctiveness is not only an issue for modern theologians and philosophers, it is also embedded into the Christian mystical canon.

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[87] Underhill's magnum opus *Mysticism* was produced prior to this, leading to some criticism of the volume within Anglican circles. However, it is clear from her chapter on unitive mysticism that Underhill's thinking is deeply grounded within the Christian mystical tradition, a point that is made more apparent in her discussion of her favourite mystic was Ruusbroec: see Wynschenk, *John of Ruysbroek*.

[88] On Underhill's criticism of James: Bernard McGinn, 'Theoretical Foundations: The Modern Study of Mysticism' in *The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century*, The Presence of God: A History of Western Mysticism Vol 1 (SCM Press Ltd: London, 1992), Appendix pp. 265-343, in which McGinn provides an overview of the different methodological approaches to mysticism that had defined the field up until the early 1990s.

[89] Underhill, *Practical Mysticism*, p. 12ff.

[90] This is an account that she clearly outlines in her *Practical Mysticism*.

[91] See Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*, 2nd edition (Oxford, OUP, 2007 [first edition Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981]).

[92] Augustine of Hippo, *The Confessions with an Introduction and Contemporary Criticism*, trans. by Maria Boulder, ed. by David Vincent Meconi S.J. (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2012). On Augustine's three visions: John Peter Kenny, 'Mysticism and Contemplation in Augustine's *Confessions*' in Lamm, Wiley Blackwell Companion to Christian Mysticism, pp. 190-201. (Kenny rejects the term 'mysticism' as helpful in analysing Augustine's three visions since the concept is to his mind too wed to private experience in modern understanding). On Augustine and deification: Rosenberg, Stanley P., 'Not So Alien and Unnatural After All: The Role of Deification in Augustine's Sermons', in Mark Edwards and Elena Ene D-Vasilescu, *Visions of God and Ideas of Deification in Patristic Thought* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), pp. 89-117.

Turning to the Francophone context (on which Underhill also drew),[93] we likewise find a new fascination with mysticism arising around the turn of twentieth century. Much of the discourse occurred within Paris. Notable figures include Henri Bergon, Edouard Le Roy, Jean Baruzi, the psychologist Henri Delacroix and the sociologist, Louis Massignon. [94] Michael Conway demonstrates that mysticism is also central to the philosophical work of Maurice Blondel, as evidenced by his doctoral thesis *L'Action* (1893).[95] While Anglophone scholars mention the relationship between mysticism and action, early Francophone discussions of mysticism, which drew heavily on the sixteenth-century mystics John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila overtly stress the relationship between mysticism and action (neither is Quietist despite certain Quietist elements: both were leading figures in a reform of the Carmelite Order). These mystics have remained important within francophone feminist discussion of mysticism, for example, Simone de Beavoir, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva).[96] Francophone scholars defended mysticism against accusations of Quiestism, (that is, a promotion of an absolute withdrawal from the world, along with religious beliefs, institutions and practices) that had seen mysticism vilified in francophone (and other) contexts from the 17th onwards. As Conway notes, '[f]or the greater part of the nineteenth century in France, discussing mysticism, the mystic, or the mystical was treacherous or foolhardy; best avoided'. As he comments, Prouhdon, for example, maintains that, 'All the powers of mysticism conspire to make people stupid'.[97] We find mystical experiences in this context classified in negative terms such as 'hysteria'.[98] James too in an Anglophone context set about rehabilitating mysticism against such accusations, yet the focus in francophone circles on John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila arguably led to greater emphasis on mysticism and action in emerging francophone methodologies. Thus Bergson in his *Les Deux Sources*, stresses that mysticism invests the mystic with power that enables him/her to transform society. As well as praising both Teresa and John in this regard, Following Delacroix, he also classified Joan of Arc as an important mystic.[99] Scholars of Black Theology are now drawing attention to the dynamic between mysticism and action elsewhere within Christian mysticism across its history.

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[93] Louise Nelstrop, 'Evelyn Underhill et sa réception. Déification, action et « mysticisme complet', in Mariel Mazzocco, François Trémolières and Ghislain Waterlot (eds), *Sommaire l'Université face à la mystique* (Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2018), pp. 155-168.

[94] For example, Henri Bergson, *Les Deux Sources de la morale et de la religion* (Paris: PUF, 1932), Henri Delacroix, *Études d'histoire et de psychologie du mysticisme: Les grands mystiques chrétiens* (Paris: Alcan, 1908). On this see Michael Conway, 'With Heart and Mind: Maurice Blondel and the Mystical Life' in Louise Nelstrop and Bradley B. Onishi (eds), *Eruptions from France* (Farnham: Ashgate 2015), pp. 17-35.

[95] Maurice Blondel, *La philosophie de l'action et la crise moderniste* (Paris: PUF, 1997)

[96] For example, Julia Kristeva, Thérèse mon amour (Fayard: Paris, 2008); Also see Amy Hollywood, 'Beauvoir, Irigaray, and the Mystical', *Hyptia*, 9/4 (1994), 158-185; on Luce Irigarary and Teresa: Amy Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History* (University of Chicago: Chicago, 2002), esp., chapter 6.

[97] *Grand Dictionnaire universel au XIXe siécle* (1874), vol. 11, p. 754, s.v. mysticisme, quoted in Conway, 'With Heart and Mind', p. 17.

[98] French feminists would later argue that women used hysteria as a way of transcending male dominated modes of knowing. For example, Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément. *The Newly Born Woman*. (La Jeune Née)1975, trans. by Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

[99] On Bergson and Joan of Arc, see Pamela Sue Anderson, 'An Eruption of Mystical Life in Feminist Action: Mysticism and Confidence after Bergson', *Mysticism in the French Tradition: Eruptions from France* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), pp. 37-57. The fact that Underhill was familiar with these francophone discussions (she read French well although mostly read Bergson through the translations of William Scott Palmer) may accounts for her greater emphasis on action in comparison to James.

It appears to be an overlooked (at least in Anglophone methodologies) defining characteristic, that is slowly gaining wider recognition.[100] For instance, Bernard McGinn recently noted that this theme is prominent in the writings of many modern western Christian mystics, such as Thérèsa of Lisieux, Karl Rahner, Howard Thurman, and Thomas Merton (the latter of whom also taught on mysticism and created a taxonomy of it).[101] The relationship between mysticism and action, and mysticism and non-action is a theme ripe with possibilities for further research.

Another methodological consideration is relates the mysticism's potential to cross religious boundaries. Within early theorisations of Christian mysticism, we find the assumption that mysticism is a useful platform for interreligious dialogue (a topic that is discussed more fully below). However, an important methodological shift in the 1970s impacts the study of Christian mysticism (and all other forms of mysticism) in this regard. (It also has implications for the importance of ecstasy and experience as defining characteristics of mysticism). Driven by Steven T. Katz, the contextualist or constructivist school of mysticism posits the specificity of all mystical encounters.[102] While Katz is admittedly more interested in mysticism in Jewish and other religious traditions than in Christianity, often viewing the latter as a poor example of some of the central linguistic features of mysticism as he understands it,[103] Christian mysticism nonetheless is implicated in his edited volumes which drive this contextualist methodological change in perspective. Katz *et al* argue when we speak of mysticism, we generally mean a body of literature. These "literary remains" present the "encoded experiences", already embedded within "interpretative" frameworks. It is, he stresses, impossible to get beyond the text to recover pure prior experiences. Indeed he holds that all mystical experiences are already groundedness in specific religious and cultural contexts (and so linguistic forms), meaning that in this senses there are no pre-linguistic experiences. Katz, in particular, thus promotes a hard contextualism that denies the possibility that any experiences are ineffable. 'There are' Katz writes, "[NO pure (i.e. unmediated) experiences".[104] While he accepts that some mystics believe their experiences to be ineffable, he argues that in this they are mistaken:

> Mystical reports do not merely indicate the postexperiential description of an unreportable experience in the language closest at hand. Rather, the experiences themselves are inescapably shaped by prior linguistic influences such that the lived experience conforms to a preexisting pattern that has been learned, then intended, and then actualized in the experiential reality of the mystic."[105]

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[100] Joy R. Bostic, *African America Female Mysticism: Nineteenth-Century Religious Activism* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013).

[101] McGinn, *Modern Mystics*; Thomas Merton, *Contemplation in a World of Action* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1998).

[102] For example see: Steven T. Katz', 'Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism', in S.T. Katz (ed.), *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis* (London: Sheldon Press, 1978), pp. 22–74; 'Mystical Speech and Mystical Meaning', in S.T. Katz (ed.), *Mysticism and Language* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 3–41; *Mysticism and Religious Traditions*, ed. by S. T. Katz (Oxford: OUP, 1983); *Mysticism and Sacred Scripture* ed. by S. T. Katz (NY: OUP, 2000).

[103] For example, in he compares Pseudo-Dionysius's use of negative language as rather limited in relation to the use of Buddhism kaons (Mystical Speech and Meaning').

[104] Katz, 'Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism', p. 26.

[105] Katz, 'Mystical Speech and Meaning', p. 5.

While we may find family resemblances across mystical tradition, Katz stresses that if we remove the experiences from their context and linguistic shaping, we distort them. Katz is interested in the way that language functions within mystical texts and effect of linguistic devises on the reader. While Katz is interested in comparative mysticism, his work has led to an (accidental) stultification of comparative mysticism in concrete terms (more on this below).

A further methodological shift, which in some ways extends Katz, and has likewise impacted study of Christian mysticism, took place in the 1990s. It too challenges the place that ineffable experience/ecstasy has within mysticism, and indeed the role experience *per se* plays within it. This challenge is presented by 'performative language' readings, which focus particularly on apophasis as a linguistic tool within mystical texts.[106] Working solely from a Christian perspective, Denys Turner argues that from Pseudo-Dionysius onwards (and in specific debt to Pseudo-Dionysius' apophatic thought) Christian mystical texts are shaped by concerns over epistemology rather than experience.[107] Placing great emphasis on one feature found within Christian mysticism writing – its linguistic apophatic dynamic – Turner posits that the function of Christian mystical material is to reveal the ineffability of God (experiences, if they are occur, are secondary and of little importance). As not all texts traditionally associated with the canon of Christian mysticism stress this feature (or even contain it), Turner argues for a reduction of the canon, limiting it to Christian texts that do.[108] (But meaning too, the possible inclusion of texts not previously associated with the Christian mystical canon).

Although the Eastern Christian mystic, Pseudo-Dionysius, holds a central place in this and other methodological discussions of mysticism (James, Katz, Turner, Knepper),[109] historically he has had greater importance for western Christian mysticism than its eastern counterpart. An significant lacuna where the methodological study of Christian mysticism is concerned relates to Eastern Christianity. This is now being addressed through a new methodological focus on deification across Christian traditions.[110] While traditionally limited to the Christian East,

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[106] This is my terminology: Louise Nelstrop (with Kevin Magill and Bradley B. Onishi), *Christian Mysticism: An Introduction to Contemporary Theoretical Approaches* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009).

[107] Karl Rahner previously challenged the emphasis on experience in Christian mysticism (see below) but Turner's methodological approach is different: Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). For a criticism: Peter Kügler, 'Denys Turner's Anti-Mystical Mystical Theology', *Ars Disputandi*, 4 (2004), at www.ArsDisputandi.org. The focus on epistemology is also taken up by Herbert McCabe, and Brian Davies, *God Still Matters*, (New York, 2005) (chapter 2: 'the Logic of Mysticism').

[108] Turner, *The Darkness of God*.

[109] In addition to those discussions already mentioned, Timothy Knepper offers an important contribution to the discussion of Dionysius and Christian mysticism: Timothy Knepper, *Negating Negation: Against the Apophatic Abandonment of the Dionysian Corpus* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014). Elsewhere Knepper extends this discussion, arguing that negative language is the beginning rather that the goal of Christian mysticism. He points instead to the mystery of the liturgy. For example, 'Ranks are not Bypassed, Rituals are not Negated: The Dionysian Corpus on Return', *Modern Theology*, 30/1 (2014), 66-95. In this respect, Knepper's understanding of Christian mysticism aligns more close with Louis Bouyer, '"Mysticism": An Essay on the History of the Word', in *Mystery and Mysticism: A Symposium* (London: Blackfriars, 1956), pp.119–37. (I apologise for the typo that refers to Knepper as 'Thomas' in my *Introduction to Christian Mysticism*.)

[110] Paul Gavrilyuk, 'The Retrieval of Deification: How a Once-Despised Archaism became an Ecumenical Desideratum', *Modern Theology* 25:4 (2009), 647-659); Gavrilyuk, Paul et al, *Oxford Handbook of Deification* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming). For a dissenting voice: Gösta Hallonsten, '*Theosis* in Recent Research: A Renewal of Interest and a Need for Clarity', in Michael J. Christensen and Jeffrey A. Wittung (eds),

scholars are now arguing not only that deification is central to the thought of Augustine, and other major western medieval mystics, it has been noted as significant within the thought of Luther and Calvin in the early modern period, and across western culture more generally, even appearing in the thought of Nietzsche.[111] This is an area that demands further consideration – whether it can be more than just an ecumenical platform.[112]

In terms of methodology, Bernard McGinn accepts the findings from contextualist and performative language theorists but does not entirely negate the role that consciousness plays within Christian mystical encounters. Where this idea is interpreted in the light of the work of Bernard Lonergan, McGinn finds consciousness a 'fruitful way to conceive of the forms of special encounter with God spoken of by Christian mystics, primarily because consciousness emphasizes the entire process of human intentionality and self-presence'.[113] Lonergan proposed that Christian mysticism offers 'a mediated return to immediacy'. As Howells clarifies, for Lonergan, 'Mysticism is not an escape from the complexities of human relationships, language and activity; and yet it is also an "immediate" kind of access to the divine dynamic present within these realities.'[114] This occurs as our consciousness is joined to God-consciousness. This conception of union begs questions about other ideas of union and deification for Christian mystics and is also area that demands further research.

Despite taxonomical disagreements concerning Christian mysticism, some have attempted stratifications of mysticism in which Christian mysticism plays a key role. R.C. Zaehner's early account posits a distinction between a) 'panenhenic' extrovertive experiences (in which a person experiences oneness with nature and self), b) 'monistic experience' of unity (which give the impression of a transcendence of time and space) and c) 'theistic' experiences (where a duality between subject and object remains).[115] Zaehner considers the later to be the superior category, and he places Christianity within it, contrasting it with Buddhist mysticism (which he places in category 2).[116] This taxonomy proved problematic, however, with Zaehner forced to admit that it does not adequately account for Zen Buddhism.[117] Aldous Huxley suggested an alternative stratification of mysticism, in his case differentiating 'chemical' mysticism (induced by drugs) from 'natural mysticism' (as found within religious traditions).[118] Yet for Huxley both opened

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Partakers of the Divine Nature, pp. 281-293. Jules Gross, *The Divinization of the Christian According to the Greek Fathers*, trans. Paul A. Onica (Anaheim, Calif.: A & C Press, 2002).

[111] For an overview of recent research on deification: Vladimir Kharlamov, *Theosis. Volume 2: Deification in Christian Theology* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2012); Daniel A. Keating, 'Typologies of Deification', *International Journal Of Systematic Theology*, 17/3 (2015), 267-283; Louise Nelstrop, *On Deification and Sacred Eloquence: Richard Rolle and Julian of Norwich* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020).

[112] Gavrilyuk, 'The Retrieval of Deification'.

[113] Bernard McGinn, 'Mystical Consciousness: A Modest Proposal', *Spiritus* 8/1 (2008), 44-63 at 46.

[114] Edward Howells, 'Mysticism and the Mystical: The Current Debate', *The Way* (2001), 15-27 at. 16

[115] R. C. Zaehner, *Mysticism: Sacred and Profane: An Inquiry into some Varieties of Praeternatural Experiences* (Oxford: OUP, 1957). The stratification that Zaehner produces contrasts with essentialist or perennialist approach that we find in W. T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1960); W. T. Stace, *The Teachings of the Mystics* (NY: New American Library, 1960), who holds an experience of union to be the defining feature of mysticism across traditions. On Zaehner's approach to mysticism see: Richard Jones and Jerome Gellman, 'Mysticism', The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2022 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.), URL = https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2022/entries/mysticism/.

[116] Zaehner, *Mysticism*.

[117] Richard Jones and Jerome Gellman, 'Mysticism'.

[118] Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception* (Chatto & Windus: London, 1954), For Huxley's approach to mysticism more generally: Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy* (New York: Harper & Bros, 1945).

new 'doors of perception', and in this regard he wrote of a certain compatibility between Christianity and mescalin.[119] Huxley's personal experimentation with mescalin and subsequent publication catalysed extensive academic debate on the equivalence of drug-induced and religious mystical experiences. This research ground to a halt when psychedelics were banned in the 1960s in the wake of widespread recreational use. New research has, however, begun to emerge since the 1990s.[120] All are with secular scientific contexts. Within Christian contexts it is fair to say that there is still strong resistance to the idea that the effects of drugs and Christian mystical experience can be viewed as comparable. There are no recent studies from the perspective of Christian practitioners or theologians advocating for this comparison.[121] Andrew Prevot suggests that a better taxonomy of Christian mysticism (one that excludes the possibilities of comparisons between drug-induced and Christian experiences) centres on grace. He argues that *Christian* mystical texts recognise God's grace as their governing factor. As he puts it, it is better to take '[Christian] mysticism to be a type of grace, which may come with various psychosomatic features, but which is primarily an act of God on, or within, the human subject or community.'[122] This definition has the advantage of emphasising the integration of Christian mysticism into wider Christian theology and belief, a facet to which McIntosh and Turner also draws attention. Moving forward it will be important to build comparative methodologies that take Christian specificity seriously, whether the focus is on unity, deification, language, experience or action.

Ecstasy/Experience, Imagination and Engagement with the World

While scholars of Christian mysticism (e.g., Turner) have downplayed experience or opted for consciousness (McGinn) as a better category, the issues of ineffability and experience have emerged as pivotal categories within analytical philosophy literature.[123] This material can be classified as pertaining to Christian mysticism in that many of its arguments are grounded in Christian examples or in Classical theism depending on Christianity. Timothy Knepper, for example, has based his explorations of ineffability on Pseudo-Dionysius, leading him to stratifying notions of ineffability into higher and lower order categories.[124] In this sense,

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[119] Huxley, *The Doors of Perception*, p. 21.

[120] For an overview: David B. Yaden, Khoa D. L. Nguyen, Margaret L. Kern, Alexander B. Belser, Johannes C. Eichstaedt, Jonathan Iwry, Mary E. Smith, Nancy A. Wintering, Ralph W. Hood Jr., and Andrew B. Newberg. "Of Roots and Fruits: A Comparison of Psychedelic and Nonpsychedelic Mystical Experiences." *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 57, no. 4 (2017) Also see Christopher M Bache, 'Mysticism and Psychedelics: The Case of the Dark Night', *Journal of Religion and Health*, 30/3 (1991), 215-236, who refers particularly to the work of Stanislav Grof.

[121] For a helpful summary of Christian attitudes towards drug taking: Luke Bretherton, *The Use and Abuse of Drugs* (Grove Books Limited, Cambridge, 2004).

[122] Prevot, *Mysticism and Ordinary Life*, p. 6.

[123] For example, James Kellenberger, 'The Ineffabilities of Mysticism', American Philosophical Quarterly, 16/4 (1979), 307-315, and more recently: Timothy D. Knepper & Leah E. Kalmanson (eds), *Ineffability: An Exercise in Comparative Philosophy of Religion*, Comparative Philosophy of Religion 1 (Cham: Springer, 2017); Guy Bennett-Hunter, *Ineffability and Religious* (London: Routledge, 2014); Sebastian, Gäb, 'The Paradox of Ineffability', *International journal of philosophy and theology*, 78/3 (2017) 389-300; Silvia Jonas, *Ineffability and its Metaphysical: The Unspeakable in Art, Religion and Philosophy* (Brill: Leiden, 2016).

[124] For example, Timothy D. Knepper, 'Ineffability Investigations: What the Later Wittgenstein has to Offer to the Study of Ineffability', *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion*, 65/2 (2009), 65-76.

experience remains an important concern in methodological considerations of Christian mysticism. This is the case on other grounds too.

Firstly, there is a keen sense that self-consciousness remains within Christian mystical encounters. While Christian mystics sometimes employ annihilation language, the mystics is never held to entirely disappear into God. Secondly, a case can be made for broadening the category of experience beyond the ineffable to include ordinary sensations experienced in extraordinary ways. We see this, for instance, in the fourteenth-century English Mystic, Richard Rolle (d 1349). In a related sense and from a psychological perspective, Christopher M. Bache highlights that negative experiences play an important role within Christian mysticism.[125]. He argues that such 'dark night' experiences may in fact prove a better comparator for many user of psychedelics. Building on the empirical work of Grof, Bache moots that John of the Cross's 'dark nights' – experiences of intense suffering – have much in common with 'prenatal' encounters experienced on 'bad' trips. He notes that users of psychedelic substances have been shown to associate them with a form of (spiritual) purging. While neither John of the Cross nor the user of psychedelics holds such experiences to be the goal of mystical path, they nonetheless play a role within it and are an integral aspect of Christian mysticism for many writers.

Of course, the idea of ecstasy as the high point of Christian mysticism does find some support in early Christian texts From Augustine onwards (e.g. Augustine speaks of Paul's rapture to the third heaven),[126] rapture becomes an important motif. The extent to which it forms the zenith of the Christian mystical encounter is, however, disputed. The English mystic, Richard Rolle, for instance, compares Pauline rapture to run of the mill afterlife visions, which are as likely to befall sinners as saints (in modern terms think Scrooge in Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*).[127] While Rolle writes often of experiences (bodily encounters of heat, sweetness and song), rapturous, ineffable experiences do not significantly feature. Rolle is likewise in disagreement with Augustine over the place that imagination holds within Christian mysticism. Augustine in *De Genesis ad Litteram* (an extremely influential text in the Middle Ages where the spiritual value of imagination is concerned) connects imagination with the body and not therefore with 'mystical' knowledge. In the late medieval period we find a debate amongst some of the fourteenth-century English mystics which indicates that there are mystical authors willing to give imagination a more elevated status.[128] *The Cloud*-Author condemns the elevation of imagination as a potential point of confusion between spiritual and bodily ideas (he seeks to keep the two apart) yet Walter Hilton is willing to concede imagination more space.[129] Rolle allows imagination a role at all points of the mystical path. He differentiates between reality and imagination begging the question of what imagination meant in this period but there is clearly a connection between imaginative devotion and the mystical in his thought.[130]

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[125] Bache, 'Mysticism and Psychedelics'.

[126] Augustine of Hippo, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, trans. by John Hammond Taylor, 2 vols (NY: Paulist Press, 1992), book 8, chapter 12.

[127] Richard Rolle, *Fire of Love* in *The Fire of Love and the Mending of Life by Richard Rolle*, trans. by M.L. Del Mastro, (NY: Image Books, 1981), p. 236.

[128] Alister Minnis, 'Affection and Imagination in *The Cloud of Unknowing* and Walter Hilton's *Scale of Perfection*', *Tradition*, 39 (1983), 323-66.

[129] Anon., *The Cloud of Unknowing*, trans. by James Walsh (New York: Paulist Press, 1981); Walter Hilton, *The Scale of Perfection*, trans. by J.P.H. Clark and R. Dorward (New York: Paulist Press, 1991).

[130] See Michelle Karnes, *Imagination, Meditation and Cognition in the Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), although Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and* the *Making*

In the modern period we find many differing attitudes towards spirituality, art and materiality, which impact on the place of imagination in treatments of Christian mysticism. We might, for example, consider the work of the Catalan artist Antoni Tapies, who engages with the work of medieval Spanish mystic Ramon Lull, while also grounding his art in concrete materials and materiality. Several modern French and Flemish artists have also engaged with the work of Marguerite Porete and Hadewijch imaginatively (e.g., Anne-Mei van Kerkhoven, Wim Henderickx, An Pierlé, Hendrik Van Abeele, Aline Kiner). In their work imagination plays a positive role. AMVK, for example, uses it to highlight patriarchal control over women's bodies.[131] It seems safe to say that the value of how 'imagination' in the Christian mystical tradition finds myriad responses – hinting at diversity where experience within Christian mysticism is concerned. At the same time, it is important to recognised, as McIntosh stresses, that mystical theology in the Christian tradition is a form of theology in which experience, in terms of practice, is central. Christian mysticism cannot be detached from prayer and praise. This is fundamentally inscribed into Christian mysticism and we find it clearly signalled Dionysius' *Mystical Theology*, which begins with a prayer.[132] The living out of the Christian faith and its doctrines are inseparably intertwined with Christian mysticism; another reason why McIntosh prefers this term 'mystical theology' over 'mysticism'; for him the later can be taken to imply that this area of Christianity is only interested in ineffable encounters with the divine, but experience more generally understood is fundamental to many aspects of Christian mysticism. This underpins McGinn preference for speaking of Christian mysticism in terms of 'lived process', 'practice' and 'consciousness' (rather than experience).

Yet while McIntosh has argued for a renewed close integration of theology, Christian mysticism and Christian spirituality; a trait that he sees continuing into the High Middle Ages and perhaps beyond,[133] the tensions between mystics and the Church that we find emerging in the medieval period are part of a slow shift that would eventually see key scholars such as Sandra Schneiders argue for the separation of spirituality and theology in the modern period. Schneiders maintains that theology and spirituality are two entirely separate disciplines, with the former a subset of the latter (since she hold spirituality to be a universal anthropological feature of which we find Christian but also other types). In this regard, unlike theology, for Schneiders, spirituality (including mysticism) is entirely defined by personal experience.[134] As she puts it:

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of *Images, 400-1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), argues that it is memory not imagination that his the guiding force. Also see Shannon Noelle Gayk, *Image, Text, and Religious Reform in Fifteenth-Century England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

[131] Louise Nelstrop and Pol Herrmann, 'Love Knows No Bounds: Contemporary Artistic Engagement with Marguerite Porete' in Gender and Medieval Mysticism: From India to Europe (Routledge: Abingdon, 2023), pp. 209-230. Also see Helen Appleton and Louise Nelstrop (eds), *Art and Mysticism: Interfaces in the Medieval and Modern Periods* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018).

[132] Pseudo-Dionysius, *Mystical Theology* in *Pseudo-Dionysius: the complete works*, trans. by Colm Luibheid, Classics of Western Spirituality, (London: SPCK, 1987).

[133] Mark McIntosh and Edward Howells (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Mystical Theology* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2020).

[134] Sandra Marie Schneiders, 'The Discipline of Christian Spirituality and Catholic Theology', in Bruce H. Lescher and Elizabeth Liebert (eds.), *Exploring Christian Spirituality: Essays in Honor of Sandra M. Schneiders, IHM* (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2006), pp. 196-212

> There are scholars in both spirituality and theology today who long for the reconstitution in the modern context of this premodern integral approach to theology as theoretically reflective and articulate 'lived spirituality'. I share their nostalgia for but not their confidence in such a revival. The Enlightenment has happened. Humpty Dumpty, mortarboard and all, has tumbled from the wall and cannot, I am afraid, be put back together again.[135]

Schneiders agrees that rift was not however in effect prior to Enlightenment but does not see a way of healing it in modern times. Experience too offers a fruitful area for further research.

Discourse

The theme of discourse within the PRISM reference documentation concerns authority. It focuses on questions such as 'How does the authoritative structure of religious institutions handle the event of mystical experience?' and 'Can the historical role of women in religion be contextualized in mysticism in this tradition, and what are the overlaps of gender with spirituality?*'*

Where the issues of gender and authority are concerned, not all women who might also be considered mystics found themselves in conflict with Church authority. Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179) certainly drew spiritual and political authority from her (waking) visions in which she saw the living flame of God directly inspiring her. [136] As a consequence, corresponded with the pope and leading monastic theologians of her day, and even went on preaching tours. Things became more complicated in the High and Later Middle Ages for women but a scholarly shift in understanding the relationship between mysticism and authority where later women are concerned occurred in the 1980s, when Caroline Walker Bynum identified a significant female spiritual/mystical movement within the High Middle Ages,[137] which appeared to push against a denigration of women. By the Church Council, Lateran IV (1215) women had been redefined by ecclesial circles (in the wake of the so-called Gregorian Reforms) as essentially bodily (therefore malleable, sinful and less spiritual/intellectual than their male counterparts).[138] However Bynum

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[135] Schneiders, 'The Discipline of Christian Spirituality', p. 199.

[136] Barbara Newman, *Sister of Wisdom: St Hildegard's Theology of the Feminine, With a New Preface, Bibliography and Discography* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1998). Also see her *Voice of the Living Light: Hildegard of Bingen and Her World*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 1998). Newman has suggested that she is better categorised as a visionary. While it is clear that she was treated as such in the Medieval period – and her authority justified on this basis – it is not clear how helpful to delineate between visionaries and mystics, see Bernard McGinn, 'Hildegard of Bingen as Visionary and Exegete', in Hildegard von Bingen in ihrem historischen Umfeld. Internationaler Kongress zum 900 jährigen Jubiläum, ed. by Alfred Haverkamp (Bingen am Rhein: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 2000), pp. 351–71, who speaks of Hildegard's 'mystical visions' (p. 343).

[137] Caroline Walker Bynum has expounded her reader through a series of monographs. Three of the most relevant for this essay are: Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast, Holy Fast: the Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); idem, *The* Resurrection *of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1995); Idem, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

[138] Gary Macy, *The hidden history of women's ordination: female clergy in the medieval West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

drew attention to how metaphors associated with the body which were being used to forge spiritually-authority within the writings of women. Bynum argues that many women turned the new limitations to their advantage by claiming their bodies as the site of divine intervention (drawing extensively parallels between Christ's incarnate body and their own). Bynum's suggestion has led to a wide-ranging modern recovery of forgotten women mystics, who male authorities appear to have endorsed as they acknowledged their own rootedness in the body. Many mw officially-championed female texts that privilege extraordinary bodily experiences and visions (e.g., The Life Elizabeth of Spalbeek composed by Philip of Clairvaux).[139]

However, feminists are now extending beyond this fruitful research into women and the body. Katherine Kerby-Fulton and Katie Buygis have, for instance, begun to draw attention to women leaders, a lens through which they stress does not simply cast women as victims who can only gain authority through subversion. They note several instances of women in the Later Middle Ages who were considered leaders in they day on the basis of their mystical encounters in this more positive sense – Catherine of Siena being one prominent example.[140]
Another group of women likewise mystics, who do not appear to have gained authority via subversion, are non-cloistered women from the Low Countries (which included parts of what are now the Netherlands, Belgium and France). Bernard McGinn speaks of Hadewijch, and three other women from the High Middle Ages – Marguerite Porete, Beatrice of Nazareth and Angela of Foligno – as the four female evangelists of the fourteenth-century, in large part due to the depth of authority that they lay claim to as a result of their mysticism encounters.[141] Marguerite and Hadewijch write quite intellectually, particularly the later. Another similar writer is Beatrice of Nazareth, who too appears to have resisted an identification between her mysticism and her body. Her hagiographer inserts such an identification into her vita, perhaps in order to protect her from criticism, but her own writings appear to eschew such ideas.[142] It was with considerable daring that the Flemish mystic Hadewijch claimed to speak out of her primordial state within the Godhead. Of the four, Marguerite most explicitly pits her mystical wisdom against that of the Church, speaking of the Institution as 'Church the Less' in comparison to women inspired by God, who constitute 'Church the More'. Marguerite's work was (perhaps unsurprisingly) condemned as heresy, and she was burnt alive in 1310 for failing to recant.

Walker Bynum excludes Marguerite from her seminal monographs on the rise of Christian spirituality and mysticism in the High Middle Ages on the grounds that Marguerite is a heretic. Amy Hollywood cautions, however, that this accusation and Marguerite's fate possibly illustrates that women's spiritual authority was limited by patriarchal perceptions, transgressions of which were not tolerated.[143] John Ablaster has similarly pointed out that, even if Marguerite's claims

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[139] Her vita, along with those of other women, were event translated into Middle English: Jennifer N. Brown, *Three Women of Liège: A Critical Edition of and Commentary on the Middle English Lives of Eliabeth of Spaalbeek, Christina Mirabilis and Marie d'Oignies* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008).
[140] Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, Katie Bugyis and John Van Engen (eds), *Women Intellectuals And Leaders In The Middle Ages* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2020).
[141] Bernard McGinn, 'The Four Female Evangelists of the Thirteenth-Century: The Invention of Authority' in Walter Haug, et al. (eds), *Deutsche Mystik im abendländischen Zusammenhang* (Tübingen: Continuum, 2000), pp. 175-194.
[142] See: John Arblaster and Rob Faesen, 'The Influence of Beatrice of Nazareth on Margaret Porete: The Seven Manners of Love Revised', *Citeaux*, 64/1-2 (2013), 41-88. For a wider discussion of mystical anthropology: Rob Faesen and John Arblaster (eds), *Mystical Anthropology: Authors from the Low Countries* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017).
[143] Amy Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy*.

push the boundaries by any standards, there are still clear line of influence between Marguerite's thought and that of William of St. Thierry (a well-respected Cistercian), who – writing a century earlier, and as a man – was never being accused of heterodoxy. Yet despite Arblaster's defence of Marguerite, it should be noted that ideas similar to those propagated by William concerning the direct working of God within the soul circulated by men were condemned in the period in which Marguerite lived (similar ideas appear in Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, possibly also influenced by William).[144] Indeed both male and female mystics fell foul of Church authority in the Middle Ages. For instance, some of the writings of John Scotus Eriugena came to be viewed as heterodox, [145] as did certain claims made by the thirteenth-century Parisian theologian, Meister Eckhart, some of which he had written particular for women.[146] Gender and being lay therefore both play into issues of authority where Christian mystic are concerned by not exclusively so.

Another issue which it has been noted that scholars of Christian mysticism need to be alert are forms of abuse. Julie Miller has suggested that some of the texts by women from the period need to be used with caution, as there are possible suggestions of God overpowering the women erotically against their wills.[147] The role of patriarchy in dictating who is a 'Christian' mystic likewise need to be considered carefully. Prevot stresses the importance of feminist readings in identifying such patterns of thinking and offering modernity an engagement with historical mystical texts that rejects abusive facets within them. He points too to racist and colonialist tendencies within this Christian literature (and their wider reception) to which feminists have likewise drawn attention.[148] Approaching Christian mysticism through the lens of Black Theology, Joy Bostic has similarly recovered important roles played within society by Christian mystics of colour, including the throught of Jarena Lee in the early modern period.[149] The activism of modern mystics of colour stands in contrasts to a tendency within Christian mysticism to which McGinn has drawn renewed attention, the rise of Quietism in the early modern period – which implied a complete withdrawal from the world.[150] Action and non-action

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[144] The claim that we love God with the love that God love's Godself in Lombard was rejected by both Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure on the grounds that it undermined human freedom and also negated the role of humanity in loving God. Philipp W. Roseman, '*Fraterna dilectio est Deus*: Peter Lombard's Thesis on Charity as the Holy Spirit', in *Amor amicitiae: On the Love that is Friendship: Essays in Medieval Thought and Beyond in Honor of the Rev. Professor James McEvoy*," eds., T.A.F. Kelly and P.W. Roseman (Peeters 2004), 409-436. Also see on Aquinas: Geetjan Zuijdwegt, "'Utrum caritas sit aliquid creatur in anima": Aquinas on the Lombard's identification of charity with the Holy Spirit', *Recherches de Théologie et Philosophie médiévales* 79/1 (2012), 39-74, and on Bonaventure, Louise Nelstrop, 'The Middle English *Myrrour of Symple Soules: More than a "Rhetoric of Deification", Viator* 50/2 (2019), 227-259 (241-242).

[145] John Scotus Eriugena, *The Voice of the Eagle: The Heart of Celtic Spirituality John Scotus Eriugena's Homily on the Prologue to the Gospel of St. John* trans. by Christopher Bamford (Great Barrington, MA: Lindisfarne Books, 1990, repr. 2000); John Scotus Eriugena, *Periphyseon*/the Divisions of Nature, trans. by I.P. Sheldon-Williams, revised by John J. O'Meara (Montréal: Bellarmin, 1987) – although his Christmas sermon (trans into modern English as *Voice of the Eagle*) continued to circulate widely.

[146] See Meister Eckhart, *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatise and Defense trans by Edmund Colledge and Bernard McGinn* (Paulist Press: New Jersey, 1981) for a discussion of the defense documents.

[147] Julie B. Miller, 'Eroticized Violence in Medieval Women's Mystical Literature: A Call for a Feminist Critique', *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 15 (2) 1999, 25-49.

[148] Prevot, *Mysticism and Ordinary Life*, p. 6.

[149] Bostic, *African America Female Mysticism*.

[150] Bernard McGinn, *The Crisis of Mysticism: Quietism in Seventeenth-Century Spain, Italy, and France* (New York: Crossroad, 2021).

(discussed further below in relation to culture) are important themes for Christian mysticism and authority and topics that require further study.

Finally, it's important also to stress that certain mystics played a seminal role in shaping the Christian mystical tradition. In the West, Origen and Augustine, and Pseudo-Dionysius act as founding fathers.[151] Pseudo-Dionysius writings even were debated and discussed in quodlibets in the emerging universities in the High Middle Ages.[152] In the East, central mystics include Ephrem the Syrian, Symeon the New Theologian and Gregory Palamas, who have likewise played roles in shaping the Christian mystical tradition and its reception. The impact of these writers continues to be felt into the modern period, e.g., in debates about whether deification holds an equal play in Christian mysticism East and West. More research is needed into the legacy of such authorities and the ways in which it continues to shape understandings of Christian mysticism and the place of gender within it.

Interfaith Dimensions

There is an urgent need for the renewal of Comparative Mysticism through alternative comparative taxonomies and methodologies. As originally theorised at the turn of the twentieth-century, mysticism was viewed as a platform for ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue. This shifted as a result of the work of Katz, which demonstrated the importance of culture and context across all mystical writing. There have been attempts to rehabilitate the field post Katz' hard contextualism (discussed above in the methodology section) however new avenues are still urgently required.

One approach is that taken by Michael A. Sells, who has drawn attention to a similar apophatic linguistic feature in Islamic mystical texts to that which Turner independently highlights within Christian mysticism (performative language approach). Sells suggests that apophasis can act as a new comparative contact point across traditions (He discusses John Scotus Eriguena and Marguerite Porete in this regard).[153] While this opens up a space for comparative conversations, it brings with it a number of problems. The narrowness of focus results in the exclusion of, particularly female, mystical writing that do not easily fit with this taxonomy. Given the role of patriarchy has played in potentially limiting women's right to compose apophatic mystical texts, to exclude female accounts of mysticism on the grounds that they do not engage in apophatic discourse would be to reinforce patriarchy. Sells re-reading of Marguerite Porete in the Christian tradition does resonate with at least one modern anti-patriarchal consideration of Marguerite's thought in the work of the internationally-acclaimed Dutch artist, Anne-Mie Van Kerkhoven.[154] Yet neither Turner nor Sells address the fact that the body (especially marginalised and persecuted bodies) are not fully embraced in their apophatic taxonomies. Feminist methodological engagement with Christian mystical texts need to play an key role in any new comparative methodologies, so as to ensure that issues of gender, race, sexuality etc are not overlooked.[155] Turner and Sells also do not fully acknowledge the problems that arise for these two traditions (Christianity and Islam) from the fact that the Christian mystics who best fit the performative language model are also those against whom accusations of heresy

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[151] Louth, *Origins*.
[152] For example, Aquinas *Summa Theologiae* 1a.13.2: https://www.newadvent.org/summa/1013.htm
[153] Michael Sells, *Languages of Unsaying* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994).
[154] Nelstrop and Herrmann, 'Love Knows No Bounds'.
[155] Prevot, *Mysticism and Ordinary Life*.

were levelled by their own contemporaries. While these accusations can and have been questioned, such accusations may nonetheless prove problematic when trying to build new platforms for interreligious dialogue.[156]

Possible new platforms of interfaith conversations include:

- The relationship between mysticism and action. Dylan Esler has already begun to explore its avenue. It has the advantage that neither doctrinal differences nor the vexed issue of experience need be central within any comparative work. [157] There is clearly scope to extent this to encompass topics of modern cultural importance, such as the current environmental crisis.
- Although there is no agreed approach to the role of imagination within Christian mysticism, imagination and its value within mysticism may offer another avenue for interdisciplinary interfaith collaborations. This topics facilitates ecumenical considerations of the relationship between art and mysticism more generally (and in the Christian tradition different attitudes towards art and images East and West).[158]
- Within modern theorisations of Christian mysticism, Eastern Christianity has historically been neglected. The growing body of research that is positing deification as an ecumenical point of connection might be fruitfully extended to a reconsiderations of ideas similar to deification across religious traditions.[159] It is important to remember in this regard that points of contact do not have to uncover sameness, just points for conversation and better appreciations of difference.
- The topic of mysticism and everyday life may also offer opportunities for interfaith discussions (discussed further under the theme of culture).[160]

It seems particularly desirable that multiple theoretic platforms be developed rather than one new objective metanarrative; an approach which would be clearly open to criticism on methodological grounds given the wider rejection of the latter in scholarly discourse.

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[156] For a defence of Marguerite's theology: John Arblaster and Rob Faesen, 'Commune à tous par largesse de pure charité: Common Love in Beatrice of Nazareth and Marguerite Porete', *Ons Geestlijk Erf*, 84/4 (2012), 297-323.

[157] On this see the work of Dylan Esler, *Effortless Spontaneity: The Dzogchen Commentaries by Nubchen Sangye Yeshe* (Brill: Leiden, 2023); 'Contemplation and Non-Doing: Solitude, Absorption and Letting-be as Structural Principles of Contemplative Religious Practice', *Entangled Religions*, 14/4 (Special Edition) (2023) ed. by Dylan Esler, and his "Dzogchen" research project: https://ceres.rub.de/en/research/projects/dzogchen/

[158] For example, Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: The Image before the Era of Art*, Chicago, 1992; Natalie Carnes, *Image and Presence: A Christological Reflection on Iconoclasm and Iconophilia*, Stanford, 2018; Graham Howes, *The Art of the Sacred* (I.B.Tauris, 2007).

[159] See note 42 above.

argues for a difference between Hellenistic and Christian approaches to deification as a repost to von Harnack's assertion that Eastern Christian mystics denigrate Christianity. While it is important to recognise the specificity of Christian accounts of deification, it does not necessarily negate useful discussion of such ideas across religions, including as means of highlight difference.

[160] On this see recent work by *Mysticism and Ordinary Life*.

Culture

In terms of the pro-social benefits of mystical encounters in the modern period, scholarly attention has recently been drawn to the distinctive contribution made by Christian mystics of colour.[161] It seems useful to consider one example. The modern mystics Howard Thurman's sense of mystical unity led him to be an inspiration in the Civil Rights movement in the US. Barbara Holme situates Thurman's within what Alton B. Pollard calls a 'mystic culture' that is 'indebted to the African continent' and the 'creative genius' of black slaves.[162] Although Thurman discusses both mysticism and social action across his writings, the connection between them is overly addressed in his 1978 Lawrence lecture. Here Thurman stresses that one cannot separate the inner and outer aspects of one's life, which he suggests 'represent a single pulsebeat ... one ebb and flow'.[163] There is however, always a tension between them for the mystic: 'How' he asks 'to keep my … inner altar, uncluttered and at the same time not sure that as an escape from involvement in the traffic of life'.[164] Without such reflections Thurman argues social actions may fail to deliver: 'unless a person is centred, all kinds of actions are perfectly futile'.[165] Mystical-inspired action is not mere social action. It is not, he stresses, action for actions sake. It is action that knows that it needs to be first and foremost grounded in the contemplative, even while it is at the same time social action. As Thurman writes in his Lawrence lecture:

> the mystic's concern with the imperative of social action is not merely to improve the condition of society. It is not merely to feed the hungry, not merely to relieve human suffering and human misery. If this were all, in and of itself, it would be important surely. But this is not all. The basic consideration has to do with the removal of all that prevents God from coming to himself in the life of the individual. Whatever there is that blocks this, calls for action.[166]

This leads the mystic to a particular dilemma. She cannot merely side with the oppressed but also has a duty to work for change on behalf of the oppressor since both are cut off from God by the social injustices in which they are caught. As he continues:

> When social action is viewed from this perspective, a very crucial problem arises. The problem that the victims of injustice, for instance, face is not unlike that which faces the perpetrators of the deeds that offend. The assumption here is that both parties--the sufferer and the offender--are cut off from their own altars. I am under obligation to identify with

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[161] Bostic, *African America Female Mysticism*.
[162] Barbara Holmes, *Joy Unspeakable: Contemplative Practices of the Black Church* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2004); Alton B. Pollard III, *Mysticism and Social Change* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992).
See Bostic, *African America Female Mysticism*, p. xiii.
[163] Howard Thurman, *Mysticism and Social Action: Lawrence Lecture and Discussions with Dr Howard Thurman, October 13th and 14th 1978*, edited by Richard Boeke and Patrick Wynne-Jones. London: IARF British Chapter 2014, p. 351. (The following argument draws on Louise Nelstrop, '"Love will not be idle": Non-Doing and Action in the English Mystical Tradition', in Contemplation and Non-Doing: Solitude, Absorption and Letting-be as Structural Principles of Contemplative Religious Practice', *Entangled Religions*, 14/4 (Special Edition) (2023) ed. by Dylan Esler).
[164] Thurman, *Mysticism and Social Action*, p. 357.
[165] Thurman, *Mysticism and Social Action*, p. 409.
[166] Thurman, *Mysticism and Social Action*, p. 244.

> each. It is much easier within the context of mystical piety to identify with the sufferer, the hungry, the poor, the neglected, than with those whose power, privilege and insensitivity are largely responsible for the social ills. But I must not forget that the ill that a man does to others stands between that man and that man's own altar. Of course, of this he may not be aware. One of the radical functions of social action is to make the offender aware of this.[167]

It is when it is undertaken without this awareness that Thurman argues that social action may be futile. Mystically-driven social action works to remove those things that prevent all humanity from realising who they truly are:

> it must never be forgotten that the central concern of the mystic is to seek to remove anything that prevents the individual from free and easy access to his own altar-stair that is in his own heart. … social action is never for such a person an end in itself.

For Thurman, this means a lifetime of working through peaceful means and using 'shock-tactics', like boycotts, to help people realise how they are cutting off both themselves and others from a vision of the true unity of all things. Yet, he notes that the mystic never know how he or she will react when faced with the ultimate challenge of giving up his or her life for what he or she believe. The mystic, for Thurman, is never free of such decisions, is not so lost in God that she or he does not live as a self in the real world.

Thurman was, of course, not the first or only Christian mystic to stress the relationship between mysticism and action. Joy Bostic has drawn attention to black women in the nineteenth-century (Jarena Lee, Sojourner Truth and Rebecca Cox Jackson) for whom mysticism is the driving force within their social engagement.[168] Earlier mystics whose mysticism led them into action in society include Hildegard of Bingen, who felt inspired to challenge the ecclesial and political structures of her day, Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, who reformed the Carmelites (with John in particular suffering terrible persecution by those who resisted the reforms), and in the early modern period Ignatius of Loyola (the founder of the Jesuit order) who asserted that it is possible to 'find God in all things'.[169] The latter has inspired several modern Jesuits to explore the possibility of a mysticism of the everyday or 'ordinary' life.

Karl Rahner, for example, famously wrote that 'the devout Christ of the future will be a "mystic", one who has "experience" of something, or he will cease to be anything at all'.[170] Prevot notes that by this Rahner did not intend that Christians would engage in

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[167] Thurman, *Mysticism and Social Action*, p. 253.

[168] Bostic, *African America Female Mysticism*.

[169] This point is made clearly by Underhill who list Teresa, John and Ignatius amongst those who she considers to be model Christian mystics because of the way which their mysticism impacted the world: Underhill, *Mysticism*, p. 495 (She adds to this list Catherine of Siena, George Fox, Bernard of Clairvaux and Joan of Arc). Ignatius only uses the phrase once in his writing but it is considered to summarise this his spirituality on a practical level: Margaret Hebblethwaite, *Finding God in All Things* (London: Collins 1987).

[170] Karl Rahner *Christian Living Formally and Today*, in *Theological Investigations*, vol 7 trans. by David Bourke (New York: Seabury, 1977), pp. 3-24 (p. 15.) See Prevot, *Mysticism and Ordinary Life*, pp. 31-62; Also see Karl Rahner, 'Mystical Experience and Mystical Theology' in *Theological Investigations* vol 17, trans. by Margaret Kohl (New York: Crossroad, 1981); Karl Rahner, 'The Ignatian Mysticism of Joy in the World', in *Theological Investigations* vol 3, trans. by Karl-Heinz and Boniface Kruger (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1967), pp. 227-93. On the role of action in Christian mysticism period to this see Louise Nelstrop, 'Love will not be Idle'.

parapsychological experiences as part of their everyday practice. His meaning was rather that, through uncreated grace, God will be acknowledged to be at work within each Christian, providing (sometimes unexperienced) tastes of heaven in the midst of normal (often negative) daily experience (e.g., loneliness, despair and boredom).[171] Rahner posits that when God is at work mystically within the Christian it may be that nothing is felt. In fact, it is when life feels at its *worst* that God is often said in Christian tradition to be present.[172] Mysticism is manifest as, Rahner argues, God's grace enables the Christian to act in Christ-like ways in the face of oppression – and it is this that he holds to be a mysticism of ordinary life. As such, Rahner views Christian mysticism primarily in terms of grace, and makes little room for experiences of any kind. Prevot notes with approval that '[Rahner's] argument for the possibility of experiencing uncreated grace prior to the eschaton does not depend on any "cruel optimism", which would blame those who find themselves dissatisfied.'[173] Yet he questions Rahner's blanket acceptance of suffering, which leads to a failure to stress the need to seek justice for marginalised and persecuted groups.

Rahner's more pessimistic approach to the mysticism of the everyday can be contrasted with that of another Jesuit, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, who in the wake of his experience as a stretcher-bearer in WW1, maintained the life was progressing towards a positive endpoint with a mystical core.[174] De Chardin suggests that human consciousness is the key to unlocking a way of understanding such that the Christic power within all that is might shine out and so come to fruition. De Chardin bases his thinking on an evolutionary scientific model prominent in his day. Clearly there are dangers in such thinking (evolutionary ideas of human nature have been used to justify abuse). De Chardin's thinking on mysticism and the everyday may however, still has something useful to say about the incorporation of the body and nature into Christian mysticism, both of which are lacking in many Christian taxonomies of mysticism. De Chardin's thinking on mysticism may thus have potential for bringing Christian mysticism into conversations on the current ecological crisis.[175] As McGinn points out in his *Modern Mystics*, there are many mystics in the modern period who stress a dynamic between mysticism and action, including Charles de Foucauld (1858-1916), Thérèse of Lisieux (1873-1897), Elisabeth of the Trinity (1880-1906), Pierre Teilhard de Chardine (1881-1955), Edith Stein (1891-1942), Dag Hammerskjörd (1905-1963), Simone Weil (1909-1943), Henri Le Saux (Swami Abbhishiktānanda) (1910-1973), Etty Hillesum (1914-1943), Thomas Merton (1915-1968) They bear witness to varied engaged responses within the Christian mystical tradition, which have become more evident in the modern period even though the tendency exists across Christian mystical history[176] This is clearly an area for further consideration and research.

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[171] Prevot, *Mysticism and Ordinary Life*.
[172] Prevot, *Mysticism and Ordinary Life*.
[173] Prevot, *Mysticism and Ordinary Life*, p. 51.
[174] De Chardin wrote a huge number of books and letter. For example, *The Heart of Matter*, (Collins (UK), Harcourt Brace Jovanovich (US), 1978); *Christianity and Evolution*, (Collins (UK), Harcourt Brace Jovanovich (US), 1971). On de Chardin's spirituality: Ewert Cousins (ed.), *Hope and the Future of Man*, Teilhard Study Library, (Teilhard Centre/Garnstone, 1973).
[175] Also see the work of Catherine Keller in this regard, for example *On the Mystery: Discerning Divinity in Process* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2007).
[176] McGinn, *Modern Mystics*.

Conclusion

This paper has tried to summarise some of the key methodological and taxonomical shifts across the modern reception of Christian mysticism. We have noted that 'experience' is a complicated word with the context of Christian mysticism, with McGinn preferring 'consciousness'. Yet McGinn's sense that it connects to 'lived process', is bound up with 'practice', is an 'element' of a bigger whole within Christianity, and leads to 'transformation' seems very insightful. It has been argued that while there is a specificity about Christian mysticism, this should not preclude the development of new comparative methodologies, and attention has been drawn to a number of areas. The relationship between mysticism and action and the contribution of scholars building on Black Theology in correcting a lacuna where action is concerned has been noted as particularly important.

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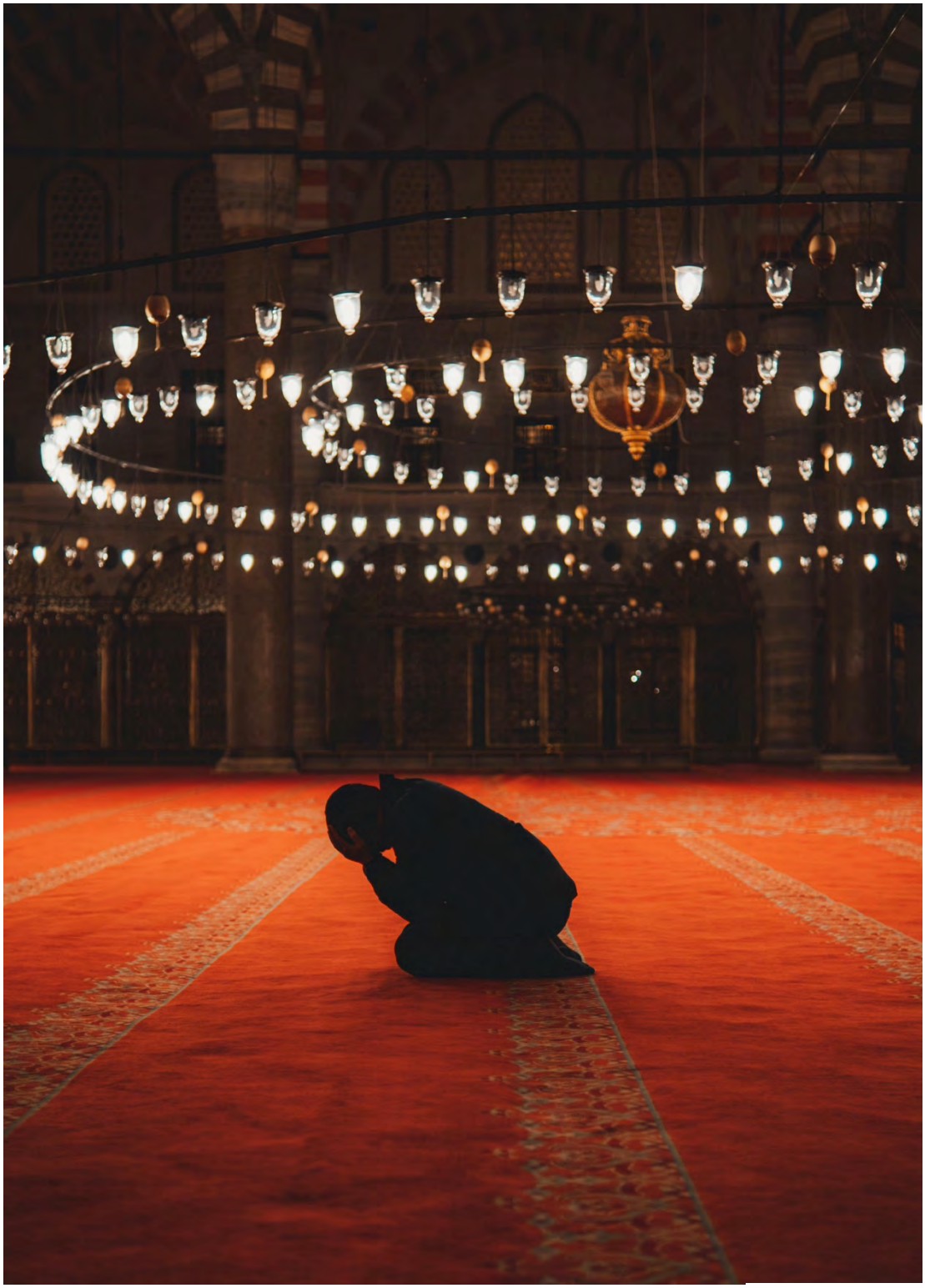

Fatih Maraslioglu

Chapter 5: Ascetic-Mystical Movements in Islam: *state of the field and future directions*

Alexander Knysh

Introduction

Before discussing the ascetic-mystical stream of Islam commonly called "Sufism" (Arabic *tasawwuf*; Persian *tasavvof*; Turkish *tasavvuf*), one inevitably has to answer the question about the definition of religion and mysticism one will be using in the discussion. Answering the question about religion, presupposes addressing the relationship of religious belief to the realities of material and social existence. In other words, to what extent religious experiences in general and those of ascetics-mystics in particular are real or imaginary? Do they have tangible implications? What role do they play in individual's social life, group dynamics and/or in politics? Why has religious faith proved so persistent and attractive to humans, often against great intellectual and cultural odds?[177] Narrowing down the focus of inquiry to mysticism, can investigators who are not a mystic themselves adequately comprehend and explain this highly personal, intuitive and elusive perception of God (or any other transcendent force, for that matter) and the universe? Each question brings another in its train, rendering investigators' task not just complicated, but also wellnigh impossible. The vast body of literature about both religion(s) and mystical experiences (which many mystics claim to be ineffable, but keep speaking and writing about) complicates the task even further.

To avoid this predicament, I will limit myself to cursory answers to the big questions, or "hinge propositions," to use Ludwig Wittgenstein's (1889–1951) term (Bakhurst and Misak 2017, 738). I will begin by examining definitions of religion and ascetic-mystical experiences articulated by the American pragmatist philosopher William James (1842–1910). I will then compare them to those of Wittgenstein and American anthropologist Thomas Tweed, whose work exemplifies the so-called "spacial turn" in the study of religions (Knott 2005; Tweed 2006). These and many other scholars, whom I do not have enough time to discuss, share some common assumptions about the role of religion in human life. For example, they emphasize emotions and moods that religions generate in their followers or point out that the faith may help believers to cope with traumas and difficulties of daily life . No less importantly, scholars of religions are keen to study the cognitive and moral-ethical functions that religious convictions fulfill on both individual and collective levels. As far as methods of the study of religions are concerned, many experts on this subject accept the veracity of the oft-quoted dictum: "He who knows one [religion], knows none."[178] After examining these general theories of religion and religious experience, I will provide my own five-fold definition of religion with special focus on Islam, followed by my definition of the ascetic-mystical and esoteric stream of Islam that are not confined to Sufism. After this introductory discussion, I review some methods methods of studying mysticism, examine the nature of mystical experience and its relationship with mainstream religious doctrine (orthodoxy), and assess the possibility of an interfaith dialogue based on the rich and variegated Sufi tradition and its complex, and often ambiguous, interactions with societies and cultures in which it it is embedded. My choice of theories of religion(s) to highlight and

[177] For one explanation, see Crone 2003, 123–129.

[178] It belongs to Friedrich Max Müller (1823–1900), often referred to as the "father of religious studies," who coined the term "science of religion" (or, in German, *Religionswissenschaft*) in 1873; for details, see Strenski 2006, 63–90.

test has been determined by my own intellectual preferences as well as their applicability to and utility in the study of asceticism-mysticism in Islamic contexts.

Before explaining my own research methodology, I would like to cite the programmatic statement of William James in his *Varieties of Religious Experience* (published in 1901–1902), according to which,

> *We*[179] cannot divide man sharply into an animal and rational part. *We* cannot distinguish natural and supernatural effects; nor among the latter know which are favors of God, and which are counterfeit operations of the demon. We have merely to collect things together without any special *a priori* theological system, and out of an aggregate of piecemeal judgments as to the value of this and that experience—judgments in which our general philosophic prejudices, our instincts, and our common sense are our only guides—decide that *on the whole* one type of religion is approved by its fruits and another type condemned (James 1902, 327).

First, as we can see, James considers investigators not just neutral observers, but also judges of the veracity or authenticity of the religions they investigate based on their (that is, religions') "fruits." Second, he stresses the impact of the investigators' prior convictions and intellectual-religious inclinations on their approach to the subject of their study. Third, James implicitly argues that in the investigators are effectively (and unwittingly) setting up a theology of their own, thus acting as systematic scholastic theologians.[180] To those atheist or agnostic academics who may protest their innocence, James replies,

> If disbeliefs can be said to constitute a theology, then prejudices, instincts, and common sense which we chose as our guides make theological partisans of us whenever they make certain beliefs abhorrent (James 1902, 328).

Whether secular scientific views of religion, which may or may not be shaped by atheism and agnosticism, are indeed "theologies" is a moot question. James believes they are, while many of us today are likely to disagree citing academic objectivity (as opposed to the prescriptive function of theology) and "bias-free" scientific methods that are believed, rightly or wrongly, to distinguish academic scholarship from theology. However, we can hardly deny that by exploring religious phenomena we, consciously or not, are creating a certain descriptive and evaluative system based on our own intellectual, cultural and/or religious "precommitments."[181] Such system by definition can be neither neutral nor objective. For James, the scholar's religious precommitment inevitably entails an implicit or explicit acknowledgement of God's existence, which he describes as follows,

> Something ideal, which in a sense is *part of ourselves and in another sense not part of ourselves*,[182] actually exerts an influence, raises our center of personal energy, and produces regenerative effects unattainable in other ways (James, 1902, 411–412).

Being a pragmatist, James insists that belief in God is necessary for humans due to the critical role it plays in their life: "The god we stand by are the gods we need and can use"

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[179] The emphasis is in the original.
[180] For a vivid example systematic theology, see Tillich 1951–1963.
[181] This term is used by Marshall Hodgson (1922–1968) in the introduction to his monumental study of Islamic civilization; see Hodgson 1974, 1:26–30.
[182] The emphasis is mine.

(James, 1902, 331).[183] James, however, is not oblivious of the self-evident emotive power of religion. On the contrary, he claims that God does not have to be known or understood rationally. He is worthy of human emotions, especially love, because he serves as an essential source of moral support in times of spiritual turmoil and misery. In his opinion, God "proves himself useful" by giving humans an emotionally "larger, richer, more satisfying life." So long as this invisible but indispensable deity enables believers to rise above their physical, emotional and intellectual limitations, its presence is real for them and must be considered a reality, not an illusion. In other words, the concept of God is real because its produces real, tangible effects (James 1902, 506–507 and 516–517).

Despite his overall disagreement with James's thoroughgoing pragmatism, Ludwig Wittgenstein, shares his idea that religion, being the essential carrier and promoter of ethics, aesthetics and values, constitutes "the sense of the world" (Bakhurst and Misak 2017, 740). He suggests that it is sometimes reasonable to believe a hypothesis before it has been conclusively proven true. If the data collected by the investigator calls in doubt the existence of God, it is still reasonable to uphold it, "if there is something to gain by so doing" (Bakhurst and Misak 2017, 7390. In reference to experiences we consider mystical, Wittgenstein's definition includes the transcendent and the mystical (*das Mystische*) elements. Lying outside the limits of the human language and reasoning, religion encompasses such vital human concerns as God, death and the meaning of life. Therefore, it is essential (here he follows Emmanuel Kant) for supporting human (or humanistic) morals, ethics and values (Cottingham 2017, 641).

In summary, while both James and Wittgenstein are interested in the emotional, moral-ethical, and mystical aspects of religion, their focus on its pragmatic utility somewhat obscures its social and political dimensions. Furthermore, for Wittgenstein, all religion is essentially mystical and so is the very existence of the world itself (Cottingham 2017, 641). James, on the other hand, is particularly interested in asceticism-mysticism per se. He devotes large sections of his momentous *Varieties of Religious Experience* to a detailed and erudite analysis of voluntary poverty (asceticism) and saintliness in world religions, both of which are closely associated with mysticism. Concerning poverty, he believes that overcoming its fear through ascetic self-denial can produce valuable psychological states, including a truly benevolent regard for, and love of, one's fellow humans (Yearley 1998, 105).[184] Poverty is thus a necessary precondition for achieving saintliness, "a feeling of being in a wider life than that of this world's selfish interests" (Yearly 1998, 133). Saintliness, in turn, produces in spiritually capable individuals a deep emotional longing for an otherworldly "Ideal Power." Consequently, they experience its continuity with their own life and willingly and enthusiastically "surrender to its control." Apart from asceticism, this state of the intuitive awareness of the "Ideal Power" is achieved through equanimity, as well as the strength of the soul, purity and charity (James 1902, 272–274). Relevant to our forthcoming discussion of a comparative study of mysticism is his following statement, which resonates with Wittgenstein's understanding of religious experience,

> 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 and creed. In Hinduism, in Neoplatonism, in Sufism, in Christian mysticism, in Whitmanism, we find the same recurrent note, so that there is about

[183] Many decades later the Danish-British scholar Patricia Crone (1945–2015) says basically the same thing: we could no more survive without religion, which is part of human culture, "than could beavers without tails or cats without claws," Crone 2003, 125.

[184] For Sufis' own attitude to the world and its inhabitants, see al-Qushayri, 2007, 280–288; al-Ghazali, 2019; cf. Rosenthal, 2014, 184–186, 235, 508–509, 774–775; 778–779, 958–959, and Melchert, 2020, passim.

> mystical utterances an eternal unanimity which ought to take a critic stop and think, and which brings it about that the mystical classics have, as has been said, neither birthday nor native land. Perpetually telling of the unity of man with God, their speech antedates languages, and they do not grow old (James 1902, 410).

James seems to advocate a comprehensive approach to the study of mystical traditions, according to which Sufism as a variant expression of the universal mystical experience and primordial wisdom (Zaehner, 1957; Sedgwick, 2004a; 2017, 135–261; Sorgenfrei, 2018, 155; Saif, 2019, 4–7 and 48–49).[185] Somewhat confusingly, he refers to the sameness of mystical experiences expressed in mystics' utterances, yet antedating the languages and cultures in which they originated.

This brings us to James's definition of mysticism. He names several characteristics that, in his view, make an experience recognizably mystical (James 1902, 379–383):

1. Ineffability (only individuals with specially developed senses who have had a similar state of mind/soul can perceive and describe it).
2. Noetic quality (mystical visions, illuminations and revelation may occur to many people, but only a handful of them can recognize them as containing a unique and highly valuable knowledge).

According to James, two other characteristics of mystical experience "are less sharply marked, but usually found":

3. Transiency (experiences cannot be sustained for long, except in rare instances; they fade and then could be imperfectly reproduced from memory).
4. Passivity and spontaneity[186] (mystics may try to prepare the conditions for the arrival of a mystical experience; however, it always descends on them powerfully and unexpectedly, while their own will is in abeyance).

I will refrain from a detailed analysis of James's definition of mysticism. *Mutatis mutandis* it is not much different from the definition of Sufi teaching and practice by the Khurasanian Sufi of Arab descent 'Abd al-Karim al-Qushayri (d. 1073) in his *Epistle on Sufism* that I translated into English in 2007 (al-Qushayri, 2007). Although the terms and concepts al-Qushayri uses are different from James's, there are some remarkable resonances in their understandings of mysticism, despite the great time distance that separates these two authors.

To sum up, definitions of religious experiences are legion, because they are always fruits of concrete observations extrapolated onto other similar cases that may or may not be incongruent with the ones from which the definitions have been derived. This pitfall is duly acknowledged by many investigators, including the French historian, philosopher, psychoanalyst Michel de Certeau (1925–1986) who calls upon his colleagues to recognize "the fact that we are dealing with it [culture] from one site, our own… An analysis always amounts to a localized practice that produces only a regional discourse" (quoted in Tweed, 2006, 20). In other words, observers' perspective on cultural and religious phenomena are always limited by their personal character traits, social status and environment, academic training (if any), aesthetic and intellectual/ideological preferences. All these, shape what Hodgson has described as "precommitments." In essence, de Certeau's statement is not that different from James's suggestion that investigators of religions construct their "personal

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[185] For a belletristic take on the issue of perennialism and its proponents, see Irwin 2011, 87–93 and 210–211.
[186] James does not explicitly mention this term; however, his statements seem to imply it.

theologies" to make sense of the diverse and occasionally contradictory material they study. Today, of course, calling one's own theory or method "theology" is problematic outside the walls of a theological seminary, as it would seriously undermine one's credibility as an academic expert on religion(s). Therefore, academic researchers and teachers with obvious or hidden theological agendas prefer to disguise themselves by putting on an academic mantle (Knysh, 2022, 349–353 and 356–358).

To prevent this from happening, American anthropologist of religion Thomas Tweed recommends that investigators frankly acknowledge their personal biases and presuppositions before sharing their findings with the public. However, he warns that the deeply buried biases will persist, nevertheless, due to the inevitable limitations of any given vantage point or the peculiarity of investigators' personal backgrounds. On the methodological level, their position in academy (especially, their affiliation with a specific academic or teaching unit or units) often decisively determine their approach to the subject of their study (Tweed, 2006, 178). This factor also affects the investigators' teaching if they happen to be college instructors. Finally, argues Tweed, interpreters and theorists will never investigate "religion-in-general," because they always are "situated observers encountering particular people in particular contexts." Therefore, no theory of religion, including his own, can formulate a universally applicable definition of the vast and variegated phenomena and beliefs that fall under this rubric (Tweed, 2006, 13–28, 55, and 165; cf. Knysh, 2022a).

For Tweed, religions are "confluences of organic-cultural flows that intensify joy and confront suffering by drawing on human and superhuman forces to make homes and cross boundaries" (Tweed, 2006, 54 and 167). These confluences "create institutional networks that, in turn, prescribe, transmit, and transform tropes, beliefs, values, emotions, artifacts, and rituals." On the emotional level, religions provide "the lexicon, rules, and expressions for many different sorts of emotions, including framed as most positive and most negative" (Tweed, 2006, 70). In other words, religions provide occasions for joy in collective (ritual) and personal (devotional) settings, while also helping believers to alleviate suffering, especially disease, personal and natural disasters and death (Tweed, 2006, 71). No less importantly, religions shape and are shaped "by cognitive (*beliefs*), moral (*values*), and affective (*emotions*) processes," thereby helping to determine "what people want and how they feel," because "believing and valuing are part of religions too" (Tweed, 2006, 68). Furthermore, religions position "women and men in natural terrain and social space," orienting "devotees temporally and spatially by creating cosmologies and teleographies that represent the origin and destiny of the universe" (Tweed, 2006, 74 and 116). Finally, religions draw boundaries "around *us* and *them*" (Tweed, 2006, 111; the emphases in the quotations are Tweed's).

I find Tweed's definition of religions[187] helpful, because it is based on his own research and a wealth of theoretical material culled from the works of the leading psychologists, sociologists and historians of religion, including Max Müller, Freud, Jung, James, Long, Kaufman, Durkheim, van der Leeuw, Eliade, Taylor, de Certeau, Deleuse, Guatarri, Latour, Appadurai and others. At the same time, one cannot but notice that some of Tweet's seemingly novel ideas have notable predecessors mentioned earlier in this essay. Use of spatial metaphors apart, Tweed's definition of religions presented here in a condensed and schematic form, cannot but invoke the "pragmatic" definitions offered by James and Wittgenstein. For all three thinkers, religion is an effective (and thus necessary) way of overcoming the chaos of everyday existence and fear of death. Had religion not been there from the outset, it should have been invented to help humans not just to survive, but also to

[187] Throughout his book, Tweed consistently uses plural rather than singular.

enjoy life and build institutions.[188] Tweed's view of religions reinforces de Certeau's warning (sympathetically cited by Tweed) about the inevitable limitations of our research optics and the dangers of extrapolating one particular cultural phenomenon onto others that may or may not be congruent.

Considering the formidable methodological and theoretical challenges just described, any general definition of religion, no matter how tentative, is inevitably liable to accusations of narrowness and one-sidedness. The one I am about to propose is no exception.

Religion: A Working Definition

In his widely read book, *Holy Terrors: Thinking about Religion after September 11*, Bruce Lincoln, a Professor of Divinity at the University of Chicago, argues that

> Anyone definition [of religion] that privileges one aspect, dimension, or component of religion necessarily fails, for in so doing it normalizes some specific traditions (or tendencies therein), while simultaneously dismissing or stigmatizing others (Lincoln, 2006, 5).

To avoid this serious pitfall—already pointed out by James almost a century ago—Lincoln proposes a definition of religion that, in his opinion, places the study of religion on a more solid ground. According to this definition, religion consists of the four major components:

1. Religion is a ***doctrine***[189] claiming to transcend the human, the temporal and the contingent; for the followers of a given religion, it is represents an absolute, unassailable, superhuman truth about God, the universe and the human condition. By accepting this truth and acting on it, they hope to achieve bliss and certitude in this world and salvation in the hereafter.
2. Because certain actions are required of the believers to fulfil this overarching goal, the doctrine defines the ***practices*** they must perform and restrictions they must observe.
3. Religion's practices are enacted within a ***community*** whose members acquire a distinctive identity setting them apart from other individuals within or outside their society.
4. Religion is transmitted and reproduced by and within ***institutions*** that have specific rules, sources of funding, and hierarchies.[190]

In my *Sufism: A New History of Islamic Mysticism*[191], to the four domains or components of religion proposed by Lincoln, I have added the fifth, which, in my view, is essential for the functioning and continuity of any religious tradition (Knysh, 2017, 7–8).

5. Religious institutions are headed by ***leaders*** who assume responsibility for preservation, interpretation, and dissemination of the religion's doctrine. They supervise the performance of religion's practices (rituals), advocate and enforce its moral and ethical precepts, and defend it against criticisms of both outsiders ("infidels") and insiders ("heretics"). The leaders staff the religion's institutions and

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[188] Cf. Crone, 2003, 124–132.
[189] Lincoln uses the term "discourse" that I find a bit vague and overused, so I have replaced it with "doctrine."
[190] My version of Lincoln's definition is different from the original but preserves its major points.
[191] Published by Princeton University Press in 2017.

guide the faithful in their everyday and ritual activities. The leaders' major task lies in modifying religion's doctrines, practices and institutions, while preserving its status as the eternal and immutable truth and the only way to salvation in hereafter.[192]

After testing this five-fold classification in both my own teaching and research, I am satisfied with the result. At the same time, I readily acknowledge that mine is but one of possible other ways to represent and analyze religions generally and Islam in particular.[193]

After these important preliminaries, I will discuss various definitions and possible approaches to Islamic asceticism-mysticism (Sufism), including my own.

What is Sufism? A Variety of Definitions

Based on their research focus and intellectual or devotional preferences, students of Sufism they have defined it as:

- the apprehension of divine realities by the followers of the Real that rests on three cardinal concepts: Light, Knowledge and Love (Nicholson, 1989, 1 and 8).[194]
- a life of sincere obedience to the Will of God lived abstemiously and meditatively, guided by the Word of God, the Life of the Prophet, and the example of his saints; in the course of this spiritual journey the devotee passes through various stages (*maqamat*) and states (*ahwal*) (Arberry, 1950, 13–14)
- a direct experience of God leading to communion between him and the Sufi mystic (Trimingham, 1998, 1);
- the never-ending quest for God symbolized by the path (*tariq* or *tariqat*) and punctuated by waystations (*maqamat*); through this quest the personality of the wayfarer is profoundly and irrevocably transformed (Schimmel, 1975, 4–5);
- a mystical and metaphysical concern "above all with the 'mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven'" and the constant "remembrance of the Supreme Self which infinitely transcends the human ego and which is none other than the Deep towards which the wave ebbs" (Lings, 1975, 12–13);
- the path of love (Persian *madhhab-i ishq/eshq*) by which mystics seek to experience God as a Beloved above all else, above heaven and hell, above salvation (Safi, 2018, xx; Lewisohn, 2014 and 2015; Ahmed, 2016, 38–46;).
- the ardent desire to know God by traveling on the spiritual path, which, on the social plane, results in the creation of Sufi brotherhoods and the formation of the concept of elect "friends of God" or "saints" (Karamustafa,2007, 19–26).
- the absorption and continuation of the original [pre-Sufi] renunciant tradition as a result of which renunciation of the world (asceticism) is declared an early stage in the progress to God, while mystical knowledge of and union with God is conceived as a greater and superior goal (Melchert, 2015, 22–23; Melchert, 2020, 193);

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[192] The five categories proposed here do not necessarily exhaust the other spheres of human activity and thought influenced by religious beliefs and practices; thus, the famous British scholar of comparative religion Ninian Smart (1927–2001) has proposed seven such categories; see Smart, 1996, 10–11.

[193] For my general survey of approaches to Islam, see Knysh, 2022a; for the study of Sufism in Russia before the Communist revolution of 1917, see Knysh, 2019; for the post-revolutionary period, see Kemper and Connerman, 2011; for a revival Sufism and Sufi studies in contemporary Russia, see Knysh, 2023.

[194] I have kept the capitalization and style of the sources I am citing with slight modifications.

- one of the strands (along with Twelver Shi ‘ism and Isma‘ilism) of the Islamic esoteric tradition or a Muslim variant of *prisca theogia* (Corbin, 1969; Green, 2008; Laude, 2010; von Stuckrad, 2010, 26–33; Hanegraaff, 2012, passim.)
- a revolt against sectarianism and legalism whose followers use poetry and elaborate symbolism to express their most profound feelings of oneness with the divine absolute manifesting itself in nature and in their souls; without such experiences people are incomplete in both their knowledge and personal lives (Adonis 2005, 11–19, 49–118).

Academic scholars interested in social and political roles of Sufism across the centuries have presented it as:

- a Muslim equivalent of monasticism in Christianity and other world religions, especially Buddhism and Hinduism (André, 1956, 35, 37 and 305; Molé, 1967; Knysh, 2017, 20–25 and 142; Blackburn and Feener, 2018; Yaghoobi, 2018; Ernst, 2018, 479–483; Burchett, 2019);
- an effective means of spreading Islam in areas recently conquered by Muslims (André, 1956, 307–316; Eaton, 1977; Trimingham, 1998, 166–193);
- an organizational basis of resistance against European colonialism (Evans-Pritchard 1949; Knysh, 2010, 245–300; Vikør, 2015);
- a refuge for social outcasts and deviants and a space for psychiatric treatment of individuals in need of such treatment or consolation (Crapanzano, 1973; Eickelman, 1976 and 1985; Pratt Ewing and Corbett 2020);
- “a *tradition* of powerful knowledge, practices and persons” (Green, 2012, 3);
- “Prozac” for militant Muslims (*mujahedeen*) that alleviates their destructive activities by turning their gaze quietly inwards or , on the contrary, strengthens their resolve to resist the tyranny of powers-that-be (Bouasria, 2015, 1 and 5);
- a vehicle for social and political reform of Muslim societies in the age of modernity and globalization (Weismann 2001, 2011, 2016);
- a bulwark of the Muslim “Counter-Reformation” and religious conservatism (Sedgwick, 2004b; Hamid, 2016, 66–87; Jordan, 2021);
- an elaborate cover for *Kryptopolitics* and political dissent (Bousria, 2015, 3 –4, 9, 11, 28–30, 32–34, 171–172) and a specific form of new religious movement often described as “Neo-Sufism” (Sedgwick, 2012; Sedgwick, 2016; Piraino and Sedgwick, 2019).
- an Islamic form of Jürgen Habermas’s “public sphere,” in which “people recruited from a range of private spheres expressed differing modes of social agency” and mobilized “against the authoritarian tendencies of the state” (Muhammad, 2023, 1–2 et passim).

All these definitions highlight important doctrinal and practical aspects of Sufism as well as its numerous social and political functions. They are also revealing of the personal backgrounds and intellectual preferences of the scholars who study it. Faced with such a wide array of vastly different expert definitions, it is difficult to articulate one that is comprehensive and cogent, but not too detailed. Based on my definition of Islam I propose to treat Sufism as “Islam in miniature,” that is, one that possesses all the major features and domains of Islam outlined above.

Like Islam as a whole, Sufism has many subdivisions and communities, often mutually opposed. Like Islam, it has elaborate exegesis, mythology, cosmology, metaphysics and gnoseology. Like Islam, it accommodates believers of different social classes, political convictions, mindsets and temperaments. Like Islam, it promises its followers guidance, certitude, emotional release and orientation in chaotic and unpredictable circumstances. Like

Islam, it features a gallery of heroes and role models, as well as villains and impious characters. Like Islam, it is a language by which its followers express and make sense of their experiences, aspirations and frustrations. Like Islam, it offers answers to the most important questions of human existence.

My own definition of Sufism emphasizes inclusion over exclusion. It includes events, personalities, lifestyles, and patterns of thought and practice that academic and non-academic observers consider "Sufi," unless there are compelling and objective reasons not to do so. My inclusive definition does do not necessarily question or dismiss more narrowly focused normative (prescriptive) definitions as long as they are viewed as such, that is, attempts by parties a or individuals to legitimize or normalize a certain understanding of Sufism for ideological or theological reasons.[195] Sufism is an influential and powerful voice of the chorus of Muslim voices. Sufism also has had a visible and tangible presence in Muslim life due to its brick-and-mortar edifices, be they tombs of revered Sufi friends of God (*awliya'*), memorial mosques dedicated to them, cenotaphs symbolizing their presence, Sufi lodges or "monasteries." Such monuments or their vestiges are ubiquitous in North and West Africa, Egypt, Sudan, Yemen, the Volga region of Russia, Siberia, the Caucasus and Central, South and Southeast Asia. Supported by charitable donations of God-fearing or impious rulers, government officials, military commanders, merchants and their wives they thrived in the past and in some areas are enjoying a revival today (Derieva et al., 2018; Piraino and Sedgwick, 2019, Papas, 2020; Pratt Ewing and Corbett, 2020; Golestaneh, 2023; Knysh, 2023). Alongside Sufism's physical and architectural presence in Muslim societies, Sufi ideals, ideas, and practices have left a deep imprint on the everyday behavior, ritual activities (both collective and individual), beliefs and clothing of Muslims with or without formal Sufi affiliations. No less importantly, the elegant allure of Sufi poetry, has attracted numerous admirers not just among Muslims worldwide, but among non-Muslims as well. This wide array of cultural products, ideas, moral-ethical principles, folklore, buildings, behaviors, and costumes constitute the phenomenon that we call "Sufism." Condemned by opponents and praised by advocates, Sufism remains an organic part of Muslim life today (Knysh, 2017, 34).

As already mentioned, Sufism plays a multitude of social functions. They include promotion of diverse forms of artistic creativity (music, poetry, painting and architecture), provision of food and shelter to travelers and the needy (charity), moral-ethical guidance, as well as spiritual solace to people in distress. By virtue of their popularity and spiritual authority (Weber's "charisma"; see Weber, 1968), in premodern time and to a lesser extent today, Sufi-affiliated individuals were and are in a position to mediate often-troubled relations between rulers and their subjects in conflicts among mutually hostile socio-political factions, tribal clans, families and individuals (Evans-Pritchard, 1949; Babboyi,1992; Buehler, 1998; Bang, 2003; Knysh 2010; DeWeese 2012; Bouasria, 2015; Devin DeWeese and Jo-Ann Gross, 2018; Papas, 2020; Alatas, 2021). These and other vital functions make Sufism an important player in networks of social and political interactions within a given society from which it cannot be artificially detached without distorting the overall picture of its life its Islamic communities. The better we understand the multifarious contexts in which Sufis operate, the more nuanced and accurate our understanding of Sufism is.

Another consideration is in order here. Due to its political, social and cultural importance Sufism has been an active and influential participant in dialogues with various other strands of the Muslim intellectual tradition, such as *fiqh*, *kalam*, *adab*, and *falsafa*. Muslim mystics, whether they explicitly identified themselves as Sufis or not, took interest in the Shi'i-Isma'ili version of "esotericism" (*batiniyya*), especially in the "Epistles of the

[195] See the statement of Bruce Lincoln quoted above.

Brethren of Purity" (*Rasa'il Ikhwan al-Safa'*).[196] Islamized Neoplatonism and Hermetic wisdom, as well as occult sciences associated with them (*'ulum al-ghayb*; *al-'ulum al-ghariba*; *'ilm al-huruf; al-jafr*), also enjoyed wide popularity among educated classes.[197] Sufis were also in conversation with ideas and practices of other religions and religious-philosophical systems, especially, Judaism, Christianity, Gnosticism, Manichaeism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Greek philosophy. By the logic of inclusion, I have suggested earlier in this essay, the new generation of students of Sufism should not restrict itself to the cozy confines of the "Islamic tradition," but look beyond it for typological parallels, mutual influences and intellectual encounters. At the end of this essay, I will make some suggestions for studying Sufism in comparative perspective and its potential role in cross-cultural and inter-confessional dialogs.

Sufism: An Expanded Definition

While presenting Sufism as "Islam in miniature" may be a good way to start a conversation about it, it is too schematic and requires some fleshing out./ The most obvious way to do this is to identify the ideas, practices and values shared by most Sufi communities worldwide. While these communities are extremely diverse in many respects, for heuristic and educational purposes, their experiences, teachings and practices are still placed under the rubric "Sufism" in the same way as the experiences, teachings and practices of diverse or even mutually hostile groups of Muslims are considered manifestations of the monolithic abstraction called "Islam." Obviously, the list of Sufism's "constants" I propose is incomplete and possibly faulty, but it can certainly serve as a basis for elaboration, discussion, correction and adjustment. The phenomenon we call "Sufism" exhibits the following major characteristics:

- Recognition by Sufis or sympathetic outsiders (and denial by their opponents) of the supersensory, intuitive, and revelatory knowledge of God and the world (*ma'rifa*; *'irfan*; *kashf*) that they consider God-given and superior to both received (*naql*) and rationally obtained knowledge (*'aql*). This superior knowledge represents the hidden (esoteric) aspect of the Islamic revelation and is inaccessible to ordinary believers;
- Acceptance of claims to such knowledge by divinely chosen, enlightened individuals not only by Sufis themselves but also by the Muslims at large and the resultant popularity of these individuals and of the Sufi tradition they exemplify in its various hypostases.
- Promise by the possessors of this superior, divinely-inspired knowledge to impart it to their followers through special training techniques that include meditative techniques and bodily regimes commonly conceived of as renunciation of this world and its delights for the sake of a loftier goal, especially experiencing God's immediate presence, communicating with him or even becoming one with him;
- A radical transformation of the ascetic-mystic's self (*nafs*) in pursuit of this goal, which is commonly described as a gradual path (*tariq*) to God during which the traveler traverses certain stages (*maqamat*) and experiences certain spiritual states (*ahwal*);

[196] Fierro, 1996; Ebstein, 2014; Casewit, 2017; Gasimov, 2024.
[197] Saif 2019, 18–23; El-Bizri and Orthmann, 2018; Shihadeh, 2007; Conrad 1996; for Sufism and occult sciences, see Saif et al., 2021; Gardiner, 2020; Melvin-Koushki, 2020; Casewit, 2017, 34–39, 64–74, 313; Karamustafa, 2014.

- The transformation of the traveler's (*salik*) self is believed by be possible individually under the guidance of a Sufi teacher or collectively in company with like-minded individuals, who form a spiritual "brotherhood," "order" (*tariqat*) headed by an experienced Sufi master Heirs to the common spiritual lineage (*silsila*) the members of the brotherhood may reside in a special building called "lodge" (*zawiya/ribat*) or "monastery" (*khaneqah*) or gather there for special occasions. The position of the spiritual guide may or may not be hereditary.
- The belief, shared by most Sufis, that the progress of the seeker of God (*murid*) is impossible unless supervised and directed by such spiritual guide (*shaykh, murshid, ustadh, pir, guru*) whose *silsila* connects his students to the Prophet.
- The emotional ties and mutual obligations of the master and his disciples constitute the foundation of Sufi communities described above.
- As bearers of God-given, salvific knowledge and providers of moral-ethical and spiritual guidance, Sufi shaykhs are viewed by their followers and the Muslims generally as God's elect friends (*awliya'*) enjoying his blessing (*baraka*) and capable of bestowing it upon others. Their special status in the eyes of Muslims results in what is often described, accurately or not, "the cult of Sufi saints" (Knysh, 1993; 1997; and 2017, 44–53).
- This expanded definition of Sufism does not include relationships between Sufis and their institutions, on the one hand, and secular and military authorities of the societies in which they reside, on the other. These relationships may be cooperative or adversarial and vary from region to region, from Sufi order to Sufi order and from one epoch to another (Knysh, 2017, 224–225).
- As already mentioned, this definition is tentative and open to criticisms, additions and adjustments. In what follows, I will briefly address major issues and trends within Sufi studies today.

Methods, Approaches and Research Foci

1. I have already discussed the characteristics that are shared by various types of Sufism in my definition and will not repeat myself. As for "mysticism" more broadly, it is not unique to Sufism and is found in several other strands of the Islamic tradition, especially, the Neoplatonic writings of the Brethren of Purity, Islamic Hermeticism traced back to ancient Egypt, Twelver Sufism, Isma'ilism, and various manifestations of 'Alid-loyalism,[198] such as Bektashism, Alawism (Nusayrism), Ahl-i Haqq and the Druze, the latter two being treated by many Islamologists as independent religions outside the pale of Islam (Firro, 2013; Bruinessen, 2009). Henry Corbin (1903–1978) and S.H. Nasr (b. 1933) have considered Twelver Shi'ism, Isma'ilism and Sufism to be part of the same perennial esoteric wisdom (*prisca theologia*) permeating all world religions (Knysh, 2006, 230–231; Amir-Moezzi et al., 2016; Knysh, 2017, 36–40 and 42–44; Laude, 2010, 40–45; 55–57, 82–90 and 159–160; Sedgwick, 2004, 153–159 and Sedgwick, 2017, 5 –6, 86, 88, 94; Sorgenfrei, 2018; Saif, 2019, 48). Highlighting the role of Henry Corbin in creating this syncretic concept of "Islamic esotericism," the

[198] This description of various Shi'i communities was used by Marshall Hodgson throughout his *Venture of Islam*.

founder of the academic study of Western esotericism Antoine Faivre (1934–2021) wrote:

> In this area, H. Corbin is the principal reference author. Reading his works not only allows us into Shiite esotericism, but also helps us to better understand Judeo-Christian esotericism, especially since the author himself never missed the opportunity to establish discerning connections. All of his work should be cited (quoted in Saif, 2019, 4).

The applicability of the term "esotericism" to various *batini* (from the Arabic *batin*; inward, secret or hidden) movements and schools of thought in Islam has been discussed elsewhere and should not detain us here (Ebstein, 2014, 16–19; Amir-Moezzi et al., 2016; Sedgwick, 2017; Sorgenfrei, 2018; Saif, 2019, 29–31 and 48–49). The main difference among these three strains of Islamic esotericism, if we accept this term, is not just political, but also doctrinal, or, to use Hodgson's term "life-orientational."[199] Early Shi'i theologians focused primarily on the political and religious authority of 'Ali and his progeny, that is, the leaders (imams) of his bloodline (Ghofrani, 2023, 159). They believed that 'Ali's descent from the Prophet gave him and his family, the Alids, a critical advantage over all other claimants to revelatory knowledge (*'ilm*) and leadership (*imama*) of the community (Hodgson, 1974, 1:335, 345, 372–384; Sachedina, 1988; Amir-Moezzi, 1994; Dakake, 2007). By contrast, in the teachings of early Sufis, spiritual authority and special knowledge of God (*ma'rifa; tajalli; kashf*) was to be earned by seekers of truth and guidance, irrespective of their genealogy, through exceptional piety, constant self-examination, self-abnegation, repentance and meditation on the mysteries of the Qur'an and the exemplary ways of the Prophet (al-Kalabadhi, 1991; al-Qushayri, 2007; Hujwiri, 1911; Orfali and Saab, 2012; al-Sulami, 2019; cf. Böwering 1979). In later Shi'ism and Sufism, spiritual authority and the precious revelatory knowledge associated with it acquired cosmic and metaphysical dimensions, as it was usually traced back to the events of pre-eternal covenant with God mentions in the Qur'an (Böwering, 1980, 145–155; Amir-Moezzi, 1994; Ghofrani, 2023, 159–160). Eventually, the mystical-esoteric cosmologies and gnoseologies of Sufism and Shi'ism merged in a relatively organic synthesis thanks in large part to their common adoption of Ibn al-'Arabi's principles of allegorical-mystical exegesis and unitive metaphysics known as the unity (oneness) of being/existence (*wahdat al-wujud*) (Ebstein, 2014, 23–27 and 79–81; Ebstein, 2023; Amir Moezzi et al., 2016; Hermann and Terrier, 2020; Keeler and Rizvi, 2018; Knysh, 2017, 106–109; Lange and Knysh, 2022; Terrier 2023). The remarkable continuity of Ibn al-'Arabi's unitive metaphysics, cosmological psychology and allegorical-mystical hermeneutics as well as their resonances with Shi'i, Jewish and Christian Neoplatonism constitute a fascinating subject for future research (Morris, 1981; McGinn, 1991; Knysh, 2017, 124–136; Chamankhah, 2019; Lange and Knysh, 2022). As the Israeli Islamologist Michael Ebstein has cogently pointed out,

> Familiarity with Jewish North-African or Andalusi figures such as Isaac Israeli, Solomon Ibn Gabirol, Judah Ha-Levi and others would have caused scholars to realize that, from the tenth century onwards, a unique type of mystical-philosophical

[199] Hodgson, 1974, 1: 88, 128, 362; cf. Ebstein, 2014, 19–20.

> thought evolved in al-Andalus that differs in a fundamental way from the Islamic mystical tradition known as "Sufism" (Ebstein, 2014, 21).

While the difference between Sufism in the Muslim East and the mystical-philosophical tradition of the Muslim West (which included Isma'ili Neoplatonism) may not be as significant as Ebstein has suggested , his fellow Islamologists should definitely take heed. In general, comparative approaches to mystical-esoteric movements and schools of thought are now definitely on the agenda of many researchers. Thus, Wouter Hanegraaff (b. 1961), a doyen of Western academic esoteriology, has mentioned unmistakable parallels among various manifestations of mystical-esoteric thought and weltanschauung. However, he also warned his colleagues about the heuristic consequences of these parallels in an academic field dominated by advocates of *prisca theologia* and perennialism (traditionalism),

> Western esotericism must have its parallels in the East. The logical result of such a perspective is that the study of "esotericism" turns into a form of comparative religious studies that seeks to discover the universalia of "inner" religion world-wide (quoted in Saif 2019, 5).[200]

His skepticism about the perennialist-traditionalist quest for the *prisca theolgia*[201] notwithstanding, Hanegraaff acknowledges that "esoteric-mystical" visions of the world do share some common features in various historical and cultural contexts. Therefore, it now seems obvious that studying any mystical (esoteric) tradition in isolation from its counterparts in other religions is no longer a viable option for scholars of religion.[202] Another promising research question is how, by whom and in what forms esoteric-mystical knowledge was disseminated, transmitted and popularized for the uninitiated. Why certain variants of it have proved more effective and long-lasting than others? Is the utilitarian-pragmatic conception of religion and religious experience formulated by James and Wittgenstein applicable to the study of perennialist quest for *prisca theologia*? To what extent is traditional Sufism amenable to study within the framework of this cross-cultural and cross-denominational intellectual paradigm? This question inevitably raises the issue of the characteristics and definition of Neo-Sufism (Irwin, 2019; Malik and Zarrabi-Zadeh, 2019, 84–100, 200–203, and 281; Bazzano and Hermansen, 2020, passim; Hermansen and Zarrabi-Zadeh, 2023, passim).

2. In his discussion of the usefulness of "unitive psychological measures" to explain "mystical piety" in Islam, Marshall Hodgson briefly refers to the psychological and physiological state of "oceanic consciousness" (Hodgson, 1974, 1:396–397).[203] It is derived from the Sigmund Freud's (1856–1939) theory of "oceanic feeling," who, in his turn, borrowed this phrase from a letter of the French writer and mystic Romain Rolland (1866–1944). Besides Freud, Jung's ideas have also influenced the interpretations of Sufism by members of the traditionalist-perennialist community that included some distinguished Western Islamologists (Ernst, 1994; Sedgwick, 2004, 190; Hermansen, 2007; Sorgenfrei, 2018, 145–146 and 156–157; Saif, 2019, 2–4 and 48–49; Hermansen and Zarrabi-Zadeh, 2023, 94, 108, 113, 226, 257). As I have already

[200] Similar misgivings about the excessive emphasis on "Sufi universalism" to the detriment of Sufism's Islamic roots are expressed by Carl Ernst, a major American expert on Sufi Islam; see Ernst, 2018, 21.
[201] For the history of the idea, see Allen et al., 2002; Stuckrad, 2010; Sedgwick, 2017, 86, 88 and 94; Alegre, 2022.
[202] For a pioneering discussion of Jewish, Christian and Muslim theological and philosophical ideas (including mystical) in pre-modern Islamdom from a comparative perspective, see Adamson 2016; see also Netton, 2011.
[203] In his classification, Sufism belongs to "imaginative piety."

pointed out, the appropriateness of the traditionalist-perennialist approach to the study of mystical-esoteric traditions in general and Sufism in particular is a moot and hotly debated question. It is further complicated by the fact that many Western intellectuals learn about Islam and Sufism almost exclusively from the works of traditionalist-perennialists such as René Guénon, Idries Shah, Titus Burckhardt, Toshihiko Izutsu, Fritjhof Schuon, Martin Lings, S.H. Nasr, William Chittick, Éric Geoffroy and Reza Shah-Kazemi (Lings, 1975; Laude, 2010; Irwin, 2011, 87–93, 119, 122–123; Sedgwick, 2017, 156–185; Sorgenfrei, 2018, 155–157; Lipton, 2018). As a result, in the mind of the public, knowledge about Sufism has become intricately intertwined with the vicissitudes of not just Islamic and Western esotericism, but also of any religious trends and schools of thought considered "esoteric." Judging by recent publications, Islamologists continue to debate the usefulness of treating Sufism as a variant of global or universal esotericism in the years to come (Sorgenfrei, 2018; Ernst, 2018; Lipton, 2018; Saif, 2019).

3. The terminology and symbolism of Sufi literature have been the subject of scores of academic and non-academic publications. The works on this subject of the German-American scholar Annemarie Schimmel (1922–2003) are highly regarded and considered a *sine qua non* for any researcher interested in Sufi poetry and prose (Schimmel, 1975, 1979, 1982 and 1984).[204] The same applies to the studies of classical Sufi poems and treatises by German, British, French and Russian Islamologists such as Hellmut Ritter (1892–1971), Fritz Meier (1912–1998), Richard Gramlich (1925–2006), Bernd Radtke (b. 1944), Reynold Nicholson (1868–1945), Arthur Arberry (1905–1969), Louis Massignon (1883–1962), Paul Nwyia (1925–1980), Michel Chodkiewicz (1929– 2020), Jean-Jacque Thibon, Valentin Zhukovskii (1858–1918), and Evgenii Bertel's (1890–1957) . Their studies, translations and critical editions of Sufi texts, which constitute the textual foundation of Sufi theory and practice, contain sections explaining Sufi terminology (for example, Hujwiri, 1911; al-Sarraj, 1914; Zhukovskii, 1926; Bertel's, 1960–1988; al-Suhrawardi, 1978; al-Qushayri,1989 and 2007; al-Sarraj, 1990; al-Kalabadhi 1991; Abu Talib al-Makki, 1992; Ibn al-'Arabi, 2002; al-Sulami, 2019). For the study of the language of later Sufi allegorical exegesis, cosmology, gnoseology and soteriology, the translations and commentaries of Ibn 'Arabi's works by the American scholar of religion William Chittick (b. 1943) are indispensable. He is also the author of a valuable study of the language and symbolism of the poetic corpus of Jalal al-Din Rumi (1207–1273) whose legacy has been examined in dozens academic and popular publications over the past four decades.[205] The elaborate symbolism of another mystical poet of Persia, Farid al-Din 'Attar (ca. 1145-1146–1221), has also received ample attention both inside and outside academia.[206] Uses of Sufi symbols, personalities, practices, poetry, music, folklore and physical sites (especially, shrines of "God's friends" or *awliya'*) to construct state ideologies, build nations and architectural monuments, write poetry and prose or redefine gender relations have been examined in numerous recent monographs focused primarily, but not exclusively on Turkey, Iran and India (Frembgen, 2912; Ridgeon, 2015; Soileau, 2018; Ernst, 2018, 369–483; Piraino and Sedgwick, 2019; Feldman, 2022; Doostdar, 2018; Malik and Zarrabi-Zadeh, 2019; Pratt Ewing and Corbett, 2020; Haeri, 2021; Golestaneh, 2023). Finally, the rich symbolism and imagery of non-Sufi streams of mystical philosophy in

[204] For a sharp criticism of Schimmel's "romantic" approach to Sufism, see Radtke, 2005.
[205] Chittick, 1983; see also Rumi, 1925-1940; Schimmel, 1993; Lewis, 2000; Rumi, 2010; Lewisohn, 2014; Renard, 2021; Irwin, 2019; Sedaghat, 2023.
[206] For example, Darbandi and Davis, 1984; Seyed-Gohrab, 2012; 'Attar, 2013; O'Malley, 2023.

Islamic contexts have been explored by scholars of Isma'ilism and Nusayrism (Alawism) (Walker, 1994 and 1999; Bar-Asher and Kofsky, 2002; Bruinessen, 2009; Ebstein, 2014; De Smet, 2021). These studies indicate that Sufism was not the "only game in town," as far as mystical, beliefs, practices, psychology and cosmology are concerned.

4. I have already addressed the "spatial turn" in religious studies ushered in by Kim Knott and implemented by Thomas Tweed in his seminal study of "crossings and dwellings" as a trope of religious life and experience. While Tweed emphasizes the mobility of believers, their stories, and devotional objects, one can also envision Sufi centers as "anchors" and "ports of arrival" in the religious seascape of a given society or geographical area. Over the centuries, enclaves of sanctity around the tombs of Sufi "friends of God" have attracted pilgrims, both local and international, seeking help, physical or psychological cure and spiritual solace (Gellner 1985; Chattopadhyaya 1993; Werbner 2003; Rozehnal 2007; Dickson, 2015; Piraino and Sedgwick, 2019; Ewing and Corbett 2020). This historical and ethnographic fact makes the concept of sacred space highly relevant to the task of exploring the social, psychological and behavioral implications of religious authority acquired by certain individuals through practicing and teaching a version of ascetic-mystical Islam. Indeed, since the eleventh century CE, if not earlier, followers of both Sufism and Shi'ism congregated around Sufi lodges (*zawiya, ribat, khanegah*) and shrines (*mazar; qubba; dargah*), on the one hand, and tombs of the Shi'i imams and their progeny (*imamzadas*), on the other.[207] The architectural salience of such structures and their role as loci of saintliness and charisma have rendered them an attractive research subject for social and cultural historians, architects and anthropologists.[208] Cases in which Sunni and Shi'i devotional activities center on the same shrine are particularly intriguing, because they signal a potential possibility of overcoming, or at least downplaying, the entrenched Sunni-Shi'i divide (Mahendrarajah, 2021; Darieva et al., 2018). The importance of shrines in Sufism, Shi'ism and popular religiosity generally springs from the fact that they usually, but not always, contain the remains of *awliya'*[209] that, as already mentioned, are believed by both Sunnis and Shi'is to possess beneficial and healing power known as *baraka* ([divine] blessing or grace). Rituals and customs associated with individual and collective visits to such shrines have attracted the attention of anthropologists and sociologists since the formation of these disciplines in Western academia in the late nineteenth-early twentieth centuries.[210] Historians of Muslim societies have also been keen on exploring the rise and spread of such institutions, especially since they often contained rich libraries and archival documents.[211] Because, for many centuries, Sufi shrines were an essential and ubiquitous element of traditional (premodern) religiosity, with the onset of movements for Islamic reform in the late-nineteenth-early twentieth centuries, they came to be seen by their leaders as a major symbol of what, in their opinion, "went wrong" with traditional Islam and its followers. For the critics, such

[207] For details regarding *imamzadas*, see Momen 1986, 116, 118, 182; O'Kane, 2021; Flaskerud, 2023. For Sufi lodges, see Papas, 2020, 105–18; for pre-modern Islamic societies, see Ephrat, 2021; Muhammad, 2024, 67–86; cf. Meier, 1999, 335–421.

[208] For architectural aspects, see O'Kane 2021; for social and political functions, see Knysh, 1993 and 1997; Pemberton, 2010; McChesney, 2014; Snehi, 2019; Khan, 2023.

[209] The Shi'is consider their imams to be the *awliya'* par excellence, see Momen, 1985, 17, 157 and 208; Sachedina, 1998, 95–100; Bos, 2002, 46.

[210] For some vivid examples, see Gellner, 1969 and 1985; Eickelman and Piscatori, 1990; Werbner and Basu, 1998; Stauth and Schielke, 2009; Pemberton, 2010; Frembgen, 2011; Pratt Ewing and Corbett 2020; Bandak and Bille, 2013; Darieva et al., 2018; Snehi, 2019; Bin Ibad, 2019; Papas, 2020; Khan, 2023.

[211] See, for example, McChesney, 2014; Rowe, 2015; Ziad, 2021.

"holy places," as well as beliefs and practices associated with them, represented a "shameful" relapse into idolatry that, they argued, God sent the Prophet Muhammad to abolish. Consequently, one Muslim's sacred space and source of *baraka* became an abode of idolatry (*shirk*) for his reform-minded coreligionist.[212] The opponents of worship at Sufi and non-Sufi shrines, collectively known as Salafis,[213] call upon the "worshippers of graves" (*quburiyun*) to recant and revert to the true monotheism (*tawhid*) of the Prophet and his companions, ignoring the fact that worshipping a transcendent God with no tangible connection to this world and its human inhabitants is not for everyone. Believers who are unable to relate to the unreachable God of the Salafis and modernist reformers seek mediators between them and the remote Maker. The *awliya'* had successfully fulfilled this mediatory role for many centuries until their mediation and spiritual authority were challenged by new social classes, realities and ideologies (Knysh, 1997; Radtke and De Jong, 1999; Spadola, 2014; Ridgeon, 2015; Knysh, 2017, 44–53). Time will show whether the Salafis will find an effective substitute for the *awliya'* and the roles they fulfilled and dispel the long-standing popular belief in their beneficial powers enshrined in their bodies and graves. If they succeed, traditional forms of worship in Islam will lose the aura of enchantment and miracle, which was essential for the collective and individual faith of believers in the realm of the unseen (*ghayb*) known only to God and his elect friends. Will this popular disenchantment be the beginning of the Muslim reformation and wide-ranging secularization? Answering this question requires a through engagement with the studies of the Christian Reformation to draw informed and meaningful comparisons between the two (Eickelman, 1988; Christmann, 2008; Knysh, 2017, 46 and 142; Knysh, 2023). In the meantime, some Western researchers inspired by Jürgen Habermas (1991 and 2002) see in gatherings at Sufi and Shi'i shrines and in contemporary Sufi associations, the incipient emergence of an Islamic public sphere separate and independent from the intrusive control of the nation-state. In the West, so the argument goes, private associations, closed clubs, salons and coffeehouses prepared the ground for the formation of the civilian public sphere that, in turn, served as a vital ore-condition for the rise of a vibrant civil society (Salvatore, 2007; Muhammad, 2024). For example, in today's Islamic Republic of Iran Sufi teachings and practices provide space for a non-official discourse and an alternative form of association that expands into and shape the public sphere outside state surveillance and control (Bos, 2002, 207, 213 and 231; Golestaneh, 2023). Similar conclusions have been reached by a scholar of Sufism in contemporary Morocco (Spadola, 2014; Bouasria, 2015; cf. Weismann, 2011). The "public sphere" thesis may be dismissed as an example of Eurocentric wishful thinking, but it does alert us to the new roles Sufism may play in our rapidly changing world. As with the mystical language and symbolism, comparative approaches to ascetic-mystical teachings, institutions, sites of sanctity and saints' afterlife, as well as popular devotions, sentiments and imaginations associated with them, are not only welcome, but essential for the advancement of both Islamic studies and religious studies broadly writ (Cornell, 1998; Amri and Gril, 2007; Palmer, 2020; Wieser, 2020).

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[212] For a Sufi criticism of Muslim modernists and reformers that equates them with Western Orientalists, see Keller 2002, 7 and 26–27.

[213] From the Arabic phrase, *al-salaf al-salih*, "the pious ancestors of Islam" (that is, the first three generations of Muslims), whom their followers (*al-salafiyya*) hold up as the model to be emulated; for details, see Knysh 2017, 183–191.

Conclusion

Paths to understanding and explaining ascetic-mystical trends and movements in Islam vary and so do motives and presuppositions of those who study, teach or publicly speak about it.[214] In the present essay, I have focused on Sufism, because it is my main field of research and teaching. Dealing with various strands of Shi'i mystical (esoteric) thought and practice requires a separate study. In this essay and my previous publications, I have argued that approaches to Sufism are as diverse as (a) its social, spiritual, artistic and institutional manifestations ae well as (b) the backgrounds of those who study and teach it. My main point here and elsewhere is that broad generalizations regarding the "true" essence of Islamic asceticism-mysticism or the actions and intentions of its followers are not just reductive, but may also be misleading (Knysh, 2010, 326–327; Knysh, 2017, 15–61; cf. Ernst, 2018, 412–414 and 481–483). Sufism and other forms Islamic ascetic-mystical thought and practice should be considered with close attention to their constantly changing contexts and the peculiarities of the societies in which they are embedded. This historical-contextual approach to Sufism should not prevent us from extrapolating our observations to broader social-political contexts and from drawing meaningful comparisons between Muslim versions asceticism-mysticism and their non-Muslim counterparts. Both "micro" and "macro" approaches are viable and enrich one another (Netton, 2011; Knysh, 2022a, 347–349). Thanks to the efforts of European, American and Russian scholars, as well as their colleagues in the Middle East and Eurasia, we now have a fairly comprehensive and accurate picture of the history and current status of Sufi doctrines, institutions, practices and cultural production not just in the Muslim world, but in societies in which Muslims live as a minority. As the study of Sufism is increasingly becoming a "native enterprise" (Eickelman, 1998, 277), some formerly unshakable Western epistemological certainties, including those mentioned in this essay, begin to crumble and are discarded as unhelpful or outright erroneous. However, the scholarship of insiders is also not immune from biases and prejudices, informed as it is by their commitment to their own religious, political and nationalist agendas as well as their personal understanding of what constitutes correct and authentic Islam or correct and authentic Sufism. Because writing history of a given cultural-religious phenomenon is as much about the past as it is about present, we keep finding new research angles and new issues to explore within the rich legacy left behind by numberless known and unknown ascetics and mystics of Islam.

Addendum:

The Intellectual, Artistic, Institutional, Political and Moral-Ethical Legacy of Sufism and Its Relevance in Today's World

In the course of its long history, Sufism has accumulated a broad array of social, political, moral-ethical, institutional and cultural assets that can be used to promote cross-cultural and ecumenical conversations and mutual understanding that, hopefully, will make this world a better place. Here is a list of some of these assets and their possible uses:

1. From the first decades of the nineteenth century onward, the rich repertoire of sophistical mystical poetry has attracted the attention of numerous literary connoisseurs and spiritually "oriented"[215] individuals in the West and Russia. Due, in part, to the

[214] For some challenges faced by educators who teach Islamic subjects, see Ernst, 2018 and Knysh, 2022b.
[215] The pun is intended.

European fascination with Sufi poetry, in Iran, Central Asia, India and some parts of the Arab world, Sufi poetry composed by local poets over the centuries has become a major source of unique cultural and national identity, and a wellspring of inspiration for present-day litterateurs, artists, and public figures.[216] Behind the popularity of Sufi poets (or poets who have used Sufi symbolism) among some members of the Western societies always lurks the danger of commodification and profanation (especially, de-Islamization) to pander to the cosmopolitan tastes of Western readers.[217] Nevertheless, because spiritually focused people around the world have similar tastes and experiences, translations of Sufi poetry can become a meeting place of different minds and cultures. The same applies to Sufi music and dance that have been part of international musical scene since the early twentieth century (Ernst, 1997, 179–198; Irwin, 2011, 119; Frembgen, 2012; Sedgwick, 2017, 158–159, 161–163, 179, 223, 227–128; Brigaglia, 2019; Jankowsky, 2021; Feldman, 2022; Rodriguez, 2023).

2. The high-moral precepts and rules of proper behavior (*adab*) formulated and promoted by Sufi leaders among their followers and ordinary believers serve as an important source for modern-day individuals anxious to develop their human potential and achieve moral-ethical improvement regardless of their religious and ideological convictions and ethnic backgrounds.[218] Therefore, the rich and variegated legacy of Sufi *adab* can also become a foundation for ecumenical dialogues around the importance of maintaining high moral-ethical standards and preservation of society from self-centered individualism, cynicism, and moral indifference or corruption.
3. The unitive (monistic) metaphysics and epistemology of Sufism and other esoteric-mystical trends in Islam (especially, in Shi'ism) resonate with similar monistic-unitive trends in other cultures, especially with Jewish and Christian Neoplatonism and Buddhism. These commonalities can serve as a suitable starting point for theological and ecumenical conversations across religions and cultures. Such conversations are already attested in case studies from the Balkans and Russia (Raudvere, 2019, 243–247; Knysh, 2023, 174–179). In the case of Neoplatonism, doctrinal affinities also call for comparisons between Near Eastern religions that drank from the same Greek sources (Netton, 1982 and 2011; Ebstein, 2014, 21; Adamson, 2016; Sedgwick, 2017, 15–68).
4. Sufi patterns of fellowship and communal living have universal significance and can be fruitfully explored in conjunction with Christian and Buddhist monastic traditions. This line of academic inquiry has already begun but needs further elaboration.[219] It may become a basis for an interconfessional conversations between Christian or Buddhist monks, Indian gurus, and Sufi teachers.
5. Sufi mausoleums, shrines, former and active lodges (sing. *qubba; mashhad; darih; dargah, zawiya; ribat; khaneqah*) can be included into tourist itineraries during which competent guides, custodians of these sites, or local historians and ethnographers could explain their significance to visitors, thereby contributing to a better understanding by non-Muslims and Muslims alike of popular Muslim religiosity, psychology and culture(s). In some areas, such as India, the Balkans and the Caucasus, sacred sites

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[216] Knysh, 1996; Ernst, 1997, 147–178; Lewis, 2000; Adonis, 2005; Frembgen, 2012; Spadola, 2014; Bouasria 2015; Ahmed, 2016, 26–57; Sedgwick, 2017, 114–121; D'Hubert and Papas, 2018; Soileau, 2018; Irwin, 2019; Golestaneh, 2023; O'Malley 2023; Talattof, 2023.

[217] For critical discussions of this phenomenon, see Ernst, 1997, 170–173 and 2018, 396–401 Sedgwick, 2017, 119–125; Ali, 2017; Irwin 2019.

[218] These rules (Arab. *adab*), which for many Sufis constitute the heart and soul of Sufism, are discussed in Chiabotti et al., 2017; Orfali et al., 2022; cf. Bouasria 2015, 37–38.

[219] e See, for example, Chattopadhyaya, 1993; Meier, 1999, 335–347; Blackburn and Feener, 2018; and Wieser 2020.

belonging to different religious communities are located close to one another, demonstrating the possibility of their peaceful coexistence and mutual respect.[220] Guided visits to such places may help visitors to appreciate the sense of religious tolerance and mutual understanding that existed among different religious communities sharing the same territory.

6. Sufi lodges often serve as spiritual clinics and refuges for people unable to find their place in society or deeply traumatized by some events in their personal lives or by social and political cataclysms. The ability of Sufi shaykhs to heal and console such individuals is an important asset that may be used by local municipal authorities alongside modern methods of psychological help (Knysh, 2010, 288; Zarcone and Hobart, 2013; Mijares, 2016; Bouasria, 2015, 34–38; Pratt Ewing and Corbett, 2020; Jankowsky, 2021; Pankov et al., 2022; Selim, 2024).
7. Today as in the past, Sufi institutions can and do serve as an effective means of empowering women in patriarchal societies (Hoffman, 1995; Helminski, 2003; Pemberton, 2010; Sultanova, 2011; Diaz, 2015; Haeri, 2021; Jankowsky, 2021; Kuehn, 2023; Rodriguez, 2023, 66–77). This potential must not be overlooked by state authorities and civic organizations seeking to emancipate Muslim women from the outdated patriarchal and male-centered ethos. Using examples from Sufi history to promote pro-women agendas is more effective than transplanting feminist ideas (and ideals) from the West that is often associated with colonial oppression and post-colonial exploitation of Muslims.
8. Finally, colorful Sufi outfits might inspire haut couture fashion designers to introduce new, exotic elements into their artistic creations. Recent studies have provided a gallery of vivid descriptions and illustrations of Sufi costumes and paraphernalia along with explanations of their symbolic significance.[221]

[220] For such inter-confessional shrines, see Zeleke, 2015; Darieva et. al., 2018; Snehi, 2019; Bin Ibad, 2019; Pratt Ewing and Corbett, 2020; Khan, 2023.
[221] Frembgen, 1999; Papas and Zarcone, 2025 (forthcoming).

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