

Chapter III

THE DEFINITION OF MYSTICISM

The purpose of this chapter is to define what we mean by the term, mystical state of consciousness. A typology of basic characteristics of mystical experience in the broad sense is developed. The broad sense means a basic typology which is universal and holds true for mystical experience in different cultures and religions. Before defining the typology in detail, we shall discuss mystical experience with regard both to its relationship to religious experience and to the universality of its occurrence.

Mystical Experience in General

The Relationship between Mystical Experience and Religious Experience

A simple identification of religious experience and mystical experience fails to take into account the many definitions of religion. Religions vary in their emphasis upon mysticism, although there is a tendency, especially among psychologists of religion who have been interested in the dramatic and intense phenomena of the mystical experi-

ence, to make the mystical element the most important characteristic of religion.¹

All religious experience is not necessarily mystical in the sense of our definition of mystical experience as given below. Pratt, for example, divides religion into four kinds or aspects, of which the mystical is only one, the other three being the traditional, the rational, and the practical or moral.² Even when quite emotionally meaningful, participation in a particular religion by such practices as observance of religious laws, intellectual belief in a certain creed or theology, institutional membership, and attendance at rites and rituals, may not result in or be the product

¹William James reflects this attitude by his preference for religion which is an "acute fever" rather than a "dull habit" (op. cit., p. 8).

²J. B. Pratt, The Religious Consciousness: A Psychological Study (New York: Macmillan, 1921), p. 14. Compare a similar discussion of the elements of religion by R. M. Thouless, An Introduction to the Psychology of Religion (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), pp. 12-15. Pratt includes all four divisions in his definition of religion, which is as follows: "the serious and social attitude of individuals or communities toward the power or powers which they conceive as having ultimate control over their interests or destinies" (op. cit., p. 2). Note Thouless's similar definition of religion: "a felt practical relationship with what is believed in as a superhuman being or beings" which are "felt to be greater than man or may be looked up to by him" (op. cit., p. 4).

of mystical experience.

On the other hand, all mystical experience is not necessarily religious. Again, of course, much depends on how one chooses to define religion. If one makes the concept of a "personal God" central in the definition of religion, many forms of mystical experience could not be considered religious. The phenomena of mystical experience, for example, may occur outside the framework of any formal religion, with no reference to any articulated theology.

The problem is by-passed or merely indicated, rather than solved, by broadening the definition of religion to include any experience which would qualify as mystical by our criteria. Tillich, for example, considers as religious an experience which gives ultimate meaning, structure, and aim to human experience or in which one is concerned ultimately.³ Wach gives a similar definition of religious experiences as a total and intense existential response to what is experienced as Ultimate Reality (i.e., nothing finite)

³Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), Vol. I, pp. 11-14. It is Tillich's opinion that what is truly ultimate can be best symbolized by Jesus who is called the Christ, in Christian theology (pp. 15-18).

and adds the practical criterion that the experience must compel to action.⁴

Rather than attempting to define religion and religious experience in order to differentiate precisely the relationship between religious and mystical experience, we have indicated the nature of the problem and the error of loosely speaking of religious and mystical experience as if the two were always synonymous. Our attention will be focused upon the nature of the mystical experience, whether the experience be religious or not.

The Universality of the Characteristics of Mystical Experience

Many of the well-known commentators on and analysts of mystical experience have made the presupposition that there are certain fundamental characteristics of the experience itself which are universal and are not restricted to any particular religion or culture, although particular cultural, historical and religious conditions may influence

⁴Joachim Wach, The Comparative Study of Religions, (Columbia Paperback Edition; New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), pp. 30-36. See also his important work, Types of Religious Experience: Christian and Non-Christian (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), pp. 32-33.

both the understanding and the description of the essential mystical experience.

James lists four common or universal characteristics of mystical experience: (1) ineffability, or the feeling that the experience cannot adequately be expressed with words; (2) noetic quality, or the certainty that the knowledge gained as insight is true; (3) transiency, or the impermanence of the mystical state; (4) passivity, or the feeling that one is not acting but, rather, being acted upon.⁵ His examples range from persons with no particular religious allegiance to monks and nuns, but the cases in his series possess these common characteristics. Pratt provides a broad and universal definition of mysticism as a consciousness of a Beyond, or the sense or feeling of the presence of a being or reality, via other means than sense perception or reason.⁶ He distinguishes between mild and extreme types. The mild is characterized by (1) ineffability, (2) noetic certainty, especially of the presence of the Beyond, and (3) joy and calm.⁷ The extreme

⁵James, op. cit., pp. 371-372.

⁶Pratt, op. cit., pp. 337-341.

⁷Ibid., pp. 346-362.

type is exemplified by the unitive state of ecstasy which includes the phenomena of (1) suddenness, (2) passivity, (3) loss of sense impressions of the outside world, (4) noetic insight or knowledge of acquaintance which combines feeling and cognitive intuition, (5) ineffability, (6) immediate intuition of the Beyond, or God's presence, and (7) intense, ecstatic joy and love.⁸ He takes his examples from both Eastern and Western sources.

Bucke has collected cases from various times and cultures with the following universal criteria of "cosmic consciousness": (1) suddenness or instantaneousness, (2) photism or subjective light, (3) moral elevation; with an emotion of joy, assurance, and triumph, (4) ineffable intellectual illumination, (5) sense of immortality, (6) loss of the fear of death, (7) loss of the sense of sin, (8) usual occurrence between the ages of 30-40, and (9) added charm to the personality after the experience.⁹

Underhill gives four universal tests which must

⁸Ibid., pp. 394-429.

⁹R. M. Bucke, Cosmic Consciousness: A Study in the Evolution of the Human Mind (Philadelphia: Innes & Sons, 1901), pp. 60-62.

be satisfied by any example of true mysticism and which penetrate behind the particular descriptive symbolism employed.¹⁰ For her mysticism must: (1) be an organic life-process in which the whole self is involved in an active, practical, and intense experience (this in contrast to an intellectual opinion which can be merely passive and theoretical), (2) have a wholly transcendental and spiritual aim (i.e., the mystic is interested in a realm of ultimate reality, the changeless One, beyond ordinary, everyday reality); (3) know this One not merely as the Reality of all that is, but also as a living personal object of Love which draws one's whole being under the guidance of the heart--love is defined as the driving power and deep-seated desire of the soul toward its Source and is "the ultimate expression of the self's most vital tendencies";¹¹ (4) have a Living Union with this One involving the liberation of a new, or rather latent, form of consciousness which is called "ecstasy" or better, the Unitive State.

¹⁰E. Underhill, Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness (New York: Meridian, 1955), pp. 81-94.

¹¹Ibid., p. 85.

Clark also makes the assumption that there are universal characteristics of the mystical state of consciousness. He lists and comments upon those mentioned by James and Underhill and adds (1) that "the language of mysticism makes extensive use of figures of speech and paradox,"¹² (2) that the mystics "regard what the ordinary man considers the Real as the Unreal, and what the ordinary person considers the Unreal as the Real"¹³ and (3) that the mystic has a "tendency toward extravagance in behavior" which expresses his "desire for integration of the psychic life."¹⁴

Johnson universally defines mystical experience as the state of illumination in which the sense of separateness, of individuality, is to a great degree lost and which has positive significance, value, and certainty for the experiencer.¹⁵ Such experiences are divided into the slighter and the more profound types. He finds

¹²W. H. Clark, The Psychology of Religion: An Introduction to Religious Experience and Behavior (New York: Macmillan, 1955), pp. 81-94.

¹³Ibid., p. 273.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 274-275.

¹⁵R. C. Johnson, The Imprisoned Splendor: An Approach to Reality, based upon the significance of data drawn from the fields of Natural Science, Psychological Research and Mystical Experience (New York: Harper, 1953), pp. 300-302.

the following four common features of the slighter type:

(a) The illumination or radiance which is seen to infuse everything 'without' is felt to come from 'within.' (b) The sense of belonging to a new and greater unity is always felt. That which is seen forms a part of a larger whole (c) The emotional tones are always supremely attractive: pulsing light, livingness, joy, peace, happy wonder. Through them, and interwoven, is an enormously enhanced sense of the supreme values, and the most adequate description usually seems to the experiencer to be a 'revelation of God.' (d) Words fail to express the experience, and the terms used are known to be only symbols and analogies.¹⁶

He lists the universal features of the more profound type in two groups:

1. Those who have had the more profound type of mystical experiences, no matter in what age or to what race or creed they have belonged, tell us the same fundamental things: the sense of separateness vanishes into an all-embracing unity, there is certain knowledge of immortality, there is an enormously enhanced appreciation of values, and there is knowledge that at the heart of the universe is Joy and Beauty. This unanimity of testimony is quite remarkable.

2. Those who have known such an experience are always profoundly impressed by its significance as a revelation of truth. There is from then onwards, not the satisfaction of an intellectual answer to life's ultimate questions, but a serenity born of the knowledge that all is well, and that the secret purpose of the universe is good beyond all telling.¹⁷

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 324-325. ¹⁷Ibid., pp. 320-321.

Johnson quotes experiences which are described in traditional religious language as well as those which do not mention orthodox religious symbols yet still have the universal phenomenology covered by his description.

Walker considers the mystical consciousness a state of Universal Consciousness which is a higher level than the usual self-consciousness of everyday existence. Characteristics include an intuitive, experiential realization that "the small individual self has always been a part of the great Universal Self," a "melting away of the individual 'self' into 'boundless being'"¹⁸ and "a world completely outside of time."¹⁹ His chief examples are Edward Carpenter, Wordsworth, Sri Aurobindo, R. M. Bucke, Jacob Boehme, H. G. Wells, Plotinus, Meister Eckhart, and his own personal experience. His quote from Ouspensky demonstrates his own presupposition and that of the other writers mentioned above:

If we follow neither the religious nor the scientific views, but try to compare descriptions of the mystical experiences of people of entirely different races, of different periods and of different religions,

¹⁸Walker, op. cit., p. 40. ¹⁹Ibid., p. 41.

we shall find a striking resemblance amongst these descriptions, which can in no case be explained by similarity of preparation, or by any resemblances in ways of thinking and feeling. In mystical states, utterly different people, in utterly different conditions, learn one and the same thing, and what is still more striking, in mystical states there is no difference of religion. All the experiences are absolutely identical: the differences can be only in the language and in the form of discipline.²⁰

Although Suzuki does not make the claim that the satori experience is the same as other mystical states of consciousness, his description has many of the same universal characteristics given by other writers on mysticism: (1) irrationality which defies intellectualization, conceptualization, or logical explanation, (2) intuitive insight, (3) authoritativeness or finality, (4) affirmation or positive acceptance of all things that exist, (5) sense of the beyond or a melting away into something indescribable and of quite a different order than that to which one is accustomed, (6) impersonal tone, (7) feeling of exaltation, (8) momentariness--abruptness and transitoriness.²¹

²⁰Ibid., pp. 92-93, quoting from P. D. Ouspensky, A New Model of the Universe (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1937), p. 51.

²¹D. T. Suzuki, Zen Buddhism: Selected Writings of D. T. Suzuki, ed. William Barrett (Doubleday Anchor Edition; Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1956), pp. 103-108.

W. T. Stace in Mysticism and Philosophy has surveyed the mystical literature to make his case for the universality of the basic phenomena of mystical experience. He has given examples from the writings of those who have personally experienced mystical states of consciousness to support what he calls the universal core of mystical experience. He has distinguished between introvertive and extrovertive types which both "culminate in perception of, and union with, a Unity or One though this end is reached through different means in the two cases."²² He has listed seven characteristics of each type but five of the seven are the same. These five common elements are:

- (1) Sense of objectivity or reality, (comparable to James' noetic quality which leads to certainty of the objective reality of what is learned in the experience).
- (2) Feelings of blessedness, joy, peace, happiness, satisfaction, etc.
- (3) Feeling that what is apprehended is holy, divine, and sacred.
- (4) Paradoxicality.
- (5) Alleged by mystics to be ineffable.²³

The introvertive type as the name suggests is

²²Stace, op. cit., p. 62. ²³Ibid., pp. 13-132.

inner-directed and its essence is the experience of undifferentiated unity which is "...the Unitary Consciousness, from which all the multiplicity of sensuous or conceptual or other empirical content has been excluded, so that there remains only a void and empty unity."²⁴ The Unitary Consciousness is by definition nonspatial and nontemporal. The extrovertive type is outer-directed and is experienced through the physical senses in or through the multiplicity of objects. The essential characteristic for this type is "...the unifying vision expressed abstractly by the formula 'All is One.'" The One is apprehended "...as being an inner subjectivity in all things, described variously as life, or consciousness, or a living Presence."²⁵ Spatiality is paradoxically preserved, but the normal sense of time may be lost.

The extrovertive and introvertive are not mutually exclusive and may occur in the same mystic.²⁶ Stace shows how Meister Eckhart is an example of this.²⁷ Brinton's study of Jacob Boehme supports Stace's point. Boehme harmonized the in-going and out-going wills by going from

²⁴Ibid., p. 110.

²⁵Ibid., p. 79.

²⁶Ibid., pp. 63-65.

²⁷Ibid., pp. 98-99.

one goal to the other and back in a kind of dynamic equilibrium.²⁸ Stace maintains that although the extrovertive and the introvertive One are experienced in different ways, they are identical.²⁹

Primary Experience versus Interpretation

After a general discussion of the problem of the universal core Stace quotes the writings of representative mystics from a wide variety of cultures to substantiate the extrovertive and introvertive types and each of the common characteristics. He always tries to reach behind individual interpretations which he feels are conditioned by various theological and intellectual frames of reference, to the raw experience itself. Again and again he emphasizes his distinction between primary phenomenology and interpretations conditioned by culture. He feels that his characteristics of the universal core are the basic phenomenology of mystical experience stripped

²⁸H. H. Brinton, The Mystic Will: Based on a Study of the Philonophy of Jacob Boehme (New York: Macmillan, 1930), p. 21.

²⁹Ibid., p. 152, 273-274.

bare of interpretation.³⁰

Stace's distinction between the primary experience and the interpretation is either stated or implied by other writers who attempt to abstract general characteristics of the mystical experience from the phenomenological accounts thereof. Some examples are as follows:

Such symbolism as this--a living symbolism of experience and action, as well as of statement--seems almost essential to mystical expression. The mind must employ some device of the kind if its transcendental perceptions--wholly unrelated as they are to the phenomena with which intellect is able to deal--are ever to be grasped by the surface consciousness. Sometimes the symbol and the perception which it represents become fused in that consciousness, and the mystic's experience then presents itself to him as 'visions' or 'voices' which we must look upon as the garment he has himself provided to veil that Reality upon which no man may look and live. The nature of this garment will be largely conditioned by his temperament-- as in Rolle's evident bias toward music, St. Catherine of Genoa's leaning toward the abstract conceptions of fire and light--and also by his theological education and environment. Cases in point are the highly dogmatic visions and auditions of St. Gertrude, Suso, St. Catherine of Siena, the Blessed Angel of Foligno; above all of St. Teresa, whose marvellous self-analyses provide the classic account of these attempts of the mind to translate transcendental

³⁰See especially pp. 62-133, 153-182.

intuitions into concepts with which it can deal.
(underlinings mine)³¹

We must, however, be careful to distinguish between the content of the intuition which takes place during the ecstasy, and the truths which the mystic comes to believe as a result of reflecting upon his experience.³²

I recognize the fact that those who have enjoyed mystical experiences are likely to describe them afterwards in terms of their own religion, and that this entails their making use of the terminology and the beliefs of the religion in which they happen to have been brought up.³³

This mystical experience, in its essential aspects as experience, is pretty much the same through the centuries and in all lands. What accounts for the historical types is, therefore, not the nature of the experience as such, but the prevailing theological or metaphysical conceptions of the time and place, which color the expectation of the given mystic, and form the background setting through which he interprets his illumination.³⁴

The fact is that the mystical feeling of enlargement, union, and emancipation has no specific intellectual content whatever of its own. It is capable of forming matrimonial alliances with material furnished by the most diverse philosophies and theologies, provided only they can find a place in their framework for its peculiar emotional mood.³⁵

³¹Underhill, op. cit., pp. 78-79. See also her Essentials of Mysticism (Dutton Everyman Paperback Edition; New York: E. P. Dutton, 1960), pp. 4, 18-19.

³²Pratt, op. cit., p. 407. ³³Walker, op. cit., pp. 156-157.

³⁴Rufus Jones, The Radiant Life (New York: Macmillan, 1944), p. 100.

³⁵James, op. cit., pp. 416-417.

As far as the psychology of satori is considered, a sense of the Beyond is all we can say about it; to call this the Beyond, the Absolute, or God, or a Person is to go further than the experience itself and to plunge into a theology or metaphysics.³⁶

It is recognized that not all writers on mysticism accept the presupposition that mystical experience has a universal core which is basically the same but which is interpreted differently according to time, place, personality, and culture. We are not speaking of Rudolph Otto who in Mysticism, East and West might seem to take the position that mysticism is not fundamentally one and the same, and therefore, that the essence of the experience is not independent of circumstances and conditions. For example, he says:

It is still very generally held that mysticism, however diverse the sources from which it springs is fundamentally one and the same, and as such is beyond time and space, independent of circumstances and conditions. But this seems to me to contradict the facts. Rather, I hold that, in spite of the similarity of terms, which can be surprising enough, there is a diversity in mystical experience which is not less than that of religious feeling in general.³⁷

³⁶Suzuki, op. cit., p. 106.

³⁷R. Otto, Mysticism East and West: A Comparative Analysis of the Nature of Mysticism (Living Age Edition; New York: Meridian, 1957), p. 139. See also pp. 162, 165, 168, 206.

The diversity which he emphasizes here is the variety of expression or interpretation. For example; he distinguishes between the soul-mysticism of Yoga and Buddhism and the God-mysticism (mysticism of union) of Theism.³⁸ He points to subtle differences between Eckhart and Sankara in use of metaphors and ethical content reflected in doctrines of salvation, justification, sanctification, and grace as well as in valuation of the world.³⁹ He devotes the longest part of his discussion, however, to a comparison of their similarities, both in regard to their experiences and to their metaphysical speculations.

In terms of Stace's position, these differences are mainly differences of interpretation or intellectual expression rather than of the primary experience itself. In fact, Otto also makes this distinction when he gives the conclusions of his study:

We maintain that in mysticism there are indeed strong primal impulses working in the human soul which as such are completely unaffected by differences of climate, of geographical position or of race. These show in their similarity an inner relationship of types of human experience and spiritual life which is truly astonishing. Secondly, we

³⁸Ibid., pp. 142-146.

³⁹Ibid., pp. 181-211.

contend that it is false to maintain that mysticism is always just mysticism, is always and everywhere one and the same quantity. Rather, there are within mysticism many varieties of expression which are just as great as the variations in any other sphere of spiritual life, be it in religion generally, or in ethics or in art. (underlining mine)⁴⁰

Many of Stace's categories are illustrated as basic to the experience of both Eckhart and Sankara even when Otto is trying to show their metaphysical differences. For example, the introvertive and extrovertive types are discussed by Otto as "the two ways: the mysticism of introspection and the mysticism of unifying vision" which interpenetrate and become one in both Sankara and Eckhart.⁴¹ Both describe an experience of unity with a losing of self and a submergence into the absolute, unqualified, one divinity.⁴² The category of objectivity and reality is illustrated by the discussion of their common intuitive mystical knowledge.⁴³ Both hold to a metaphysical theism which resulted from a personal experience of the holy, sacred, and divine.⁴⁴ Both give evidence of the experience of the exalted feeling of mystical, numinous rapture, although Otto feels that

⁴⁰Ibid., p. xvi.

⁴¹Ibid., pp. 38-69.

⁴²Ibid., p. 166.

⁴³Ibid., pp. 35-37.

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 103-136.

Eckhart also paradoxically emphasizes humility as result of the experience of numinous majesty.⁴⁵

The Otto of The Idea of the Holy is closer to Stace's approach because here Otto describes the phenomenology of what he calls the "characteristic notes of mysticism in all its forms, however otherwise various in content."⁴⁶ The universal features he lists are (1) annihilation of the self or rejection of the delusion of selfhood by means of a consciousness of the transcendent as the sole and entire reality⁴⁷ and (2) "Identification in different degrees of completeness, of the personal self with the transcendent Reality. . . the Something that is at once supreme in power and reality and wholly non-rational."⁴⁸

R. C. Zaehner clearly does not agree with Stace's argument for the universal core and in Mysticism, Sacred and Profane argues against such a view throughout.⁴⁹

⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 181-182.

⁴⁶R. 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 (Galaxy Edition; New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), pp. 21-22.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 21

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 22

⁴⁹The first part of the final chapter gives a clear statement of his position (op. cit., pp. 198-199).

Zaehner goes one step beyond Otto's analysis by stating: "But there is not only a difference in tone between Eckhart and Sankara, which Otto himself fully brought out; there is obviously a fundamental difference in the experiences which must have formed the basis of the two men's writings" (underlining mine).⁵⁰ In his analysis of mystical experience Zaehner distinguishes three types which he insists are quite distinct: (1) the pan-en-henic (all-in-one) experience found especially in nature mystics, (2) the Atman-Brahman union of the individual self with the Absolute (in this experience the phenomenal world is superceded), and (3) Christian theistic mystical union with God by love (in this experience the self remains a distinct entity).⁵¹

Zaehner admits his own Roman Catholic bias.⁵² He implies that Christian theistic mysticism at its best is true supernatural union with God, whereas the Atman-Brahman experience, although theistic, reaches only self-isolation in rest and emptiness within the self. For him the pan-en-henic experience is definitely inferior to either of the other two, because to admit that nature mysticism is a form of union with God would be pantheism and would identify

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 182. ⁵¹Ibid., pp. 28-29. ⁵²Ibid., p.xii.

God with the evil in nature.⁵³

The pan-en-henic and Atman-Brahman types correspond to Stace's extrovertive and introvertive experiences of unity with the One, although he would maintain that the same One or Absolute was being experienced in both types.⁵⁴ Stace argues that the Atman-Brahman and Christian theistic types represent the same basic experience and that culture and individual conditioning account for the apparent differences.⁵⁵ Here again Stace insists that interpretation not be confused with the primary experience.

No one would deny that there are many varieties of expression and interpretations of mystical experience. This study is not an attempt to settle the debate as to whether there is a universal core of primary experience interpreted differently because of differences in cultural situation and individual conditioning or whether there are many varieties of expression and interpretation because different cultural situations and individual conditioning actually produce different experiences which have no universal, basic core of identity. The former position is taken as our presupposition on the basis of the work of

⁵³Ibid., p. 200.

⁵⁴Stace, op. cit., p. 152.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 97 (footnote 44).

Stace and the others mentioned' above.

As a tool of evaluation for the empirical data from drug experiences, a typology of the phenomenology of mystical experience is developed below. Stace's position has been used as a presupposition in two ways. First, his list of the basic characteristics of the universal core of mystical experience has been used as a framework which has been enriched and expanded from other thinkers who have dealt with the same problem. Second, his distinction between primary experience and the interpretation of this experience points toward an ideal of phenomenological analysis. The reservation must be added that perhaps it is impossible ever to reach pure uninterpreted experience.

Phenomenological Typology of Mystical States of Consciousness

Category I: Unity

The category of unity is divided into internal and external types, which are different ways of experiencing an undifferentiated unity. The major difference is that internal unity is experienced through an "inner world" within the experiencer, and external unity is perceived with the senses through the external world outside the experiencer.⁵⁶ The

⁵⁶Internal and external unity correspond to Stace's introvertive unitary consciousness and extrovertive unifying vision, respectively (op. cit., pp. 63-133).

experiences themselves are phenomenologically different. Both are experiences of unity and therefore are listed as subcategories.

Internal Unity

The essence of internal unity is the direct experience of an undifferentiated unity. This unity comes with the loss of the multiplicity of all particular sense impressions. There is a fading or melting away into pure awareness with no empirical distinctions or particular content except the awareness of the unity itself.⁵⁷ One is beyond the self-consciousness of sense impressions or empirical ego, yet one is not unconscious, but very much aware of the undifferentiated unity. There is a loss of the sense of finite selfhood and personal separate identity, but experience is not extinguished: it has as its content the pure awareness of the empty, yet full and complete unity. During the experience there is a dissolution of individuality with no internal or external distinctions, yet the person is aware of the experience.²⁸ After the experience such a phenomenon can be remembered. Such a non-empirical, inner experience is by definition

⁵⁷Stace, *op. cit.*, pp. 86-87.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 111-123, 245.

non-temporal and non-spatial.⁵⁹

These phenomenological descriptions contain several paradoxes which Stace maintains are necessary in order to give as adequate a representation in words as is possible of an experience which the mystics allege to be ineffable. He calls the loss of the empirical ego with the retention of awareness of the unity one example.⁶⁰ The undifferentiated unity itself is called empty, yet full and complete; is considered both impersonal and personal; is experienced both as totally inactive, static, and motionless and as dynamic, creative, and active. Stace calls this the vacuum-plenum paradox referring to the negative and positive aspects respectively. These aspects are not mutually exclusive, but one side may be emphasized more than the other due to culture, personality, and intellectual frame of reference. Stace gives examples from representative mystics of the world.⁶¹

Such a discussion of paradox involves the question of interpretation. Interpretations are handles with which to get a hold on and deal with the experience conceptually.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 110.

⁶⁰Ibid., pp. 244-245.

⁶¹Ibid., pp. 163-178.

We are interested chiefly in the universal core of primary experience. Some mention, however, of the various interpretations which different mystics have used to integrate their experiences into their philosophies of life or theological frameworks is necessary in order to recognize the basic experience more easily.

According to Stace, the closest to the pure experience of internal unity with no interpretation added is the Hinayana Buddhist experience of Nirvana which is revealed and participated in when the stream of ordinary conscious states is gradually stopped. Nirvana "transcends both the individual consciousness and the space-time world."⁶² Hinayana Buddhism stops with this experience of pure undifferentiated unity and makes no interpretation of what this experience is other than to call it Nirvana. The mystical traditions of all the other higher cultures go at least one step further and interpret this unity as the pure ego or the unity of the self. The Samkhya, Yoga, and Jaina philosophies stop here, but other cultures then push the interpretation and identify the pure undifferentiated unity which is reached after transcendence of the usual sense of self or empirical ego

⁶²Ibid., p. 127.

with something greater-than-self or all-encompassing.⁶³

Suzuki describes the satori or enlightenment experience of Zen Buddhism as a dissolution of the usual sense of individuality by melting "away into something indescribable, something which is of a quite different order from what I am accustomed to."⁶⁴ It is this something of a quite different order which has received many names. For example, for Tennyson, "individuality itself seemed to dissolve and fade away into boundless being." (underlining mine)⁶⁵ For Koestler, "the I ceases to exist because it has, by a kind of mental osmosis, established communication with, and been dissolved in the universal pool."⁶⁶ J. A. Symonds, the nineteenth century man of letters, called this underlying or "essential consciousness" "a pure absolute, abstract Self."⁶⁷ Plotinus described the state of simple unity as a merging with the Supreme or the One.⁶⁸ It is Stace's opinion that the

⁶³Ibid., pp. 123-127. ⁶⁴Suzuki, op. cit., p. 105.

⁶⁵Stace (op. cit., p. 119) cites this example which James (op. cit., p. 374) quoted from Tennyson's letter to Mr. B. P. Blood (no reference given).

⁶⁶A. Koestler, The Invisible Writing (New York: Macmillan, 1954), p. 352, quoted in Stace, op. cit., pp. 120-121.

⁶⁷Stace, op. cit., p. 91, uses this example from James, op. cit., p. 376, who quotes it from H. F. Brown, J.A. Symonds, A Biography (London, 1895), pp. 29-31.

⁶⁸Stace, op. cit., pp. 104-105, citing from Plotinus, Works (trans. by Stephen MacKenna; New York Medical Society, n.d.), Enneads VI, IX, XI.

Hinduism of the Upanishads and the advaita Vedanta identify the pure ego with the Universal or Cosmic Self (Brahman or the Absolute)⁶⁹ and that Mahayana Buddhism uses the concept of Sunyata or the pure Void for the same basic experience.⁷⁰

According to Stace, orthodox Islam, Christianity and Judaism have emphasized the transcendence of God and condemned pantheism or identity with God as heresy. Their mystical traditions reflect this emphasis and regard the experience of unity as something less than identity with God.⁷¹ In the Sufi mysticism of Islam, fana (passing away or melting away into the Infinite) is correlative to baga, "which means the survival in God of the soul which has experience fana."⁷² Orthodox Christian mysticism uses such terms as union with God, the Divine Unity, or spiritual marriage, but is careful to qualify such statements with the explanation that "the individual soul does not wholly pass away into God, but remains a distinct entity."⁷³ Stace regards Judaism as the least mystical of all the great world religions. Judaism

⁶⁹Stace, op. cit., p. 120. ⁷⁰Ibid., pp. 107-109.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 113.

⁷²Ibid., p. 115. Stace uses as his authority, R. A. Nicholson, Studies in Islamic Mysticism (London, n.d.), p. 66.

⁷³Stace, op. cit., p. 114.

insists on the greatest gulf between creature and Creator, yet does not rule out relationship between the individual and God. The Haisidic mystics are closest in phenomenological description to an experience of internal unity, but Stace does not consider them the major trend in Judaism.⁷⁴

With the example of Martin Buber, the Jewish philosopher, we come back to the basic experience, free from interpretation.

Now from my own unforgettable experience I know well that there is a state in which the bonds of the personal nature of life seem to have fallen away and we experience an undivided unity." (underlining mine)⁷⁵

Stace points out how Euber at first interpreted this experience as "union with the primal being or the God-head," but that later he repudiated this interpretation and chose to understand his experience as "the basic unity of my own soul . . . certainly beyond the reach of all the multiplicity it has hitherto received from life . . . though not in the least beyond individuation . . . and not 'the soul of the All.'" Such a position shows similarities with Hinayana Buddhism in the basic phenomenology of the experience and

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 157-158.

⁷⁵Martin Buber, Between Man and Man (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1947), pp. 24-25, cited by Stace, op. cit., p. 155.

the refusal to interpret the experience beyond the self. Buber's Jewish background may well be the reason for his repudiation of his initial interpretation, as Stace suggests, but his basic experience of undivided unity still remains.⁷⁶

Various metaphorical expressions occur in descriptions of this state of internal unity and can be classified according to which side of the vacuum-plenum paradox they belong. The vacuum or negative side includes such nouns as emptiness, darkness, nothingness, void, abyss, silence, stillness, nakedness, nudity, or desert; and such adjectives as contentless, imageless, numberless, formless, wayless, fathomless, soundless, spaceless, or timeless. The plenum or positive side includes such nouns as fullness, completeness, brightness, light, oneness, perfection, or pureness; and such adjectives as harmonious, infinite, limitless, or boundless. Both sides are needed to give a complete picture of the basic experience and sometimes they are paradoxically joined in the same metaphor.⁷⁷

Other writers on mystical experience besides Stace

⁷⁶Stace, op. cit., pp. 156-157, quoting from Buber, op. cit., pp. 24-25.

⁷⁷Stace, op. cit., pp. 299-301.

have described the phenomena of internal unity as an important characteristic of the mystical state.

The central aspect of it (genuine mystical experience) is the fusion of the self into a larger undifferentiated whole.⁷⁸

Underhill says the following in her account of the state of mystical ecstasy:

In this experience the departmental activities of thought and feeling, the consciousness of I-hood, of space and time--all that belongs to the World of Becoming and our own place therein--are suspended. The vitality which we are accustomed to split amongst these various things, is gathered up to form a state of 'pure apprehension': a vivid intuition of--or if you like conjunction with--the Transcendent.⁷⁹

Self-mergence, then--that state of transcendence in which . . . the barriers of selfhood (are) abolished . . . is the secret of ecstasy.⁸⁰

Others do not give as precise a phenomenological description as Stace, but the similarity is apparent. Pratt describes the unity as a state of consciousness in which the outside world is shut out and the senses are closed.⁸¹

⁷⁸Rufus Jones, The Inner Life (New York: Macmillan, 1916), p. 185.

⁷⁹Underhill, Mysticism, p. 367.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 373.

⁸¹Pratt, op. cit., pp. 396-397.

Johnson states that "the highest mystical experiences show that the Spirit of man, his true Self, lies beyond this (usual sense of selfhood) and is normally veiled from the Ego . . . The essence of mysticism is the glimpsing of the true Self by the Ego." In the highest state when all the "veils" are stripped away, "there is complete blissful unity in the One, the Impersonal, the Absolute."⁸² Walker's mention of "the melting away of the individual 'self' into 'boundless being'" (underlining mine) is similar to the passages quoted from Suzuki and Tennyson above.⁸³

Stace classifies the experiences of Tennyson and Koestler (see quotes above) as incomplete examples of internal unity because they did not completely experience undifferentiated unity. There was not a total loss of extraneous sense impressions or complete certainty of the loss of individuality, and therefore, not truly pure awareness.⁸⁴ Such a distinction is an attempt to be very precise, but if some of the mystics which Stace uses as examples of the complete experience could have been questioned as Koestler was, perhaps their experiences, too, would have

⁸²Johnson, op. cit., pp. 331-332.

⁸³Walker, op. cit., p. 40.

⁸⁴Stace, op. cit., pp. 119-123.

to be categorized as incomplete. However, this distinction between complete and incomplete can be used as a general guide when other statements which might be included under the sub-category of internal unity are examined. For example, the consciousness of a "Beyond" as described by Pratt⁸⁵ and Clark⁸⁶ or the awareness of a "More" with which one's higher self is coterminous and continuous as discussed by James⁸⁷ is not alone sufficient for internal unity without also the loss of sense impressions and pure awareness.

Although such phenomena are certainly very close to internal unity and can form a valid part of the complete experience, alone they are not enough. Similarly the boundaries of the personal self of usual experience may be partially broken down or dissolved within the self without complete loss of all distinctions and the emergence of pure awareness.

Also the kind of loss of sense of self which results in unconsciousness as in sleep or coma is not the same as the paradoxical dissolution of the self in internal unity. Without the phenomena which includes the essential experience of undifferentiated

⁸⁵ Pratt, op. cit., pp. 337-341, 412-413.

⁸⁶ Clark, op. cit., p. 263.

⁸⁷ James, op. cit., pp. 498-499.

unity, these experiences are characteristic only of an incomplete form of internal unity.

In summary, there are both complete and incomplete forms of the basic introvertive experience of internal unity, and there are various metaphors and ways of interpretation. The essence of the experience stripped bare of all interpretation is a direct, conscious experience of undifferentiated unity in pure awareness when all sense impressions fade or melt away and the empirical ego is transcended.

The state then attained is called by various names in the major mystical traditions: Nirvana, the Void, the Pure Self, the Universal or Cosmic Self, the Absolute, the One, or union, bond, or contact with God. But here interpretation begins and basic phenomenological analysis ends.

External Unity

Unity may also be experienced through the physical senses as an underlying oneness behind the empirical multiplicity of the external world. The sense of oneness with external objects (inanimate or animate) is the essence of this subcategory. The observer or subject feels that the

usual separation between himself and an object is no longer present, yet the subject still knows that his individuality is retained. In spite of the empirical multiplicity of objects, which are still perceived as separate, the subject-object dichotomy is nevertheless in a paradoxical sense dissolved. On one level the objects are separate, yet at the same time at another and more basic level they are one with the subject.⁸⁸ Another way of expressing this phenomenon is to say that the essences of objects are experienced intuitively while their outward forms are experienced through the senses. At the deepest level the essence or inner reality of all things is felt to be one.⁸⁹ The subject feels a sense of oneness with these objects, because he "sees" that at the most basic level all are a part of a single unity.⁹⁰ External unity may also present itself as a deeply felt awareness of the life or living presence in all things or as the realization that nothing

⁸⁸Stace, op. cit., pp. 64-65.

⁸⁹Ibid., pp. 69-70.

⁹⁰Walker, in describing the level of Universal Consciousness experienced by Edward Carpenter, states: "...we lose the customary feeling of existing as separate individuals and find ourselves, instead, a part of everything else...the subject and object coalesce and become one." (Op. cit., p. 39.)

Johnson phrases the same thought as "The sense that all the visible, tangible world is a part of a larger whole and is apprehended as having an underlying unity. . ." (Op. cit., p. 326.)

is "really dead."⁹¹ The unifying vision is experienced at an insightful rather than purely rational level through animate and/or inanimate "objects" external to the self. This profound feeling of oneness as an expression of the underlying undifferentiated unity despite empirical multiplicity is the criterion.

The most complete form of external unity has both depth and breadth. The deep oneness experienced through individual objects or people is felt to be part of the underlying unity in all things. Any experience without this cosmic dimension lacks maximum completeness.

The fully developed experience of external unity certainly includes an expansion of consciousness beyond the usual sense of self as well as a consciousness of a "Beyond" or "More" which in such a case may represent the unity. As in the instance of internal unity, however, these phenomena alone, without any relation to undifferentiated unity experienced through the external world of objects, are not enough to constitute external unity. At best they may be considered incomplete or undeveloped

⁹¹Stace, op. cit., p. 78. Bucke also describes such a living presence in his own experience of cosmic consciousness. (op. cit., p. 8.)

forms. They are necessary but not sufficient elements.

Stace expresses external unity abstractly by the formula, "all is One." He makes this kind of unity the chief characteristic of the extrovertive type of mystical experience.⁹² Underhill discusses the same kind of experience as the illuminated vision of the world or the pantheistic and external type of mysticism.⁹³ The claim is made in both the experiences of internal and external unity that a level of reality other than the ordinary is touched. Stace identifies this reality or unity as basically the same in both kinds although the unity is perceived in a different way. He feels that the "all is One" of external unity has the same "One" which is experienced during the state called internal unity.⁹⁴ Although Stace's argument is impressive, it is not crucial to our thesis.

Category II: Transcendence of Time and Space

This category refers to loss of the usual sense of time and space. Time means clock time, but may also

⁹²Stace, op. cit., p. 79.

⁹³Underhill, Mysticism, pp. 254-265.

⁹⁴Stace, op. cit., pp. 152, 273-274.

be one's personal sense of his past, present, and future.⁹⁵ Transcendence of space means that a person loses his usual orientation as to where he is during the experience in terms of the usual three-dimensional perception of his environment. Experiences of timelessness and spacelessness may also be described as an experience of "eternity" or "infinity."

The experience of internal unity by definition includes transcendence of both time and space because of the loss of all empirical sense impressions. The experience of external unity may or may not include the transcendence of time, but space is paradoxically and only partially transcended because external objects seem both separate and yet not separate because of the feeling of underlying unity.

Category III: Deeply Felt Positive Mood

The most universal elements (and therefore, the ones which are most essential in the definition of this category) are joy, blessedness, and peace. Their unique character in relation to the mystical experience is that their intensity marks them as being at the highest levels of

⁹⁵Walker in describing the experience of Universal Consciousness says: "...the words 'before' and 'after' seem to have lost all their former meaning for us, so that we appear to have been transported to a world completely outside of time." (Op. cit., p. 41.)

the human experience of these feelings and they are valued highly by the experiencers.⁹⁶ Joy may be of an exuberant or quiet nature and may include such feelings as exultation, rapture, ecstasy, bliss, delight, and/or happiness.⁹⁷ Peace is of the profound nature that "passeth understanding." Closely related to peace is blessedness which includes beatitude, satisfaction, and/or a sense of well-being. Tears may be associated with any of these feelings of positive mood because of the overpowering nature of the experience.⁹⁸ These feelings may be directly associated with the peak of the experience or occur during the "ecstatic afterglow" when the peak has passed, but its effects and memory are still quite vivid and intense.⁹⁹

Love is also an element of deeply felt positive mood which has been mentioned by many students of mysticism, but love does not have the same universality as joy.

⁹⁶Stace, op. cit., p. 68. Pratt, op. cit., pp.351-352.

⁹⁷Underhill, Mysticism, p. 366.

⁹⁸Laski, op. cit., pp. 85-86.

⁹⁹"This is the condition that I call the 'ecstatic afterglow' when, with returning consciousness, the realization, appreciation, and interpretation of the experience begins." Laski feels that especially calm, stillness, peace, and sense of well-being are likely to carry over into an "ecstatic afterglow." (Ibid., pp. 85-86.)

blessedness, and peace.¹⁰⁰ One example of mystical love is the love which the mystic feels between himself and God, and which may rise to an indescribable intensity and tenderness.¹⁰¹

Love has an interrelation with several other categories. The love of God which is especially common in Christian mysticism is an obvious example of the experience of sacredness (see next category). Love in terms of Union with God is one way of interpreting the experience of internal unity.¹⁰² External unity also may have a mood of love especially if the oneness is attained through people, who become a symbol of the oneness in all things. The deeply felt mood or feeling in this case is not necessarily interpreted as love of "God."

In summary, deeply felt positive mood is most universally expressed by joy, blessedness, and peace. Love is closely related and may also be present.

¹⁰⁰Stace does not include love as one of the "universal core" characteristics (op. cit., pp. 68). Pratt suggests that the more personal that God is to the mystic, the more the sentiment of personal love is aroused (op. cit., p.349). The very mention of "God" is for Stace already an interpretation rather than a description of the basic psychological experience.

¹⁰¹Underhill, Mysticism, pp. 425-428.

¹⁰²Stace, op. cit., pp. 101-105.

Category IV: Sense of Sacredness

This category comprises the sense of sacredness which is evoked by the mystical experience. The sacred is here defined broadly as that which a person feels to be of special value and capable of being profaned. The basic characteristic of sacredness is a non-rational, intuitive, hushed, palpitant response in the presence of inspiring realities. No religious "beliefs" need necessarily be involved even though a sense of reverence or a feeling that what is experienced is holy or divine may be included.¹⁰³

As Rufus Jones points out, Rudolph Otto calls such a non-rational (yet deeply felt) response the consciousness of the "numinous" which uniquely transcends the finite or ordinary and moves one with awe and wonder.¹⁰⁴ Otto's phenomenological description includes feelings of awe (with the emphasis on uncanniness or numinous dread), profound humility before the overpowering majesty of what is felt to be holy, numinous energy or urgency, a sense of the wholly otherness of what is experienced, and mysterious fascination in spite

¹⁰³Stace, op. cit., p. 341.

¹⁰⁴New Studies in Mystical Religion (New York: Macmillan, 1927), pp. 31-32.

of terror or fear in the sense of shaking or trembling in the innermost depths of one's being.¹⁰⁵ These characteristics which Otto mentions are sufficient, but not exclusively necessary conditions. If they are present they can lead to a feeling of sacredness; but such a feeling may be experienced in other ways as well.

Otto emphasizes the feelings of fear, creaturehood, finitude, and humility in his description of the response to the holy. However, the previously listed elements of joy, blessedness, peace, and love may be closely related to, but not identical with, the sense of sacredness.¹⁰⁶ Positive mood and unity may be the emphasis rather than fear and separation. Awe has two elements, wonder and fear, and contributes to both types of experience; wonder is an important part of one type, and fear predominates in the other. Both types can give rise to the feeling that what is apprehended is sacred, and both may be present at different points in the same experience.

It might be argued that an exclusive experience of separation could not also include the experience of unity. Fear and creatureliness emphasize the negative

¹⁰⁵Otto, Idea of the Holy, pp. 13-46.

¹⁰⁶Stace, op. cit., p. 79.

side of the vacuum-plenum paradox. The full range of the mystical experience must take into consideration both negative and positive possibilities or a combination of the two sides.¹⁰⁷ An experience with no element of unity or no joy, blessedness, or peace would not be considered the most complete kind of mystical experience. (See the last section in this chapter for a further discussion of completeness.)

The expressions, "joy of the Lord" or "Love of God," which are used by Christian mystics show the close relationship between deeply felt mood and sacredness.¹⁰⁸ The phenomenology from the category of sacredness may be interpreted by the experiencer as an experience of "God," the presence of some other specific deity, or simply as a "sense of Presence."¹⁰⁹ Spontaneous acts of worship such as prayer or kneeling may be evoked. Otto argues that a profound existential experience of "creature-feeling" makes the experiencer strongly feel that the numinous is objective and outside the self.¹¹⁰ Such a feeling is one possible example

¹⁰⁷Ibid., p. 250. ¹⁰⁸Pratt, op.cit., pp.356-357, 416-418.

¹⁰⁹Stace, op. cit., p. 79.

¹¹⁰Otto, op. cit., pp. 10-11.

of the category of objectivity and reality which is to be defined and discussed next. However, an interpretation is involved if this something objective outside the self is identified as "God."

Category V: Objectivity and Reality

This category has two inter-related elements:

- (1) insightful knowledge or illumination felt at an intuitive, non-rational level and gained by direct experience and
- (2) the authoritativeness of the experience or the certainty that such knowledge is truly real, in contrast to the feeling that the experience is a subjective delusion. These two elements are connected because the knowledge through experience of ultimate reality (in the sense of being able to "know" and "see" what is really real) carries its own sense of certainty. The experience of "ultimate" reality is an awareness of another dimension not the same as "ordinary" reality which is the reality of usual, everyday consciousness, yet the knowledge of "ultimate" reality is quite real to the experiencer.

Such knowledge does not mean necessarily an increase in facts, but rather in insightful knowledge or intellectual illumination, e.g. seeing new relationships of old facts or ideas, new understandings of meanings, new appreciation of

the universe as a whole, or an experience of "everything falling into place."¹¹¹ This immediate feeling of objective truth is called by James the noetic quality.¹¹² Things seen in a new light can become vital and living as never before.¹¹³ Although the mystics do not dwell on personal psychological insights, Underhill has described an increase in self-understanding which comes from the mystical experience.¹¹⁴ Such insight is also an example of intuitive knowledge which seems very real.

111

Bucke describes such intellectual illumination in his definition of cosmic consciousness: "Like a flash there is presented to his consciousness a clear conception (a vision) in outline of the meaning and drift of the universe...The person who passes through this experience will learn in the few minutes, or even moments, of its continuance more than in months or years of study, and he will learn much that no study ever taught or can teach. Especially does he obtain such a conception of THE WHOLE, or at least of an immense WHOLE, as dwarfs all conception, imagination or speculation, springing from and belonging to ordinary self consciousness, such a conception as makes the old attempts to mentally grasp the universe and its meaning petty and even ridiculous." (Op. cit., p. 61.)

Similar is his description of his own experience: "...it was impossible for him ever to forget what he at that time saw and knew, neither did he, or could he, ever doubt the truth of what was then presented to his mind." (Ibid., p. 3.)

112 James, op. cit., pp. 331-332.

113 Pratt, op. cit., p. 411.

114 Mysticism, pp. 375, 378.

The lasting authoritativeness or conviction of the true reality of the experience and the sense of the profound significance of the content are at least closely related to, and perhaps enhanced by, the totality and intensity of the response. This knowledge at the level of intuition and insight is felt to require no proof at a rational level by the experiencer.¹¹⁵ There is a feeling of being totally grasped and dealt with by ultimate reality. James calls this passivity.¹¹⁶ The intensity and totalness is such as to leave no doubt to the experiencer of his participation at a very deep and basic level which although non-rational and even non-verbal is most convincing.¹¹⁷ The unshakable certainty of the objective reality of the experience persists even after the experience is over. Stace discusses in detail the validity of the claim to objective reference, but we are concerned here only with the fact that the mystic is convinced of the objective reality of the experience of what to him is ultimate

¹¹⁵"There is no certitude to equal the mystic's certitude." (Underhill, Mysticism, p. 331.)

¹¹⁶"...the mystic feels as if his own will were in abeyance, and indeed sometimes as if he were grasped and held by a superior power." (James, op. cit., p. 372.)

¹¹⁷Pratt, op. cit., pp. 347-48, 400-402.

reality.¹¹⁸

Category VI: Paradoxicality

Rational statements about, descriptions of, and even interpretations of the mystical experience tend to be logically contradictory when strictly analyzed. Such paradoxical language is universally found in the writings of those who have had mystical states of consciousness when they try to describe their experiences.¹¹⁹

Examples of paradox have been mentioned in the typology above as a basic part of the mystical consciousness. In the experience of internal unity there is a loss of all empirical content in an empty unity which is at the same time full and complete. This loss includes the loss of the sense of self and dissolution of individuality, yet something individual remains to experience the

¹¹⁸Stace, op. cit., pp. 67-68, 134-206.

¹¹⁹James, op. cit., pp. 408-412. Suzuki feels that persons who experience satori "are always at a loss to explain it coherently or logically." (Op. cit., p. 103.) Stace argues that mystical paradoxes are meant to be true paradoxes (i.e., both sides although contradictory are really true descriptions by those who reported what they actually experienced and are not due to confusion or unclearness (op. cit., pp. 257-276). The extensive use of figures of speech and paradox is one of Clark's characteristics of the mystical experience (op. cit., pp. 273-74). Stace would agree but would insist that much of what might at first be thought to be figure of speech or metaphor is

unity. The "I" both exists and does not exist. External unity is experienced through the empirical multiplicity of the external world with the insight that all is One. There may also be a paradoxical transcendence of space.¹²⁰ The vacuum-plenum or negative-positive paradox has three aspects: the One or Universal Self is both unqualified and qualified, both impersonal and personal, and both inactive and active.

Category VII: Alleged Ineffability

The impossibility of adequate expression in words or unintelligibility of the mystical state of consciousness has been stressed as a main characteristic by writers on mysticism.¹²¹ A distinction must be made between the time during the actual experience and afterwards. During the experience of either internal or external unity, there

in fact true description which is by nature paradoxical (op. cit., pp. 299-303). This point is discussed further in the next section.

¹²⁰Stace maintains that this paradox of identity in difference gives rise to pantheistic philosophical interpretations of mysticism. For example, the contradictory propositions that the world is identical with God and that the world is distinct from God are both asserted to be true (op. cit., pp. 212-218ff).

¹²¹James, op. cit., p. 371; Pratt, op. cit., pp. 346-347, 476; Johnson, op. cit., p. 325; Suzuki, op. cit., p. 103.

are no concepts or multiplicity to describe within the "unity" or the "One."¹²² The profound intensity of positive mood accompanying the experience adds to the inadequacy of words to accurately communicate and tends to make one fall silent.¹²³ It would appear that there are grounds for the claim that during the experience, ineffability is a characteristic. But afterwards when they have had time to integrate and interpret, mystics have written descriptions of their remembered experiences while at the same time they have insisted that the actual experiences were indescribable.¹²⁴

Stace gives an interesting psychological explanation for this alleged ineffability. Any experience, sensory or nonsensory, cannot be adequately communicated with words to a person who has not had the experience himself.¹²⁵ The unique and actual characteristic that mystics allege their experiences to be ineffable is based on an embarrassment with language. Statements made afterwards about the actual experience stripped of interpretation are literally true descriptions, but because mystical experience is paradoxical

¹²²Stace, op.cit., p. 297.

¹²³Ibid., pp. 281-283; Pratt, op.cit., p.410.

¹²⁴Stace, op.cit., p. 298. ¹²⁵Ibid., p. 283.

in nature, an attempt to be strictly logical involves contradiction. To avoid the frustration of contradiction, the mystic calls his experience ineffable.¹²⁶ The categories of ineffability and paradoxicality are thus closely related.¹²⁷ The category of objectivity and reality also has a close relationship to ineffability because the intuitive and insightful knowledge gained cannot be adequately communicated to others, although it remains of profound significance and reality to the experiencer.¹²⁸ Whether or not Stace's explanation is accepted, the alleged ineffability of mystical experience is a more accurate description of this category than simply "ineffability." If the actual experiences were truly beyond words, not much could be accomplished in a study of the mystical state of consciousness by a phenomenological analysis of even the remembered descriptions.

Category VIII: Transiency

Transiency refers to duration and means the

¹²⁶Ibid., pp. 304-306.

¹²⁷Underhill, Mysticism, pp. 331-32. Suzuki uses the term "irrational" to cover both categories (op. cit., p. 103).

¹²⁸Pratt, op. cit., p. 476.

temporariness of the mystical state of consciousness in contrast to the relative permanence of the level of usual consciousness. Transient appearance of the special and unusual levels or dimensions of consciousness which are defined by this typology with subsequent disappearance and return to the more usual is the characteristic of this category. The peak level or climactic moment of the experience may last for only a relatively short period (variously described from seconds to hours) although the feelings of an "ecstatic afterglow" effect may be experienced for many hours or even days.¹²⁹ The characteristic of transiency, however, means that the mystical state of consciousness cannot be sustained indefinitely.

An objection might be raised at this point on the grounds that the greatest mystics achieved a permanent state of mystical consciousness which continued while they led active lives in the world.¹³⁰ Although continuing effects of the ecstatic afterglow can remain (but with decreasing intensity unless there are repeated mystical experiences)

¹²⁹Laski, op. cit., pp. 60-66. James, p. 372.

¹³⁰See Underhill's discussion of the "unitive life" (Mysticism, pp. 413-44) or Pratt's chapter on "The Mystic Life" (op. cit., pp. 430-441).

a prolongation of the peak experience of unitary consciousness or unifying vision could not have been sustained at the same level or lives of fruitful activity in the world would have been impossible.¹³¹ With proper discipline for successful repetition of mystical experiences, a general change in level of consciousness may be induced, but this is not the same as a continual peak experience.¹³² Such changes and other permanent effects of the experience in the experiencers' lives are considered in the last category below. The mystics' own descriptions of internal unity usually include references to transiency.¹³³ Similarly, the actual experience of external unity is not described as permanent.¹³⁴ Transiency is a characteristic of the immediate mystical state of consciousness which is felt by the experiencer to be on a different level or

¹³¹Pratt speaks of the rhythm between contemplation and activity (ibid., p. 433).

¹³²Underhill states that "the greatest of the contemplatives have been unable to sustain the brilliance of this awful vision for more than a little while." (Mysticism, p. 331.)

¹³³C. Butler in his Western Mysticism (Grey Arrow Edition; London: Arrow Books, 1960) includes transiency as a characteristic in his description of mysticism and gives specific examples from the writings of St. Augustine (pp. 165-167), St. Gregory the Great (pp. 140-141), and St. Bernard of Clairvoux (pp. 165-167).

¹³⁴For example, Jacob Boehme's experiences as

dimension from his usual state. The transient nature is realized by contrast when the experience is over.

Closely related to transiency is the suddenness of appearance and disappearance of these levels or dimensions of consciousness which are different from usual. The unexpected character of coming with an element of surprise no matter how well prepared one is or how hard one has tried to gain the experience enhances the sense of striking change from ordinary consciousness. Although Suzuki¹³⁵ combines both suddenness and transiency in the same category (listed as momentariness), we consider transiency the universal and most important of the two elements.

Category IX: Persisting Positive Changes
in Attitude and/or Behavior

If a person goes through the kind of experience characterized by the eight categories above, his attitude and/or behavior are changed.¹³⁶ He cannot remain indifferent

related in Brinton's biographical chapter were temporary although the impact and insight gained were so great as to have a lasting influence on his life. (Howard H. Brinton, The Mystic Will [New York: Macmillan, 1930], pp. 47-52.)

Bucke's own experience of cosmic consciousness happened only once. "The illumination itself continued not more than a few moments, but its effects proved ineffaceable; ...There was no return that night or at any other time of the experience." (Op. cit., pp. 7-8.)

¹³⁵Op. cit., p. 108.

¹³⁶Johnson, op.cit., p.332. Clark, op.cit., pp.274-275.

to the experience. The profound personal impact is a strong motivation for action, even if the result is only a rearrangement of the life in order to cultivate more mystical experience.¹³⁷ Positive effects of the mystical experience in the life and personality of the experiencer is the criterion of whether or not to call the experience truly mystical by many commentators and also by mystics themselves.¹³⁸ Such a value judgment, as well as the fact that the phenomena observed extend over a longer time than just the few minutes or hours when the primary experience occurred, makes this category stand apart from the preceding eight. However, the "fruits for life" or "value for life" is included in the typology with this acknowledgment in order to distinguish the experience as defined above from an experience which might resemble the typology but result in negative effects in the individual's life.

¹³⁷Compare this necessity for action to Wach's fourth universal characteristic of genuine religious experience-- that it results in action. He distinguishes, however, the "right" action from any action. (Wach, Comparative Study of Religions, pp. 36-37.)

¹³⁸James uses such a pragmatic approach as a guide in evaluating all kinds of religious experience (op. cit., pp. 21-22, 321). Pratt also judges the value for life by the practical fruits (op. cit., pp. 466-477). Zaehner points to Ruysbroeck's condemnation of quietism on the basis of what it produced (Mysticism, Sacred and Profane, pp. 173-174).

Quietism and unhealthy self-indulgence are examples of this possible potentiality for effects in a negative direction.¹³⁹ We seek a typology of a healthful, life-enhancing mysticism, and thus, the present category describes positive effects.

These effects can be divided into four main groups of persisting changes in behavior and/or attitude:

(1) toward self, (2) toward others, (3) toward life, and (4) toward the mystical experience itself. The duration of the change must also be considered. Diminishing afterglow effects may persist for days or even weeks, but usually fade away in time unless the experience is repeated. Changes which remain even after the experience is only a memory are the most significant.

(1) Increased integration of personality is the basic inward change in the personal self. This may come about as a fruit of a radical experience of death and rebirth or conversion; or from the profound depth of the experience, insight may be gained which can subsequently be utilized in a gradual reorganization of the personality and growth

¹³⁹H. N. Wieman and R. Westcott-Wieman, Normative Psychology of Religion (New York: Crowell, 1935), pp. 186-188.

in maturity. Undesirable traits may be faced in a way that enables them to be dealt with and finally reduced or eliminated. Issuing from personal integration, the sense of one's inner authority may be strengthened, and the vigor and dynamic quality of a person's life may be increased. Creativity and greater achievement efficiency may be released. There may be an inner optimistic tone with consequent increase in feelings of happiness, joy and peace.¹⁴⁰

(2) Attitudes and behavior toward others may change in such ways as more sensitivity, more tolerance, more real love.¹⁴¹ The effectiveness of such change is measured by the response in others who may remark on the development of a more positive relationship, or have the tone of their lives changed. Another result of increased personal inte-

¹⁴⁰ Such positive changes toward self are emphasized in discussions by Jones, the Wiemans, and Underhill. R. Jones especially notes the optimistic tone and heightened dynamic quality in the life of a person who has been opened to the utilization of resources of vital energy through transcendent experience (The Inner Life, pp. 171, 180). The Wiemans give a balanced presentation of both the potential evils and values of mystical experience. (op. cit., pp. 186-91). Underhill is one of the most enthusiastic describers of the life-enhancing power of mysticism. (Mysticism, pp. 413-46; Essentials of Mysticism, pp. 12-14.)

¹⁴¹ Underhill, Mysticism, p. 437.

gration may be to be more authentic as a person by being more open and more one's true self with others.

(3) The third area of change is in attitude toward life and what one works for in life. One's philosophy in life, sense of values, sense of meaning, and purpose in life may be changed.¹⁴² Vocational commitment may be strengthened or changed completely. The need to serve others may be felt. As a result of the experience of a new dimension in life, more appreciation for life and the whole of creation, a stronger sense of the preciousness of life, or an increased sense of reverence may emerge in a new way.¹⁴³ More time may be spent in devotional life and meditation.

(4) The experience itself is regarded as valuable and what has been learned is thought to be useful.¹⁴⁴ A positive experience is remembered as a high point, and an

¹⁴² Clark stresses extravagance in behavior, (i.e., acting in an imprudent way for self-benefit) as a characteristic effect of mystical experience, (op. cit., pp. 274-275).

¹⁴³ Wieman and Westcott-Wieman, op. cit., pp. 190-191.

¹⁴⁴ Walker, op. cit., p. 156.

attempt may be made to recapture the experience or, if possible, to gain new experiences as a source of growth and inspiration. However, the experience is seen neither as a means to an end nor as an end in itself, but as a balance of both.¹⁴⁵ Mystical experiences of others are more appreciated and understood although even among mystics theological, philosophical, or cultural bias can lead to value judgments of preference for their own particular interpretations.

The Continuum of Mystical Experiences

Many writers on mysticism have noted a difference in degree in the experience. For example, Pratt distinguishes mild and extreme types of mystical experience.¹⁴⁶ Johnson divides his fifteen examples into three groups ranging from the slighter to the more profound.¹⁴⁷ Stace regards the extrovertive type of experience as on a lower level than the introvertive.¹⁴⁸ Thouless and Underhill differentiate various stages in the growth of the mystic life on a continuum from the prayer of quiet in which the self is awakened

¹⁴⁵Stace, op. cit., pp. 339-340.

¹⁴⁶Pratt, op. cit., pp. 338-339.

¹⁴⁷Johnson, op. cit., pp. 301-318.

¹⁴⁸Stace, op. cit., p. 132.

and illuminated to the ecstasy and spiritual marriage or unitive life.¹⁴⁹

The categories in the above typology allow for a difference in intensity or level within the mystical experience. The question arises as to when an experience ceases to be defined as mystical. Stace has classified experiences which do not have all the core characteristics of either the introvertive or extrovertive types as atypical or borderline.¹⁵⁰ Laski in her study of what she calls transcendent ecstasy includes aesthetic experiences in art, poetry, music, drama, and nature; creative experiences in writing or scientific work; and certain sexual and child-birth experiences as well as the commonly termed religious or mystical experiences. Some of her criteria are the same as our categories, but the breadth of her characteristics leads her to include experiences in which all our categories would not be represented.¹⁵¹ Such experiences

¹⁴⁹R. H. Thouless, An Introduction to the Psychology of Religion (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), pp. 228-233. Underhill, Mysticism, pp. 167-443.

¹⁵⁰Stace, op. cit., pp. 81-84.

¹⁵¹See especially her Appendix D for a summary of her characteristics (op. cit., pp. 482-495).

would be called more or less atypical or borderline by our definition unless some essential characteristics from all of our categories were present. Some categories have a variety of phenomena which are an expression of the same universal characteristics. Not all the phenomena of each category need be experienced for the category to be counted positively in the evaluation of a particular experience (e.g., all the various elements of deeply positive mood or changes in attitude and behavior). What is experienced, however, should occur to a strong or adequate degree to qualify that particular category when the completeness of the mystical typology as a whole is judged.

The category of unity is the most important, and if either external or internal unity is experienced, characteristics from the other categories are likely to be experienced also.¹⁵² If neither internal nor external unity is complete, unity has not been truly experienced. Even if all the other categories are represented, such an experience must be considered as close to, but not strictly the same as the most complete mystical experience by our definition. In such a case, the total experience would be classified as

¹⁵²Stace, op. cit., p. 67, 83, 110, 132-133.

incomplete, although more complete than atypical or borderline.

All the phenomena which resemble and include mystical experience¹⁵³ can be placed on a continuum from dim aesthetic feelings in nature and the arts through experiences considered as atypical or borderline to the complete extrovertive type and finally to the most profound introvertive experience with the strongest presence of characteristics in each of our categories.¹⁵⁴ The ideal example of the most complete mystical state would be an experience in which all categories were experienced to the strongest or most complete degree. With the suggested continuum in mind, this categorization of mystical states of consciousness can now be used to evaluate drug experiences and determine where on the continuum, if at all, they fit.

¹⁵³The phenomena of visual and auditory hallucinations, trances, involuntary vocal utterances, and/or automatic writing have not been included in the universal characteristics of the mystical state of consciousness. None of these phenomena are universal or necessary although they may be present along with mystical experience, but their varying content and presence are determined by the culture and temperament of the individual. (Ibid., pp. 47-55.)

¹⁵⁴Ibid., pp. 80-81.