

A Phenomenological Examination of Esoteric States of Consciousness

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## Abstract

### A Phenomenological Examination of Esoteric States of Consciousness

Daniel Kurstak

Esoteric states of consciousness, also known to us as mystical experiences, are characterized by the presence of three main elements: highly unusual and oftentimes ambiguous sensory and non-sensory forms of awareness, along with the bestowment of various forms of seemingly *vast knowledge*, upon the subject. Due to the first two elements, mystical experiences are often said to be *ineffable* and *esoteric*; due to disagreements regarding the third element, they can also become the source of serious socio-political and religious conflicts. Finally, due to all three of these elements, they are also often viewed with great scepticism, especially within the scientific milieu. We propose a joint solution here, both to the problem of potential conflicts, as well as to the concerns of the sceptics. We do so by showing, by way of a *phenomenological* investigation, that much of what is purportedly claimed to be ineffable, by the mystics, is actually quite "*effable*", on condition that the proper questions be asked, and that the proper descriptive framework be employed. In so doing, we pull mystical experiences out of the shadows, and into the spotlight of public language-games. Finally, we further show that, far from negating the mystics, this process actually *empowers* them, with the fine distinctions needed to address the concerns of today's pedantic sceptics, as well as with the ability better to voice their account of the mystical experience. This, in turn, helps to alleviate potential conflicts, arising from misunderstandings, regarding the contents of the experience itself.

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## Dedication

To my Parents,

For their unending love and devotion.

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## Introduction: Moving Beyond “Mundane” Experiences

The term “esoteric state of consciousness” can be understood in two ways: in a broad sense and in a narrow sense. In the broad sense, it can refer to almost any kind of experience which one may have, especially when given from the perspective of highly varying socio-cultural contexts. In the narrow sense, however, it refers to a very special group of experiences, which share a number of resembling features, and which are equally present, across various socio-cultural and religious contexts. These experiences are called *mystical experiences*.

In this thesis, we will show that, despite the already quite impressive knowledge accumulated thus far, there still remains much ambiguity and misunderstanding surrounding mystical experiences. We will further show that these problems are in no small part due to their simultaneously purported *ineffability* and *esoterism*, as well as to the great knowledge claims, or impressive *noetic qualities*, which they are said to convey; for, when combined, these elements serve, not only to purportedly restrict access to mystical experiences to a very select sphere of individuals, but also, based on the cosmological noeses conveyed by them, serve potentially to turn mystical experiences into a socio-political and religious *lever* for advancing one’s conceptual, as well as *normative*, worldview.

Now, given the great variety, not only of mystical experiences themselves, but also of the various knowledge claims, derived from them, we are faced with two very contemporary problems: The first involves the frequent lack of validity befalling mystical experiences, when they become appropriated, studied and interpreted, within various scientific milieus (with scepticism about their possibility sometimes even starting at the

descriptive level); the second and much more serious problem, involves the presence of many socio-cultural and religious conflicts, generated by varying interpretations of the knowledge claims, supposedly bestowed by mystical experiences.

Consequently, we feel that these important problems need to be addressed, and we argue, in this thesis, that they can be resolved, by first granting greater access to the peculiar and often impressive *phenomenal qualities* of mystical experiences. Naturally, given the sensitivity and inherent difficulty of the task at hand, we have chosen to adopt a neutral route, and limit ourselves to providing solely the best *description* of mystical experiences possible, without further commitment to either the truth or falsity, of the purported knowledge claims, conveyed by them.

Thus, our investigations into the phenomenal qualities of mystical experiences, lead us to uncover the following *preliminary* information regarding them: Concerning their very nature, all mystical experiences can be understood as (a) holding an ineffable quality, (b) being *noetic*, (c) often holding an additional paradoxical quality, and (d) being said to leave a memory trace. Furthermore, mystical experiences can also be grouped according to a number of categories, depending on whether they are (1) either sudden/transitory or continuous, (2) of a theistic/non-theistic nature, (3) extrovertive (sensory-like) or introvertive (non-sensory-like), and (4) whether they hold a multiple or unitive quality. Finally, mystical experiences can be reached by way of two main avenues: The first includes all forms of mystical events, which were *unintentionally* arrived at, and the second includes all forms of mystical events, which were reached by way of some form of *intentional participation*, by the subject, towards their realization. These latter ones can be further classified into four main categories, which regroup all



forms of mystical experiences, reached by way of (i) meditative practices, (ii) the use of psychotropic substances, (iii) dream states, and (iv) aesthetic experiences.

While this preliminary information is certainly impressive, it is still too “superficial” to afford a real descriptive sense of the *qualia* of mystical experiences. We therefore pursue our investigations further and, in so doing, we find that, due to the rather private and highly subjective quality of mystical experiences, it is inappropriate to study them by way of the same investigative procedures employed to study our *shared objective lifeworld* or “world of things”; for they are simply not given to investigation, in the same manner in which “physical reality” is. We therefore turn ourselves to a *Husserlian* phenomenological approach, and choose to examine mystical experiences, by considering them as being a very special and peculiar kind of *psychic event*. Furthermore, by wishing to study them without objective prejudice taking over, and without use of “objective reality” as the *benchmark*, against which their phenomenal qualities and noeses are to be gauged and ultimately validated, we adopt the philosophical attitude, developed in Husserl’s *phenomenological reduction*; and, by studying various mystical experiences, as they are given to us, we discover a number of important facts, concerning them:

The first thing we discover is that mystical experiences can be understood as being constituted by varying *phases of awareness*. Furthermore, we find that there are two such main kinds of phases, respectively mirroring the *extrovertive* and *introvertive* qualities of mystical experiences, mentioned above. We then argue that extrovertive or *sensory-like* phases, of mystical experiences, can be studied by way of a *three-strata phenomenological descriptive framework*, exemplary of Husserl’s *hylomorphic scheme*,

and indicative of three distinct levels of complexity, at which all manners of sensory and sensory-like experiences, can be understood to manifest themselves. This *transposition* of the hylomorphic scheme, from “waking perception” to extrovertive phases of mystical experiences, is made possible, due to the relative “proximity” of these phases, to the kinds of sensory phenomena, which we are used to experiencing in our day-to-day living. Finally, by employing this three-strata phenomenological descriptive framework, we demonstrate that extrovertive phases of mystical experiences can contain, at the non-constructed level, either *pure or raw, sensory qualities* or, at the constructed level, one’s “perception” of *mystical entities* and/or one’s “perception” of a *mystical realm*. When this framework is applied to describing these three possibilities of mystical “sensory-like” awareness, as encountered, we effectively disambiguate and render “effable”<sup>1</sup>, extrovertive phases of mystical experiences.

*Non-sensory* phases of mystical experiences, however, require another approach, seeing as how there is nothing contained therein, which can be properly understood as “appearing”, per se. We turn ourselves, therefore, primarily to Sartre, Michel-Henry, Mohanty and Samkara, in our search for a phenomenological “descriptive” framework, which can deal with introvertive phases of mystical experiences, and we find our answer to lie in the existence and distinction drawn between a claimed state of *pure consciousness*, and other *opaque*, yet still non-sensory, forms of awareness. Now, given that *pure consciousness* itself contains no additional internal distinguishing characteristics, it is impossible effectively to say something more about it, other than to “call it by its name”, when encountered. Nevertheless, within the residual *opaque* non-

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<sup>1</sup> By using the term “effable”, from now on, we will understand this to mean that we render the experience linguistically expressible, in clear opposition to it being allegedly ineffable.

sensory forms of awareness, reflected by *pure consciousness* itself, we also find a form of *non-sensory mystical intuition* to be present, within certain introvertive phases of mystical experiences.

Further investigation of this mystical intuition reveals to us that, due to its connection with the shared objective lifeworld, as experienced by the senses, it acts as a *phenomenal trace*, heralding the “imminent possibility” of such “future” encounters with worldly states of affairs. This realization, in turn, renders the phenomenal trace expressible *by proxy*, by our three-strata phenomenological descriptive framework, as employed earlier, towards our disambiguation of extrovertive phases of mystical experiences; although we also find that, due to the additional impressive ability of the phenomenal trace at compressing long and complex noetic acts, into singular and *atemporal* flashes of awareness, it can only be properly “described”, by use of an intricate analogy, expressing it as operative along *three main axes*; these express both the peculiarities of its actual phenomenal qualities, as well as the noesis conveyed thereby. Finally, by examining introvertive phases of mystical experiences, and demonstrating the presence, therein, of either (1) pure consciousness, and/or (2) phenomenal traces, we equally disambiguate and render effable, introvertive phases of mystical experiences. Additionally, we find the phenomenal trace to be directly responsible for the actual grand noetic qualities of mystical experiences, themselves.

With these two possible phases of mystical awareness being respectively taken care of, we shown that the final step, in a complete disambiguation of mystical experiences, is to describe them according to *all* of their successive and possibly *superimposed* phases of awareness; whether they be introvertive and/or extrovertive. In

so doing, we are finally able to ground, into an actual palpable “description”, not only the impressive phenomenal qualities of mystical experiences themselves, but also the *noetic force*, underlying the experience in question.

As with every philosophical investigation, our approach to studying mystical experiences, in this specific manner, has its inherent benefits and drawbacks. The benefits, which we gain, rest with a much more precise and accurate elucidation of the actual *qualia and noeses*, of very many kinds of mystical experiences, as given by our complete phenomenological descriptive framework, than what is available thus far, by way of more “common” linguistic imagery or metaphor. This, in turn, allows all subjects of mystical experiences to both: (1) better express what they have experienced therein; (2) as well as to better communicate it to others, which, in turn, should hopefully serve to (i) both better validate their experiences as genuine states of consciousness, which one can encounter, (ii) as well as to help alleviate the various conflicts, generated by various contradictory and ambiguous interpretations, of their contents.

The drawbacks, on the other hand, are twofold: (1) By basing ourselves rather extensively on Husserl’s descriptive phenomenology, our employment of the phenomenological descriptive framework presupposes a certain set core of *minimal cognitive structures* to be in place, for it to be applicable (namely the structures of the hylomorphic scheme); although, as it stands, we feel that our approach does not suffer from the problem of appropriation, in the same manner in which other descriptive frameworks do, for it does not utilise the shared objective lifeworld as its benchmark, but rather as a *simple referent*; and (2), while certainly providing us with a better description of the experience in question, the phenomenological description alone brings us no closer

to being able to “validate” one kind of mystical experience over another (not that this is necessarily something which we would wish to accomplish), and cannot, therefore, serve to validate certain mystical knowledge claims, as being preferable, over others.

Finally, we also realize that these descriptions, provided by our phenomenological approach, encompass only the first step, and we must not forget that a truly complete elucidation of the nature of mystical experiences, requires the additional development of our understanding of the role of *feelings* and *emotions*, as well as of the often altered status of the *Self*, within mystical experiences. This is necessary, for us to be able to fully grasp, not only the *descriptive element* of the mystical experience, as explained above, but also the *lived element*, as well. Once this second step is fully developed, it will allow us to better understand and appreciate, as *genuine phenomena*, the richness and depth of the esoteric state of consciousness, known as the mystical experience.

**Chapter 1:**

**The Mystical in Esoteric States of Consciousness**

### 1.1: The Phenomenal Qualities of Mystical Experiences

If we are to be thoroughly consistent in our examination of esoteric states of consciousness, we need to start off our investigation, with an eye keenly set to examining them, within a variety of socio-cultural contexts. In so doing, the first thing we realize, is that there are actually a *great number* of experiences, which may come to be considered as examples of “esoteric states of consciousness”, by various individuals, within such varied socio-cultural contexts. Furthermore, the most common cause of such unusual experiences can be found in cases of *drastic alterations* to one’s socio-cultural and/or physical environment, or to the kinds of *continuities of events*, which one is used to experiencing.

This realization, however, presents us with an immediate problem: If our criteria for distinguishing between mundane and esoteric states of consciousness, is made this charitable, then even such “unambiguous” experiences as a sudden transition into a foreign land, or into a “completely new” physical environment, and back, may come to be interpreted as holding an *esoteric quality*, by the individual in question.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, it is quite natural that we do not wish to accord such a high degree of flexibility to our understanding of the nature of esoteric states of consciousness; for, in so doing, we would end up with a definition which is *so inclusive* that, given proper alterations to the socio-cultural and physical environment, almost *any kind* of experience could end up being classified as an “esoteric state of consciousness”. Therefore, we need to limit our understanding of actual *bona fide* esoteric states of consciousness, to experiences, which are: (1) *exceptionally unusual*; and (2) can be shown to have a basis

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<sup>2</sup> We are referring here, to individuals who make a transition from a rather simple and secluded lifestyle, to another earthly environment, exhibiting alien, complex, and chaotic features (such as a transition from the steppes of Mongolia, to a major metropolis, for instance).

of *reoccurrence* and *recognition*, even across potentially highly varying, socio-cultural contexts.

Thus, by (1), we understand experiences, which feature such *drastic changes* to one's present state of awareness, that they simply cannot be explained by an alteration to one's immediate socio-cultural and/or physical environment. What this means, is that we understand such experiences to hold a *phenomenal quality*, which is importantly *over and above* that which can be shown to be conveyed, by the presently given socio-cultural and physical environment, as well as by other such potential socio-cultural and physical environments, with which one could counterfactually come into contact. Furthermore, we also understand, by (2) that such experiences have a certain basis of *reoccurrence* and *recognition*, across various socio-cultural and *religious* contexts, which leads them to be recognized as the kinds of esoteric states of consciousness that they are.

If we are to clarify better what we mean, then, by these *genuine* esoteric states of consciousness, we need to turn ourselves now to the philosophical and religious literature. In so doing, the first thing we realize is that these unusual kinds of experiences have already been classified and studied, under the heading of *mystical experiences*. Secondly, it would seem that mystical experiences exist in almost all socio-cultural and religious contexts, and are a central tenet, not only of many religious faiths, but also of various spiritual groups, and even of certain solitary, spiritually-minded people. Thirdly, we also come to find that, despite a great diversity in the actual *phenomenal qualities* of these various mystical experiences, as described by the mystics, there remains a number of *generally reoccurring features*, which are to be found in what are understood to be the most "common" and "prevalent" types of mystical experiences, as are to be found across



various socio-cultural and religious contexts. This third realization, in turn, allows us to begin our actual investigation of esoteric states of consciousness, by classifying mystical experiences under a number of *main categories*. To accomplish this task, we turn ourselves to two philosophers, who have already performed such a similar categorization, and who bequeath us their findings: William James and Jerome I. Gellman.

To start off with, William James outlines, in *Varieties of Religious Experience*, a number of *basic distinguishing characteristics*, which are to be found in all types of mystical experiences, properly understood as such. He subsumes these characteristics, in his own words, as follows:

1. *Ineffability*. The handiest of the marks by which I classify a state of mind as mystical is negative. The subject of it immediately says that it defies expression, that no adequate report of its contents can be given in words. It follows from this that this quality must be directly perceived; it cannot be imparted or transferred to others. In this peculiarity, mystical states are more like states of feeling than like states of intellect. No one can make clear to another who has never had a certain feeling, in what the quality or worth of it consists. One must have musical ears to know the value of a symphony; one must have been in love one's self to understand a lover's state of mind. Lacking the heart or ear, we cannot interpret the musician or the lover justly, and are even likely to consider him weak-minded or absurd. The mystic finds that most of us accord to his experiences an equally incompetent treatment.<sup>3</sup>
2. *Noetic quality*. Although so similar to states of feeling, mystical states seem to those who experience them to also be states of knowledge. They are states of insight into the depths of truth, unplumbed by the discursive intellect. They are illuminations, revelations, full of significance and importance, all inarticulate though they remain; and as a rule they carry with them a curious sense of authority for after-time.<sup>4</sup>

James points out that these first two characters are proper to all mystical states, and entitle them to be so called. There are, nevertheless, two more qualities, which are less sharply marked, but which are also usually found. They are as follows:

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<sup>3</sup>William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*. With a foreword by Michael James and new introductions by Eugene Taylor and Jeremy Carrette (Centenary Edition, London, New York: Routledge, 2002. Originally published: Longmans, Green and Co., New York, 1902), pp. 295-96.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

3. *Transiency.* Mystical states cannot be sustained for long. Except in rare instances, half an hour or at most an hour or two, seems to be the limit beyond which they fade into the light of common day. Often, when faded, their quality can but imperfectly be reproduced in memory; but when they recur, it is recognized; and from one recurrence to another, it is susceptible of continuous development in what is felt as inner richness and importance.<sup>5</sup>
4. *Passivity.* Although the oncoming of mystical states may be facilitated by preliminary voluntary operations, as by fixing the attention or going through certain bodily performances or in other ways which manuals of mysticism prescribe; yet when the characteristic sort of consciousness once has set in, 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. This latter peculiarity connects mystical states with certain definite phenomena of secondary or alternative personality, such as prophetic speech, automatic writing or the mediumistic trance. When these latter conditions are well pronounced, however, there may be no recollection whatever of the phenomenon, and it may have no significance for the subject's usual inner life, to which, as it were, it makes a mere interruption. Mystical states, strictly so called, are never merely interruptive. Some memory of their content always remains, and a profound sense of their importance. They modify the inner life of the subject between the times of their recurrence. Sharp divisions in this region are, however, difficult to make, and we find all sorts of gradations and mixtures.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, James concludes that these four characteristics are sufficient to mark out a group of (esoteric) states of consciousness, peculiar enough to deserve a special name, and to call for careful study. He calls them the *mystical group*.<sup>7</sup>

While James' four preliminary characteristics provide us with a *basic understanding* of what we can expect to find in a mystical experience, if we are to develop a better understanding of the actual *phenomenal qualities* of such mystical experiences in question, we need to turn ourselves now to Jerome Gellman, and to his book entitled *Mystical Experience of God*. In this work, Gellman describes a "genuine" mystical experience to be one where:

... a person allegedly has a *non-sensory perception*, apparently of a reality (or state of affairs) of a sort that can neither be perceived by sense perception, nor known by ordinary introspective self-awareness.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Jerome Gellman, *Mystical Experience of God: A Philosophical Inquiry* (Aldershot, Hants, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2001), p. 4.

Concerning his use of the term “perception”, Gellman writes that:

... a mystical experience is a “perception” in the sense of including a phenomenal content, present to the subject as an alleged appearance of a reality or state of affairs.<sup>9</sup>

He further points out that the phenomenal content possesses a *subject-object structure*; that is, the experience includes the sense of something being present to the subject. Furthermore, observes Gellman, mystical experiences sometimes involve heightened affective states and sometimes entail “unusual behaviour or speech”, but he does not identify the mystical experience with these, for he claims that, in mystical experience, the ground of the emotional state of the subject, and of the accompanying behaviour, is due to a perception by the subject.

Now, as far as the alleged “nonsensory” quality of mystical perception is concerned, Gellman claims that this perception is supposed to be neither via the five senses, nor by way of one’s “inner sense” of what is happening with or in one’s body. This is what, according to him, Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179) called “the eyes of the spirit and the inner ear.”<sup>10</sup> Consequently, Gellman believes that there is an additional nonsensory “mystical sense”, by way of which people can perceive phenomenal content of a different sort, than the one available by the ordinary sensory means. Thus, continues Gellman, because this “mystical sense” is *non-sensory*, we are to think of the mystical component of mystical experience, *per se*, as excluding sensory content, such as visual or auditory images.

The reader will immediately notice that Gellman considers the actual mystical component of the mystical experience itself, as being *wholly non-sensory*, but that this

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

*does not entail* that sensory content *cannot* accompany mystical experiences as well. In this connection, Gellman distinguishes between those mystical experiences where the subject loses all sense awareness, including awareness of the body and even of the “Self”, and those in which the subject is aware of the Self and has sense experience. The latter can be subdivided into at least three categories: the first occurs when the sense perception is merely the occasion for a mystical episode and the second occurs when the mystical reality is perceived somehow “inside” the occurring sense content. The third kind of sense experience, accompanying mystical experience, takes place when *extraordinary sensory input* occurs along with the mystical perception.<sup>11</sup>

Since Gellman roots the actual mystical element of a mystical experience within a *non-sensory form of perception*, he also wishes to make some exclusion from what is to count as a *genuine* mystical experience. The anomalous experiences he wishes to exclude include “synesthesia”, where sense modalities are crossed (as when a taste seems yellow), out of body experiences, so called “psi-related experiences”, including telepathy (mind to mind communication), precognition (seeing the future), clairvoyance (seeing distant events), psycho kinesis (thoughts causing physical events directly), past-life and near-death experiences. Gellman leaves these anomalous experiences out because: (1) either they do not involve nonsensory perceptual content (as in psycho kinesis, for instance); or (2) they involve the perception solely of objects or qualities, perceivable by the senses (as in clairvoyance, for example) or by introspection (as in telepathy). Now, as far as “mystical entities” are concerned, Gellman consequently *assumes* that God, Brahman and

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, pp. 4-5.

the Oneness of all reality cannot be accessed (literally) by sense perception or by ordinary introspection.<sup>12</sup>

Gellman also excludes other kinds of sensory experiences, which we might want to call experiences of God, but which he does not include under the rubric of “mystical experience”. Examples of these include “revelations” of the sensory type (given by visual or auditory cues, for example). Gellman’s reasons for doing so are that, while these experiences may be considered to be experiences of God in specific contexts, they do not include *non-sensory* perception of God. Gellman thus makes his distinction between an “experience of God” and a “mystical experience of God” and points out that, while every instance of the latter is an instance of the former, the reverse is not true.<sup>13</sup>

Gellman’s reasons for restricting the term “mystical experience” to the perception of realities, not available to the physical senses, is by no means arbitrary, and actually rests on a very genuine two-fold concern, which he holds. Firstly, the seeing of unusual visions and hearing of unusual voices, mimicking sense perception, characterizes not only some “spiritual” perceptions, but also various forms of mental illness. For this reason, Gellman feels that there would likely be a natural resistance to taking these as indications of an experience of an objective reality. He therefore prefers to exclude such manner of experience from the mystical, in order to present the best case for the genuineness of mystical experiences of God. Secondly, observes Gellman, important mystics have demoted the value of unusual visions and voices to their meeting God, on

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. 6.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

the grounds that these do not afford a deep sense of God's presence. Thus, according to them, a corporeal image could not be God, since God is spiritual.<sup>14</sup>

Having thus laid out this basic groundwork for his understanding of the nature of mystical experiences, Gellman makes some additional refinements to his ideas, in *Mysticism and Religious Experience*, and he now devises a *number of categories*, by way of which he classifies all manners of possible mystical experiences. To do so, he starts off by distinguishing between the *wide sense* of "mystical experience" and the *narrow sense*. In the wide sense, he speaks of mystical experience as:

A purportedly *super* sense-perceptual or *sub* sense-perceptual experience, granting acquaintance of realities or states of affairs that are of a kind not accessible by way of sense-perception, somatosensory modalities or standard introspection.<sup>15</sup>

Concerning this preliminary definition, Gellman makes the following refinements:

1. A *super* sense-perceptual experience includes perception-like content of a kind not appropriate to sense perception, somatosensory modalities (including the means for sensing pain and body temperatures, and internally sensing body, limb organ, and visceral positions and states) or standard introspection. Some mystics have referred to a "spiritual" sense or senses, corresponding to the perceptual senses, appropriate to a non-physical realm. A *super* sense-perceptual mode of experience may accompany sense perception (see "extrovertive" experience). For example, a person can have a *super* sense-perceptual experience while watching a setting sun. The inclusion of the *super* sensory mode is what makes the experience mystical.
2. A *sub* sense-perceptual experience is either devoid of phenomenological content altogether or nearly so (see pure conscious events) or consists of phenomenological content appropriate to sense perception, but lacking in the conceptualization typical of attentive sense perception (see below on "unconstructed experiences").
3. "Realities" includes beings, such as God, as well as abstract "objects" such as the Absolute. "Acquaintances" of realities means the subject is aware of the presence of (one or more) realities.
4. "States of Affairs" includes, for example, the impermanence of all reality and that God is the ground of the self. "Acquaintances" of states of affairs can come in two forms. In one, a subject is aware of the presence of (one or more) realities on which (one or more) states of affairs supervene. An example would be an awareness of God (a reality) affording an awareness of one's utter dependence on God (a state of affairs). In its second form, "acquaintance" of states of affairs involves an insight directly, without supervening on acquaintances of any reality. An example would be coming to "see" the impermanence of all that exists following an experience that eliminates all phenomenological content.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> William J. Wainwright, *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 138.

5. Mystical experience is alleged to be “noetic”, involving knowledge of what a subject apprehends (James 1958).
6. Para sensual experiences, such as religious visions and audition fail to make an experience mystical. The definition also excludes anomalous experiences such as out-of-body experiences, telepathy, precognition, and clairvoyance. All of these are acquainted with objects or qualities of a *kind* accessible to the senses or to ordinary introspection, such as human thoughts and future physical events. (A degree of vagueness enters the definition of mystical experience here because of what is to count as a “kind” of thing accessible to non-mystical experience).

In the wide sense, mystical experiences occur within the religious traditions of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Indian religions, Buddhism and primal religions. In most of these traditions, the experiences are allegedly of a super sensory reality, such as God, Brahman or, as in some Buddhist traditions, Nirvana (Takeuchi 1983, 8-9). Many Buddhist traditions, however, make no claim for an experience of a super sensory reality. Some cultivate instead an experience of “unconstructed awareness” involving an awareness of the world on a relatively or absolutely non-conceptual level (Griffiths 1993). The unconstructed experience is thought to grant insight, such as into the impermanent nature of all things. Some Buddhists describe an experience of *tathata* or the “thisness” of reality, accessible only by the absence of ordinary sense-perceptual cognition. These Buddhist experiences are sub sense-perceptual, and mystical, since thisness is claimed to be inaccessible to ordinary sense perception. Some Zen experiences, however, would not count as mystical by our definition, involving acquaintance with neither a reality nor a state of affairs (Suzuki 1970).<sup>16</sup>

Having thus defined the wide sense of mystical experience, Gellman moves on to define the *narrow sense*. As far the narrow sense of mystical experience is concerned Gellman states that it refers to a subclass of mystical experience, in the wide sense, and that this specifically refers to:

A (Purportedly) super sense-perceptual or sub sense-perceptual *unitive* experience, granting acquaintance of realities or states of affairs that are of a kind not accessible by way of sense-perception, somatosensory modalities or standard introspection.<sup>17</sup>

He further comments that:

... a *unitive* experience involves a phenomenological de-emphasis, blurring or eradication of multiplicity. Examples are experiences of the oneness of nature, “union” with God, the Hindu experience that Atman is Brahman (that the self/soul is identical with the eternal, absolute being), the Buddhist unconstructed experience, and “monistic” experiences, devoid of all multiplicity. Excluded from the narrow definition, though present in the wide one, are, for example, a dualistic experience of God, a Jewish kabbalistic experience of a single supernal *sefirah*, and shamanistic experiences of spirits. These are not mystical in the narrow sense, because they are not unitive experiences.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, pp. 139-40.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 140.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

Gellman writes that there are still two more ways in which mystical experiences can be classified, in addition to the built-in difference between mystical super sense-perceptual and sub sense-perceptual experiences. These distinctions are the most important ones, for our investigation, and are drawn between the *extrovertive-introvertive* experience and the theistic-non-theistic experience. Thus, concerning the extrovertive-introvertive distinction, Gellman writes that:

When an experience includes sense-perceptual content, we may say that it is an *extrovertive* experience. There are mystical extrovertive experiences, as in a consciousness of the unity of all of nature, as well as numinous extrovertive experiences, as when experiencing God's presence when gazing at a snowflake. When wholly nonsensory, we may say an experience is *introvertive*. An experience of nothingness or emptiness, in some mystical traditions, and an experience of God resulting from a disengagement from sense experience, would be examples of introvertive experiences.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, concerning the theistic-non-theistic distinction, Gellman writes that:

A favourite distinction of Western philosophers is between theistic experiences, which are purportedly of God, and non-theistic ones. Non-theistic experiences can be of an ultimate reality other than God or no reality at all. Numinous theistic experiences are dualistic, where God and the subject remain clearly distinct, while theistic mysticism pertains to either *union* or *identity* with God.<sup>20</sup>

With this final quote, we now have a pretty clear understanding of the kinds of complex *phenomenal qualities*, which we can expect to find in *genuine mystical experiences*. At this point, however, we need to clarify a certain *disagreement*, between Gellman's idea, of what renders an unusual experience *truly* mystical, and our own: Gellman clearly specifies that, according to him, even in cases of super-sense or sub-sense perceptual experiences, it is actually the *non-sensory* component of the experience, which is the actual mystical force behind it. While his reasons for making this strong distinction are quite understandable (he wishes to draw our attention to the *genuine* quality of mystical experiences, as being *over-and-above* that of possible cases of mental

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p. 142.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.



illness, and he equally feels that the Divine, being “so sublime”, simply cannot manifest itself by way of such a “low-level” phenomenal content, as of the kind similar to sense-perception), we feel that this restriction of his, is, nevertheless, not sufficiently warranted, for us to retain it. Our reasons for holding this view are as follow:

1. While the highest level of the Divine may indeed be solely found at a wholly non-sensory level, there is no good reason for believing that “lesser” parts of the mystical realm, may not hold a sensory-like quality; although it is quite understandable, that such a sensory-like quality would nevertheless have to be *most extraordinary* and *most unlike* that which is usually experienced in cases of waking perception, for it to qualify as an indicator of mystical experiences.
  
2. Similarly, while certain cases of mental illness may indeed manifest themselves by the subject’s experiencing unusual sensory-like content, there is equally no good reason for believing that *all* such unusual sensory-like content, when experienced, is necessarily attributable to cases of mental illness, and we have good reason<sup>21</sup> for believing that at least some of it can be attributed to genuine cases of mystical experiences.

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<sup>21</sup> We are referring here, to the disparity between the interpretation given of the phenomenal content of the experience, by a psychiatric or psychological milieu, and a spiritually-minded one: what may count as access to the mystical realm, by one, may count as a symptom of mental illness, by the other, with correspondingly highly distanced epistemological and metaphysical implications. It is important to note, however, that this does not mean that we wish to validate or invalidate one distinction over another; we only express our concern, here, that in *certain cases*, the line between a mystical experience and a case of mental illness, can be rather difficult to draw.

Consequently, our understanding of the nature of mystical experiences ends up being more flexible than Gellman's, in that we understand both the *full content* of *introvertive*, as well as of *extrovertive*, genuine mystical experiences, to be indicative of that which renders a purportedly mystical experience, truly mystical. Thus, what is sufficient for us, to render a purportedly mystical experience, genuinely mystical, is the presence of either a particular *non-sensory form of awareness* or of a necessarily *extraordinary sensory-like form of awareness*, or both.

With these final clarifications at hand, we are now ready to give an outline of the distinguishing characteristics of mystical experiences, as we understand them to be. We therefore understand all types of unusual experiences, which fit the staple of mystical experiences, as having the following qualities:

1. Mystical experiences exhibit *ineffable qualities*, referring to the inherent difficulty in trying to account for them, in one form or another, within linguistic practices.
2. Mystical experiences are *noetic*, in that they are bearers of *knowledge or meaning*. They therefore involve purported acquaintances with either *mystical realities, states of affairs* or both.
3. Mystical experiences usually leave a "memory trace", meaning that their phenomenal content can be voluntarily recollected at a later period, albeit in a usually diminished and attenuated form.

4. Mystical experiences can be either, sudden and transitory (as per James) or they can continue on, in a more attenuated state or in repetitions of such states, over a long period time.<sup>22</sup>
5. Mystical experiences can be characterized by either unusual sensory-like content or by no such content at all. When the former is the case, they are considered to be *super sense-perceptual*; when *unconstructed* sensory-like content, or almost no sensory-like content is present, they are considered to be *sub sense-perceptual*.
6. When *wholly devoid* of sensory-like content (pure conscious events, on Gellman's definition), a mystical experience is considered to be *introvertive*; when at least some sensory-like content is present, an experience is considered to be *extrovertive*.
7. Mystical experiences can be defined, either in the wide sense, as given by the points above or in the narrow sense, where they are characterized by an additional phenomenological de-emphasis, blurring or eradication of multiplicity, and thus exhibit a *unitive* quality between the subject of the experience and the "experienced object".
8. Mystical experiences can be of the *theistic* or *non-theistic* kind, depending on whether they are purportedly of God, of an ultimate reality, other than God or of no reality at all.
9. In addition to exhibiting ineffable qualities, mystical experiences also often hold seemingly paradoxical qualities, due to their reports being very

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<sup>22</sup> Jerome Gellman, *Mystical Experience of God: A Philosophical Inquiry*, p. 4.

well surprising or contrary to expectation, as well as to mystical language sometimes adopting logically offensive forms.

Having thus outlined our understanding of the intricate phenomenal qualities of mystical experiences, we also feel it necessary to examine which types of avenues can be employed to achieve such experiences. This is necessary, so that not only the kind of experience, but also the specific circumstances of its genesis, can be brought to light. We will perform this task in the next section.

## 1.2: The Various Avenues towards Mystical Experiences

In the previous section, we have outlined the various kinds of phenomenal qualities, by way of which we can recognize, amongst various unusual experiences, those which actually constitute a *genuine* mystical experience. In so doing, we have performed the first required step, for us to be able to study esoteric states of consciousness, in a rigorous and systematic manner: we have effectively identified *what* it is, that we wish to study.

This first step alone, however, is insufficient for our project at hand; for rigorous systematicity requires, not only that the subject of study be properly identified, but also that an effective *methodology* be devised, so as to *grant access* to it, in a “reasonably consistent” manner. We are using the term “reasonably consistent” here, for it has also been made clear, by the work of William James, in *Varieties of Religious Experience* that, despite modern scientific advancements, mystical experiences are not the types of events which may be (or necessarily should be) effectively reproduced, in all of their richness and variations, in laboratory conditions. As a matter of fact, James also forewarns us that, even if some mystical experiences can be generated by way of modern technology, by *divorcing* them from their socio-spiritual context, we may be inadvertently robbing them of a number of *salient features*, which are quite necessary for their complete fulfillment and experience, by the subject.<sup>23</sup>

This being said, we nevertheless remain aware that a certain degree of systematic consistency is the minimal effective requirement, if we wish to better clarify the nature of these impressive events. Furthermore, in our examination of the mystical literature, we

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<sup>23</sup> See introduction by Jeremy R. Carrette, in James' *Varieties of Religious Experience*, pp. xxxix-lxiii.

find that there already exists a myriad of procedures and approaches (some of which are already quite rigorous and systematic), intended to assist the subject in accessing the mystical realm.<sup>24</sup> We will therefore examine the most common ones here, so as to provide the reader with an understanding of the effective “selection of choices”, which may be employed in our future *active* investigations<sup>25</sup> of the nature of mystical experiences. To avoid possible confusion, however, we first need to draw an important distinction between two main possible avenues, towards mystical experiences. This distinction is the one drawn between *intentional* and *non-intentional* avenues:

1. By intentional mystical experiences, we understand experiences of the sort that are arrived at, by some form of participation or active partaking of the subject, in the hope of creating such an event (whose nature is either already known beforehand, from previous encounters, or is aimed at, based on convincing testimony).
2. By non-intentional mystical experiences, on the other hand, we understand all those experiences which are of a sudden, non-premeditated nature, such as sudden cases of mystical revelation or insight.

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<sup>24</sup> William J. Wainwright, *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion*, p. 141.

<sup>25</sup> This term indicates that what we are presently engaged in, here, is essentially a bibliographical examination of mystical experiences; but it remains our future goal to further our investigations, by way of actual participation in the creation of these events, once the academic groundwork for properly understanding, and tracking them, is adequately laid out.

Basing ourselves on this clarification above, we realize that the best method for “generating” mystical experiences, in a systematic and consistent manner, resides with those practices, whose *explicit intention* it is to assist the subject in reaching the mystical realm. While this by no means entails that non-intentional mystical events may not also be examined by way of the same criteria as the ones employed towards the examination of intentional mystical experiences, their rather sporadic and unpredictable nature greatly diminishes the accuracy and precision, with which they can be studied; for, while in cases of intentional mystical experiences, we can potentially *re-access* the mystical realm a great number of times, in cases of non-intentional ones, we are most often forced to resort to *memory-traces* of them, when wishing to re-access their phenomenal content.

Consequently, if we wish to study mystical experiences with a certain minimal degree of systematic consistency, we are better off focusing on those, which can be attained intentionally. We will therefore explore the *four main existing intentional avenues*, towards mystical experiences:

(1) The first and perhaps most common form of avenue, which can be employed to reach the mystical realm, is that of the *meditative practice*. Meditation exists in many forms, and is practiced in practically all socio-cultural and religious contexts. It may range from a quiet form of self-reflection or inner-contemplation, to the recital of prayers, singing of *mantras* or collective humming, and it can be further assisted by various kinds of physical exercises, ranging from breathing techniques, to the kinds of impressive poses adopted in *Yoga*. Furthermore, various forms of meditation can be practiced, either alone, or in groups, with usually noticeable effects on the actual phenomenal qualities of the

meditative states, which one enters. It is also important to mention here, that not all meditative practices are necessarily conducive to reaching mystical experiences, nor that they are usually expressively aimed at their attainment, but it has nevertheless been clearly shown, throughout the course of history, that the practice of meditation is one of the genuine *intentional* activities, which one can engage in, if one wishes to access the mystical realm.

(2) The second and almost equally common form of avenue, employed to reach the mystical realm, is that of the voluntary taking of psychotropic substances, intended to allow one to enter an “altered state of consciousness”. This process remains, to this day, a common practice in various tribal societies around the world, and is usually associated with shamanistic practices. While often criticized by so-called “higher religious institutions”, for generating, not actual mystical experiences, but rather *sole* hallucinogenic episodes, even if hallucinogens are, indeed, restricted to generating solely *sensory-like content* (a claim which has not been effectively defended) the great peculiarity of the sensory-like content, present in such cases, warrants our classification of the incurred experience as *potentially* mystical, albeit not without some explicit reservations; for while this practice has a genuine spiritual role in such tribal contexts, in the Western World, we have seen a contextual shift in the taking of psychotropic substances, from a religious or spiritual context, to a recreational one. This, in turn, results in the effective *de-mystification* of this ancient avenue, towards the reaching of the mystical realm, and the additional economically driven incentive to produce ever-more



refined and potent recreational psychotropic substances, has equally resulted in the unfortunate problem of substance abuse, of which we are presently well-aware.

Consequently, while the taking of psychotropic substances is still recognized, in many socio-cultural and religious contexts, as a valid avenue towards having mystical experiences, the often effective lack of a proper spiritual context for this activity, as seen in our Western societies, coupled with the medically recognized *genuine hazards*, associated with the taking of such substances (further expounded by the *potency* of the recreational ones, presently available) leads us to strongly advise against this type of method, for accessing the mystical realm.

(3) The third (and perhaps most surprising) avenue, employed to reach the mystical realm, is to be found in *dream states*. We feel that dream states also fall under the category of intentional avenues towards mystical experiences, for, while the events encountered therein usually occur in a non-intentional fashion (for the dreaming subject) they can also be experienced within *lucid dreams*, whereby the subject has some (if not an incredible) degree of flexibility and control, over that which occurs therein. Now, as far as the actual possible mystical content of dreams is concerned, when one examines the literature on Oneiromancy (or the study of dreams), one realizes that, in ancient days, the practice of dream interpretation was actually called a divine art, because dreams were understood as heralds of things to come, concerning both the fates of the dreamer, as well as of whole nations. Consequently, it was no surprise that the very idea of dreams containing mystical experiences was widely accepted at the time. Unfortunately, this idea, of the presence of mystical experiences in dreams, diminished with the advent of a

new role for the dream interpreter, which saw dream interpretation as a tool for understanding and studying man in a naturalistic setting, and by way of an ever-increasing mechanistic take on the nature of the workings of inner-man. This trend, started at the end of the classical period, continued on throughout the Middle Ages, the enlightenment, the beginnings of Freudian psychoanalysis, in the late nineteenth century, right up to the appearance of the *phenomenological-existentialist* take on dream interpretation, where the dream's role as potential conveyor of mystical experiences, was finally restored. This is made clear by Boss's historical account of the role of the dream interpreter, as found in the first part of his *Analysis of Dreams*.<sup>26</sup>

What really interests us here, however, is to be found in the later part of his book: two final distinctions, which he draws amongst possible dream experiences, which are most important for us: (1) Boss' re-affirmation of the possibility and role of divine relationship in dreams; and (2) his close attention paid to "nonsensical" and "paradoxical" dreams. The first of these two possibilities, exhibits dreams betraying *numinous features*<sup>27</sup>, which are strikingly reminiscent of Gellman's characterization of "garden-variety experiences of God" (referring here, primarily to religious visions<sup>28</sup>), but it is the second one, which strikes us as most interesting: According to Boss, "nonsensical" dreams are those which involve absurd time-and-place relationships. These allow various kinds of "unnatural" warping of both the former and the latter, which, interestingly enough, hold perfectly good unity and meaning, within the confines of the dream world, and only become absurd when understood in relation to our waking concept

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<sup>26</sup>Medard Boss, *The Analysis of Dreams*, translated by Arnold J. Pomerans (New York, Philosophical Library, 1958), pp. 11-74.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid, pp. 141-50.

<sup>28</sup>Jerome Gellman, *Mystical Experience of God: A Philosophical Inquiry*, p. 7.

of space and time, as a given, independent and homogeneous dimension, measurable with universally valid measuring rods. Thus, we come to realize that these “nonsensical” dreams, in turn, are “sensory-based”, but function at a “super-sensory level”, betraying the possibility of *super sensory-like* qualities in dreams and, consequently, of *extrovertive mystical experiences*, contained therein.

More interestingly still, the final possibility, concerning dreams about a “paradoxical something”, is strikingly similar to an *introvertive mystical experience*, in that these dreams are of a “something”, but that this “something” is in no way describable or comparable to anything normally encountered in waking perception. This realization, in turn, often leaves the patient no other choice than to use “logically offensive” language to try and get a sense of what is experienced. An example of such an account goes as follows:

There is always something great, and nothing else except this gigantic something. I perceive it with a sense transcending my ordinary senses. I can somehow touch the gigantic something, but at the same time I am in it as it is in me. It is gigantic and infinitely small at the same time, and it is just this “at the same time” that is so magnificent. I am never afraid. All these dreams have always struck me as surprisingly impressive and my astonishment is always mixed with reverence.<sup>29</sup>

By basing ourselves on this rich information, we can clearly see that, based on Boss’ investigations, it would seem that one can have, not only *theistic* and *non-theistic*, but also *introvertive* and *extrovertive* mystical experiences, in dreams.

(4) The fourth and final intentional avenue, employed to reach the mystical realm, rests with *aesthetic experiences*. These are to be understood at two levels: artistic production and artistic contemplation. While current phenomenological investigations into the nature of aesthetics, already show them to exhibit some of the *ineffability* and

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<sup>29</sup> Medard Boss, *The Analysis of Dreams*, pp. 203-04.

*esoterism* of mystical experiences<sup>30</sup>, we need to draw a clearer distinction between a *non-mystical* aesthetic experience (one which can be emotionally quite stirring, and difficult to put into words, but which does not actually afford one contact with the *sublime*<sup>31</sup>) and one which, in addition to the emotional and sense-perceptual component, also contains an actual *mystical component*, which accompanies the aesthetic experience itself. Our criteria for distinguishing between these two possibilities, rests with our nine distinguishing characteristics, for all manners of mystical experiences, as outlined at the end of the previous section. Thus, when examined by way of these criteria, we find that, while certain aesthetic experiences may indeed exhibit unusual and quite stirring emotive qualities, it is only those, which are also accompanied by either an additional *super sense-perceptual* or *sub-sense perceptual* component of the experience, which can be said to “contain” an additional mystical experience therein. This final cautionary remark notwithstanding, the fact remains that, along with meditative practices and psychotropic substances, aesthetic experiences remain, thanks to the high degree of influence and “control”, exerted by the subject, one of the most favourable intentional avenues, towards mystical experience.

With these final clarifications at hand, we can now summarise our four main kinds of avenues, by way of which intentional mystical experiences can be reached, and subsequently studied:

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<sup>30</sup> See, for example, Michel Henry’s development of the expression of the underlying “invisible” force of life, manifested through artwork, in *Voir l’Invisible, sur Kandinski*, by Michel Henry: Michel Henry, *Voir l’Invisible* (Editions François Bourin, 27, rue Saint-André-des-Arts, 75006 Paris, 1988), pp. 14-25.

<sup>31</sup> It is clear, from this remark, that we understand here an experience of the sublime as constituting a genuine *bona fide* mystical experience; for its full phenomenal qualities are clearly irreducible to both the emotional, as well as the sense-perceptual components of the underlying aesthetic experience, which may be the occasion and/or catalyst for the overlaying subliminal experience. For further clarification of our specific understanding of the sublime, see Kant’s *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement*, Book II, § 23-29, in his *Critique of Judgment: Immanuel Kant, Critique of Judgment*, translated by James Creed Meredith, with seven introductory essays notes, and analytical index (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1911).

1. Meditative practices
2. Psychotropic substances
3. Dream states
4. Aesthetic experiences

We further find that, of these four possible avenues, 1, 2 and 4 afford the most “control” over the unfolding course of events, although 3 can also afford (potentially even more incredible) control; but access to this level of control (as is to be found in the case of lucid dreams) is usually much more limited and problematic, than for the other three. Therefore, the best choice of avenues, towards the consistent and systematic “production” of mystical experiences, consequently rests with avenues 1, 2 and 4, with 1 and 4 being the most cautious, but by no means less productive and fascinating, ones.

Having thus clarified, both the phenomenal qualities of mystical experiences, as well as the many avenues, by way of which they can be reached (so that the reader may be made well-aware of what we *specifically understand* mystical experiences to be), we can now finally explain why we feel the need to render them effable. We will clarify this topic in the next section, by showing how their purported ineffability, esoterism and grand noetic qualities, taken together, generate a number of *socio-cultural problems*, and how this can be addressed by performing an even more rigorous and in-depth examination of them, than what has been performed, thus far.

**Chapter 2:**

**Why a Phenomenology of Esoteric States of Consciousness?**

## 2.1: The Need for a *Rigorously* Phenomenological Examination of Esoteric States of Consciousness

In the previous chapter, we have seen that esoteric states of consciousness, when understood under the more precise category of mystical experiences, are present in practically all socio-cultural and religious contexts, can manifest themselves in many different forms, and can be attained by various means. Given the great variety of mystical experiences, we have seen that they can be categorized under the headings of wide/narrow sense of mystical experiences, introvertive/extrovertive, theistic/non-theistic, unitive/non-unitive and intentional/non-intentional. We have further seen that these experiences can occur in such wide-ranging circumstances, as within various kinds of meditative practices, while taking various kinds of psychotropic substances, during dreams, during moments of aesthetic appreciation or creation, or that they can even come down at any time upon a subject, taking one quite effectively by surprise.

The next thing, we need to do, is to address *two main points* of interest:

1. The first point involves determining which of these various kinds of mystical experiences we wish to examine in an even more rigorously phenomenological manner, so as to resolve the problem of ineffability, which is often said to befall them; for as we will come to see, not all mystical experiences are affected by the problem of ineffability in the same way. In fact, we will show that most *extrovertive* mystical experiences can see this problem resolved by “simply” asking a *core set* of ontological, epistemological and cosmological questions, but that only a small set of “ambiguous” extrovertive mystical experiences, as well as all

*introvertive* mystical experiences, require that we ask *truly phenomenological questions*, for the problem of ineffability to alleviate itself. This will become clear later on.

2. The second point involves explaining *why* it is that we wish to “resolve” this problem of ineffability, “befalling” mystical experiences, in the first place. This will also become clear, as we answer the first point.

Before we can address these two points, however, we need to deal with another very important issue, confronting our project: since our examination of mystical experiences takes, as its starting point, a very rich and diverse variety of mystical experiences, present in a great number of socio-cultural and religious contexts, it is quite natural that the very epistemological, ontological and cosmological bases upon which these accounts rest, can, and do, vary quite greatly, from one such context to another. This results in an immediate concern that one may have, which is whether there is anything “proximate or similar, enough”, within these various *conceptual schemes*, allowing for mystical experiences to be grouped and studied in such a systematic manner in the first place? From the onset, it is clear that we have already performed such a grouping, by basing ourselves primarily on the categorical distinctions of Jerome Gellman, but is this even something that it is reasonable to do, without inheriting a myriad of problems, ranging from over-generalization to the potential threat of incommensurability?



This very genuine concern can be addressed as follows: It is important to realize that our grouping is much more “charitable” than other such groupings that have already been performed. As an example, we find other attempts at such groupings, present in a number of philosophers, whom Jerome Gellman refers to as the “perennialists”. In a nutshell, these perennialists (Walter Stace, R.C. Zaehner, and William Wainwright) believe that there are a certain *set number of features*, which all manners of mystical experiences share, across all socio-cultural and religious contexts. Furthermore, they set out to try and devise, on the basis of these feature, categorical delineations for “common” mystical experiences.<sup>32</sup> Needless to say, their categorical delineations are much narrower and more controversial (especially Walter Stace’s) than Gellman’s, and stir up criticism from what we will call the “proponents of the incommensurability thesis”. These proponents (Katz being the main one mentioned by Gellman) believe, in a nutshell, that, since the conceptual scheme a mystic possesses massively determines, shapes, or influences the nature of the mystical experience, and that since these conceptual schemes vary greatly across mystical traditions, that there cannot be a common mystical experience, across various cultural traditions.<sup>33</sup>

We choose to adopt a more neutral route: While we feel that such a strong claim as the one advanced by the perennialists may be problematic, we are also not overly sympathetic towards the incommensurability thesis. Dialogue concerning mystical experiences may be difficult at times, but there is no good reason to believe that, given the proper time, patience, clarification and precision, headway cannot be made. As a matter of fact, this is something which occurs in all manners of discourse, where the two

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<sup>32</sup> William J. Wainwright, *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion*, pp. 145-46.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, p. 150.

parties involved arrive at the discussion table with potentially drastically different conceptual schemes; not only in terms of alien cultures, but also in terms of various expert cultures, within a similar socio-cultural and religious context.

But then, if we wish to study mystical experiences in a *rigorous* and *systematic manner*, doesn't this require that we employ a certain *minimal* set number of features, which will serve to distinguish mystical experiences from non-mystical ones? The short answer is *yes*, but with an important distinction: the key to avoiding the kinds of problems that the perennialists encountered is to make these features *dynamic and flexible*, as opposed to making them into a necessary *fixed set*. By doing so, we end up adopting a much more neutral stance, towards the kind of systematic examination of mystical experiences that we wish to perform, than either the perennialists or the proponents, of the incommensurability thesis.

Our stance can thus be summarised as follows: we feel that there is sufficient evidence for claiming the presence of mystical experiences (as distinct from "mundane" experiences), across varying socio-cultural and religious contexts, but that there need not necessarily be a *set number of distinguishing features* which determine, in a fixed manner, which kinds of experiences are mystical and which ones are not. Note that this observation does not entail, however, that there isn't a certain group (or groups) of often reoccurring qualities (such as "ambiguous" *sensory-like* content in the experience, or various forms of non-sensory awareness, for example), which are to be found across widely distributed mystical experiences, of various sorts. This is made clear by our nine criteria for the presence of mysticism in an experience, as outlined at the end of section 1.1. What this means, is that, regarding what makes a mystical experience mystical in the

first place, our approach employs Wittgenstein's model of *family-resemblance*<sup>34</sup> as our identity designator, as opposed to an *attribute* or *property-based*, identity model.

This being said, while many of the distinguishing features of mystical experiences are thus made flexible, some much more basic *core features* need to be retained, for our conceptual scheme to even be *intelligible*, in the first place. This may seem, at first glance, like a contradiction in terms, in light of our earlier claims, but we feel that it is not the case, for the following two reasons: (1) we feel that these concepts can be, and already have been, "translated" quite adequately across the various *language games*, which are "played" by various mystical traditions (as can be observed when looking at the extensive mystical literature); (2) such basic concepts are quite necessary, if we are to have *any* kind of discourse about mysticism and mystical experiences (let alone about most anything), to begin with.

Thus, our conceptual scheme can be resumed as follows: we understand that the *phenomenal quality* (the *qualia*, or "what it feels like") of a mystical experience can be examined according to the following concepts:

1. sensory elements, understood here as per the five "natural" senses
2. Feelings, designating such experiences as pleasure, pain, hot, cold, etc.
3. Emotional elements, designating emotive states
4. Ontological elements, designating *entities*, whose modes of appearance, and "metaphysical nature", can be *reflected* by the three concepts above

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<sup>34</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, translated by G.E.M. Anscombe (Basil Blackwell & Mott, Ltd, Oxford, G.B., 1968), §§ 66-71.

Basing ourselves on this outline, the first three concepts are considered (pending some flexibility and adjustments), to hold a *universal* character. The fourth concept, however, is considered to be *potentially* highly determined by the socio-cultural and religious peculiarities of various lifeworlds, which entails that what makes a mystical experience an experience of such and such “entities”, needs to be determined by local socio-cultural and religious considerations.

With these final clarifications in place, we can now return to the problem of *ineffability*, which is said to befall mystical experiences. To properly bring this problem into perspective, we first need to look at the *esoteric* quality that is usually associated with mystical experiences and mysticism, in general. How are we to understand the esoteric nature of mystical experiences? For one thing, we know that the term “esoteric” refers to something that is generally secretive and meant to be understood by a select group of people. We also know that mystical experiences are also generally understood, in all socio-cultural and religious contexts, to be kinds of occurrences, importantly *over-and-above* the “mass kinds of experiences” that make up the effectively “common objective lifeworld”, of those respective socio-cultural and religious contexts. Furthermore, such experiences usually occur: (1) rather rarely; (2) in specific circumstances; (3) and are usually encountered by only a certain number of “select” people; for were they to be *common experiences*, they would no longer be *unusual* and would therefore belong to the category of mundane experiences, making up the “common lifeworld”.

Now, given that such experiences occur in all socio-cultural and religious contexts, and given that they are experienced by at least a certain number of people, when

such people realize that they have had (or think they have had) such similar unusual experiences, and when they organize themselves into groups and come together to study, examine, interpret and preserve these kinds of experiences in question, they end up creating an effectively “expert culture”. Now, as far as the experiences themselves are concerned, given their unusual qualities (in relation to what this specific socio-cultural *lifeworld* considers to be “mundane experiences”), and given the often very important socio-political and religious implications, that the “proper” handling and communication of these experiences entails (something developed quite well by Christopher Yorke in his thesis entitled *The Mystic and the Ineffable: Some Epistemological, Political and Metaphilosophical Concerns*), it is quite natural that such experiences receive the staple of *esoterism* by the mystics, who often make it their duty to be the official channels and interpreters of the *noetic quality* or “conveyed knowledge”, of such experiences. This results in mystical experiences, of all sorts, being rendered *esoteric*, when put into the context of an expert culture, which, for various reasons, chooses to maintain a secretive nature around them and to withhold discourse on them, from the public sphere.

This observation, in turn, leads us to the central question of the alleged ineffability of mystical experiences: Are, at least, some mystical experiences truly ineffable, in that they really do defy utterance, or is it a matter of various personal, social and political interests at stake, and disparity between different language games? Are the mystics, in fact, quite capable of discussing these experiences amongst themselves, and do they simply choose not to open up dialogue with the public sphere?

Our answer would have to be primarily in the affirmative, although with some caution: we would be well-advised, not to claim that all manners of mystical experiences

can necessarily be rendered effable. On the other hand, we feel that much (but not all) of that, which is originally alleged by the mystics to be ineffable is, in fact, *quite effable*, and only requires that the *proper questions* be posed. These questions, as mentioned already, constitute a *threefold core*, and can be understood under the titles of ontological, epistemological and cosmological questions. Thus, when confronted with a purportedly ineffable mystical experience, we first need to ask ourselves the following:

1. What is it that appears (ontological)
2. What kind of immediate knowledge is communicated by this appearance (epistemological)
3. What are the greater implications of this knowledge (cosmological)

These questions, when posed in this order, can serve to elucidate (at least from a preliminarily *descriptive* perspective) what the nature of the mystical experience allegedly is, and they can do so quite successfully for a great variety of mystical experiences. The problem, however, is that these questions function well when dealing with garden-variety “mystical” experiences, understood, by us, as being usually *wholly sensory* in nature and involving various *apparitions* of sorts, but not when dealing with the following two possibilities:

1. A certain class of extrovertive mystical experiences, which have a most peculiar “super-sense perceptual” or “sub-sense perceptual” quality, and

which are consequently *highly ambiguous*, as to the ontological status of the apparition in question

2. All manners of *wholly non-sensory* or *introvertive*, mystical experiences.

The reason why our three preliminary questions fail to clarify the nature of these two kinds of possible mystical experiences is that “garden-variety” apparitions are of a sensory nature, which is rather proximate to waking-perception, and, consequently, usually commands little ambiguity as to their ontological status. On the other hand, when dealing with cases of *ambiguous* extrovertive mystical experiences, or with cases of introvertive mystical experiences, it simply becomes *drastically unclear* what the ontological status (if any) of the “appearing entity in question” actually is. Consequently, we find that, in cases of “relatively clear” apparitions, the ontological, epistemological and cosmological questions rest with the lifeworld particularities of the socio-cultural and religious context, within which the mystical experience was documented, but in cases of such “super-sense perceptual” or “sub-sense perceptual”, extrovertive mystical experiences, as well as in most cases of a first experience of mystical non-sensory awareness, one is, most often, at a loss for words, when attempting to utter its content.

This is where the *truly ineffable* quality of mystical experiences comes in. We find it to be most “stubbornly” present in such peculiar cases of ambiguous extrovertive and in introvertive, mystical experiences, where, even given “ideal speech situations” (where the subject is not coerced in one way or another into falsely claiming ineffability), a genuine “loss for words” occurs, when attempting to utter the contents of the mystical

experience. The reason for this is that the experience in question, given its great distance from the myriad of “common” sensory experiences, which constitute the majority of the subject’s lifeworld, is not properly interwoven into the *language games*, as described by Wittgenstein<sup>35</sup>, which the subject usually plays in their day-to-day living.

In contrast, the other kinds of mundane sensory experiences, which the subject is quite used to, are already properly interwoven into the language games that are played, between the subject and other members of the community, and require, therefore, little effort on one’s part to smoothly and readily partake in them. This is the reason why, by asking our three preliminary questions above, we are able to render, quite readily effable, most of our unambiguous sensory-like mystical experiences; the links connecting our language games with our mundane sensory experiences are already well in place and require little alteration for us to make the transition from talking about sensory experiences in the common realm, to sensory experiences in the mystical realm.

On the other hand, the unusual and quite drastic nature of the ambiguous sensory mystical experience, and even more so of the non-sensory mystical experience, when encountered for the first time, is so *alien* to the locally established language games, that attempts at uttering it leave one either at a “loss for words”, or (in the best of cases) forces one to rely on crude and misplaced metaphors and linguistic imagery, to try and convey a sense of the experience in question; a task which is, most often, *inadequate*, and which can leave all more confused than they had been, before attempting this utterance.

Given this observation, it is important to remember that, this does not mean that all such ambiguous sensory and non-sensory mystical experiences necessarily *transcend* language games, and that they cannot be made part of such language games (to greater

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid, §§ 7-23.



and lesser degrees of success). Exceptions to this general rule (of the ineffability of ambiguous sensory and non-sensory mystical experiences) are already to be found within the select expert cultures of mystics, who concern themselves specifically with these most peculiar mystical experiences. What we find to be happening, in such groups, is a variation of a very peculiar and specific language game being played out, amongst members who have had similar experiences, and who have devised a way to interweave linguistic discourse, with the *residual phenomenal qualities* of their ambiguous sensory and non-sensory experiences in question. In this respect, their employment of metaphorical language serves the purpose of phenomenal re-collection or re-activation, of these mystical experiences. This “mystical language”, therefore, becomes perfectly intelligible for them, but it cannot be understood on its true merit, if one simply comes as an outsider, has not already become a part of their expert culture, and has not had these peculiar mystical experiences, in question; for, in such cases, one is simply neither playing the same language game, nor experiencing the same “mystical residue”.

This final observation, however, exposes the very problem which we wish to address: while it is already possible to devise a language game, which can take into account such ambiguous sensory and non-sensory mystical experiences, the relative scarcity of such experiences, along with the associated socio-political and religious interests that often become formed by the people initiated into these expert cultures (which make it their business to manage, interpret and communicate these experiences), result in the creation of a myriad of *highly diverse and exclusive language games*, which are often in conflict with each other and, given sufficient differences amongst them, can even approach the problem of incommensurability. We further find this disparity to be

responsible, not only for the great variety of accounts and interpretations of mystical experiences, but also for the various *squabbles* between mystical groups and between other “expert cultures” (such as the scientific community, for example), over the nature of the experiences in question (which can result, in the worst of cases, in serious conflicts, based on disagreements over the alleged cosmological knowledge, conveyed by these experiences), as well as for the general public’s mistrust of mystical organizations, holding purportedly very secretive, and yet very important information, for all concerned.

What is therefore required, to correct this disparity, is a *restitution*, not only of such ambiguous sensory mystical experiences, but, most importantly, of *non-sensory* mystical experiences to their rightful place, into our language games, as *genuine* states of consciousness, which one can experience. To do so, we need to perform a phenomenological study, which will go far beyond simply asking the three preliminary questions, which we have outlined above (and which are of no direct use to us, in their present form, when dealing with such peculiar kinds of mystical experiences) and further examine these experiences at the level of the *pure phenomenological description*. What this entails, is the playing out of a “completely new” language game; one which will make the *fine distinctions* needed to distinguish the non-sensory from the sensory, as well as from what we take to be “objects of sense-perception”, and one which will equally be able to link the noetic qualities of non-sensory forms of awareness, and of “pure” sensory elements of experience, with the various effectively sensory lifeworlds, which we are all used to navigating. To accomplish this task, we need to perform a *rigorously phenomenological* examination of our ambiguous sensory and non-sensory mystical experiences, and this requires that we lay out a *specific phenomenological descriptive*

*framework*, which will allow us to fulfill this goal. We will perform this task in the next, and in the final chapter.

**Chapter 3:**

**The Transition from the Natural Attitude, to the Phenomenological  
Standpoint**

### 3.1: Our Shared Concerns with Husserl

In the previous chapter, we have seen that, while many extrovertive (garden-variety) mystical experiences command relatively little ambiguity as to the ontological status of their apparitions, and require, therefore, only that we properly ask the first three preliminary core questions to alleviate their purported ineffability, matters become more complicated, when dealing with certain ambiguous extrovertive mystical experiences, and certainly when dealing with introvertive mystical experiences, where it is not at all clear, exactly what it is that “appears”. Thus, concerning the first possibility, referred to, by Gellman, as “super-sense-perceptual” or “sub-sense perceptual” mystical experiences, what we consequently come to find, is that these experiences, while still holding phenomenal qualities which *bind them to the greater sensory genus*<sup>36</sup>, see these qualities manifested in a most unusual and peculiar manner; most unlike the kinds of mundane cases of “waking perception”, which we are usually used to experiencing, in our day-to-day living. The consequences of this realization, for us, are as follows: since it is clear that there are such experiences (where the ontological status of the mystical apparition cannot be directly given by our preliminary three-fold descriptive account), and since we know that they still are of a sensory nature, it is necessary to supplement our preliminary three-fold descriptive framework with *further conceptual refinements*, so that it may effectively accomplish the following:

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<sup>36</sup> We are referring here to an *abstraction* of the kinds of phenomena which are directly related to sense and sensory-like perception, as derived from our manifold flow of consciousness.

1. Properly distinguish between “pure” sensory elements of experience, actual objects of sense-perception, and objective realms (or what we take to be objective “spatio-temporal” environments).
2. Provide us with an adequate understanding of the *relationship* between these three levels of description, in view of what interests us here, namely the *proper phenomenological description*, per se.

To properly accomplish these two tasks, we need to turn ourselves to a philosopher who has been called the effective founder of Western phenomenology, and to his impressive philosophical developments: Edmund Husserl. Our reasons for relying on his particular philosophical approach are as follows: (1) Husserl not only developed his *descriptive phenomenology* by starting out with a number of *key concerns*, which resemble ours in a number of important ways; (2) but this very fact also led him to develop a set of philosophical concepts, which were specifically demarcated as being descriptive, as opposed to explanatory or genetic (both in relation to the psychical, as well as the objective world); thus, holding a characteristic which interests us here.

To properly understand the full extent of our shared key concerns, we need to turn ourselves to what is referred to as Husserl’s last great work, entitled *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*. In this work, we find Husserl’s final (and most developed) outline of what he saw to be a number of increasingly prevalent and problematic trends, within the scientific and intellectual culture of his time, which he subsumed (somewhat derogatively) under the headings of *historicism*,

*naturalism* and *psychologism*. While Husserl saw all three of these trends working together to produce the so-called crisis of European sciences and culture, it is actually the latter two, which are particularly representative of our present modern concerns. We will therefore clarify these two in turn:

(1) The first trend, namely “naturalism”, dealt with what Husserl saw as a propagation of the “naturalistic attitude”, within scientifically-inclined milieus. This propagation, in turn, entailed a growing reliance on what Husserl called “physicalistic rationalism”<sup>37</sup>, increasingly employed to effectively map and explain the lifeworld. While not in denial as to the various evident achievements, gained throughout the course of the history of the sciences, by way of reliance on this *positivistic approach*, Husserl was nevertheless concerned that its excessive emphasis on the reduction of the idea of science to “mere” factual science, lead to an effective loss or devaluation of its meaning for life. What this meant, was that Husserl saw the primary role of natural science as having its meaning-fundament given to it by the lifeworld, and not the other-way around.<sup>38</sup>

(2) The second trend, namely “psychologism”, bears a direct link with the first, and serves to bring the *shared qualities* of our problem into perspective: It dealt with what Husserl saw as the drawbacks of an increasing reliance on the empirical approach (already extensively employed by the natural sciences), by the *Geisteswissenschaften* of his time, which included the various emerging specialised psychological disciplines; for

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<sup>37</sup> Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: an Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, translated, with an introduction, by David Carr (Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1970), § 12-14.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, § 9h, i.

Husserl was concerned that this use of the empirical approach could not simply be transposed *as is* to the study of “the life of the soul” or “subjectivity”, due to the following reason:

Being highly inspired by Franz Brentano (despite some important later disagreements), Husserl realized, early on in his philosophical career, that what we understand to be the psyche or “life of the soul”, was not given to empirical investigation, in the same way that the natural objective world was; for, when properly reflected upon, one realizes that the various complex psychic phenomena (such as the various mental acts of thinking, feeling, remembering, perceiving, judging, etc.), constitutive of the life of the soul, simply do not have the same kinds of *factual spatio-temporal attributes and properties* usually attributed to physical objects. This is because psychic phenomena cannot be thought of, or seen, as having any kind of effective *spatial position, extension and temporal duration*, as is consistently observed in physical objects; and yet, remarked Husserl, the various psychological disciplines of the time, were nevertheless attempting to map and explain subjectivity, by relying on essentially this very same kind of *metaphysical and epistemological framework*, as employed by the natural sciences. This led him to conclude, that this practice resulted in them simply “aping” the methods and investigative procedures of the natural sciences, which, in turn, resulted in an effectively *inadequate account*, being given of the sphere of purely psychic phenomena, properly understood as such.<sup>39</sup>

Despite this disparity between the “observable” properties of physical and psychic phenomena, Husserl was also well aware that this realization, of his, concerning the peculiar qualities of the psychical, did not entail that it does not have certain reoccurring

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, § 60-62.



*patterns of regularity*, which opened up the very possibility of studying it in a *rigorous* and *systematic* fashion, in the first place. This being said, Husserl realized, however, that to properly study the psychical, one needed to devise an effectively *new descriptive framework*, much improved upon what was available then; one which could capture these psychic phenomena in their *self-given immediacy* and *apodicticity*, free of all of one's previous *physicalistic* and *naturalistic* presuppositions, and respectively describe them as such.<sup>40</sup>

Finally, in the same manner in which Husserl saw the sphere of the psychical as requiring a specifically new and separate investigative framework, for it to be adequately studied, we find a similar correlation to apply to the kinds of events, which we encounter in mystical experiences; for, if we are to fast-forward to our times, we still find the following two observations to be valid:

1. Mystical experiences are not given to examination in the same manner in which the objective world is, seeing as how their "presence" in the *inner or subjective, sphere*, as opposed to the *public sphere*, leads us to

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<sup>40</sup> Having said this, it is very important to realize that Husserl's envisaged role for the phenomenological approach, actually goes much further and rejects the very validity of this hard distinction between "external and internal phenomena", as well as between cases of "external and internal perception"; distinction, which he relegates to the inheritance of Descartes' dualism amongst souls and bodies, spewing off onto the solely presumptive dualism amongst physical and psychical events. Consequently, he sees the "manifestations of physical events", in our consciousness, as operating on the *same essential level* as that of so-called "psychical events" (although given by way of clearly different structures and contents) and, therefore, argues for the need to dispense with the antiquated physical-psychical distinction, in favour of what was to become his transcendental phenomenology. This is made evident by § 60-67 of *Crisis*. We, however, choose to retain the distinction between physical and psychical events, for now, but only as a *tentative referent*, intended to help us along. This point will become clearer in section 3.3.

understand them as being analogous to very specific kinds of *psychic phenomena* or *events*.<sup>41</sup>

2. Mystical experiences, granting access to realities or states of affairs, which are often *highly distanced* from the shared objective lifeworld, simply cannot be studied with prejudicial reliance on this very same objective lifeworld, as the benchmark, against which their phenomenal qualities and complex constituents, are ultimately to be based and judged. This does not mean, however, that certain elements from the shared objective lifeworld cannot be employed, as *simple referents*, to help us along; but, in so doing, we need to hold fast to our commitment to studying mystical experiences, *as truly given to us*, without such objective prejudice potentially clouding our investigations.

Consequently, we find that Husserl's commitment to avoiding physicalistic and naturalistic presuppositions, in the development of his descriptive phenomenology, makes it into an *adequate tool*, for the study of the "psychic phenomena", known to us as

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<sup>41</sup> In light of the previous footnote, it is also important to understand here that, by "psychic events", we do not understand them to be cases of "internal perception" in the Brentanian sense, in which the distinction between internal and external perception is drawn (referring roughly to the *positional* distinction between perceptions of psychic states and perceptions of physical objects), but rather in the Husserlian sense, in which they are seen as both belonging to essentially the same phenomenal sphere: See Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, translated by J.N. Findlay (Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., Broadway House, 68-74 Carter Lane, London, E.C.4, 1970), Investigation VI, appendix, §1-8. What we simply mean, by this denotation, is that access to mystical experiences, does not operate by way of the shared lifeworld modalities, which we usually employ to gain what we call "empirical knowledge" of our environment. Thus, because the subject, experiencing the mystical experience, *appears* to external observers to still be present amongst them, in our "shared world of things", the mystical experience is understood, from *their external perspective*, as a "psychic event"; but this very important distinction, which we draw here, effectively serves to show that mystical experiences cannot be thought of as literally "occurring in the head", and therefore, being *limited* to the head, even though that is the impression often given of them.

mystical experiences. We will therefore adopt his take on the relationship between “pure” sensory elements of experience, actual objects of sense-perception, and objective realms, to help us to further refine our preliminary three-fold core descriptive framework thus far, and slowly begin to first alleviate the ineffability, befalling ambiguous extrovertive mystical experiences.

### 3.2: The Phenomenological *Epoché*

To properly develop our understanding of the relationship between “pure” sensory elements of experience, actual objects of sense-perception, and objective realms, as is to be found in Husserlian phenomenology, we need to perform a special kind of philosophical reflection, which will allow us to “transition” from the *natural* to the *phenomenological* attitude. This reflection is known as the *phenomenological epoché*, and is explained by Husserl in chapter 3 of *Ideas*.<sup>42</sup> Now, seeing as how we have found this peculiar philosophical attitude to be notoriously difficult to grasp, often misunderstood, and yet, central to what will become, both our investigative procedure, as well as our phenomenological descriptive approach, we will explain its origin and role, in relation to the *natural attitude*, in some detail here:

Husserl held the concern, that if his phenomenology as descriptive psychology was to adequately demarcate itself from empirical psychology, as being the one which is truly concerned with the examination of psychic acts, in their *self-evident, given purity*, then the phenomenologist would have to employ a special kind of philosophical *tool*, or *attitude*, so as to render this realm of the “purely psychical” effectively present before oneself. There is a special reason for this: Husserl felt that, while these purely psychical elements are, in fact, already present, in the phenomenal field of experience (one’s effective field of awareness), they are “hidden” from one’s *immediate* awareness, because one normally finds oneself to be operating within the “natural attitude”. What this attitude entails, is a form of automatic presupposition of one’s presence as a “subject in a world of things”, whose objective existence as a *corporeal being*, is simply taken as a given

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<sup>42</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, Translated by W. R. Royce Gibson (Collier-Macmillan Ltd., London, 1969), pp. 91-100.

(basically referring to our “inherent” tendency to *objectify* various elements, from our manifold flow of consciousness, into existing “external” objects). Furthermore, Husserl realized that, as long as one was to remain in such a “frame of mind”, one would effectively remain shielded from ever being able to grasp the essential nature of this *purely psychical realm*.

What was therefore needed, according to Husserl, was a method of *suspension of judgment*, which would serve to awaken one from this form of “realist dogmatic slumber”. To find such a method, Husserl turned to René Descartes for inspiration. In Descartes works, he found the delineation of his “method of radical doubt”, which Descartes used to try and effect a simultaneous suspension of judgment, concerning all that he took to be his cumulatively acquired knowledge of the objective world. For Descartes, this was done so as to try and escape the threat of scepticism, as entailed by the dream and the evil demon predicaments, and this threat of scepticism was to be overcome by finding, in philosophical reflection, some *fundamental grounds*, upon which *apodictic* knowledge could be based. Working with this method, we find Descartes arriving at his famous conclusion, within his second meditation, that he, as a thinking substance, must exist<sup>43</sup>, which, itself, was to lead to his now famous affirmation “I think therefore I am” or *cogito ergo sum*, as found in his *Discourse on Method*.

While Husserl found Descartes’ method of radical doubt inspiring, he did not transpose it directly *as is*, to his own project. The reason for this lay both in a variation in goal, and in ideas, amongst the two philosophers, concerning its proper application; while Descartes’ approach was aimed at resolving the possibility of epistemological

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<sup>43</sup> Elizabeth Anscombe, Peter Thomas Geach, *Descartes, Philosophical Writings* (Library of Liberal Arts, Prentice Hall Inc., Upper Saddle River, NJ 07458, 1971), pp. 67-71.

apodicticity, concerning his very own existence, Husserl's concern lay with finding a solution to the problem of the natural attitude, cloaking the possibility of an examination of the underlying, purely given, psychic phenomena. Husserl thus informs us that, concerning phenomenology, the suspension of judgment does not operate by transforming the *natural thesis* into its antithesis, and neither is it a transformation of the thesis into a presumption, indecision or doubt. In this respect, Husserl claims it to be something wholly unique, for it does not imply that the original thesis is relinquished, but only that it is suspended or "bracketed"; put aside for the moment and remaining unchanged, as long as we do not introduce new motives of judgment.

Husserl goes on to say that this universal *epoché*, in the sharply defined new sense given here, could replace the Cartesian attempt to doubt everything. Furthermore, since it is to have an instrumental role in the development of the phenomenological method, which he is interested in, there is a need to limit its universality in important ways: If it were to simply be left as it is, as including each and every manner of judgment, there would be no room left for unmodified judgements.<sup>44</sup> Husserl thus believes that the following limitation is to be made: We put out of action the general thesis that is characteristic of the natural standpoint; we bracket whatever it contains concerning the nature of being. This leaves the entire natural world as still there for me, although suspended between brackets. This does not entail a denial of the world, as if one were a sophist, nor a doubt of its existence, as if one were a sceptic, but the employment of the

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<sup>44</sup> Unmodified judgments, for Husserl, refer to the most basic acts of consciousness, whereby objects "present themselves to us", in our consciousness, without any additional *existential qualifiers or attributes*.

phenomenological *epoché* effectively bars one from making use of any judgment that concerns *spatiotemporal factual beings*.<sup>45</sup>

Thus, with these final clarifications at hand, we are now familiar with the goal and procedure entailed by the phenomenological reduction. Let us now see what kinds of fruits have already been reaped, by Husserl, using the phenomenological reduction, concerning the existence and relationship amongst “pure” sensory elements of experience, actual objects of sense-perception, and objective realms.

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<sup>45</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, pp. 96-100.

### 3.3: The Objective World as Psychic Phenomena

Once we have duly performed the phenomenological reduction, and reached the phenomenological *epoché*, a “whole new world of facts reveals itself to us” (to use Husserl’s own words). One of these facts, concerns our realization that, within the immediate phenomenal field of experience, there are to be found such things as “*pure*” or *raw sensory elements of experience*, which are *necessarily present*, in all acts of waking perception, properly understood as such. We actually arrive at this conclusion, by way of the following deduction:

1. “Pure” sensory elements of experience are the most basic and universal *unstructured forms of awareness*, which can be given by the senses.
2. All objects of sense-perception, being given by the senses, and constituting an already *structured form of awareness*, necessarily include an underlying experience of these pure sensory elements of experience.

Therefore:

3. If these pure sensory elements of experience were to be absent, there would be no possible *sensory* perception of objects, per se.

Our next task involves explicating the nature of these “pure” sensory elements of experience, with additional precision. To do so, we start off by postulating a number of



categorical distinctions, which classify these, according to the greater genus of our *five natural senses*; this indicates the various kinds of individuated *qualia*, of the same sense-genus, that can be given by them. Secondly, our next level categorical distinctions, postulate various *sub-categories*, themselves respectively located within these five preliminary categorical frameworks. Thus, within the greater category of visual sense-experiences, we find sub-categories, corresponding to various *colour intensities, hues and shades*; within the greater category of auditory sense-experiences, we find sub-categories, corresponding to various *tones*, and so on, for the other three natural senses.

We choose to make these kinds of categorical distinctions, because they can, and already have been, quite effectively “translated”, across various socio-cultural conceptual schemas. Thus, by “pure” sensory elements of experience, we understand those most basic and unitary *unstructured forms of awareness*, which can be given by way of sight, sound, touch, smell and taste. For ease of use, we will call these “pure” sensory elements of experience “sensory traces”, from this point forward.

We now need to specify how this concept of sensory traces is to be understood in relation to a much more complex experience, of full-fledged objects of sense-perception, as is to be found in Husserlian phenomenology. To accomplish this task, we need to turn ourselves, to what is referred to as the “early Husserl”, and to his dualistic *matter-form scheme*; for we find that this scheme was to serve as the effective *basis* of his phenomenological description of the genesis of our *apprehension* of objects of sense-perception, by way of their *sensory substrates* (sensory traces). Before we get into the technical details of this actual phenomenological description, however, we will provide the reader with an example of the kind of “orthodox” description, of what is actually

quite a complex sensory experience, as is usually given in the natural attitude. This will help the reader to follow our clarification of our Husserlian concepts, as we move along, by referring back to this example, whenever needed:

*I am driving about in the countryside, towards beautiful Verona Italy. Before me, I see the winding greyish road with white stripes on the sides, and a segmented yellow line in the middle, disappearing under my car. Above me, I see the clear blue sky with barely a few wispy clouds, and all about me, a lush green landscape of little hills and valleys, punctuated by small farms and vine orchards. On the sides of the road, I pass row after row of cypress trees, and I hear the whispering of the wind across my ears, all on my drive to Verona.*

Let us now consider this rather orthodox description (of a, nonetheless, quite pleasant experience), from the perspective of Husserlian phenomenology: One will immediately notice that it makes reference to a number of *perceived entities* or *objects*, encountered along the way; the road, the lanes, the trees, the hills and valleys, etc., are all examples of these. Now, as far as our actual phenomenological description is concerned, the first important observation that we need to make here, is that, even though, from an orthodox naturalist or physicalistic, standpoint, it is not really appropriate to call the sky or wind an “object of sense-perception” (for they have no actual *spatial position* and *extension*, and are rather considered to be “physical phenomena”, as opposed to actual physical objects), it *is* appropriate to do so from a phenomenological standpoint, for the

following reason: Remember, from section 3.2, that Husserl's phenomenological description relies on a *suspension of the natural attitude* and, therefore, does not consider an actual "object of sense-perception" to be solely limited to that which is normally considered to be a *physical entity*, but rather encompasses any such "thing" or "being", which has the following two most basic *ontic* attributes:

- (1) A distinguishable element of sense-experience, no matter how vague or sparse, which points to a certain *meaning*, itself referring, at an even deeper level, to a potential *objective identity-pole*.
- (2) A distinguishable element of sense-experience, which has a minimal substrate of "sensory patterns", under which it "appears", or "manifests itself" to us.

Thus, according to these now more refined phenomenological criteria, the road, trees, hills and valleys are all certainly considered to be *objects of sense-perception*; but so are also the sky, the wind, the chirping of birds, the vibrations of the car, rays of light, etc; for all of these fulfill the two criteria given above, and are therefore: (1) not only referred to, in our description, in terms of various *meanings* (pointing at their respective objective identity-poles); (2) but can also be shown to be manifested by way of *underlying sensory qualities*.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> It is important to remark that, in so doing, we are departing from Husserl in an important way; for we are sustaining our suspension of judgement, regarding the question of the "real" existence of such objects of sense-perception (concerning their transcendental quality). In so doing, we immediately open up a much greater spectrum of possibilities, regarding what is to count as such an actual "object of sense-perception", than if we were to solely limit ourselves to those which are also considered to exhibit qualities of "sensual corporeality" or *leibhaftigkeit*, as defined by their manifestation necessarily operating as a coherent aggregate, *across various senses*. Our reasons for doing so rest with our commitment to avoiding *existential*

Now, while our first ontic attribute above will require some further explanation, the reader will immediately notice that our second attribute is already made implicitly evident by our use of various preliminary *colour, tactile and auditory attributes*, referred to, in our example above, and our description could easily encompass a much more developed account of the actual richness of the various sensory elements, constitutive of this particular experience, if the need were to present itself (and if I were a more effective poet).

To clarify our first ontic attribute, we need to look at chapter one of *Ideas*. This chapter deals with Husserl's understanding of the relationship between *ideas, facts* and *essences*, and it consequently clarifies the nature of his concept of an *objective identity-pole*: In a nutshell, Husserl explains that the reason why our experience of a certain specific reoccurring pattern of sensory traces, manifests itself, to our consciousness, in the form of an *apprehension* of our perception of an "external object-in-the-world", is because these reoccurring patterns point to an effective *idea* or *essence*, of the object in question, given by way of a certain *mode of appearance* (quality of the act of consciousness). Thus, what we understand to be a more "superficial" *object-fact* actually refers to an underlying *object-essence*, for Husserl, as given according to one of its many possible *modes of manifestation*.

Husserl arrives at this conclusion by performing his *eidetic reduction*, which consists in a *play of fancy*, where the phenomenologist varies the different *modes*, under which an object may manifest itself to one's consciousness (spanning all such possible cognitive acts as presentation, representation, imagination, fantasy, remembrance,

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*qualifiers*, in our description of sense-perception, which is necessary for us to be later able to bring in mystical experiences, into our sphere of inquiry.

reflection, judgment, etc.), and *eidetically intuits* which of these various modes of manifestation of the object, are necessary to retain the *very idea* of the object's *effective identity* in question. Once this is performed, the phenomenologist realizes that these various modes come to constitute a *central pole* of modes of manifestations (or logical structures), which point to the effective *eidōs* or *essence*, of the object in question. Thus, by speaking, no longer of an object-in-the-world, but rather of such a collection of possible modes of manifestation of the object in question, Husserl makes the effective transition from the natural attitude, to the phenomenological standpoint, and consequently refers to our road, trees and sky, no longer as objects-in-the-world, but rather as actual *objective identity-poles*, as correlates of our acts of consciousness.<sup>47</sup>

Therefore, by basing ourselves on this clarification above, when we now speak of our “objects of sense-perception” as “objective identity-poles”, the reader will understand that we will be referring, from this point forward, to all such manners of possible “perceivable beings”, ranging from the simplest to the most complex *objective identities*, as determined by our two-fold criteria above, designating their most basic ontic attributes, necessary for them to properly be understood as such.<sup>48</sup>

With these final clarifications at hand, we are now ready to specify the actual role played by Husserl's *matter* and *form* concepts, in his matter-form scheme, also referred to, later on, as the *hylomorphic* scheme: The first member of the pair, referred to, by Husserl, as *matter* or *hyle*, refers to the primeval, *non-intentional*, sense-material itself. It is the effective “matter”, out of which sensory experiences are constructed. The latter part, referred to as *morphe* or *noesis*, is the “animating” or “meaning-giving” layer of the

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<sup>47</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, pp. 48-51.

<sup>48</sup> As respectively understood in relation to footnote 46.

experience, which, when combined with the *hyle*, serves to effectively render an experience into an *intentional* one, which becomes *noetic*, and conveys a certain knowledge, by pointing (according to its simpler *meaning*) to an effective objective identity-pole.<sup>49</sup>

At this point, however, we need to clarify an important difference, between our use of this concept of matter, and Husserl's. The reader already realizes that our "sensory traces", as described above, can be considered analogous to Husserl's *hyle*, but only to a certain point: Husserl thought that the sensible *hyle*, being a *bona fide* unconstructed element of experience, was also, therefore, wholly *unintentional* and destitute of all *meaning and referent*; remember that, for the early Husserl, it is the character of intentionality which renders an experience into an effective "consciousness-of" and, subsequently, endows it with *meaning* and (possibly) *referent*.<sup>50</sup> Thus, in the case of the *hyle*, seeing as how it is "pure sense-material", Husserl thought that it was only after it had effectively been "animated" by the *morphe* that it could generate an apprehension of an object of sense-perception. Now, concerning the important question of whether *all manners* of possible sensory experiences (even at their most basic level) are intentional, Sokolowski points out that Husserl left this question rather unanswered; at one point arguing in the affirmative, and another in the negative.<sup>51</sup>

Thus, to make clear what we have in mind here, we will consider our sensory traces, the most basic form of possible sensory experience, as being "partly intentional", for the following reasons: while they are effectively devoid of "objective meaning", in

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<sup>49</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, pp. 226-30.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 222-26.

<sup>51</sup> Robert Sokolowski, *The Formation of Husserl's Concept of Constitution* (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1964), p. 49.

the traditional sense (their “meaning” points to no effective objective referent, either present or absent, in any cognitive activity, in which they may manifest themselves), they are not entirely devoid of “pure ontic” significance, per se; referring here to the very basic definition of what can be properly distinguished as an *individual being*. Our reason for claiming this is that, while the pure experience of sensory traces, as encountered in the phenomenological reduction, may not point to anything that has any kind of effective *position, extension, duration* or even conceivable *physical properties*, sensory traces nevertheless hold a *primeval meaning*, in that they point to one of the main possible categories (and, possibly, sub-categories) of the greater genus of possible sense-experiences, as per the five natural senses. Furthermore, they can be, not only abstracted from more complex sensory experiences, but also experienced “directly”, by themselves. This, therefore, is our actual reason for understanding them to be “partly intentional”.

Having clarified this important point, let us now return to our example: If we are to re-examine, by way of our *hylomorphic scheme*, the experience of our drive to Verona, we realize that what we referred to, in our account, as “trees”, “road” and “sky” are actually phenomenologically described as *idealized meanings*, which, according to Husserl, point, not to external physical objects as their correlates (which would entail falling back into the natural attitude), but rather to *transcendental ones*; meaning “roughly” those which are taken to exist in the form of an *essence*, even when not directly encountered in an experience, and whose essence is the effective *idea* that is communicated to us, when they are encountered, according to their various modes of manifestation, in our consciousness.

At this point, we need to say something more, concerning the actual *eidos*, underlying these objects of sense-experience. While the essence or *eidos*, for Husserl, is what refers to an objective identity pole, he also argued that this identity pole is always: (1) given in a certain *mode*; and (2) only always points to an *idealized* version of the perceived object in question, and never to what is, or actually *can* be, perceptually experienced of it. These two points lead us to the following startling, and very important realization, drawn by Husserl:

(1) Husserl realized that, in addition to us being able to distinguish a certain object of sense-perception, we are also able to distinguish between different *modes*, by way of which these reoccurring sensory patterns of the objects (such as “trees”) are given. This includes distinguishing between various cases of sense and sensory-like perception, as are to be found in various *other* activities of the soul (Husserl uses *waking perception* as a kind of “benchmark” for the standard act of consciousness), such as dreaming, imagination, fantasy, and so on. Thus, if we dream, imagine or fantasize about a certain tree, for example, this entails that we can not only also “picture” (or *re-present*) it, but also that these representations always carry with them, not only the *idealized meaning* of a “tree”, but also the *meaning* of a tree *experienced as dreamt, imagined, fantasized, and so on.*

(2) Husserl also realized, quite early on (as explained in chapter one of *Ideas*), that what we take to be “objects of sense perception”, as described above, are never given to us as complete wholes, but always in terms of often unclear and ambiguous *profiles*, or



*Abschattungen*; from which type of *limited perception* we nevertheless generate an *apprehension* of the “entire object”, per se.<sup>52</sup> This is something which can be quite readily verified, as we only need to focus on one of our trees by the roadside, in our example, to understand this phenomenon. If we are to focus on that which is *truly solely presently given*, by the senses, we realize that, at the level of pure sensory description, the tree is given to us as a profile, like a painting on a canvas, but that, within our actual act of consciousness, we are not simply conscious of a flat and lifeless profile of a “tree-like thing”, but rather of an *entire tree*. This entire tree is given to our consciousness, complete with *all its other potential profiles* (not currently in our present field of perception, but *potentially given* by additional acts of perception), as well as with all of its potential *interactive modalities* (referring here to additional *meaning-horizons*, pointing to the fact that we can climb it, cut it, pick its fruits, etc.).

Thus, once Husserl realized that a *complete act of consciousness* necessarily includes these additional, presently “invisible” elements of awareness, and that a proper description of them needs to be included, to produce an effectively complete phenomenological description of the act of consciousness in question, he realized that he had to deal with them, and somehow incorporate them, into his hylomorphic scheme. The necessity to perform this integration was referred to, by him, as the “functional problems”<sup>53</sup> and he dealt primarily with them in much of the second part of *Ideas*.

Now, concerning our first point above, Husserl felt that the key to clarifying these additional complex properties of consciousness, lay in his explication and delimitation of

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<sup>52</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, p. 48.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 230-35.

the “real” phases of experience (namely the hyletic and noetic ones), and the “non-real”, “intentional” or “immanent”, ones (namely the noematic ones). In the process of so doing, Husserl also developed his additional concepts of the *noesis* and the *noema*, related to the *matter and quality* concepts, as found in an act of consciousness, with the former indicating the “bestowing of knowledge”, generated by the now-intentional nature of the objectivating act of consciousness, generated by the *synthesis* of hyle and morphe, and the latter indicating the effective *full-meaning* that is conveyed by one’s knowledge of the present profile, by way of which a certain objective identity-pole becomes apprehended, as one’s perception of such and such *object-in-the-world*.<sup>54</sup>

To better explain these concepts of the *noesis* and *noema*, let us return, once again, to our example of our “drive to Verona”. According to our phenomenological description, when one perceives a tree by the roadside, two things actually occur:

1. One recognizes the *full meaning* of the present sense-impression, as that of a “tree”. This *full meaning* corresponds to the *full noema* of “tree”, whose apprehension is generated by the complex act of perception, itself conveyed by the *noesis*, lying at the base of the *noema*.
2. One also realizes, by way of the nature of this very same *noesis*, that this “tree” is presently given from a specific angle and under a specific mode of awareness (in our case, let us say “waking perception”).

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid, pp. 235-64.

So far so good, but if we are to examine this *phase of the experience* more carefully, however, and focus on only *that which is truly solely given*, at this point in time, we realize that what is actually occurring, is that the tree, both in terms of *sense-impression* and in terms of *meaning*, is apprehended by way of *only one* of its many possible profiles. Thus, concerning the second point above, this means that the present profile does not include the *full noema*, but rather, only a present *noematic phase*. In the same manner, the present noesis does not convey the full knowledge of the meaning “tree”, but rather only the knowledge of its present profile, referring to the present *noetic phase*. This lead Husserl to the further realization that the *only actual knowledge*, solely conveyed by the present noetic phase, is of this immediate and specific kind of profile of a tree, and that, consequently, the actually present noema (or meaning) is also restricted to immediate knowledge of *only* this present profile of the tree.<sup>55</sup>

This presented Husserl with a serious problem: If profiles convey so *very little information*, by way of that which is actually fully and immediately given by them, then this entails that they are *drastically insufficient* to account for one’s full act of consciousness: namely one’s perception, and effectively *full* apprehension, of the complex nature of an entity such as a tree; for a tree is a complex “object of sense-perception”, “composed” of many smaller objects of perception (such as its many branches and leaves), as well as of complex *interactive modalities*, which all need to be given to us (by way of a myriad of noetic-noematic phases), before its effective objective identity-pole becomes sufficiently *cemented into place*, so that we may properly comprehend the *full meaning* (or noema) of “tree”, from only one of its many possible profiles. Furthermore, we come to find that this observation applies equally well to all

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid, pp. 246-50.

such objects of sense-perception, properly understood as such, no matter how simple or complex, our continuous interaction with them, eventually avails them to be.

Perhaps our example of a tree is not the best one to clarify this phenomenon, so we invite the reader to consider the following alternative example, which brings this disparity, and Husserl's concern, much more drastically into perspective: One can easily think of the difference, between the effective knowledge of the "object of sense perception" known as a *lion*, which is gained by a wildlife reserve ranger, who is in direct and sometimes rather intimate contact with the animal, on a regular basis, and the knowledge gained by an "armchair zoologist", whose only source of "perceptual contact" with lions is restricted to texts and to his very own drawing-inspired imagination of them, found in a zoology book. Thus, if we are to transpose our phenomenological description onto this example, it becomes immediately clear that the various *noetic-noematic phases*, constitutive of one's perception and effective development of one's knowledge of the meaning of the *idea*, underlying the name "lion" (as objective identity-pole), are drastically different between the ranger and the armchair zoologist, and this remains the case, even though these two drastically different perceptions, by both individuals, still point to a certain *common idea* (Husserl would say *essence*), namely that of a *lion*, as that of a *real* entity.<sup>56</sup> The armchair zoologist may learn very much from reading about lions and examining various illustrations of them, but without experiencing them *live* and *in motion*, in all of their majestic daily activities and rituals, the knowledge gained of them will naturally be far more limited and, ultimately, inadequate, when compared with that of the ranger. This is simply because, at the level of our phenomenological description,

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<sup>56</sup> Meant here strictly as opposed to a non-real or *phantasized* one, in the strictly Husserlian sense of the term.

the *full noema*, constitutive of the objective identity-pole, designating the *full meaning* of the term *lion*, will be much richer, more intricate and, ultimately, closer to its “idealized meaning” for the ranger, than for the armchair zoologist.

This final realization lead Husserl to the important conclusion that all of our simple and complex objects of sense-perception, which we are used to encountering in our lifeworld, derive their actual *full noema* (the full *idea* of what “tree” or “lion”, means) from a great number of such lesser noetic-noematic phases, which, only when properly *synthesized* together, after a long period of intricate encounters with the object in question, come to constitute our full apprehension of the object’s identity. In the same vein, Husserl also concluded that the eventual collection and synthesis of these numerous noetic-noematic phases served, not only to account for our apprehension of the kinds of objective identity-poles, which are the intentional correlates of our various acts of perception, but also for our ability at differentiating amongst the various *modes*, under which they may be encountered; be it waking perception, hallucination, dream, fantasy, imagination, and so on.<sup>57</sup>

This final realization is only one of many, which served to reinforce Husserl’s growing understanding of the effective role played by *time*, in the formation of such objective identities, and which came to heavily affect the development of his phenomenological description.<sup>58</sup> This becomes evident, when we realize that objective

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<sup>57</sup> Husserl actually describes these processes, in chapter ten of *Ideas*, as occurring by way of an intricate number of functions and syntheses, based on highly complex and interconnected stratified noetic-noematic structures, themselves operating within and across various cognitive activities. Furthermore, such intuitions as those of *spatiality* and *temporality*, are considered, by Husserl, to be *pre-requisites* for the formation of our concepts of such things as movement, duration, sides of an object (profiles), etc.; all necessary for us to be able to operate as effective *monads* in the lifeworld. But, for our purposes, our characterization above is sufficient to get our point across.

<sup>58</sup> While Husserl really only passes over the question of the role of phenomenological time and time-consciousness in *Ideas* (pp. 215-18), he had already greatly developed it in his lectures on internal time-

identities are not necessarily *fixed*, according to a set number of relatively unchanging possible profiles; when given in the flow of time as *constant infinite horizon*, objects continuously reinforce and/or reshape their core identity-pole, but never effectively complete it and thus, only refer, in the best of cases, to a solely *ideal* and, ultimately, *dynamic* identity-pole or core *objective meaning*.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, this identity pole can, and actually does, change, sometimes quite drastically:

- (1) Across time, for the same individual (think of an object's wear and decay)
- (2) From one individual to another
- (3) From one socio-cultural context to another

Thus, when given within a *temporal framework*, we find these changes to be based on the often minute, but steady alterations, to the effective noetic-noematic phases, which come to constitute this objective identity for the individual in question (remember the knowledge of the lion as drastically different for the ranger and the armchair zoologist). What this realization further entails for us, however, is that we need to consider the *very notion* of an objective identity-pole, not in the actual Husserlian sense of a *fixed transcendental object*, at which we need to aim, nor in the sense of an impossibility (as argued for, by the proponents of the incommensurability thesis), but rather as a very "real", but *dynamic entity*, which can nevertheless be shown to "exist" as correlate of our acts of consciousness, and respectively studied as such.

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consciousness of 1905, which was only published, later on, in 1928, thanks to Martin Heidegger, under the title translated as *The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness*.

<sup>59</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, pp. 307-08.

With these final important clarifications in mind, we have effectively completed the *first half* of our matter-form based phenomenological descriptive framework. This allows us to formulate the following points, concerning our conceptual refinements, developed thus far:

1. All *fully sensory experiences*, which are properly understood as such, are ultimately rooted in an effective “manifold flow of sensations”, indicative of the myriad of *unstructured phases* of sensory awareness, themselves constituted by “pure” sensory elements of experiences or “sensory traces”, whose effective *qualitative* differences are understood and categorized, by us, according to the greater genus of our five natural senses.
2. All *objects of sense-perception*, in the *specifically* phenomenological sense explained above, are given, to us, by way of which we apprehend their effective complex *meaning* at the three levels of (i) specific objective identity-pole; (ii) profile (or angle of perception); and (iii) mode of manifestation (waking perception, imagination, dream, etc.).

To properly complete the *second half*, however, we need to further refine our present phenomenological descriptive framework, with the introduction of a few additional concepts for describing, not only the effective perception of such *singular* objective identities, but also the perception of an effective *objective field of awareness*. This means that our phenomenological description now needs to be given at *three distinct*

*stratified levels of complexity*, indicative of all possible sensory and sensory-like experiences that one can have:

If the reader remembers correctly, we have already outlined the first two *strata of complexity* that a sensory experience can adopt: at the most basic level, we have *unconstructed phases* of sensory awareness, referred to, by us, as “sensory trace”; at a more complex level, we have an actual perception of a certain “object in the world”, given by the noetic-noematic synthesis of the given data (from the manifold flow of sensations), into our apprehension of its objective identity-pole, which manifests itself to us as such. But there is still another, even higher stratum of possible sensory experience: that of an effective awareness, not only of *one* singular objective identity pole, but of the presence of *many* such objective identity poles, simultaneously constituting a complex *field of objective awareness*.

Thus, if we return, once again, to our example of our “drive to Verona”, the reader will remember that our phenomenological description, which we have given thus far, effectively stopped at the level of our perception of the various individuated objects, which we encounter along the way; the road, the trees, the sky were all examples of these. This description, however, lays one step short of the *full* hylomorphic phenomenological description of the experience in question, which needs to be given at the highest and final possible stratum of complexity, for it to be truly complete.<sup>60</sup> The reason for this, is that our complete phenomenological account, of what is actually occurring (at the sensory level), in our example, needs to take into account our

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<sup>60</sup> We are referring here, naturally, to the completion of a solely *preliminary* descriptive structure, for there still remains much more to be explored, for us to be later able to integrate this description of awareness, as found in the manifold flow of *sensations*, with the higher stratified levels of awareness, as found in the manifold flow of *consciousness*.



awareness, not only of that which our gaze (or ego's glance) presently focuses upon, but also that which we are still aware of, albeit in an *indirect* (albeit immanent) *manner*; for, within an individuated act of perception, we are fully conscious of the object upon which our ego lays its gaze, but this object effectively *arises* out of the manifold flow of sensations, and sometimes becomes constituted from elements of other objects, of which we are no longer directly aware of, at this point in time.

To better understand this phenomenon, consider the following example: When we first focus on a tree as a complete entity, and then shift our gaze onto one of its branches, as another complete entity, do we no longer perceive the tree itself, while we are focusing on its branches? According to our phenomenological description, the answer is yes, but Husserl would have us know that this does not mean that we are absolutely *no longer aware* of that which originally constituted the tree in question. We are still aware of it, but in an *indirect manner*, because, for all manners and purposes, it no longer exists in our immediate consciousness, as our apprehension of the "tree" object. To clarify this peculiar phenomenon, we need to look back at the relationship between sensory traces and objects of sense-perception:

Husserl's phenomenological description deals with this phenomenon in the following manner: the manifold sensory traces, which were previously "synthesising themselves" (by way of noetic-noematic phases) into our apprehension of the tree-object, are now synthesising themselves into our apprehension of the branch-object. And yet, these are, essentially, still the *same patterns* of sensory traces, which are present in our greater field of awareness, and are responsible for our current act of perception.<sup>61</sup> Husserl

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<sup>61</sup> This peculiar ability, at perceiving two (or more) distinct objects, from the same sensory substrate, is made most dramatically evident when you focus on a *Gestalt figure*, such as the *Necker Cube* or *Rubin's*

concluded that this possibility is due to the fact that sensory traces “transition” from *foreground* to *background levels*, and vice-versa, as our gaze moves about our world: Thus, what is presently in the foreground, is what becomes constitutive of our apprehension of our perception of an object-in-the-world; what is presently in the background, is what becomes “background-data”, and constitutes the effective *backdrop*, against which objective identities come to see their objective identity-pole constitute itself.

Therefore, objective identities (such as the trees, the sky, the road...) see their present immanence effectively “fade in and out of existence”, when described phenomenologically, and when understood in relation to our immediate field of awareness, as our gaze moves about the world. The pure sensory components of these objective identities do not disappear with the cessation of their perception, however; they remain present as *background* experience (within our broader field of awareness), when we choose to focus on one object of sense-perception instead of another. Thus, the sense-data, which constituted the now-dissolved object, and which is now reduced to *background sense-data*, as opposed to *constitutive sense-data*, is not gone; it is still experienced, albeit indirectly.<sup>62</sup>

The consequences of this realization, for us, are that, regarding objects of sense-perception, our phenomenological description also needs to be given by way of the additional concept of *meaning-horizons*. Husserl enumerates a grand total of *four* such

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*Figure/Vase*, and experience the phenomenon of *Multistability*, whereby ambiguous perceptual experiences tend to pop back and forth unstably between two or more alternative interpretations of the object. That this correlation be observed between the central properties of Gestalt psychology and Husserlian phenomenology is no accident, seeing as how the two share a number of rather close ties and principles.

<sup>62</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, Translated by Dorion Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960, German original, 1931), pp. 77-80.

meaning-horizons: concerning the effective *temporal continuum*, within which a sensory experience is given, there are the *protentive, retentive and internal* horizons; concerning the final and ultimate background, against which all experiences can be given, there is the *external* horizon.<sup>63</sup>

Thus, in the case of a perceived object or of a perceived objective field of awareness (such as the tree on the side of the road or the actual row of trees, passing me by), the noesis of the object (or objects) as objective identity-pole(s) also carries with it a *future, past and internal* horizon: the future horizon indicates noematic phases (meanings, associated with possible profiles), which are *still to come*, if the temporal flow of experience continues along, on its present course; the past horizon holds a *retention* of the noematic phases that have just recently come to pass; and the internal horizon indicates other *possible contingent perceptions* that could be had, if we altered our current course of events. Finally, Husserl stipulated the existence of a final *outer horizon*, which is the horizon of all possible horizons, which precludes them all, and which (for Husserl) is the world. These meaning-horizons, when understood in this more “explicit manner” here, allow us to understand the effective *historicity* of objects of sense-perception, as a true and genuine phenomenon.

Thus, if we are to revisit our example of our “drive to Verona”, by way of our now *fully completed* phenomenological description, we would include, not only a description of the various “pure” unitary sensations that accompany it (sensory-traces), as well as of our perception of an effective *landscape* (field of objective awareness),

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<sup>63</sup> Edmund Husserl, *The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness*, edited by Martin Heidegger, Translated by James S. Churchill (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1964), § 13, 24, 44; Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, pp. 215-18.

unfolding before us, with our gaze shifting about the various objects which constitute it, such as the trees, the road, the sky (individuated objective identity poles), but also a description of the *anticipatory phases* of possible contingent sensory experiences (meaning-horizons), such as *future perceptions* that could be had, if we so continued on our way, *retentions of past perceptions*, which constantly disappear into the past as we move forward, as well as *anticipations* of other *possible contingent perceptions*, which could be had, if we were to veer of onto that little side-road, over there in the distance.

With these final clarifications at hand, we can now supplement our preliminary three-level core descriptive framework, as developed in section 2.1, with the additional phenomenological concepts, explained above. In so doing, we thus find ourselves equipped with an effectively all-embracing categorical delineative scope, for understanding and tracking the *wholly sensory elements*, in all manners of conscious experiences; whether they be at the most basic level of simple apprehension of sensory traces, at the higher *constructed* level of perception of singular objective identities or at the highest level, of effective perception of objective fields of awareness, and of the immanent *temporal* apprehension of their meaning-horizons.

### 3.4: Our Updated Descriptive Framework

Let us first recapitulate. In the previous chapter, we have formulated our preliminary descriptive framework, which attempts to examine mystical experiences, by way of the following criteria:

1. Entities and realm encountered
2. Knowledge conveyed
3. Greater implications

The problem we have run into is that this preliminary descriptive framework fails to account for *two main types* of possible mystical experiences: ambiguous extrovertive mystical experiences and introvertive mystical experiences. To correct this first deficiency, we have therefore respectively supplemented our preliminary descriptive framework, with the following *phenomenological* conceptual refinements:

1. “Entities and realm encountered”, are now examined in terms of: (i) sensory traces; (ii) objective identity-poles; and (iii) objective fields of awareness.
  - i. Sensory traces, are examined by way of:
    - a. Five main categories, corresponding to the genus of our five natural senses
    - b. Various sub-categories, respectively underlying these five main ones

- ii. Objective identity-poles, and (iii) objective fields of awareness, are respectively examined by way of:
  - c. Noetic-noematic phases (phases of manifestation as profiles, and corresponding partial meanings)
  - d. Full noema (the “complete” perceived object(s), understood as being “perceived as such”)
  - e. Core *eidōs* (The essential idea underlying the perception)
- 2. “Knowledge conveyed”, is examined in terms of the categorical distinctions of (i) and in terms of the noetic phases, and full noesis, of (ii) & (iii)
- 3. “Greater implications”, awaits further development

Finally, the entire sensory or sensory-like experience is examined, within an all-encompassing *temporal framework*, by way of shifts in gaze or awareness, and by way of the corresponding alterations to the respective objective identity-poles, objective fields of awareness and immanent meaning-horizons, of the experience as a whole. Let us now see how we can employ this refined phenomenological descriptive framework, to help us first clarify the nature of ambiguous extrovertive mystical experiences, in section 4.3 of the next and final, chapter.

**Chapter 4:**

**Phenomenological Elucidation of Mystical Experiences**

#### 4.1: Mystical Experiences as Phases of Sensory and non-Sensory Awareness

Whereas we have been dealing with sensory and non-sensory elements of mystical experiences, in a *wholly partitioned manner*, thus far (as is evident by our understanding of an extrovertive mystical experience as being necessarily *wholly sensory*, and an introvertive mystical experience as being *wholly non-sensory*) the employment of the phenomenological reduction, towards the elucidation of mystical experiences, leads us to realize that a *complete* mystical experience, given as a complete act of consciousness, by way of our phenomenological description (in all of its shifts in gaze and awareness, as given within the effective timeframe of its duration) can exhibit both sensory and non-sensory elements of experience, either in a separate manner, or as *superimposed elements* of the experience, given as a whole. What this means, is that we need to *broaden* our understanding of the nature of mystical experiences, beyond our current dichotomy of either *wholly sensory* or *wholly non-sensory* ones, and allow for the further eventuality of having mystical experiences, which are not only either entirely extrovertive or introvertive, but which can also exhibit an *effective combination* of introvertive and extrovertive *phases*; themselves given, either separately or as superimposed instances. Consequently, we need to understand the phenomenal quality of a mystical experience, as expressed by one of the following four possibilities:

1. Wholly extrovertive or sensory-like phases
2. Wholly introvertive or non-sensory phases
3. A mixture of introvertive and extrovertive phases, given separately, by way of separate successions



4. A mixture of introvertive and extrovertive phases, given, either by way of separate successions, and/or by way of superimposed instances of these phases

This clarification is necessary, if we are to commit ourselves fully to describing that which is truly solely given, within the unfolding course of events, as present in mystical experiences.

#### 4.2: The Phenomenological Reduction and the non-Sensory Residuum

Having thus outlined the four different ways in which all manners of mystical experiences can manifest themselves, we now need to be able effectively to distinguish between such sensory and non-sensory phases of the experience, as they are respectively given to us. To accomplish this task, we need to return, once again, to the phenomenological reduction, and employ our three-strata descriptive framework, no longer as a descriptor of the phenomenal qualities of the experience itself, but rather as an effective *gauge*, by way of which we can identify and bracket aside, all wholly sensory elements of the experience in question, ending up effectively exposing the “wholly non-sensory”, as phenomenological *residuum*, open for examination. To do so, we first need to bracket the whole of the mystical experience itself, in all of its *successive phases* (shifts in awareness or gaze), and then bracket, within these very phases themselves, that which is sensory, so as to effectively suspend it and frame it aside, leaving the wholly non-sensory, clearly exposed.

Having said this, it takes little reflection, on the part of the reader, to realize that this task is best performed in cases of wholly introvertive mystical experiences, seeing as how there is very little (if any) sensory residue, present in such cases, and that most of the actual work is already completed by the realization of the experience itself. Consequently, we realize that it is one of the peculiar and magical qualities of various meditative practices, intended on shutting out sense and sensory-like perception, that they can simultaneously act as a “catalyst” for the non-sensory, by bringing its *prominence* to the forefront, so to speak, while, at the same time, reducing the *emanating glare* of the

sensory; resulting in the former becoming more clearly exposed and more present, in our immediate field of awareness.

Conversely, this does not mean that the phenomenological reduction cannot likewise bear fruit in cases of heavier presence of sensory elements of experience, for, while still possible, it simply becomes much more difficult, in such cases, to effectively bracket the sensory aside, and expose the non-sensory, ready for investigation; this is especially true, when the non-sensory, although present, manifests itself in a *highly attenuated* manner, and when the sensory is simultaneously *highly radiant*. We thus come to find, that the phenomenological reduction can be applied to the entire mystical experience, and capture its actual non-sensory elements of awareness, both in terms of phases which are wholly non-sensory (where it is not really needed, and only operates as a safeguard against possible confusion), as well as in cases of superimposition of sensory and non-sensory elements of experience (where it duly performs the task described above).

Having thus clarified how the phenomenological reduction allows us to expose *non-sensory forms of awareness*, within mystical experiences, rendering them open for investigation, we are now ready to develop our understanding of what they actually consist in. To do so, we first need to turn ourselves to a number of other phenomenological investigations, which have employed an approach, quite similar to ours, and see what kinds of fruits have already been reaped by them, concerning the mysterious nature of non-sensory forms of awareness. The reader will notice that we find these investigations to be equally present in Western, as well as in Eastern, phenomenological approaches.

(1) Concerning Husserl himself, Sokolowski pointed out, in *The Formation of Husserl's Concept of Constitution*, that Husserl eventually came to drop his earlier static matter-form concept of constitution, in favour of a genetic concept of constitution. He further argued that this genetic concept of constitution was to play a decisive role in the final formation of Husserl's phenomenology. The need for this transition, argued Sokolowski, is to be found in Husserl's need to solve a number of earlier problems, associated with the matter-form scheme. These problems came about, as the result of a tension between the two constitutive schemas, which Husserl had developed, and which eventually lead him, by way of his investigations on inner-time consciousness, to adopt a new image or model for constitution; namely one of a flow of elements (partial intentions or temporal phases) which gradually build up an immanent object. Under this new scheme, there is no duality and no matter-form dichotomy of intentions and sensations, which makes the nature of this scheme effectively *pre-sensory* and, thus, exposes it as an effective form of non-sensory awareness.<sup>64</sup>

(2) We find a rather impressive argument made for the presence of non-sensory elements in consciousness, in Michel Henry's *Phénoménologie Matérielle*, where he "picks up" on Husserl's strained relationship between his two constitutive schemas, related to his discoveries concerning internal-time consciousness, and argues for the greater possibility of renewing phenomenology, by entirely renewing the question that determines it. This, he wishes to accomplish by way of a return to a hyletic or "material", phenomenology (according to his own terminology), which Husserl affirmed, held far

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<sup>64</sup> Robert Sokolowski, *The Formation of Husserl's Concept of Constitution* (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1964), pp. 205-10.

less interest than noetic phenomenology (affirmation which Henry refutes). In so doing, Henry wished to “revamp” material phenomenology, by showing how, prior to all forms of “external” phenomenal constructions of being, and prior to their subsequent death and demise, there is an effectively *invisible* phenomenological substance, which is not nothing, but an *affect* or what renders possible, all affects and, subsequently, all things. This, he calls a *pathetic immediacy*, in which life executes its own trial and which itself is nothing more than this pathetic grasp and, in this manner, phenomenality itself, according to the How of its original phenomenalisation.<sup>65</sup> Henry’s characterization of this effectively pre-sensory (pre-material), primeval phenomenon (strangely reminiscent of a raw form of *feeling* or *emotion*) echoes, in many ways, Heidegger’s idea of the role of *Sorge*, as the fundamental concept of the intentional being<sup>66</sup>, although Henry expresses it in a manner which keeps him much closer to Husserl’s own philosophical framework.<sup>67</sup>

(3) More importantly still, Sartre argued, in *La Transcendance de l’Ego*, that there exists such a “thing” as the famed state of *pure consciousness*, which is necessarily wholly translucent (fully reflexive) and which is, therefore, before any kind of “cognitive activity”, a non-positional, pre-reflective awareness of itself. Since consciousness is translucent, for Sartre, this means that it cannot contain anything opaque, namely any kind of hyletic stratum. The consequences, of this, are that Sartre views *pure*

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<sup>65</sup> Michel Henry, *Phénoménologie Matérielle* (Presses Universitaires de France, 108, boulevard Saint-Germain, 75006, Paris, 1990), pp. 6-7.

<sup>66</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson (Harper & Row, Publishers, Incorporated, 49 East 33<sup>rd</sup> Street, New York 16, N.Y.), pp. 225-44.

<sup>67</sup> Michel Henry, *Phénoménologie Matérielle*, pp. 22-3.

*consciousness* as utterly empty, but fully transparent, which he sees as nothing but two aspects of the same situation.<sup>68</sup>

(4) As a fourth and final example, Mohanty observes, in his book entitled *Intentionality*, that Sartre's view on the translucent (pre-sensory) nature of consciousness, is very much akin to the Prābhākara Mimāṃsā theory of the self-luminosity of consciousness (from the school of Pūrva Mimāṃsā). He also observes that Sartre's main contentions, concerning the nature of consciousness, bear striking resemblance with some of the central theses of the school of Advaita Vedānta, which holds the cosmological view that this "de-individuated" and "wholly empty" generalized consciousness is: (1) called *Brahman*; (2) considered to be the ultimate origin of what we understand to be object-oriented (intentional) consciousness; (3) as well as of our impression of the existence of *Selves* in the world; (4) and that it is from Brahman that the entirety of what we take to be the empirical world, is effectively "projected".<sup>69</sup> In this respect, according to Mohanty, both Samkara, the great proponent of Advaita Vedānta, and Sartre, considered *pure consciousness* to be *nirguna* (devoid of qualities), considered consciousness and the world as *wholly exclusive* of each other, thought that consciousness, while immediately revealing itself, also reveals the world as its object, and thought that the self-revealing consciousness is not an ego, seeing as how the ego is as much an "object" as any other.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *La Transcendance de l'Ego*, Esquisse d'une Description Phénoménologique (Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 6, Place de la Sorbonne, V, Paris, 1966), pp. 72, 74-87.

<sup>69</sup> Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad, *Advaita Epistemology and Metaphysics: An Outline of Indian Non-Realism* (Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London, W1T 3JH U.K., 2001), p 171.

<sup>70</sup> Jitendranath Mohanty, *The Concept of Intentionality* (St. Louis, W. H. Green, 1971, c1972), pp. 136-37.

Therefore, by basing ourselves now on this rich insight, gained from the phenomenological examinations of these authors above, we can begin to clarify our understanding of the actual nature of various non-sensory forms of awareness:

(1) Firstly, we need to draw a proper distinction between *pure consciousness* (as described by Sartre and Samkara) and “lesser” *opaque* states of (nonetheless) non-sensory forms of awareness. This is because *pure consciousness*, by definition, cannot contain anything opaque, and this includes, for us, not only hyletic strata (or sensory traces), as for Sartre, but also other possible non-sensory *distinguishable* elements of awareness, as well. Thus, such things as distinguishable intuitions, volitions and emotions, cannot be thought of as being part of this *pure consciousness*, for they constitute, by their very nature, “distinct worldly elements” (or psychic phenomena), of which *pure consciousness* is necessarily exclusive. As a matter of fact, *pure consciousness* can be thought of as being characterized by one and only one attribute, which is that it is “aware of itself as being the kind of consciousness that it is” (meaning that it is fully reflexive).

(2) Secondly, once we have drawn this distinction above, we immediately realize that both Husserl’s partial intentions or temporal phases, as well as Henry’s pathetic affects, are an *inadequate designator* of such a pure form of awareness: For Husserl, this is because, by being effectively given within the context of a *temporal realm* (which is not, as Husserl thought, an *apodictically given absolute*, but rather another worldly

construct), and being responsible for the gradual formation of immanent objects, temporal phases generate the possibility of distinguishing them from each other as *separate elements of experience*; for Henry, this is because, while he argued for his pathetic immediacy as holding a unitary and indistinguishable quality (other than that of its own nature), by having it referred to, as akin to a *pathos* or *primeval emotional affect*, Henry “involuntarily” attributes to it an *affective quality* and, consequently, *opacity*, as it would be seen in the eyes of Samkara. Thus, both Husserl’s partial intentions, and Henry’s pathetic immediacy, are to be considered as actual *opaque*, albeit genuine non-sensory elements of experience, already reflected by *pure consciousness* itself.

(3) Thirdly, we realize that, by basing ourselves on these two points above, the highest possible form of non-sensory awareness, known as *pure consciousness*, cannot be studied more in-depth, for there is *no effective structure* or *differentiable qualities*, contained therein, of which something more could be said. Thus, concerning such experiences, one can simply reiterate the sayings of Samkara, concerning Brahman, where he stated that all that can be said about it, is that “it is not this”, “it is not this”, “it is not this”<sup>71</sup>, which serves to indicate that such a peculiar state of awareness simply cannot be compared to any *structured* (or *opaque*) *form of consciousness*, per se. Consequently, such a state *fully* and *effectively eludes* any further description, which one may attempt to give of it, and, when experienced, constitutes, therefore, the only *truly ineffable* kind of mystical experience, which one may encounter.

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<sup>71</sup> M. K. V. Iyer, *Advaita Vedānta* (Asia Publishing House, BY V. P. Bhagwat At Mouj Printing Bureau, Khatau Wadi, Girgaum, Bombay 4 and Published by P.S. Jayasinghe, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1964), p. 43.



Having thus drawn a preliminary distinction between *pure consciousness*, and two possible lesser opaque states of awareness (temporal phases and pathetic immediacy), we now need to draw further distinctions, amongst these opaque states themselves. In so doing, we realize that these states are characterized by various forms of awareness, which contain various *degrees* of intentionality and transparency, but which are, in themselves, never fully transparent and never fully intentional. Furthermore, such opaque states of consciousness, due to their relatedness to worldly phenomena, entail one's already effective apprehension of: (i) a primeval ontological realm, present (if not yet fully actualized) before oneself; (ii) of one's presence within this realm, as an effective "Self" or "ego-body", pole; and (iii) of a possible pathetic affect, which may accompany the experience in question. Consequently, (i) (when later supplemented and actualized by way of hyletic material), is to be understood in terms of the effective three-level strata of complexity, that all manners of sensory and sensory-like experiences can adopt, as explained in the previous chapter; (ii) is to be understood along two mutually-complementary fronts: one's apprehension of one's presence as a self as *ego*, as found in Husserl's egological investigations, and/or as a self as *body*, as richly developed by Merleau-Ponty<sup>72</sup>; and (iii) is to be understood as per our understanding of the nature of *feelings* and *emotions*, as various forms of manifestation of a primeval *affect* or *Sorge*.

Thus, if we now get back to our task at hand, the reader will notice that, *pure consciousness* notwithstanding, we are nevertheless left with the *very real possibility* of studying non-sensory awareness, by way of the *various opaque forms*, which it may

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<sup>72</sup> See Merleau Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, translated from the French by Colin Smith (St Edmundsbury Press Ltd, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, England, 2001, English translation © 1962 Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.), Part One: The Body.

adopt, and which may arise in various introvertive phases of mystical experiences. This is because, unlike cases of *pure consciousness*, these opaque elements are characterized by the presence of *distinguishable elements* therein, which are given to phenomenological examination, and of which something more can be said.

Therefore, we now need to clarify what kinds of opaque elements of consciousness may be specifically given in introvertive phases of mystical experiences, by way of non-sensory forms of awareness. To do so, we need to adopt an essentially *wholly* different descriptive scheme, than our previous three strata descriptive framework, employed thus far. This is because non-sensory awareness simply cannot be given in the same manner in which sensory forms of awareness are, lest it no longer be a non-sensory form of consciousness. It is therefore only logical that a phenomenological descriptive framework, which is intended to account for various sensory forms of consciousness, simply cannot be transposed, *as is*, to non-sensory ones, lest we be committing the very same mistake, which Husserl decried the psychological sciences of his time to be committing, regarding the life of the soul. Consequently, to devise a phenomenological descriptive framework of opaque states of non-sensory awareness, we will focus, not on the concept of the immanent appearance of things, by way of their “profiles”, nor even on the concept of the apperceived presence of objective identity-poles, but rather on the concept of the presence of a *pure noesis*, regarding, not *things themselves*, but rather the *very possibility* of having a certain *sensory* experience of the things in question, given in a manner which, for all intents and purposes, *transcends* the “waking modes of noesis”, by way of which we are usually accustomed to gain knowledge of our lifeworld.

To get a better understanding of what this new scheme consists in, we need to turn ourselves to the various impressive *noetic qualities*, which we now know to be present in introvertive mystical experiences, whereby the subject of such an experience often becomes endowed with *very vast knowledge*, concerning our lifeworld. This “knowledge” is given to the subject in various forms: for instance, we know that some subjects of introvertive mystical experiences encounter a sense of the interconnectedness of all things, or of the presence of an almighty God, overseer of all that exists. On the other hand, we also know that the Buddha had his four noble truths (which apply to all forms of life) revealed to him, in a purportedly introvertive mystical experience.

What we come to realize, when we consider these examples, is that these various effective *noeses*, bestowed upon the subject, while spanning a very vast part of the sphere of knowledge, regarding our lifeworld, nevertheless remain intimately connected with it; for, in each case, the subject experiences something very profound and very important *about the world we live in*. This final realization, in turn, leads us to draw the following conclusions, concerning this very special kind of non-sensory form awareness, as encountered in introvertive phases of mystical experiences:

1. Firstly, the actual *opacity*, present in such “lesser” (or “impure”) non-sensory forms of awareness, manifests itself as a *noetic force*, bestowing a certain kind of “lifeworld knowledge”, upon the subject.
2. Secondly, this being said, we also realize that this noetic force is experienced, by the subject, in a fully non-sensory manner, meaning

that it needs to be thought of as akin to a very peculiar and special kind of *mystical intuition*.

3. Thirdly, by bestowing, not only some knowledge in general, but a *certain kind* of knowledge, this intuition has a *certain structure* to it, which is entailed (but not reducible), to the kind of knowledge that is bestowed.
4. Fourthly, this lifeworld knowledge, conveyed by the mystical intuition, corresponds to a *possible aggregate of immanent sensory experiences*, which represents the various possible “sensory avenues”, by way of which such types of knowledge are usually acquired. In so doing, it is important to realize that the actual phenomenal quality of this intuition is *not the same* as the phenomenal quality of the sensory experiences, corresponding to the knowledge in question (see point 2); for this intuition rather acts as a *tracer* or *map*, of the sensory experiences in question.

These four points, above, provide us with a preliminary understanding of the *basic properties* of these types of specifically mystical intuitions. Having thus clarified their nature, we now need to clarify how we can render intelligible, an actual phenomenological “description”, of them: To do so, the reader will realize that these four points above open up the possibility of studying these types of mystical intuitions, not by describing their phenomenal qualities directly, but rather by describing them *by proxy*, by way of the kinds of possible sensory experiences, which they point to. This, in turn,

means that we can now employ our three strata descriptive framework, to render the peculiar phenomenal quality of the mystical intuition intelligible, by having it referred to the kind of possible sensory experience(s), whose immanence it effectively *heralds*. Finally, to properly distinguish this mystical intuition from other possible non-mystical ones, we choose to call it a *phenomenal trace*, and we can now begin to examine it more in depth:

When we begin to investigate the phenomenal trace, we realize that, in addition to what has already been said above, concerning its “basic properties”, it is also endowed with a number of *complex properties*, indicative of its *intricate structure*. These even-more peculiar properties render it possible for one to: (1) either apprehend the noesis of rather simple and somewhat “uninteresting” object-facts, by way of the mystical intuition (in which case the knowledge bestowed is not really that mystical); (2) or to apprehend the noesis of potentially *very broad* object-facts or *cosmological truths*, as are to be found in the highly diverse richness of mystical experiences; (3) and to grasp such noeses, concerning our *sensory lifeworld*, in an effective “flash of awareness”, circumventing years of normally required experience, to reach even their most basic proximity.

Thus, if we are to give a proper description of these *complex properties* of phenomenal traces, our description needs to, not only encompass the relatively simple and mundane noeses, which they convey, as given by our three-strata descriptive framework of possible sensory experiences, but it also needs to clarify the manner in which the phenomenal trace can effectively *circumvent* the limitations of the *spatio-temporal framework*, “within whose confines” these sensory experiences usually manifest themselves to us, and describe the ability of the phenomenal trace at effectively

*compressing* these various noetic acts together. This ability is needed to explain how the phenomenal trace can convey the effective noesis of a very large number of *contingent possibilities* of such sensory experiences, as well as of a long *continuum*, if not an entire *lifetime*, of these, within an effectively *highly reduced time-span*, indicative of the discrepancy between the effective duration, usually needed to coherently align these contingent possibilities, so as to properly “synthesize” them together into elements of actual knowledge, and the actual duration of the introvertive phase of the mystical experience itself.

We therefore need to describe the *complex properties* of the phenomenal trace, by way of *three dynamic axes*, along which it “operates”, and which are directly related to the three stratified possible modes of manifestation of sensory experiences, as described in chapter 3. We respectively come to call these axes the axis of *orientation*, *temporal depth*, and *self-pole*. We will now explicate them in turn:

(1) The first of these axes is the axis of *orientation*. It serves to indicate, in a *static manner*, which kind(s) of possible mode(s) of manifestation, of a sensory experience, the phenomenal trace aims at. This axis operates across the three possible strata of complexity, and its orientation serves to indicate: (i) in the case of sensory traces, the possible individual units of sense-experience, as differentiated by their genus-stratum; (ii) in the case of second or third levels of sense-perception, the effective profile(s) or *Abschattung(en)*, as depicting, either individuated objects of sense-perception, or entire objective fields of awareness.

Having said this, it is important to remember that the phenomenal trace, unlike actual acts of sense-perception, imagination or fantasy, is not limited by the “temporally determined” successive flow of sense-impressions or profiles, needed to render these acts possible. As a matter of fact, the orientation of the phenomenal trace can herald possibly imminent sense-experiences, not only in terms of *singular Abschattungen*, as present in *now-given* temporal frames, but can also effectively *transcend* these limitations of “exoteric perception” and herald *multiple* possibly imminent sense-experiences, in an effective “flame of awareness”; sense-experiences, which normally require a minimal *temporal duration*, for all of their synchronous profiles to succeed each other and effectively constitute themselves, into an awareness of their objective meaning and correspondent identity.

Furthermore, it is equally important to remember that such a “flame of awareness” is *not* akin to the phenomenon of superimposition of profiles, as found in Husserl’s *method of free variation*, which he attempted to employ as a “solution” to the “problem of essences” (See pp. 62-3). This is because this specific kind of “flame of awareness”, characteristic of the phenomenal trace, is given in a *fully non-sensory and fully a-temporal manner*, whereas the kinds of variation in imagination that Husserl had in mind, require, even in the rather free rein of fantasy, a minimal coherent structure of *succession* and *duration*, to retain their effective intelligibility.

In this respect, the orientation of the phenomenal trace is not to be understood as restricted to a one-dimensional vector (indicative of *one* possible profile of immanent appearance of a certain object in question), but as actually having a *fan-like* quality, with the number of degrees, between the fan-vectors, respectively indicating the number of

possible contingent profiles, which can be *simultaneously* given as imminent contingent possibilities of sensory experience, by the phenomenal trace. Furthermore, these simultaneously given profiles need not be limited to a single possible stratum of sensory manifestation; the orientation of the phenomenal trace can herald the possible imminence of a number of possible sensory traces, profiles of a said object of perception or objective fields of awareness, but it can also herald, quite *a-temporally*, sensory experiences as effective *crossovers* across these strata, as usually experienced in the case of sensory traces coming to constitute either foreground or background elements of awareness, with their respective objective identities, fading in and out of immanent existence.

This first axis thus serves the very important role of indicating, not only the fact that the phenomenal trace heralds a sensory experience, but also that it heralds a sensory experience of a *certain kind*. This is indicated by the simultaneously given *Abschattungen*, which serve to cement the objective meaning(s) and identity pole(s) of the experience in question, and which are given, either as the possible imminence of a single *Abschattung*, or as the imminence of a *quasi-unlimited* number of such possible *Abschattungen*, all in one highly compressed, but perfectly clear, “flame of awareness”.

While the first axis is thus able to generate an imminent awareness of all possible sensory experience, it is *limited*, in that it gives no effective *temporal dimension* or *historicity* to the ontological status of the imminent being(s) (or object(s)), that the sensory experience depicts. This results in their imminent *Abschattungen* having no greater depth than that of a “flat canvas”, when apprehended at the *sole level* of the phenomenal trace’s orientation. Granted, the potentially highly numerous profiles, heralded by the orientation of the phenomenal trace, already include an *implicit* temporal



dimension, due to the very fact that their meaning is indicative of a “perceived as such”, objective identity (holding within itself additional meaning horizons), but this temporal dimension is not yet given as effective temporal *extension* and only remains *implicit*, if we solely limit our description to the orientation of the phenomenal trace. Consequently, if we are to properly understand this temporal dimension as *explicitly* manifested, by the phenomenal trace, we need to look at its second axis of operation; namely the axis of *temporal depth*.

(2) It is thus the role of the second axis to herald, as possibly imminent, the *historical scope* of possible sensory experiences, as determined by the *temporal depth* of the constitution of their objective identities. In this respect, its operation seconds the operation of the first axis: the phenomenal trace can herald *no* temporal depth, without there already being, at least, some *minimal* orientation. Furthermore, similarly to the orientation of the phenomenal trace, the temporal depth can be either quite shallow (heralding the imminence of a relatively short time span of successive noematic phases), or it can extend *very far* into the historicity of sensory experiences, capturing, quite conceivably, entire “lifeworlds” of sensory traces, various objective identities and objective fields of awareness, in all of their contingently manifold possible phases of *successive* appearance. Furthermore, just as the axis of orientation is able to span highly numerous phases of appearance in an effectively a-temporal “flame of awareness”, so can the axis of temporal depth span *all* the *retentive*, *protentive* and *internal* meaning-horizons of possible sensory experiences, in an equally instantaneously-given “flame of

awareness". It therefore generates an *effective immanence* of a certain part of the outer horizon, as a quasi-instantaneous and boundless, phenomenal realization.

(3) The third and final axis of the phenomenal trace functions at a more subtle level, and indicates the implicit presence and nature of an effective *self-pole*, as implied by the now-constituted possible objective *lifeworld*, given by the first two axes. In this respect, the following peculiarities of the self-polar axis need to be kept in mind: (i) it indicates the possibility of an implicit self-pole at the two levels of an *ego-pole* and a *body-pole*, which are mutually-complementary manifestations of the self; (ii) the very *nature* of the self-pole is implied by the potential *navigational modalities* of the objective lifeworld, itself determined by the *dynamic ontological status* of its constituent objective identity-poles, themselves respectively given by the orientation and temporal depth of the phenomenal trace. These particularities, in turn, serve to make the self-pole either *very proximate* or *very distanced*, from the normal "selfhood" of the subject having the mystical experience in question, which means that, due to this potentially very vast disparity, the subject's original self-pole can be either *maintained* (albeit in a slightly *altered state*, as in extrovertive mystical experiences), or it can be so far distanced from the normal "selfhood" of the experiencing subject, that its very self-polar nature as "Self" effectively *dissolves* (as in the highest-order *unitive* mystical experiences). This is what occurs, when the very ontological status of the possibly imminent sensory reality, as *being*, becomes effectively destroyed, taking down with it the self-pole of the experiencing subject as well, which is one of the final steps taken towards reaching the *highest order* introvertive mystical experience in question or, the state of *pure*

*consciousness*. The self-polar axis thus serves to determine this final and most-peculiar complex property of the phenomenal trace.

What we now come to find, is that these three operative axes, when taken together, indicate exactly *how* the phenomenal trace heralds possible immanent sensory experiences, by betraying its *structure*, and are the actual *noetic driving force* of the introvertive mystical experience in question, which serves to make possible the apprehension, not only of relatively banal object-facts, but, much more importantly, of actual cosmological truths, by the subject. Let us now see how we can employ our fully updated phenomenological descriptive framework, supplemented by the additional conceptual refinements of the phenomenal trace, and by its basic and complex properties, towards a better understanding of the nature of introvertive phases of mystical experiences, in section 4.4.

### 4.3 Rendering the Ineffable Effable, in Extrovertive Phases of Mystical Experiences

With our preliminary three-fold descriptive framework, freshly supplemented with our set of Husserlian phenomenological descriptive concepts, as outlined in section 3.4, we are now ready to take on the task of alleviating the purported ineffability, surrounding ambiguous extrovertive phases of mystical experiences. To do so, we now need to outline *four logical steps* which need to be taken, to clarify the nature of such experiences:

#### Step 1:

Seeing as how Gellman has already described extrovertive phases of mystical experiences as being *wholly sensory* in nature, we know that the *minimal phenomenal qualities*, which we can expect to encounter in them, are those described by our designation of *sensory traces*, as explained in section 3.3. Consequently, our first logical step involves carefully examining an ambiguous phase of an extrovertive mystical experience, to verify whether: (i) its phenomenal nature effectively *limits itself* to such sensory traces; or whether (ii) it extends further, and contains additional apprehensions of *entities*, as given to the subject, in the mystical realm.

In case of eventuality (i), our task is relatively simple: we need to determine, in a categorical manner, to which kinds of sensory elements of experience, the sensory traces of the mystical experience belong, and to do so, we need to determine their nature, as per: (a) the five main categorical delineations of our five natural senses; (b) their additional sub-categorical delineations, proper to each of our senses. In this respect, it is quite

possible that certain ambiguous extrovertive phases of mystical experiences simply limit themselves to case (i), and are consequently wholly constituted by “sensory flashes”, but it is equally crucial to remember, however, that we need to be very careful in our investigations, and only claim that sensory traces effectively *exhaust* the phenomenological description of the experience in question, when this is *actually the case*, and when there are truly no more additional complex elements, proper to the mystical experience in question. Thus, if (i) truly be the case, we can safely end our phenomenological description. If, on the other hand, (ii) be the case, and it is revealed that the ambiguous extrovertive phase of the mystical experience, either contains something more complex, in addition to sensory traces, or simply something more complex than sensory traces *period*, we need to move on to step 2 in our investigation:

#### Step 2:

The next logical step in our investigation, involves determining the nature of the following two elements of the ambiguous extrovertive phase of the mystical experience: (a) the presence of *mystical entities*, and possibly; (b) the additional presence of an effective *mystical realm*.

To determine the nature of element (a), we need to employ a method similar to the one utilized by Husserl, to derive the effective objective identity-pole, from a number of its possible “profiled representations” and other cognitive modes of manifestation. We know that Husserl used the *eidetic reduction* for this, but we require a more flexible and less rigid version, for, in our case, we are dealing with a *dynamic*, as opposed to a *fixed*

*ontology*. Thus, in our phenomenological investigation, we need to determine whether the effective sensory content of the mystical experience exhibits certain *reoccurring patterns*, characteristic of the presence of an underlying objective identity-pole. Naturally, in our case, the objective identity-pole points, not to an object of waking sense-perception, but rather to a *mystical entity*.

In so doing, the reader should know that it would not hurt to help our investigations along, by comparing this effective identity-pole of the mystical entity, to that of our common objects of waking sense-perception. We should be cautious in so doing, however; for while a mystical entity may be given by way of “modes of appearance”, which are very similar to the ones encountered in cases of waking perception (as in cases of garden-variety apparitions), it is also quite possible that such an entity, despite being given by way of a *sensory substrate* (sensory traces), be endowed with such *peculiar* noetic-noematic phases, that *no proper analogue* from waking perception can be found. In such cases, seeing as how such an entity still manifests itself in terms of fully sensory-based noetic-noematic phases, its objective identity-pole needs to be properly assigned a wholly *new designator* or *name*, as such, and its ontological status (related to its modes of appearance) needs to be demarcated as specifically belonging to a very special classificatory group (or regional ontology), which will eventually come to constitute an “ontology of the mystical realm”.

## Step 3:

The third logical step in our investigation mirrors the second step in important ways. This step involves determining whether, in addition to an apprehension of a mystical entity, the ambiguous extrovertive phase of the mystical experience, bestows upon its subject, an apprehension of an effective *mystical realm*, itself constituted of such various mystical entities, themselves. To determine if this be the case, our investigation needs to look at whether there is contained, within the mystical experience, an apprehension, not only of a certain singular objective identity-pole of a mystical entity, but rather an apprehension of an effective objective field of awareness of a mystical realm, whose distinguishing characteristics have been explained in section 3.3, and are employed here in the same manner, with the sole difference that they be transposed from cases of waking sense-perception to the mystical experience.

## Step 4:

The fourth and final logical step in our phenomenological investigation of the nature of ambiguous extrovertive phases of mystical experiences, involves providing the reader with an all-embracing account, which presents the experience within an effectively *temporal* framework. This entails giving a *dynamic* and *living* account of the mystical experience, in terms of *shifts in gaze or focus*, and, consequently, in terms of the corresponding shifts in sensory traces, noetic-noematic phases of the objective identity-poles of mystical entities, and noetic-noematic phase of the effective *mystical realm*

itself. Once this final step has been duly performed, we find that we have given an effectively *exhaustive* phenomenological descriptive account of the nature of the ambiguous extrovertive phase of the mystical experiences in question. Furthermore, we can confidently employ this method, with all such cases of ambiguous extrovertive phases of mystical experiences, to help alleviate their purported ineffability.



#### **4.4: Rendering the Ineffable Effable, in Introvertive Phases of Mystical Experiences**

The procedure for rendering introvertive phases of mystical experiences effable, is quite similar to the one employed for extrovertive phases, pending the following differences: An introvertive phase of a mystical experience is examined for the presence of either (1) *pure consciousness*, and/or (2) phenomenal traces. If only pure consciousness is present, the effective phenomenological description stops here. If, on the other hand, phenomenal traces are also present, then they are examined and described in relation to their three operative axes, which, consequently, determine both the extent of the *cosmological noesis*, conveyed by them, as well as the status of the self-pole, of the experiencing subject. Finally, as for the extrovertive phases, the phenomenological description is completed by providing the reader with an all-embracing *dynamic* and *living* account of the introvertive phase, in terms of the constitution and dissolution of phenomenal traces, as given within the temporal framework, indicative of the actual duration of the introvertive phase of the mystical experience, in question.

Having thus clarified the procedure required to render introvertive phases of mystical experiences effable, the final step, in the disambiguation of *all manners of mystical experiences*, rests with providing a complete and accurate account of all of their extrovertive and/or introvertive phases, in all of their respective successions and/or superimpositions. In so doing, we capture all of these possible phases of mystical awareness, throughout the course of the duration of the mystical experience, and describe each of them, according to their respective sensory/non-sensory phenomenological descriptive schemas (three-strata phenomenological descriptive framework/pure consciousness and/or phenomenal traces). Thus, the final disambiguation of mystical

experiences simply rests with giving an *integrated* account of all of these phases, encountered therein, along with the respective phenomenal qualities and noetic contents, for each of them.

### **Conclusion: Towards a Better Understanding of Esoteric States of Consciousness**

In this thesis, we have shown that esoteric states of consciousness, known to us as mystical experiences, are present in practically all socio-cultural and religious contexts, betray highly impressive and peculiar phenomenal qualities, are accessible by way of a great variety of means, and endow the experiencing subject with a variety of very vast kinds of cosmological knowledge. However, we have also shown that, due to the most unusual nature of these phenomenal qualities, mystical experiences have been branded by many mystics as both ineffable and esoteric. Furthermore, when taken in conjunction with their grand noetic qualities, mystical experiences have also often been employed as socio-political and religious levers, for advancing a variety of conceptual, as well as normative, worldviews. Finally, due to the great variety in cosmological noeses, bestowed upon the subjects of mystical experiences, there exist a number of disagreements, and even conflicts, continuing on, up to this day, based on varying interpretations, brought about by these noeses.

To address this problem, we have argued for the need to examine mystical experiences phenomenologically, and to bring them into the spotlight of public language games. We have then proceeded to do so, by starting off with a core set of three preliminary questions, which need to be asked, when confronted with a purportedly ineffable and esoteric mystical experience. These questions, being of an ontological, epistemological and cosmological nature, served to clarify: (1) the nature of the mystical apparition, within a mystical experience; (2) the immediate knowledge, communicated by this apparition; (3) and, finally, the greater implications, that the manifestation of this apparition holds for us. We have then shown that, by asking these three preliminary

questions, we can effectively alleviate the purported ineffability, surrounding all manners of garden-variety mystical experiences (based on sensory-like apparitions of mystical entities); we have shown this to be possible, due to the close proximity in the manner in which our common sensory-perceptions are interwoven with our exoteric language games, and in which garden-variety mystical experiences, being quite similar to those common cases of sense-perception, can thus see their content readily transferable to these exoteric language games of ours.

Despite this early success, we have then run into two main kinds of mystical experiences, which cannot be rendered in any way effable, by sole use of our three preliminary questions above. These were ambiguous extrovertive mystical experience, and introvertive mystical experience: the former remained ineffable, because, despite being sensory-like, it was simply unclear what it was that appears therein; and the latter because, by being wholly non-sensory, there was nothing to be found as effectively appearing therein.

At this point, it was therefore necessary to further develop our specific “phenomenological language game”, by having it take the “Husserlian turn”. This involved: (1) basing our investigative attitude on Husserl’s phenomenological reduction; (2) and structuring our descriptive framework, upon his hylomorphic scheme. This double-move was advantageous for us, because, although pre-supposing a certain core set of cognitive structures (namely the ones expressed by the hylomorphic scheme), the suspension of judgment, concerning “external” factual spatio-temporal beings, as engendered by the phenomenological reduction, along with the *purely descriptive* role, played by these cognitive structures, effectively served to simultaneously allow us to

understand the mystical experience as a kind of “psychic event”, while, at the same time, not making the undesirable appropriative move of confining it “in the head”, and not employing the shared objective lifeworld as the investigative benchmark, against which the phenomenal and epistemological contents of the mystical experience were to be ultimately gauged and validated, but rather as a simple referent.

In so doing, we have uncovered a number of very interesting and peculiar properties of mystical experiences in general, as well as of ambiguous extrovertive mystical experiences, and (with some specific alterations) of introvertive mystical experiences as well. We have shown that, first of all, mystical experiences, when experienced as a whole, need to be understood as being constituted by two main kinds of phases of awareness (respectively sensory and non-sensory), with these phases in question, manifesting themselves, either as distinctive successions of the former and the latter, as well as, possibly, superimposed states of the former and the latter.

We have then proceeded to respectively render the ambiguous extrovertive phases, as well as introvertive phases, effable. For the extrovertive phases, we have employed Husserl’s hylomorphic scheme, understood, by us, in a more flexible manner, as expressible at three distinct levels of complexity, whereby all manners of sensory and sensory-like experiences, can manifest themselves. These three levels are respectively constituted by: (1) our apprehension of pure, unstructured, sensory elements of experience; (2) a structured sensory experience, where the pure sensory substrate constitutes itself into an apprehension, by the subject, of their perception of an “object in the world”; (3) and an apprehension, by the subject, of an effective field of such objects, itself given within and additional temporal framework, exemplary of our mundane

sensory perceptions and navigation of our shared objective lifeworld. We have then transposed this three-strata descriptive framework, onto ambiguous extrovertive phases of mystical experiences, and shown how, by determining the presence therein, of either pure sensory elements of experience, *mystical entities* and/or a *mystical realm*, the ambiguous extrovertive mystical experience can be shown to no longer be that ambiguous, and can consequently be rendered effable.

Having thus taken care of the purported ineffability of ambiguous extrovertive phases of mystical experiences, we have then undertaken the task of seeing what can be done, to similarly help to disambiguate introvertive phases of mystical experiences. Our investigations have lead us to uncover, within such introvertive phases, the presence of two main additional kinds of non-sensory forms of awareness: *pure consciousness* and a special form of non-sensory mystical intuition, phenomenally experienced as a non-sensory “flash of awareness”, which we have called the “phenomenal trace”. By showing that pure consciousness itself has no *effective structure*, it was consequently impossible for us to say something more about it; but we did find, nevertheless, a very peculiar and potentially immensely complex structure to be contained, within the phenomenal trace. This structure allows an individual to become suddenly endowed with potentially very great cosmological knowledge, about the world we live in, and was consequently shown to be the actual *noetic force*, behind the mystical experience itself. We have then further shown that, since this mystical intuition, exemplified by the phenomenal trace, conveys, not only some random knowledge, but rather a *certain kind* of knowledge, it was therefore possible to describe it, *by proxy*, by use of our earlier three-strata descriptive framework; although, to render this actual “description” intelligible, it was necessary to

duly modify our three-strata descriptive framework, by way of an analogy, expressed by our characterization of the phenomenal trace as “operative” along three main axes: the axis of *orientation*, *temporal depth*, and *self-pole*. Finally, by describing the phenomenal trace in this manner, we have thus shown how it is possible to disambiguate even such a peculiar form of non-sensory awareness, as of the kind found in the introvertive phase of a mystical experience, by allowing the subject to describe, in a much more accurate and precise fashion (than what can be given by way of metaphor and poetic imagery), what specific kind of cosmological knowledge was actually bequeathed to them, by way of their mystical experience.

Once we had done this, the final step, in our disambiguation of all manners of mystical experiences, simply involved giving an outline for an *integrated account* of an entire mystical experience, from beginning to end, by way of all of its successive and/or superimposed extrovertive and/or introvertive phases of awareness, with each one of them being respectively described, either by way of our three-strata phenomenological descriptive framework, or by way of the presence of pure consciousness, and/or of the specific states of each of the three operative axes, of the phenomenal trace. Once this is accomplished, our complete phenomenological descriptive framework allows all manners of mystical experiences to make the transition, from the realm of the purportedly ineffable, esoteric and secretive, to that of a more exoteric community of language users, and effectively serves to lay down the foundations for what is to become, not a private, but rather a “public” language game, concerning all manners of mystical experiences, in question.

For those who may still have some reservations, concerning our approach, it is important to point out that this first step is still quite preliminary; for our phenomenological descriptive account thus far provides the reader with an effectively “cognitivist” description of the goings-on of mystical experiences, with further work still needed to be done, regarding the very important role of *feelings* and *emotions*, as well as of the often *altered status of the Self*, within mystical experiences. This is necessary, so that all the effectively salient features of mystical experiences may be duly captured and described. Similarly, it is also important to remember that such a description, as the one provided by us here, is in no way intended to diminish the great meaning and significance, which mystical experiences may hold for some. Quite on the contrary, what our description does accomplish, is twofold: (1) a strong push for an actual recognition, by various sceptics, of mystical experiences as actual *genuine* states of consciousness, which one can experience, with all of their rich intricacy, depth and complexity; (2) and a good step taken towards the eventual alleviation of various conflicts, brought about by varying and often contradictory interpretations of the cosmological noeses, stemming from a lack of *communication* and *clarity*, regarding the contents of the mystical experiences themselves.



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