

DEFINING MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE: An analysis of issues in the
typology of momentary and concrete religious experiences.

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'The spiritual life ... is a life whose experiences are proved real to their possessor, because they remain with him when brought closest into contact with the objective realities of life. Dreams cannot stand this test. We wake from them to find that they are but dreams. Wanderings of an overwrought brain do not stand this test. These highest experiences that I have had of God's presence have been rare and brief - flashes of consciousness which have compelled me to exclaim with surprise - God is here - or conditions of exaltation and insight, less intense, and only gradually passing away. I have severely questioned the worth of these moments ... but I find that, after every questioning and test, they stand out today as the most real experiences of my life....When they came, I was living the fullest, strongest, sanest, deepest life, aware that I was immersed in the infinite ocean of God'.

- J. Trevor (quoted by W. James)

INTRODUCTION

This essay is concerned with the taxonomy of that kind of experience referred to by Trevor. Despite Stace and others, we have as yet no incontrovertible way of deciding whether and on what basis mystical experiences can be construed as constituting a type and, without knowing this, cannot be certain what our data base encompasses or what kind of approach is indicated. By philosophical analysis of various aspects of the experience presented in mystical reports, I aim to produce a characterization that the data supports and one which is corrigible.

My definition of a mystical type is unconventional largely because I give little role to mystical claims in the characterization of the experience. The reasons for this are examined in chapters 1 and 2 where I argue that these claims are not meaningful and, in any event, are inaccessible to rational analysis. However, if I ignore the content of these claims, I do identify certain features about them, notably the concreteness and apparent reality of mystical experience, which could prove to be a basis for typology. Justifying the selection of this feature as distinguishing and defining leads, in chapter 3, to an epistemological debate in which I argue that mentalistic models cannot explain this feature in the case of mystical perception or indeed perception more generally. Believing concreteness to have a hypothetical importance, I turn away from the sociology of mysticism and, in chapters 4 and 5, find that we can give our subject matter distinctive definition and context by relating it to cyclic and syndromical changes in personality which occur in the context of traumatization. Mystical perception here is defined by its circumstances - a curious sequence in psycho-physiological functioning - and by its sensory or quasi-sensory nature. In chapter 6 I look further into physiology, unsuccessfully, for empirical confirmation of this picture.

In conclusion, I explore and answer some of the questions a type, defined in terms of the essentially empirical world of human functioning, poses us. This is not a reductionist account but, if I am more concerned with the human aspects than the divine, this is because my primary aim is giving typology a corrigible basis and only the former aspects of the experience allow this.

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Can physiology be used to empirically confirm the descriptive characterization I have given and could physiology adequately explain all we might wish to know about it? The evidence is at present minimal but, more importantly, there is no reason to think that a naturalistic order of explanation alone would suffice. In conclusion, I look at three higher order questions mystical experience poses and seek to answer them in the framework of a new model of psycho-physiological functioning which gives the mystical an important role in our mundane world.

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CHAPTER 1

MYSTICAL CLAIMS AND EXISTENCE

The question of whether or not supernatural claims can be treated as statements about existence has received a great deal of attention, especially a generation ago from C.B. Martin and others, but still occasions debate for it has never been entirely resolved. As will be seen, the various considerations lead to no clear cut conclusion but on balance lead me to accept that there is no compelling rational basis for treating supernatural claims as if they had to do with reality. As a result, my subsequent approach to mystical experience is anthropocentric rather than theological. The argument here is in three parts. Firstly, ignoring altogether the analytic truths of maths and logic that empiricism is today the only acceptable basis for knowledge, indeed virtually defines what can be accepted as knowledge. Secondly, I discuss how far religious doctrines can be treated as empirical knowledge and, whilst there are arguments both ways, conclude that there are insufficient grounds to accept that these are empirically based and therefore that we are not entitled to infer anything about the world from them. Thirdly, I argue that we cannot demonstrate that mystical claims have to do with existence and, since we cannot infer this by appeal to religious doctrine, must accept that there is no reason to assume that claims of this class have to do with reality.

Apart from some minor arguments in Part 11, the considerable differences between faiths, as between mystics, with respect to the claims they make, do not materially affect this discussion. Though little more than a restatement of the standard empiricist position, I aim to include all the relevant arguments as this is a central issue which determines so much else about one's approach to mystical experience.

1) EMPIRICISM, the only basis of Knowledge.

The advent of scientific methodology proved to be a revolution in epistemology for whereas previously there was thought to be a variety of ways in which one could come to know something more about the world - reason, revelation etc. - today, in the cultural mainstream, 'the grounds of argument to be intelligible to us would have to include no unverifiable assertions'. (1) That is to say that the only claims that can command public acceptance are those that can be demonstrated. Clearly science has been very successful in using verification procedures to build up - in a usually gradual, piecemeal and endlessly self-correcting process - a picture of the world that can be shared by all since it relies on no private or psychological insight but the important point is that the empiricist would claim that verification is the only basis for such a picture.

3.

The exclusivity of empiricism rests on the proposition enshrined in logical positivism that a fact about the world must be verifiable and, if a proposition of a metaphysical kind, say, "God sustains the universe from beyond the world of experience", can in principle neither be shown to be true nor false; as a statement about reality it is meaningless*.

There are difficulties with the verification principle - can we verify it?, does the procedure need to be standard? - and, more generally, problems with the philosophy of science but it is hard to refute the general principle that for a claim about reality to be accepted it needs to be tested in such a way that it can be shown publicly and objectively to be true or false. There appear to be few advantages in claiming something to be true if it is beyond testing for not only have we no rational reason to accept the claim and the knowledge would prove unusable but it is to accept that reality has nothing to do with the world of experience which is our fondest presupposition. One could, after the manner of Plato's 'cave', conceive the idea that we are living only with the illusion of reality but, if what is 'real' is forever beyond our experience and is in principle unverifiable, nothing follows, true or false it is just the same.** It is difficult to escape the conclusion that the only reality worth talking about is the world we are capable of experiencing and verification is the acid test of what is or is not the case in this world.

* This is not however to say, as some critics seem to believe, unintelligible, for as in fiction one may imagine worlds in which such a proposition could be true, however this does not show that such a proposition is meaningful with respect to our own world.

**This is not to deny that there may be consequences for society in holding metaphysical beliefs but only that such pragmatic arguments cannot be used to ascertain the meaningfulness of such beliefs.

There is a special case worth mentioning for one might wish to argue that supernatural claims are an unknown quantity, something we are not yet able to test and thus this principle cannot be applied for the present at least. In the case of 'relativity', for example, the theory is accorded a provisional status even though none of its principal claims have yet been verified. There appear to be two important points about such theories. Firstly, unlike religious claims, 'relativity' has a contiguity with established empirical knowledge which legitimizes the inferences upon which its claims are based and secondly, unlike metaphysical 'hidden manipulator of dreams' arguments, offers the possibility of falsification for one is able to say under just what conditions 'relativity' could be shown to be true. The point here is not whether religious claims have been verified but whether they ever could be.

As most religions would claim that their objects are, in part at least, within the world of experience, it is perhaps a digression to consider attempts to show that something about the world is true even if this cannot be established empirically. However, these arguments represent a fall-back position for theologians faced with the difficulty of substantiating their claims and it is worth discussing whether any represent an acceptable substitute for verification. The most common

form of argument, used by rationalists such as Descartes and Spinoza as well as theologians, is that we may come to know something about the world from unaided reasoning alone. In the 'argument to design', for example, it is said that God 'the clockmaker' must exist for how else can we explain the regularity and integration of the universe? Interestingly, in physics there is a teleological argument - the 'strong anthropic principle' - that sees the development of man as the purpose of the universe but the problem with all such attempts is that the presuppositions on which they are based, a synthetic a priori principle of causation, for instance, carry no warranty as to how the real world is. The world may just be inherently ordered and unless we can show that no order is natural, we are not entitled to deduce anything from this state of affairs. Like Hume, I can see no value in trying to arrive at a truth that is not analytic solely through 'relations of ideas' for, if something is true only because in the light of certain assumptions it must be true, the analogy is with a detective story. In the real world we are not obliged to deduce that x must be the murderer on the basis of motive and opportunity alone for without proof that x is guilty there are simply too many other possibilities. There appears to be no case where we are entitled to move further than tested inferences allow however impeccable the logic for it is unwarranted to make assumptions about the world if these cannot be

validated. Some would argue, as in the case of the unified theory in physics, 'N = 8 supergravity', that impeccable logic is sufficient but even physics is not mathematics so what do we know for certain from reasoning however symmetrical, elegant, parsimonious and comprehensive? If derived from empirical knowledge we might treat it as best guess but in so far as throughout it contains neither 'abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number' or 'experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence' (2) nothing is established for certain. It is true that reasoning makes the claim offered publicly accessible but alone this is not enough to establish existence, only testing can do that unless one is prepared to claim that reality must mirror one's thought processes.

Sometimes it is claimed we 'just know' what the truth of a matter is, planted in us perhaps by the 'divine light of truth' or it is revealed by a prophet or handed down by authority though in none of these cases is there any more reason to accept the claim without verification than in the case of reasoning. As to 'just know' arguments, I do not doubt that we often hit upon the truth without knowing how. Be it physiology or divine guidance, frontiersmen just knew when they were being followed as I certainly know when a house I am approaching is empty. It is worth pointing out however that intuition is no substitute for verification in this case. Since mystical 'knowledge' has never been checked out as my

feelings are when I get to the front door, it does not make sense to say "I know what it feels like when God is close" in the same way that it does when we say "I know what it feels like if there is a prowler close by/the house is empty etc." As paranoia demonstrates, whole classes of intuitive feelings may be delusory and until it has been shown that a 'real God' gives rise to just such feelings they signify nothing certain about the world however 'real' they seem or strong the sense of conviction which accompanies them. In the case of mystical experience there is no reason at all to assume that intuition implies existence. Revelation, where the claims made are beyond verification, really comes down to questions of authority for it is quite irrelevant whether or not the claims are consonant with other unverifiable claims. It is however interesting to note, and I shall go into this in much greater detail elsewhere, that religious claims do form an internally consistent whole but then so do most works of fiction and the coherence of all such claims is no argument for their veridicality. It may be that the prophet is also a miracle worker perhaps, but unless the miracles are offered as an experimental confirmation of the claims in question rather than as a reason to accept his personal authority in all matters, this and similar considerations strictly belong to the psychology of belief rather than to epistemology. However, I think authors such as MacIntyre push this distinction too hard. If the miracle worker explains that he is in a special position to know and demonstrates that he is in a special position, I am less than convinced that it would be wholly

unreasonable to believe that we were hearing the truth. I accept that there is no analogy with scientists who, if pressed, could verify each of their claims, though in fact we rarely ask for this, but nonetheless miraculous powers would seem to be a form of warranty which we would not wish to reject out of hand at least before we had explained them to our satisfaction. I, at least, having met MacIntyre's 'angel of proven veracity' would be prepared to believe both in the angel and his claims; scepticism can be taken too far.

It is often argued that such alternative routes to knowledge, if wanting clear cut verification, are nonetheless confirmed in ways other than by hard evidence, testable predictions and so forth. For example, some authors, such as Wainright, have argued that if holding a belief is beneficial to the individual and his community then this is evidence of its veridicality, others follow a similar line introducing fecundity. These arguments, however, are untenable for to show that true beliefs produce good - so difficult to define - it would have to be shown that good is intrinsic to reality and only to reality and neither proposition is sustainable. No pragmatic argument based on the value to the individual of the consequences of his holding a belief would seem to be able to show that the belief is true for all involve assumptions about reality we have

no right to make. Similarly, it is sometimes argued that, if a belief has stood the 'test of time' rather than the test of empiricism, this shows that it is well founded. Though I am not an 'instrumentalist' it seems to me evident that almost any system of belief about the world, however ill-founded, will enable human society to survive and often flourish but our adaptivity is by no means the same as a factual knowledge of what is or is not the case. Anthropologists often make the point that beliefs, however primitive, are adapted to the needs of society but, because it is pragmatic to believe such and such offers no guarantee that this has to do with reality, which alone, I suggest, is what we mean when we claim something is true.

I have argued that neither reasoning - however impeccable - intuition, revelation or authority can tell us what is or is not the case in the world without recourse to verification procedures and that it is these alone which determine what is accepted as knowledge. One may question the assumption that the world we are confronted with is reality but to do this is to deny that we have any way, certainly any shared and public way, of agreeing what reality is. One may also question what we mean by verification procedures and this will be discussed below but, if these thoughts are persuasive, there can be little reason to doubt that we need to submit supernatural claims, as much as any other, to some convincing form of testing to establish just how far they are telling us something about the world.

2) ARE RELIGIOUS DOCTRINES EMPIRICAL KNOWLEDGE?

'(she) beheld our Lord, full of splendour ... He spoke other words which she understood better than she can repeat them ... it left her bewildered and amazed both on account of the vividness of what she saw and of the words heard at the time, also because it took place in the interior of the soul. As far as can be understood, the soul, I mean the spirit of this soul, is made one with God who is Himself a spirit and who has been pleased to show how far His love for us extends in order that we may praise His greatness. He has thus deigned to unite Himself to this creature' (Teresa of Avila - Interior Castle 7.2 1-3).

In questioning whether or not we have any firm grounds for treating religious doctrines, even provisionally, as a form of knowledge, the issue is not only whether we can legitimately explain mystical experience in terms of these but whether we are entitled to infer anything at all about such phenomena, their existence perhaps, on the basis of religious doctrine.

There are two principal objections to the validity of theological claims, A) that they have not been verified and B) that the main tenets of faith appear to be beyond falsification also. On these grounds it is difficult to accept that religious doctrines are making meaningful claims about the world though I would be the first to accept that in neither case are the arguments conclusive. Not only is it not clear whether religious claims might be put into a scientific form or which verification procedures should be adopted to meet this type of claim but there are questions about the definition of reality itself which make it impossible to reject such claims out of hand. I add here two other arguments, C) that religious doctrines are difficult to accept on other logical grounds, for example, their complexity and D) that religious doctrines do not in any event appear to be

explanations of mystical experience as a class both of which are subsidiary arguments against accepting religious accounts of these experiences. The primary question is, however, whether or not religious doctrines amount to an empirical knowledge of the world.

A) RELIGIOUS DOCTRINES HAVE NOT BEEN VERIFIED.

Most religious statements take a form that appears in principle to be verifiable yet we have no certain evidence to support any of the central tenets concerning spirituality. One might give reasons for this, the tests are inappropriate perhaps but since no theologian has explained why these claims are beyond our current ability to confirm and thus explained under precisely which conditions they might be confirmed, the temptation is to conclude that there is nothing to confirm rather than that we are going about it in the wrong way or, as in the case of 'relativity', we, for the present, lack the means. Though no claim which is in principle verifiable yet for which there is no evidence or convincing explanation of why confirmation is not forthcoming can command acceptance - 'yeti', 'Atlantis' etc. - in the case of religious claims it might be argued that some evidence, however slight, can be produced and this forces us to keep an open mind. There are two areas in which the religious might look for evidence to validate their beliefs, predictions about the world and predictions about human experience of the world, which are worth discussing if only for the questions they raise about what constitutes evidence and how much is needed for confirmation.

Successful prediction is one of the more important of science's interlocking procedures though, alone, it does not confirm the theory which gives rise to it. Unless all stages in the process leading up to the predicted result have been tested, there remains the possibility of chance or, as when Chinese astrologers successfully predicted eclipses on the basis of accurate observation and accounted for these in terms of a celestial dragon, that the process is imperfectly understood. Nevertheless, successful predictions about the world on the basis of religious doctrines would bring these within the orbit of empirical methodology. Most religious predictions of the 'last judgement' and 'immortality of the soul' variety, like those to do with the future prospects of the poor and meek, are quite useless for the purposes of empirical confirmation for, not only are most, apparently, beyond verification in this life, no time limits or other specifications are set, officially, for those which have to do with this world - the second coming etc. Despite their form, is it even reasonable to treat these as predictions? Certainly, few religions would appear to treat their doctrines as blueprints for the course of history and world events and it makes one doubt whether even the religious now believe that they are the possessors of an explanatory model of the world which is the only place their doctrines might be validated. However, there are some who do treat doctrine as a blueprint and these are capable of springing

surprises on the sceptic. I am obliged to record that the fundamentalist Hal Lindsay, taking these to be 'The Last Days', on the basis of 'Revelations', reasoned unequivocally that within a very few years a) Isreal would make peace with Egypt and b) that Iran would become violently hostile not only to Israel but to all western-inclined states in general. The publication date was 1970, a year in which both predictions would have appeared absurd on the basis of normal reckoning. Either 'Revelations' gave him predictive advantages which events have confirmed or this was chance, suffice it to say such success would have amply confirmed more obviously scientific theories. One wonders both how ~~many~~ such precise predictions religious doctrines might be made to yield and how many successes it would take for religious doctrine to be treated at least as a proto-scientific theory. One understands the hesitance of churchmen but either their doctrines have to do with the workings of the world or they do not and one of the few ways they can show which, is by making specific predictions which can be tested.

The second form of evidence is based on the ad hominem argument that religious belief works, for example, that God does keep His promises to the faithful revealed in scripture by healing, regenerating and providing for them in providential or miraculous ways. The weight of testimony would appear to show that the predictions in scripture are verified in human experience in ways that appear quantifiable, for example, that prayer

produces specific results. I for one do not believe that most who make such claims have lost touch with reality and ascribe benefits to their religion where there are none but there are two difficulties with this line of argument. The first is that, however much life-events appear to vindicate religious doctrines, there is no way we can infer from this the truth of religious doctrine. It may be that by setting criteria we could show that prayer, say, indeed worked but there are other, simpler, explanations for what might be happening which have a greater consonance with the mainstream understanding of the world. One may accept that the advantages are real but argue that these stem from the psychology of faith, the 'protestant work-ethic' perhaps or the undoubted power of 'faith healing' rather than have recourse to the supernatural. There is no way we can infer the existence of God from such events as we can a hidden planet by observing the irregularities of other orbits for we have no tested rule of inference equivalent to the laws of gravity to legitimize such a move. Like the celestial dragon theory the circularity of religious reasoning would count for nothing until each stage of the process could be tested or legitimately inferred.

The second and more immediate objection to the great volume of testimony is that, even if it is all concerned with events that can only be explained supernaturally, in empirical terms, it is very poor evidence.

If each testimony to God's intervention in this life originates in a highly idiosyncratic and unrepeatable life-situation despite the collective impact of the claims no one case can be confirmed, certainly not independantly corroborated under controlled conditions. That Mr. Jones gave up booze through the saving power of Jesus or that Mrs. Smith providentially received some money through the intervention of the saints to which she had been praying, are one-off occurences which took place at a particular point in the kaleidoscopic complexity of human life and allow no experimental confirmation. This would certainly appear to be a weakness in our understanding of empirical knowledge for one may imagine the case where everyone could tell of a divine intervention in their own lives yet - as for reasons to be explained below attestation alone cannot determine what is true - this phenomenon would not form part of the body of empirically established knowledge. Could the interlocking procedures of the scientific method ever deal with a class of phenomena in which every occurence took place in a different set of circumstances, none of which could ever be repeated?

There are in fact two objections to the use of testimonies as evidence. Firstly that these are incorrigible for in no case can the exact circumstances be replicated and secondly not only are the events unrepeatable but avowedly occurred only with the active participation of the observer. If God only intervenes as a result of prayer, even taking the events at face value, there is a unique relationship between observer and observed which

precludes objectivity. However, the empiricist could not object to this for in physics the 'uncertainty principle' was provided for just such a situation and the 'participatory anthropic principle' underlines the thinking of many physicists who now hold that 'objective reality' is an illusion on the basis that 'to be is to be observed'. The point about these parallels is, not only that they provide a precedent for accepting the inherent subjectivity of religious 'evidence', but that they also provide a precedent in which science is willing to sacrifice the old concept of an objective reality 'out there' to which all have access for the sake of some sort of understanding and this is relevant to the larger problem of the incorrigibility of most religious witness. Perhaps the demand for independent corroboration in verification procedures was a happenstance that arose because the phenomena which science first investigated proved ordered and regular. Yet it is not clear how far one could sacrifice objectivity to accommodate religious claims without our losing confidence in the method of verification. It may be tolerable to accept that data can only be obtained with the active participation of the observer but is it tolerable to say that no two observers can ever be in the same position? This would seem to offend all our democratic assumptions about existence but, whilst these are the root of rationality, it is not self-evident that all observers are the same or must be able to take up the identical position of their fellows. However, whilst one

would be prepared to forgo many of the tests which might be applied and even design unique verification-procedures in astronomy or some other field in which warranted inferences may be made, in the case of religious doctrines to deviate from standard procedures would appear to deny all possibility of public access and agreement. Without corroboration, controlled experiments and all the rest of it, how could one convince the sceptic that testimonies amount to evidence for, in saying that 'this is just how this type of evidence is, unrepeatabe etc.' one is going against an accumulated knowledge of reality. Whilst it is clear that empirical methods are not well adapted to dealing with situations as complex as human experience of life, if we claim that life events do not behave as 'real' things are expected to do, we have no way of compelling the unanimity of our fellows which is possible only on the basis of tests and corroboration. It is unsatisfactory to reject as evidence the very phenomena which religions predict but, in so far as testimonies are beyond corroboration, there is no good reason to treat them as empirical evidence for we would not wish to bend the rules governing objectivity to the extent that would be required.

If neither predictions about the world or predictions about the actions of God, prayer etc. in the life of individuals has yielded any empirical confirmation of religious doctrines, it is difficult to imagine how else in this world supernatural tenets might be confirmed. The line of

argument that we have simply lacked the technology to test these claims directly has, until now, been implausible for it might have been said that, since there was no evidence of a supernatural component of reality, no new technology would significantly increase the chances of verifying what manifestly forms no part of our universe. However, physics now seriously offers a view of reality in which it is possible to conceive of the supernatural as part and parcel of reality because, it is said, what is at present beyond our material and tangible universe, will soon come within the orbit of experimentation. The theory of the existence of an infinite number of parallel universes, in which everything that can happen does, is founded on experiments which show, for example, that a photon which is made to pass through two slits is in two different places at the same time. The picture arising is of a number of universes which interact with each other splitting and merging and reality is not therefore composed of the world we do experience but of all those worlds which will one day shortly be detected by machines that have a sensitivity far beyond that of the human mind. Though there is no empirical reason to suppose that we shall ascertain the truth of religious claims in one or other of these parallel worlds, this theory - which "is gaining overwhelming acceptance among physicists"(3) - makes it credible to argue that there are invisible worlds which await the technology to be brought into our picture of reality. This, as in Arjuna's vision, for example, is just the

sort of picture in which the religious have always understood their claims to be true and therefore, in saying that there is no evidence in our world to verify these claims, we cannot rule out the reasonable possibility that one day these claims might be verified in one or other of these worlds which are said to constitute empirical reality. If, as I understand, this is not an exercise in science fiction, the current verdict of unproven is not a decisive ground for reasoning that in no likely circumstances could such claims be shown to be true. Nevertheless, the fact remains that at present we have not confirmed religious claims nor do we, as yet, have any good reason for believing that we could confirm these claims in ways which could command universal acceptance.

B) CENTRAL RELIGIOUS TENETS ARE BEYOND FALSIFICATION.

Popper introduced falsification as the hallmark of scientific knowledge, a criterion which has become widely accepted. Starting from the observation that universal claims - 'all crows are black' - cannot be wholly verified by any number of confirmatory observations but can be shown to be false, i.e. if a white crow were found, he argued that the pursuit of knowledge is best served if we set conditions on claims to see under which circumstances we can demonstrate their truth or falsity. Putting a claim to a test rather than simply amassing confirmatory evidence is a method which avoids circularity of reasoning, ensures that all claims made are precise and detailed and gives us a reason to discard those theories which fail the designated test or which can never be put

to such a test at all. This procedure never allows us to believe that we have finally reached the 'truth' for the best one can say about a theory is that it has never been shown to be false but most would accept that this procedure, rather than verifiability, gives us a working picture of reality. I wish to look at three points: 1) whether or not religious claims are falsifiable, 2) if, by and large, they are not whether we can treat them as if they are making meaningful claims at all and 3) whether we can understand theology to be even attempting to build up a precise picture of reality as the sciences are when they discard and modify their claims in search of ever greater exactitude.

1) Though a variety of religious claims ranging from the old geocentric cosmology to any number of 'God of the gaps' claims have been falsified, it would appear that all central tenets are beyond falsification either in principle or in practice. Many are existence claims which might be verified but never conclusively falsified. As in "aliens have visited earth", it would be impossible to disprove most religious propositions about God, Jesus, the Trinity etc. Nikita Khreushev's celebrated remark that "God does not exist. We have been up there and seen for ourselves" does not begin to exhaust the possibilities for He might exist elsewhere in this universe or one of the countless others predicted by the new physics. Other claims take a form which appears falsifiable, "all things work towards man's redemption" of 'God is love' but in no case have conditions been set which would demonstrate their failure. It might

be thought that the suffering of the world is a test which disproves the claim that 'God is love' but, as in so many other cases, there are no empirical criteria for failure. Again we are sometimes exhorted to 'try prayer', 'put our trust in Jesus' etc. but these are never intended as a means of falsification, for not only are 'results' difficult to determine as precise measurements are impossible but the claims are so hedged around with provisos that no failure, however manifest, is accepted as showing the falsity of the theory. It is possible that such tests are used at an individual level to determine the meaningfulness of religious claims but, in view of all the non-empirical reasons offered to explain failure, it is clear that falsification plays no part in the systematic claims of religious doctrine. Religions are geared to affirmation rather than demonstration and, whilst this may owe something to their pre-scientific origins, it nonetheless lays them open to the charge that, not only can we not demonstrate their truth, but we cannot be sure that any meaningful claim is being made.

2) It is perhaps futile to consider what criteria could be offered for the falsification of religious claims or what experimental controls might be appropriate when it may be doubted whether theologians are making any specific claims about reality at all. A respected author can write

about Christology, for example, that 'we may differ about what its true form is, about how it should be interpreted and indeed about whether it is indispensable or even appropriate. But we shall not differ about the reality it is trying to express'.(4) On the basis of this quotation it may be doubted that the religious see any connection between their doctrines and reality and, if they do, that it is not merely humility which prevents them from putting their claims forward as theories but an inability to predicate their terms and define ideas to a degree which any form of experimentation requires. Even when not avowedly apophatic it is difficult to treat many religious claims as if they are defining anything in the real world precisely enough to test, an issue which has more to do with the appearance of general meaningfulness than the demonstration of truth or falsity in any particular case. Quite apart from the problem of quantifying religious claims which would be necessary for any real precision, the doctrines and concepts of which they are comprised are couched in such general and unrestricted terms as to appear in principle beyond the possibility of meaningful testing and corroboration. Unlike other empiricists, I do not say that such terms as God or references to the workings of the soul are unintelligible given the context in which they are made but that, in the modern age at least, the context gives insufficient predication or restriction for us to treat them as specific propositions about reality that can be universally comprehended. In the past, in the

context of a christian cosmology, God was a restricted concept - father of Jesus, creator etc., - and the workings of the soul, say, were spelled out systematically and to such a degree that the possibility of a test by anyone anywhere would not have seemed absurd. We need a return to the 'how many angels can dance on a pinhead' school of theology for religious claims even to appear similar to scientific ones which by contrast are defined to the nth degree. Clearly this issue might be argued at great length but the only point I am making is that experiment, even if it is only hypothetical, requires of a claim a great deal of predication and specification which many religious claims do not apparently possess. We may not expect in the religious field the precision of a scientific experiment but without this discipline being applied it cannot be assumed that doctrines, whatever the intention of their authors, are making claims about the world that are universally comprehensible and it is not then clear whether, even in principle, their truth or falsity might be demonstrated. No experimentation, no guarantee that precise concepts are being offered.

3) The final point follows on from the second. It is not strictly necessary for empirical knowledge to develop in a gradual, piecemeal and endlessly self-correcting process but through falsification science has

aimed to build up an increasingly certain and exact picture of the world by discarding whatever fails to measure up to the ever widening possibilities of experiment. There is simply no parallel process in the case of religious doctrines. It is true that a number of peripheral religious claims have been abandoned - geocentricity, for example, and that doctrines undergo modifications over the years perhaps in response to a changing intellectual climate or the demands of logic but whereas science aims to explicate its picture of reality in terms which have ever greater precision, theology apparently does not. Tinsley speaks for many theologians when he described his role to be like that of the music critic 'constantly attempting to achieve in a significant pattern of words some way of rationalizing those facets of his experience and history which point to a meaning beyond the visible and material'.(5) There is in this no suggestion that he and his fellows are seeking to sift through the accumulated scholarship of the past to discard what is manifestly implausible or ill-defined and put in its place concepts which, because they are more precise and better accord with reality as we have come to know it, have some claim to universal acceptance. It is not only, as mentioned above, that we have no guarantee that any meaningful, restricted concepts that have a universal validity are being offered but that theologians do not appear to believe that one day we may ever get to the point where this 'meaning' can be stated in

objective terms. Though the works of theologians may illumine the imagination, it is not an empirical aim or method to reflect understanding in parables but rather to move towards ever greater exactitude and if an idea in science is beyond precise formulation it is very quickly discarded as meaningless rather than endlessly reworked without hope of a conclusion. It is true that the protestant school toyed with the scientific method at the end of the last century trying to determine exactly what evidence they did have for the historical Jesus, demythologizing doctrine and so forth but not only was this a fairly isolated attempt in terms of world religions, but few appeared willing to follow the principle through. Admittedly, the findings were sketchy but none of the doctrines for which no support could be found have been abandoned and none superseded by formulations which, however unsatisfactory, could be defended in the light of the findings of scholarship. I do not say that a secular theology is necessarily the outcome of such efforts only that, if it is to have any analogy with science, theologians must be prepared to take this on board otherwise they deny that they are working towards the goal of defining the meaning with precision and clarity even if this remains forever unquantifiable. One might also suggest in this context that with only a few exceptions, few new religious sects or cults offer their creeds as a more rational or precise picture of the world in the way that new scientific theories

do when they supercede old or that few converts adopt religion or change faiths for this reason. Because no falsification principle is employed, I do not believe that it makes sense to view religious traditions as proto-scientific, aiming to build up a more certain and precise picture of reality, rejecting the untenable and looking for grounds to establish what remains and subjecting these to continuing scepticism. On the contrary, there appears to be no development at all towards precision or objectivity in religious claims and the delineation of what religious reality is actually like.

My argument is that central religious tenets are not nor cannot be put to the test and as a result we cannot demonstrate the truth or falsity of these claims. More importantly perhaps, because religions do not avail themselves of this procedure, we cannot be sure that their claims are even attempting to describe reality in any meaningful way or that it is even their aim to develop as precise and testable a picture of reality as is possible in the circumstances. If these points are persuasive, we cannot treat religious doctrines even as proto-scientific theories of the world for, not only are they not tested, but they have no correspondence with empirical aims and methods. Taken together with the earlier argument that we do not have any confirmatory evidence - though religious traditions would welcome any that they could find even if this, by itself, would not

establish the truth of their doctrines - there is no reason to treat these doctrines as a form of knowledge as it is nowadays defined, for verification procedures play no part. It would therefore be unacceptable to attempt to explain mystical experience, for example, in religious terms even though this appears to invite some such explanation or to infer anything about these experiences on the basis that such doctrines are available to us. No untested inference is warranted and since no religious doctrine has any empirical basis or even contiguity with any other branch of established knowledge, any religious inference is illegitimate. Before moving on to consider whether mystical claims have any empirical basis, it is perhaps worth mentioning two subsidiary arguments neither of which affect the principal point that we cannot approach mystical experience from a theological perspective because this has no empirical basis.

C) THE THEORETICAL WEAKNESS OF RELIGIOUS DOCTRINES

Even if we had some reason to assume that religious doctrines are making meaningful statements about reality, it is far from clear that we would wish to accept them as they stand. My reason for saying this is that such explanations are either not comprehensive or not parsimonious. To give an example one might cite the doctrine of the soul, which most religions use in some form. There is an ontological extravagance in postulating the worlds of God and soul - and in some cases spirit as well -

without real necessity which has gone against the grain of rationality at least since the time of Ockham. Defenders of the religious view might argue that a spiritual realm must be postulated for there are events in the physical world which otherwise cannot be explained. They might cite the continued common identity of particles in sub-atomic physics that no longer have any material connection, the claim that animals and humans acquire skills simultaneously but independently or the few mystical experiences which are declared to be wholly non-corporeal yet none of these necessitates the multiplication of worlds and the enormous complexity this entails.

In the case of 'non-corporeal' mystical experience, even assuming that a theological explanation is required, the idea of some soul to soul contact wholly beyond the physical world, causes more problems than it solves. In the first place, as only a few experiences of God are said to be 'non-corporeal' - 'all I have hitherto described seems to come through the senses and faculties ... but what passes in the Union is very different' (6) - to invoke a soul for just a few uncommon experiences leads to a lack of parsimony in explaining mystical experience as a class, i.e. corporeal and non-corporeal, and neither the explanation of God as spirit or God as physical entity is comprehensive. In this case a comprehensive explanation

is not simple and no simple account in terms of spirit or physiology is comprehensive, a situation without merit unless there are good experimental reasons to justify it. In the second place there might be some difficulty in explaining how the two worlds relate. Though declared to be of differing ontological status, 'non-corporeal' mystical experiences cause 'swoons', 'over-mastering feelings' and the like. Theology usually explains the actions of the spirit on the body as a one-way valve allowing love, for instance, to permeate from God who for His part cannot be corrupted by physical influences. Nevertheless, it is also said that souls are corrupted and the devil - a spiritual being - fell to earth. The problem is not insurmountable perhaps but the main point is that the complexities arising from a spirit/physical dichotomy can be simply avoided. There is no necessity at all for multiplying worlds in this case when it is the simplest solution to believe that 'non-corporeal' cases represent only an unusual form of consciousness. Sometimes emotions appear to come from outside of ourselves, in dreams we are usually unaware of the part physiology plays in bringing phenomena to mind and in 'disassociation' individuals may lose all sense of subjectivity. Though it is not common to perceive something without also being aware of how it is we perceive it, our own identity in relation to it etc., there is no necessity to invoke a soul for we have precedents to explain such experiences in physiological

terms. Benoit expands upon this point. 'Man is conscious of this dualism which reveals itself in him by the belief that he is composed of two autonomous parts which he either calls 'body' and 'soul', 'matter' and 'spirit', 'instinct' and 'reason'. The belief in this bipartite composition expresses itself in all sorts of common sayings: 'I am master of myself', 'I cannot prevent myself from' etc. ...there are not in man two distinct parts but only two distinct aspects of a single being ... the error of our dualistic conception does not lie in the discrimination between two aspects of us - for there are indeed two aspects - but in concluding that these two aspects are two different entities'(7).

The idea of two largely discrete worlds each with its own laws would, all else aside, be reason to treat religious explanations with suspicion. Though we accept that the world of quantum mechanics differs from the macroscopic world in its workings, it is nevertheless one of our fondest assumptions that reality forms an integrated whole and this religious doctrines seem to deny. There are many other possible objections, for example, the multiplicity of religious explanations but, on the grounds of parsimony and comprehensiveness alone, we might reject religious explanations even if these clearly referred to events in this life. I do not wish to give the impression that I believe the spirit and its activities, which are the very mystery the religious celebrate, can or ever will be naturalistically explained but only wish to point out that the hypothesis of a spiritual

world, beyond examination and with little application, is a solution of last resort rather than a starting point for empirical enquiry. Nor do I wish to give the impression that I believe religious doctrines to be telling us nothing of importance about the world and our place in it. On the contrary, there are a variety of reasons, not all psychological or sociological, for such beliefs, not least because they cover aspects of reality which science has not yet investigated and offer a total viewpoint which may prove far more adaptive than any atomized knowledge of a depersonalized universe could. However, without subjecting them to logical considerations and verification, I fear we may never ascertain to what it is they are pointing.

D) RELIGIOUS DOCTRINES ARE NOT THEORIES OF MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE.

Whatever value religious doctrines may have, I wish here to make the point that it is inappropriate to treat them as theories of mystical experience and, if this is the case, it would never be satisfactory to explain mystical experience as a class from a dogmatic point of view. I wish to introduce two arguments 1) that religious traditions provide no comprehensive explanation for the class as a whole nor give reasons why they should be viewed as a restricted explanation of a sub-class and 2) that mystical claims have no impact on doctrine as we might expect if doctrine was a systematic attempt to explain such phenomena. In short, though mystical

experience and religious doctrines deal in a common currency there is no way that we could legitimately claim that the latter provide explanatory models of the former.

1) Religious traditions provide no comprehensive explanation of mystical experience as a class. From even a cursory examination of mystical reports it becomes clear that no single doctrine provides a universal explanation of mystical experience. Christians, say, might wish to explain mystical experience in terms of God showing His love for man - especially for those who devote their lives to Him - but this is simply not self-evident in a great many reports. As Zaehner pointed out there are monistic and nature cases to which no theistic explanation appears relevant and other cases in which love appears to play no part. If God's love is to be understood as an explanatory principle with universal application as survival, say, is in the case of evolutionary theory, it would have to be shown how it applies to those cases in which the selected characteristic is not manifest and this Christianity makes no pretence of doing. It will not suffice to say that cases which do not exhibit the selected characteristics are delusory, demonic or 'false' in some way for it is a tautology to argue that only genuine religious experiences are explained by God's love and involves us in a meaningless circularity. Pantheism, it could be argued, avoids this problem for it offers an hierarchical model in terms of which all experiences could be understood even though

only a relatively few cases exhibit full union. Yet here again there is no reason to suppose that 'lower order' experiences are being properly explained for, apart from a circular argument, there is no reason to accept the explanatory principle offered in all but paradigmatic cases. The lack of a single universal explanatory principle is a weakness but would not cause us to abandon the explanations altogether if it could be shown why they applied restrictively to one identifiable sub-class as, for instance, photosynthesis applies to green plants but not to fungi.

There can be no objection to the arbitrary classification of mystical experience into Christian type, Judaic type etc. but this is simply a descriptive categorization on a par with the categorizing plants by the colour of their flowers. To avoid the pitfalls of arbitrary selection, it would need to be shown both that the cases extracted do form an identifiable sub-class and that the explanation offered gives us an advantage in understanding what is happening in this type of case. Do cases in the Christian corpus, say, form a definable type or were they selected on wholly arbitrary grounds? The question is made more complex because, in the religious traditions, we are seldom dealing with the reports of single, one-off experiences so much as with lives in which it is said there were signs of mystical progression. Simply on the basis of the type of reports associated with particular traditions one cannot doubt that James was right

to conclude that these represent 'an extract kept true to type by the selection of the fittest specimens in schools. It is carved out from a much larger mass; and if we take the larger mass as seriously as religious mysticism has historically taken itself, we find that the supposed unanimity disappears'. (8) In other words there is nothing about the cases selected other than their compatibility with one doctrine or another to have justified their selection. However, a variety of authors, such as S. Bernard and his ten steps or 'degrees of love' or St. Teresa of Avila and her 'seven mansions', have argued that the Christian mystical life follows a progression of stages that is sufficiently unique to distinguish one type of mysticism from others and thus gives a reason for supposing that Christian doctrines are intended as explanations of just this type of case. It is not clear how much weight the views of Bernard, Teresa and others carry, even in the Roman tradition, when it comes to determining which cases are selected but in any event I would contend that none of the criteria offered would give us grounds to believe that there is a definable form of mysticism which their theories are addressing specifically. The problem is that we would be hard put to justify selection on the basis of such imprecise models as these prove to be. The stages outlined are not clear cut for few criteria are offered to distinguish one from another and though John of the Cross' 'dark night', for instance, does stand out, none of these authors would argue that the stages must follow one another in a precise and necessary order.

On the contrary, Teresa herself admits that, whilst some may experience the most exalted states through divine favour without having gone through the progression, others find that after a lifetime on 'the path' they still at times have experiences which are most appropriate to the novice. Though we may recognize the area in which the authors are moving, it is because there is no general agreement about what it is exactly that distinguishes a Christian type of mysticism from any other, that we have no reason to suppose that Christian doctrine has any special relevance to any particular type of case. The very fact that one could argue this at length shows that most religious traditions offer no clear cut criteria for defining a sub-class of mystical experience to which their explanations have obvious relevance. If one accepts that no religious doctrine explains mystical experience in general or can be treated as a restricted explanation of an identifiable sub-class it would, all other things being equal, be entirely inappropriate to set about explaining such phenomena in dogmatic terms.

2) The second argument against treating religious doctrines as theories of mystical experience is that in few cases would doctrines appear to be modified by the reports of mystics. This may have to do with the more general problem that religious doctrines, unlike scientific ones, are rarely treated as servants of the available data and, as falsification plays no part, are seldom modified on empirical grounds let alone

continuously modified but, if this is so, it would be difficult to argue that religions are interested in explaining man's experience of the divine in all its diversity. The traditional concept of God, say, is neither defined by nor apparently modified by the experience of mystics even avowedly Christian mystics. For example, the fundamental doctrinal distinction between creator and created does not accord with some of the most treasured experiences of a number of Christian mystics. Teresa of Avila reported her 'intellectual vision' of God tactfully as like the 'light from two windows meeting' but it would be a moot point to argue that this preserves the doctrinal distinction of two fundamentally discrete categories of being. Apart from condemning any experience that does not conform to orthodoxy as unsafe, uncertain or simply deluded, it appears impossible for Christian theologians to deal with such a case for either they would need to modify their doctrines in order to accommodate the data - if that is how such reports were understood - or such claims would fall outside the possibility of systematic explanation. The position most established religions take towards a mystical experience has in fact always been ambiguous. On the one hand they will not modify their tenets to accommodate diversity, on the other they treat as confirmatory just those cases whose orthodoxy would appear to illustrate their tenets. In either event it is difficult to construe doctrine as even a proto-scientific attempt to explain man's experience of the divine, as Tart amongst others has suggested, for there is no interaction between doctrine and data.

There would however appear to be exceptions, most notably Yoga, in which doctrine perhaps was developed in relation to specific types of experience in an attempt to explain these. Chaudhuri identified ten types of experience with which Yoga is concerned, ranging from Being as Void (Sunyata) to Being as cosmic energy (Siva-Sakti). If it is the case that each school is primarily concerned with one of these experiences and these form definable types there might here be that constant and close interaction between theory and subject matter found in empirical studies but not found in the case of religious doctrines generally. If as Chaudhuri claims, the 'Yogic path consists of various self-disciplines which must be followed in order to obtain the ultimate goal of self-realization'(9), not only in this case do we have an identifiable type of experience to which a particular doctrine addresses itself in detail but, in so far as a procedure is offered, have a truly empirical relationship between theory and data though the acid test of this would be if Yoga dropped one of its tenets if its relevance for the experiences in question could not be demonstrated.

I do not wish to labour the point that in general religions do not appear to explain, or even attempt to explain, mystical experience since in the absence of verification procedures we have no reason to accept religious explanations in the first place. Nevertheless, it is interesting that, whilst most mystics adopt religious conceptions, few religious doctrines

appear actively concerned with explaining mystical experience or a sub-type of it. It may be that religious traditions give little weight to mystical claims or, though I doubt it, that they were unaware of the great diversity of mystical experience but, in any event in the main traditions at least, there would be grounds for objecting to any attempt to explain these dogmatically as they make no case to show why doctrines should be thought to apply to all or any type of mystical experience and allow no interaction with the data.

I have made three principal points. A) and B) that, because they have neither been verified nor use accepted verification procedures, there is no reason to treat religious claims as we would other empirically established types of knowledge, C) that there are logical objections to this type of claim i.e. unnecessary complexity and D) that, in any event, they do not appear to be offering explanations of mystical experience. These considerations lead me to believe that it would be entirely unpersuasive to attempt to explain mystical experience in terms of religious doctrine for the arguments would not be publicly accessible and would be open to a variety of other objections. However, I for one do not rule out the supernatural as the object of apprehension ab initio but am merely concerned that, if there is reason to introduce supernatural concepts at any stage, the grounds for doing so are scrutable and in accordance with the principles which are accepted in other areas of empirical enquiry.

3) DOES MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE IMPLY EXISTENCE?

If, as I have argued, we cannot treat religious doctrines as an empirical form of knowledge, it might nevertheless be claimed that mystical experience provides evidence for the existence of God etc. which, if it does not confirm any particular doctrine, does require the explanation of these experiences in a supernatural context. The argument about whether or not mystical and, more generally, religious experience has to do with reality was quite fully considered by C.B. Martin (10) and others a generation ago and here I only wish to review some of the main points. As I am only considering what it is legitimate to believe about these experiences on grounds that are accessible to public scrutiny, this does not cover all the reasons why individuals do believe in the veridicality of their own experience. Though I do not wish to discuss the psychology of belief here, it is worth pointing out that, if the view I present is persuasive, we have not established that mystics are wrong to hold the beliefs about their own experience that they do, merely that they can offer society no acceptable reason for believing likewise. A moment with God, it might be said, is worth a multitude of rational considerations.

The first point is that in the case of religious phenomena there is no reason to assume at the outset that the fact of experience - which few deny and which, in any event, can and has been checked by lie-detector tests - implies the existence of the object experienced. Given the possibility of illusion and delusion, no sense impression entails existence.

Veridicality must be established in any given case on other grounds but the existence claim in mundane observations - 'I see an ashtray' - is implicit as such objects have long formed part of the world of facts, that is they can be weighed, handled and agreed upon by all present etc. As religious objects have never met these standards - though how far short they are and whether they should be required to are two issues discussed below - there is no reason to assume that, as a class, mystical claims imply existence any more than claims about pink elephants do and, though such claims have the form of existence claims and are intended to be such by virtually all of the individuals who make them, that any are making meaningful truth claims.

Attfield complained that 'radical scepticism about the objects of religious experience is unreasonable as no criteria are usually given for sense perception as a whole'. This radical scepticism is not however because the 'empiricist rules out ab initio the spiritual dimension as the object of apprehension'(11) but only because we have no grounds - tested past experience etc. - for inferring anything about this class of claim, a requirement demanded of all sense impressions. The problem is not simply that mystical claims are difficult to confirm - sightings of comets were for many years in the same case, isolated, uncontrolled and usually incorrigible - but that in the absence of confirmation we have no other reason for inferring ontological status as these claims

would appear to have no contiguity with any other area of established knowledge. Change comes to U.F.O's and it becomes apparent why one needs good grounds to infer existence in any class of claim. For the reasons given above, it is not acceptable to appeal to religious doctrine to warrant the inference of existence to mystical claims. It only tells us if 'the God experienced agrees with the accumulated knowledge of the deity' that it is a genuine God-type experience, as it is a genuine unicorn if we see a white animal with a single horn, not that the Godexperienced has existence. Various confirmatory arguments for mystical experience will be considered below but it does not appear unreasonable, given the lack of consonance of mystical experience with any other area of established knowledge about the world, to take radical scepticism as a starting point. If there are any grounds for ascribing existence to this class of claim, these ought to become apparent in any investigation.

The strongest reason for ascribing existence to the objects of sense impressions is if existence claims are supported by objective data. In the mundane world a variety of tests are possible ranging from the consonance of one's own senses to the more precise forms of technological measurement. Leaving aside the questions of agreement, repeatability of findings and independent corroboration, it has to be said that, in the case of mystical objects, there is a dearth of hard evidence. There are a few very odd photographs, for example, of statues of the Virgin that appear to have moved, a few sound recordings but nothing, given the

possibility of simple explanations, that compels acceptance. As so many experiences are said to involve the five senses, it is strange, if religious objects are on a par with mundane ones, that so few have been registered technologically in one way or another. One might explain this simply enough by arguing that many mystics are alone when their experiences occur and almost certainly don't think to have a camera to hand. Equally one might argue that we haven't the equipment to register religious objects and, whilst this may well be true, for the present it does not alter the fact that none of the usual tests confirm existence in this case. Nor, until such equipment is described, is there any reason to suppose that this is the problem. For many the requirement of measurement appears simply to be the crudest form of materialism yet, in an age in which even neutrinos - which have no mass - can be registered, is it unreasonable to ask for objective data about God? To say that something exists but is beyond the possibility of measurement is not only to make a claim that is not falsifiable but one that would appear contradictory for being measurable is almost a definition of existence. Could there logically exist a class of objects that are in principle unmeasurable? There is simply insufficient data to confirm the existence claims made by mystics though as yet no certainty as to the reason why this should be.

A second strong reason for ascribing existence to mystical objects would

be if such experiences gave predictive advantages. In a world of the blind, it is often argued, the sighted could only convince the majority that their sense impressions were veridical if, on the basis of these, it was demonstrated that the sighted knew more about the way the world really is. Without being able to show that our perceptions have to do with reality there is no reason for others to treat them as anything other than private phenomena. There is little evidence, where mystical claims can be treated as predictions at all, that these can be shown to give sufficient advantage to command acceptance by others. Often 'heavenly knowledge' becomes incoherent when translated into mundane terms or as in the case of specific 'knowledge ecstasies' is usually immediately forgotten. Boehme, for example, saw 'into the essences, use and properties' of plants 'which was discovered to him' in his vision 'by their lineaments, figures and signatures'. Even taking this claim to be coherent - one can just about picture what he means - what evidence is there that his vision had to do with the real world? He did not, as far as I know, become a master herbalist as a result of it or suggest experiments which would one day improve our knowledge of plants but rather treated the revelation as self-sufficient. In this he was not untypical and, whilst it may be argued that mystics lack the knowledge needed to translate their visions into testable predictions, so few appear even to attempt to. One of the

peculiarities of mystical experience, though this always has a profound effect on the subsequent life of the mystic and anyone who believes in his visions, is that it is generally inconsequential in so far as the insights claimed would appear to make no appreciable difference to our knowledge of the way things are. Unlike psychical claims which are often verifiable, mystical insights appear as a rule so self-contained and unrelated to the world, that it is difficult to treat them as even potentially advantageous.

There are, however, exceptions in which clear cut, testable predictions are made. In the case of the visionaries of Garabandal, for instance, along with the familiar appeals for a return to faith and prayer, several specific prophecies were made. For example, the Virgin foretold that an unmistakable sign would appear over the village in the lifetime of the girls. One wonders whether, if this does not come about, the cult that has grown up around them will accept that these visionaries can lay no claim to greater insight about the real world than others who failed to have such experiences. MacIntyre, taking a similar case (12) argued that, even if the visionary found that he was dealing with an angel of proven veracity, this would not be sufficient to establish the truth of the claims about supernatural realities beyond experience and experiment. This may logically be so but, as I have already suggested in the wider

context of epistemology, is perhaps pushing reason too far. Whether it is Derby winners or signs over villages, successful prediction must affect our attitude to the general meaningfulness of religious claims. In either case I, for one, could not but accept that the visionaries claims were self-authenticating for even though we may not be able to test all of the visionaries' claims, I would find it easier to accept the claims in toto than to believe that there were supernatural beings which told us about future events but which lied about other aspects of reality. It may be that we could not achieve the same degree of certainty that empirical knowledge allows but a 'proven' higher intelligence would challenge the exclusivity of empirical methods. Testable predictions, however, are rare though there are a number of delphic utterances which are more easily believed in than falsified, as for the rest, if comprehensible at all, would appear to be beyond verification in this life. There is as yet no reason on the basis of advantage to believe that mystical experiences have to do with the world.

In the absence of hard evidence or predictive advantage there are a number of other considerations though none is decisive in establishing existence. The first of these is attestation. If nearly everyone can affirm that x is the case, it might be argued that it is confirmed as a fact. Attfield argued that as it is only 'some contemporary people (who)

do not claim to experience God' the weight of attestation throughout history is for treating God as a fact but this line of argument is unacceptable on two counts. Firstly it is inaccurate. The few quantitative surveys which have been undertaken - Gallup, Lundahl on 'near-death experience' etc. - support Alistair Hardy's contention that less than 50% claim any form of religious experience, (13) perhaps 33-40% is nearer the mark, and there is no reason for supposing that this has not always been the norm. Though still a large minority, this is not universal attestation but on a par with the numbers who claim to have seen U.F.O's. Secondly, even if Attfield was correct in point of fact, public acceptance by itself is not a basis for empirical knowledge. Nearly everyone in the world dreams; in some cultures dreams are thought to be predictive whilst in others not, universal attestation is not therefore a key factor in determining existence.

Agreement or lack of agreement by those similarly placed would however be important. Only a few can vouch for sub-atomic particles, say, but we accept their claims because it can be explained why this group alone can make such claims about reality. The problem with mystical experience however is that those who report it do not obviously have anything in common which would rationally explain why they alone can see what the

rest cannot. If, as I will later argue, mystical experience coincides with stress and a change in the perception of self-identity though the group has common and defining features these will give us no reason for ascribing existence to their claims in the way that access to an electron microscope would. However, there are cases in which those who report claims are in a particular place at a particular time and these raise some interesting questions. At Zeitun and Heroldsbach, for example, and most recently in a number of villages in Ireland many present at particular locations reported a supernatural experience. Not all who reported such experience, estimated by those in the Irish case to be about two thirds of those present (11) reported the same phenomenon. Some saw statues move in a variety of different ways, others saw a vision of the Virgin super-imposed on the statue whilst others saw a number of different religious figures, some frightening, some comforting whilst others only lights. This diversity rather counts against the idea that they were gripped by hysteria and is not in itself surprising given the wildly different accounts one is likely to get of crimes or road accidents. Given also that the conditions were not controlled, have we any strong reason to reject the testimonies of many witnesses gathered in a particular place as agreement under such specific circumstances is no less than we would expect in the case of mundane phenomena? The primary objection

revealed in Vose's account of the statues and, as far as I can tell, in other cases too, is that not everyone present could vouch for the phenomena. It was not the case that those nearest the grottos could see whereas others were less able to but either one could see something taking place or one couldn't and no reason - not even in terms of expectation or belief - could be given to account for this. In everyday cases it is sufficient to say 'stand here' but we have no parallel for a case where some at a given spot at a given time have an experience and others not. If the phenomena were illusory, like mirage the product of some environmental circumstance, we would have expected a much greater unanimity. The possibility that some have a faculty which others do not is very much a solution of last resort for, whilst we recognise the impairment of senses, it undermines the democratic foundations of empirical knowledge to argue that only some are capable of experiencing a particular class of facts. It is perhaps as unwarranted an assumption to suppose that we all necessarily have the same faculties as it is to assume that all our faculties are equally efficient bearing in mind that other species have developed very peculiar senses indeed - bat's echo-sounders, for example, - which are no less adaptive than our own. However, if the choice lies between adopting this latter solution or rejecting the ontological status of claims which, despite a high degree of agreement, were not unanimously vouched for and otherwise have no consonance with well established facts, reason, on balance, demands rejection though this is not entirely satisfactory. We might still require a better explanation

of trans-personal phenomena than this simple choice allows us even if we cannot explain why this special position gives advantages or why there was not unanimity amongst those present for it appears significant if a majority in a group that seems to share a special position, makes a certain type of claim.

There is a second form of agreement which carries much weight in determining existence and this is the agreement of those following a set of procedures.

If anyone and everyone following steps a,b, and c find that x is the case then, in the life sciences, this is taken to be a fact. However, there are two problems with such a line of argument in the case of mystical experience.

In the first place, as Wainright pointed out, there appears to be little relationship between the procedures, if any, and the experiences reported.

Mystics might treat similar claims to their own as being confirmatory,

however they were arrived at, whilst at the same time not being unduly

discouraged by a lack of confirmation even where their own 'methods' were followed. One might explain this attitude by a parallel with early explorers

who each might have landed on some distant coast without being entirely

sure how they got there. Yet the failure to specify a precise route or to

accept that failure, when taking the route specified, counts against their

claims, makes it impossible to use this method of confirmation. There is

a parallel here with the claims of 'rogue' scientists who report results

that neither they nor anyone else have been able to repeat. It may be

that the procedure was not properly recorded but, whatever the reason,

such claims are ultimately discredited. It might be objected that, in the case of God, no procedure can guarantee a result as the independence of the object must be taken into account and, if this is so, the very rough relationship between religious methods and spasmodic mystical experience, is the best we might hope for in the circumstances. I have sympathy with this view for it certainly seems that science is not geared to the possibility of occasional results through the use of the best procedures available. Again we are faced with the regularity/repeatability syndrome that is part and parcel of the empirical view of existence and the difficulty of making credible claims that are not readily corrigible.

In the second place, and most importantly, even if a tradition gives clear procedures - Yoga perhaps - and argues 'try them for yourselves' however unanimous the experimenters are in their findings, unlike the life sciences, this does not confirm that the experiences tested have to do with existence. The problem is that, in science, the procedures allow one to move from empirically established knowledge and infer that observations arrived at by the appropriate means have to do with existence whereas, in the case of religious procedures, at no point is the inference of existence warranted. By following the procedure laid down, Yogins might only demonstrate that one will have a Yoga-type experience by following the

procedures and not that their experiences arising from these procedures have to do with reality. The agreement of witnesses, whether these happen to have been in the right place at the right time or followed recommended practices, would not then appear to confirm the claims of mystics. However, it is in this area of confirmation that the most intriguing claims arise though even here the evidence falls short of what would be required of empirical knowledge.

The last form of argument I will consider here is self-authentication. One possibility lies in the quality of perception. It might, for example, be argued that our experience of all that proves to be real and only that which proves to be real is of a discernible type. Certain sensory cues may trigger more or different brain cells in the case of real phenomena and thus, as it could be empirically demonstrated whether this was so and whether, in any given case, the power of discernment was reliable, the feeling we had regarding our experience might carry weight. Leaving aside the disconcerting claim often made by mystics that their experiences feel more real than is usually the case, the few scraps of evidence there are suggest this line might be worth pursuing. Sheep, it has been shown, are not fooled by anything less than the real thing. No mock-up appears to fire the requisite number of brain cells needed for recognition and in the

human case 'lucid dreaming' fails to convince the experient that he is experiencing the real world despite all appearances. If illusions and delusions do not ring true and we can recognise constructs of mind, the discrimination of the sane at least must carry weight. I cannot guess what criteria we use to determine veridicality but that we do use some is clear enough and if an experience passes this test, not only is it reason for individual acceptance but the claim that it is real is possibly a reason for wider acceptance also. Emotional corroboration may be a subsidiary consideration. Our emotions and feelings can tell us nothing about the world - I at least feel angry when I think a wrong has been done and experience vertigo even if dreaming of standing on a ladder - but they are some kind of check nonetheless. Would I really be convinced that I was witnessing some scene of carnage if I did not feel disgust? Awe, joy, peace are presumably the appropriate responses to the presence of God-though we are not strictly entitled to infer this-and we might be surprised when weighing the evidence if these were not reported though, in being reported, they establish nothing. Self-evidence, by itself, is unlikely ever to be an acceptable basis for establishing facts about the world and would certainly involve us in wider questions about the witness's general reliability, motivation and so forth which would always leave a question mark hanging over the claims made. There are a variety of other

arguments. As mentioned above, some would claim to know intuitively what was true though, in the case of supernatural claims, it is hard to see how one could ever test this claim. Again, there are arguments of the 'angel of proven veracity' type dismissed, perhaps a little too abruptly by MacIntyre, though one takes the point that, in the absence of warranted inference, nothing should be taken at face value. All in all, the conviction mystics have about the veridicality of their own experience, its seeming reality, the certitude it brings and leaves behind, would not appear to lead anywhere in the absence of proof, checkable predictions, the unanimity of those in like positions etc. for empirical reality is nothing if not shared experience and all such arguments fail to address this central requirement.

I started from a position of radical scepticism and having discussed hard evidence, predictive advantage, forms of agreement and self-authentication, have found no compelling reason to modify this stance. As empirical reality is constructed out of a number of interlocking tests pointing out various oddities such as the general, though not unanimous, agreement of people in the same place - which can be more simply explained - falls a long way short of showing that mystical claims have to do with existence or are comparable with other knowledge claims. As I mentioned at the beginning of this section, I do not believe that this shows that Martin's

'Professor Brown' asserting alone that his experience was true must retract for, in saying that there is no empirical evidence, all one is saying is that there are no grounds at present for anyone else to accept his claim. The two are no doubt related but since science offers no final picture of reality, all we can really say is that mystical claims fall outside of the logical picture of the world derived from empirical methods.

SUMMARY.

I have argued:

- 1) That the only acceptable form of knowledge is empirical knowledge,
- 2) That religious doctrines have no empirical basis and hence we can neither explain mystical experience in terms of them nor infer anything else about mystical experience from them and
- 3) That there is no evidence that mystical claims imply existence.

Though there are a number of grey areas in all these arguments, I can only conclude that it is not legitimate to talk of the divine other than in the context of human experience. There would appear to be no basis for the theological view that we may talk of God as an objective fact or of any supernatural reality and for this reason I shall treat mystical experience solely in anthropocentric terms.

CHAPTER 2

CHARACTERIZING MYSTICAL PHENOMENA

Having argued that the experiences which mystics have of God, a unity underlying matter etc., do not imply existence, I nevertheless wish to draw attention to certain of their characteristic features around which I shall later build a variety of arguments. The most salient of these is that the form which these experiences take - 'the state of experiencing' as distinct from the content - is, in Wainright's terms, 'concrete' which suggests that mystical experience is a sensory or quasi-sensory phenomenon. Not merely might this be one criterion for distinguishing mystical experience from other, non-veridical apprehensions but, as I argue in the following chapter, appears to rule out a variety of mentalistic or 'contextual' explanations. The second observation I wish to make is that these experiences appear meaningful both to the individuals concerned and for a wider audience in a way that most delusions, dreams and other non-veridical experiences do not. Many of these experiences can, for example, be discussed, apparently meaningfully, both within the context of one or other of the religious doctrines and in relation to the individual's other experiences of life. I shall not take up this observation again until the final chapter where I shall argue that this is a significant feature, not accidentally present, which may shed light on the processes involved and which in turn may give an empirical basis to the common identity of cases which exhibit this feature in addition to the apparent reality which they also share in common. Before discussing these however it is important to point out that I select just these two characteristics of mystical phenomena because I believe they alone can be justified descriptively and, as far as I am concerned, alone out of all the features which the material suggests also have a theoretical utility.

As these latter two points raise issues which are of interest in their own right, and since the validity of my own limited typification of mystical phenomena can only be understood in relation to them, I intend first to discuss these points at considerable length before setting about my characterization. In the first place I shall argue that no descriptive analysis, in itself, has any validity and, secondly, we are in any event limited in what we can point to in the data because we can have no clear picture of what it is like or how far cases are comparable.

A) ANALYSIS AND VALIDATION.

A number of authors such as Stace, Zaehner, Hardy and Laski have sought to characterize and categorize mystical phenomena. For example, Hardy found that they fell into twenty two categories of 'cognitive and affective elements' (1) Zaehner discerns three principle types - 'theistic, monistic and pan-en-henic' - whilst Stace distinguishes 'unitary' and 'unitive' types when he set out 'to specify and classify their main characteristics, assign boundaries to the class and to exclude irrelevant types'. (2) Leaving to one side categorizations based on measurable qualities, say, physiological correlates, all these and other similar attempts to typify mystical experience on the basis of the phenomena reported are open to a fundamental criticism. The problem is that in itself a descriptive characterization has no validity. One might sort plants by the colour of their flowers but it is no basis for phenomenology to say that because of observed differences blue, red and yellow flowered plants form distinct sub-types or that colour distinguishes flowered plants as a class for the criterion is at best an aesthetic one. Unless the classification is based on quantifiable differences between sub-types or the groupings serve a theoretical purpose which could be validated experimentally - photosynthesis is a reason for

distinguishing between green leaved plants and fungi - descriptive analysis is an entirely fruitless activity.

It helps not at all to empirically confirm that there are descriptive differences between one type of case and another, though, to my knowledge, only one author, Margolis, has sought such corroboration for his typology. Margolis demonstrated that various groups showed proficiency in identifying his mystical/psychotic dichotomy by distinguishing between reports of 'genuine' religious experience and psychotic and fabricated religious experience. (3) As in this case the criteria for discrimination were not elucidated, it seems likely that the 'raters' were only confirming that we have common preconceptions about mystical experience, but in any event, if the basis of the distinction cannot be given or is otherwise simply descriptive, the exercise is as purposeless as if we empirically confirmed that there is a difference between blue and red flowers. Whilst it is interesting that we recognize a distinction between mysticism and psychosis, the problem remains of determining, on the basis of experimental criteria, what this difference is. We may confirm all the descriptive categorizations mentioned but in itself this leaves us no better off.

Most of the above mentioned authors have stated their intention to carry out an empirical study of mystical phenomena yet have failed to do so. The main reason for this appears to be that they have mistaken the frequency of occurrence of a feature to be an empirical criterion. Most have begun by 'reading through the experiences and listing what appeared to be the dominant themes of the experience' (4) whilst others, such as Laski, have undertaken a detailed 'content analysis' showing that x% of respondents have reported this or that feature. However, it helps us not at all to know what are the

main descriptive themes or the percentage of cases in which they appear any more than it does to know that red or blue flowers predominate. The only time number is an empirical criterion is when the frequency of occurrence alone suffices to distinguish between one condition and another as it does, say, in the case of cancer cells in which, above a certain level, we can identify abnormality and disease.

As the mystical phenomena reported allow no quantification and, in the jargon, are inoperationalizable, the only value in a description of the data is if this were to suggest some theory which would not only account for the observed differences but which, by being experimentally tested, demonstrated that the distinction between the categories had an empirical validity. It would however be a slow and uncertain route to knowledge to perform a detailed 'content analysis' in the hope that this might suggest to us some testable theory and perhaps the best route available is to follow Husserl's dictum to use our 'nose' - 'eidetic vision' - to select what appears to be most important in the mass of data we have and then formulate a testable theory to account for our observations. Holsti remarks on this process: 'in the absence of standard schemes of classification the (scientific) analyst often is faced with that task of constructing appropriate categories by trial and error methods. This process usually consists of moving back and forth from theory to data, testing the usefulness of tentative categories and modifying them in the light of the data'. (5) This is no light undertaking in the case of mystical phenomena for, not only have we no guarantee that anything useful might be learned from these, but we have no clear point to begin at. In other scientific fields the direction of theory development is established in the early years and the rest is revision

and modification but in the case of mystical experience where should we start, from the principles of psychology? Perhaps the best we can hope for is a piecemeal advance towards understanding what it is, if anything, that mystical phenomena, in all their interesting varieties, signify. It is in this spirit that I alight on the characteristics which I have selected, for I see no purpose in doing a 'content analysis' for its own sake. My selection, though suggested by the reports, has no more value than the two or twenty two characteristics chosen by other authors, even if it were presented in such a way that it proved corrigible, for its only justification will be if it leads on to a theory whose validity can be established experimentally. It is beyond my aim to formulate a precise theory in this work, still less to empirically validate one, but in moving in this direction I hope to stay the foremost criticism of all characterizations of mystical phenomena which is that, in themselves, they have no validity.

B) DESCRIPTIVE CHARACTERIZATION REQUIRES THAT CASES ARE EVIDENTLY COMPARABLE.

Regardless of the merits of a characterization of mystical experience, before it can be claimed that the data exhibits certain features, it is necessary to show that it is reasonable to compare the cases with which we are working. In the case of the 'phantom limb' syndrome, for example, the comparability of cases may be assumed for, not only do they have a peculiar circumstance in common, but in all other respects there can be little doubt that these straightforwardly reported experiences constitute a type. This is not however self-evident in the case of mystical experience. In this section I shall ignore the wider question of which criteria we might use to define mystical experience and select cases for study - this is perhaps the purpose of this thesis as a whole - and concentrate instead on the issue that, even if we had recognised criteria,

because of the difficult circumstances in this case we still might not be able to establish the membership of any given case with the class as a whole or ever be sure that we were comparing like with like. The problem is that unless we wish to compare and typify cases only on the basis that they appear to us to have some superficial resemblance, there are three separate difficulties in the way of determining whether in fact the experiences chosen are similar to each other even at the descriptive level.

The first of these difficulties, familiar to any researcher dealing with written evidence, is one of 'distance' from our sources. As a number of authors such as Keller (6) have dealt with this issue I only intend to review some of the main points. Apart from knowing that the text has come down to us unaltered, we need to know a great deal about its provenance to establish for what purpose it was written and, if it is intended as a description, what sort of description it is intended to be. To satisfy ourselves about such questions we need to know a great deal about the author as well as about the account and the way in which it came to be written. The second difficulty arises from the language used in many mystical accounts. Even if we treat the accounts we have as simply descriptive, much that has been written is obscured both by the use of paradoxical and metaphorical terms which may defy translation and by the use of religious terms which in many cases have no precise meaning. It is one of the ironies that mystics often appear to use religious terms as if they had a precise meaning - and we do not wish to reject these as some precise identification may be being offered to us - yet as they stand they have little or no meaning at all. The third difficulty is what I shall call an ideological one and involves a complex of issues which are not thoroughly explored until the next chapter. Here I consider two

possibilities both of which involve an assumption. In the first case I assume that at some level there is a straightforward, value free description of mystical experience and then consider our chances of recovering this from the idiosyncratic ways in which it will have been construed by the experiencers. In the second case I consider the possibility that at no level is a value free description possible, for the stimuli or 'raw' experience may be ambiguous or otherwise indeterminate and hence any conception or interpretation we are offered is irreducible. In this latter case, because conceptions are not comparable, no characterization would be possible, even in principle. In fact until we have a firm model of mystical experience we can never assess the extent of the problems which ideology actually causes us, but here my only point is that any characterization of cases is open to criticism at this level because we have no direct access to the material we are seeking to describe. I conclude with a brief look at some of the other difficulties involved in undertaking a description of mystical experience - size of sample etc.

Leaving aside altogether the real problem of ascertaining what it is that constitutes their common identity, in the light of these difficulties I do not believe it is possible to justify more than the most elementary characterization of cases even at the descriptive level. This is not to say that the material does not present us with striking points, the difficulties mentioned above notwithstanding, or that all cases are equally shrouded, but only that we could never begin research in this field with a characterization of our subject matter, for the basis on which we would have to do this is too uncertain. Apart from any intrinsic interest this question has, I hope this discussion will make clear why it is I have selected only two features from the interesting array which mystical experiences appear to present. It is not only that I believe that these

two features have some theoretical value but that they are probably the only characteristics whose selection one could justify in the face of the three possible forms of criticism outlined.

1) DISTANCE.

Though one might study mystical expression in art or dance, the principal access to our subject matter is through written material of one kind or another and these present us with varying degrees of difficulty. As a preparatory step we need to be sure that the reports we have are comparable for it is no more a basis of a descriptive characterization in our field if some are 'eyewitness', others hearsay, some tendentious etc. than it would be in any other in which we could not study the subject matter directly. The main problems we face appear to be threefold. The first is whether or not the account we have is as it was originally penned, secondly whether or not it is intended to be taken as a literal statement of 'fact' and thirdly, if it is, what kind of description it is for it is one thing to be offered a 'policeman's notebook', quite another to be offered a mature reflection. Both latter points would appear to require us to have considerable biographical information about the author for, without this, it may often be hard to tell why and when - in relation to the mystical event - the report we have was written. As will become apparent, we could seek to characterize the mystical experience from more than one perspective given the array of material we have and the question arises what exactly it is we are seeking.

PROVENANCE. It is desirable that our sources are first-hand and that we have them in the form in which they were first written but we can be sure

about neither point with respect to a great deal of the material which researchers may wish to make use of. There is a kind of evolution which affects the older mystical account, perhaps more than any other historical record, for they quite rapidly become anonymous or otherwise the attribution becomes uncertain and we lose all certainty that what we have is an original record. In some well researched cases or where authors wrote manuscripts which are still extant, this may not be a problem but so often an account first appears in a hagiography without our knowing whether it is based on some lost source material, hearsay or conjecture and others now only survive in the corpus of one tradition or another, sometimes anonymously, virtually always unauthenticated. One may well imagine that passing through various stages and hands, whatever originally underlay them, these accounts evolve through editing and glossing according to the various purposes they are made to serve and, unless great scholarship was involved, almost certainly lose a great deal in translation. It would be simple enough to disregard all unauthenticated or anonymous material - unless one were making a study of mystical writings as a genre and indeed they appear to have a style all of their own - but something of the same problem can affect even modern cases. Hardy, soliciting accounts, attracted not a few respondents who contributed anecdotes and hearsay and I am deeply suspicious of questionnaires as used, for example, by Laski and Greeley. The problem with these, as opposed to the solicited contribution, is that the researcher cannot avoid influencing the shape of the statement he is given. First-hand accounts they may be but they are already undergoing something of the evolution which makes older material so unsafe. Questions of the type: "which of the following statements clearly describes your ideas about the deity?" - and this crude specimen is not fabricated - forces experients to put their experience into a form and context which, unaided, they may not have chosen. Like committed biographers who cast a misleading light

on their subject's sayings or writings, these modern researchers are delineating mystical experiences in precast moulds. 'Yes' or 'No' gives no room for the experient to expand upon the subtleties and the ambiguities which may be the very essence of his experience and in their way redefine the source material just as orthodox commentators have done with so many of the 'classic' accounts.

PURPOSE. Not only may transcribers have purposes of their own; so may experients whether consciously recognised or not. Perhaps in many cases the experience is felt to be too important to use as distinct from describe but clearly, in some accounts, they are made to serve some other purpose than description, e.g. apologetics. This may not matter unduly in a case such as Teresa of Avila, for whilst she reports her experiences in the 'Interior Castle' and 'Way of Perfection', in the context of orthodox instruction about the spiritual life, the didactic and the descriptive are always clearly separated. In the case of John of the Cross however, if we treat the 'Spiritual Canticles' say, as source material, there is no effective way of using them without reference to his own exhaustive and tendentious exegesis. In other ages than our own there would have been inducements to conform ones account to, for example, orthodoxy, selecting, playing down, positively identifying the cause of the experience and so on which is not to impute bad faith but merely to accept that circumstances inevitably shape the form a public document will take. Still less easy to recognize and 'bracket out' are the subconscious motivations which committing anything to paper invites. A diarist may record events as he remembers them but it is inevitable that something of his own personality will go into the expression of this memory, self-justification perhaps, the fervency of his beliefs and so forth which are not necessarily part of the picture that memory provides. A moot point perhaps but it seems possible

to have a vivid recollection of events and still unwittingly allow other personal factors to influence our portrayal of these. (Perhaps the very act of writing prevents the experient retaining the vivid recollection which we as researchers most require?) The only point that needs making is that not all our material can be treated simply as attempts to describe an experience for, at a variety of levels, such accounts as these may be made to serve other purposes in a way which scientific observations cannot.

WHAT SORT OF DESCRIPTION IS BEING OFFERED?

In terms of time lapse alone it appears possible to distinguish between different types of description that we might be offered. At one end there is the running commentary, a Huxleyan experiment in describing the stream of consciousness and at the other a Froustian reflection of past events where their significance in the life-long scheme of things and juxtaposition with other events is woven into their very fabric. Perhaps what we are after is something in the middle, a report sufficiently detached and ordered for the principal features to be apparent yet one not so distant from the event that the memory of detail is suspect or the order affected by subsequent and contingent life events. As many researchers are aiming for some reliable outline of what it is like to have a mystical experience, I presume we require some 'policeman's notebook' picture of events; the sequence, the contents, the quasi-physical feelings and such like though this is by no means all that we might be after. Others would certainly prefer the longer view for the effects of a mystical experience do not end with these short experiences but, in terms of beliefs and behaviour, often last a lifetime enriching it with meanings and significance that almost certainly are not initially apparent. J. Trevor spoke for many, 'these moments ... stand out today as the most real experiences of my life ... their significance became ever more clear and evident' (7). However, though I do not believe this biographer's perspective should be

ignored - if there is a comparison with childhood experience, the events of which remembered may be understood so much better later in life, it should not be ignored - as my own subject matter is the brief experience individuals have of God, I too would prefer an earlier rather than a later recollection. It is a matter of individuality how long the memory remains trustworthy and the principal impulse is simply to record what occurred in some detail but though most mystics claim the experience is unforgettable - a subjective perception only - I doubt whether, for my purposes, I would wish to accept accounts written several or more years after the event without benefit of the sort of notes Whitehead, for instance, kept. This brings us to the first problem, for it would appear, be they responses to questionnaires, solicited accounts or biographical/autobiographical descriptions, that most experients wait many years to record their experiences. It would be interesting to know, where any indication is given, the average length of time lapse for the RERU reports say, certainly many were decades after the event. One suspects a variety of reasons for this, lack of earlier opportunity, a lessening of inhibition about what others may think of such experiences with the passing of years and, above all, a simple desire to record what they have come to see as one of their life's most important moments for posterity. However, whatever the reason, many of these accounts must be suspect on the basis that long term memory especially is fallible for it is selective and has the power to confabulate.

The second problem, which has already been alluded to, is that these different types of description do not form a common basis for characterization and whilst it would be interesting to compare perceptions of the event, say, one week and thirty years on, both at an individual

and general level - in so many cases we simply do not know what stage the description offered represents. This leads on to the wider problem of needing to know quite a lot about the experient in order to know why and when the account was written. Curiously, it is likely we know more about the lives of many medieval mystics than we do about contemporary ones cloaked as these are in anonymity. 'M58' does not begin to answer the questions we have about the account in relation to the experience let alone all the other information we would ideally like to have, and whilst understandably researchers have been reluctant to press for more details without some elementary question about how long it was since the experience occurred, we can neither assess its reliability nor comparability with other cases. There are additionally, as with all otherwise uncorroborable accounts, questions to be asked about the reliability of the witness. Laski knew her respondents personally, but most researchers haul in whatever they can find and, given that there is a difference, it is likely that psychotic accounts are being averaged out with mystical experience because no simple criteria, which require background information, are generally applied. Equally, experients have different literary skills and I.Q.'s and a sociological dimension might need to be brought into the classification of material. 'Distance' is perhaps not insuperable but to be able to characterize our written material as we might technologically registered data, a very great deal of preliminary sorting and analysis of case studies would need to be carried out in order to grade the distinctions within it. Failing this we cannot safely say that whatever it is that is actually written has much comparability.

2) OBSCURE TERMINOLOGY.

If we suppose that all the accounts we use are simply descriptions, we may nevertheless fail to show that the events being described are accessible to us and thus can be characterized as a whole, for, in so many cases, the language used to describe them is obscure. There are two aspects to this problem, manifest inaccessibility and the use of religious expressions which carry no clear meaning. I would not like to say what proportion of cases is made inaccessible on account of these two difficulties but it would be a bad practice to ignore the obscure and set about comparing the remainder, for it would be to distort our overall impression of mystical experience. If we only take cases which are described in unequivocal terms we would have the impression that the mystical experience as a type can always be coherently described. If, on the other hand, we include cases which in varying degrees are obscure, we cannot legitimately claim we are comparing like with like or justify any selection of features, for we would not know whether or not these were evident in all cases.

INACCESSIBILITY.

In the ~~most~~ extreme case mystical experiences are declared to be ineffable. I am rather sceptical of this claim for, as a point of logic, it would appear necessary that anything that can be experienced cannot be inherently incommunicable and thus defy description. Robinson has argued (8) that the very complexities involved in mystical experience can only be portrayed in terms of the paradoxical but, whilst I accept the pragmatic point, I do not see that there is a case for arguing that mystical experience is as a class incogitable though, like many diffuse and subtle sensations, in practice it may be difficult to define and delineate. It would be of interest to know if Yogins, for example, who appear more richly endowed with concepts for inner experience than others, have as

much difficulty in describing it as Christians, say, or the non-religious who may be presumed to be at a distinct disadvantage. However, I am not sure that the problem is entirely a conceptual one, for possibly some types of experience are inherently more difficult to describe than others. Though Teresa of Avila, say, had a wide range of religious concepts in which she could describe most of her experiences, a few, said to be the most vivid and memorable, appeared to be beyond even her powers to portray. The best she could manage in some cases was to say that these were marked by 'such deliciously sweet feelings' as opposed to dry or 'arid' ones. We could not however argue that there is a sub-type of mystical experience which, because of its subtlety, in practice cannot be described, for not only would membership depend on individual variables such as I.Q. and acquaintance with appropriate concepts but we could not distinguish it on this criterion from our 'experience' of sleep, fugue states and so forth. These thoughts are something of a diversion for, incogitable or not, if an experience is said to be ineffable, there is no basis for comparison with other cases or characterization. However, though a number of authors have used ineffability almost as a defining feature of mystical experience - and thereby putting it on a par with sleep - in point of fact very few experiences are bluntly stated to be indescribable. Most experients, having said they are difficult to describe, go on to say a great deal more about them.

The more common problem is that the description we are offered is incomprehensible. Some experients coin wholly private terms, e.g. 'pure-quality perception', and leave these unpredicated or contrasted with some equally uninformative phrase. It would seem possible to develop a glossary of terms to cover inner sensations however uncommon and rarely repeated

in the life of an individual they may be, for given sufficient predication, we might adopt these as labels for our own experience as and when it occurred, just as we have done in the case of emotions. The only difference between an emotional and a mystical vocabulary would be the frequency of occurrence. Some sects appear to have moved in this direction, coining terms for their most favoured experiences which are comprehensible at least to their own members - one thinks perhaps of the 'rapture' or 'being saved' experiences of the fundamentalist Christian groups - but in the absence of a vocabulary which has a common currency, even these are obscure and the private coinage wholly impenetrable. Others resort to metaphor, paradox and the use of negative definitions which, for all the evocativeness of the imagery, are rarely reducible. It may be that in some cultures these phrases have a conventional meaning despite their form and if so can be subsumed in the discussion of religious terms below but in most cases we can only treat the expression as idiosyncratic leaving the experience so described inaccessible, beyond comparison with other cases and uncharacterizable. There is, for example, a phrase 'the white' or 'brilliant darkness' which crops up quite regularly and one might wish to typify these cases much as one would do those in which a more recognizable common term is used but it really would not seem legitimate to do so. Perhaps, with empathy, I can conceive what such an experience would be like and argue that the experiencers who use the phrase must each have had some such experience which could only be described in these terms. However, not only is my own conception inaccessible and thus the basis for my characterization incorrigible; I would really have no right to assume that the similarity of terms used denoted a similarity of experience in each case. It may be unlikely that each of these experiencers uses this phrase by chance, but in the absence of a conventional meaning we cannot establish their common identity.

There are a variety of other problems which render descriptions - if that is what they are - obscure. There is incoherence, the use of arcane language, (which appears to have a fascination for mystics), poetic or other allegorical formats and above all the use of approximation. 'As it were/it was like' etc. like metaphors, may have some value in pointing us in the right direction if the experient has a good I.Q. and judgment but, depending on the analogy made, we could rarely say that we are being offered a precise identification, for we could not know which features the experient wished to emphasise. A variety of different experiences which do not even show a family resemblance may be said "to be like x" if x has a variety of aspects and without further predication we would not know which features, if any, the experiences, which were grouped under common concepts, shared in common. Whilst one appreciates the difficulties mystics face in giving us clear descriptions of what they experience, for our descriptive purposes many of the accounts we have are all but useless either because they have departed from the conventions of language or because the terms used may be read in more than one way. Perhaps I am making too much of the need for clarity and that, as it were, 'the medium is the message' which fellow mystics at least would recognize by reference to their own experience, but is it possible to undertake a corrigible characterization on such a basis as this?

RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE.

The second area of linguistic difficulty is the use of religious expressions which, though perhaps intended by experients to be descriptive, rarely convey any clear meaning to us. The problem is less one of outright inaccessibility as of deciding in each case how the experient is using a term.

It may be wondered whether, nowadays, many religious terms have any descriptive function. 'God', for example, has been defined as the 'highest principle to which we aspire' and, if this is all that it means, the term is not descriptive without further predication and, with this, the term itself is redundant. Perhaps there was a time in the history of most religious traditions when such terms had conventional and quite precise meanings. In the orthodox Christian sense God was a qualified concept - the omnipotent, the creator, the father of Jesus etc. etc. - though even in the medieval period it was perhaps used with greater latitude than a study of the doctrines of the period would allow us to suppose. Ruysbroeck, amongst others, appears to have found no distinction between creator and created in the deity he experienced and, without explaining his meaning further, the use of the term in this case would have posed questions of semantics as well as orthodoxy. It might be argued that today, in some sub-cultures, the term carries something of its historical sense or, in relation to experience at least, that it has Otto-like connotations of numinosity, power and awefulness, but, whilst I do not mean to suggest that its adoption in so many mystical cases is quite meaningless, without amplification, these possibilities are surely not a sufficient basis for the comparison and typification of all cases in which the term is used. It has long been recognised that Hindu and Christian, say, may be employing different conceptions of deity. Perhaps we should now recognize that, without knowing a great deal about an experient's beliefs, we cannot say precisely what is intended by such terms even within a given tradition. The problem is acute, for in so many modern cases little other predication is given - 'God came to me'/'I felt a presence I knew it was God' - and it cannot be assumed that the use of

a term denotes even a 'family resemblance' between cases. Some terms may retain their meanings widely even in the present age. It would be inconceivable for a Catholic to refer to the Virgin Mary descriptively without his intending to convey a variety of conventionally recognised characteristics and unlikely that a non-Roman would adopt this expression at will either but one suspects that such survivals are now quite rare.

Another problem we are faced with is in deciding when alternative terms are equivalent and when the identification chosen should be retained whether or not we have any clear notion of what it represents. Laski took the view 'that whatever terms were used by people in the religious group, "God" was their intended meaning ... the infinite, the All ... the Truth are obvious synonyms for God'. (9) This is not acceptable for, even if it were the case that the choice of term did not in itself reflect descriptive differences, in the light of the above discussion the grouping is nugatory for it offers us no basis for a comparison of cases. However, in fact, some experients do appear to be attempting to typify and distinguish their experiences by the use of distinctive terms. In a case such as 'twice in my lifetime I have been so near to God ... at the age of eighteen I suddenly became aware of a light that never was on sea or land, and my soul was filled with ecstasy. Quite recently God appeared to me again not as light but as fire. This time I was confronted with the God of Truth' (10) it may be that we have no more access to the experiences than if the experient had said God and God' but that they are quite different, qualitatively, is manifest.

When and when not to reduce is often a difficult decision to make. Osiris and Harroldsson when comparing cross-cultural descriptions of 'near-death experience' decided that in view of the many other similarities between cases - the tunnels, beings of light etc. which constituted a highest common factor cross-culturally - it was reasonable 'to bracket out ... the naming of the religious figures encountered' (11) as it appeared these signified nothing more than cultural over-belief. Given the degree of extended description and further predication in these cases, the assumption of the researchers is perhaps well founded, for there is no reason to suppose that the Christian and Hindu names here reflect any differences or, further, that either add anything to the simpler forms of description already given. However, what is one to make of a case of Teresa of Avila's of which I have encountered a few other examples. 'The three persons of the most blessed Trinity revealed themselves preceded by .. a most dazzling cloud of light. The three persons are distinct from one another .. All the three persons here communicate themselves to the Soul'.(12) Had Teresa meant to say God she would, as elsewhere, presumably have done so and it seems reasonable to suppose that her distinctive terminology is indicating some peculiarity of this experience and a reduction in this case might well mean the loss of a great deal of complex and subtle description and the possibility of lumping together cases which are fundamentally dissimilar. Each would need to be treated on its merits and since so much will depend on the experient's ability to exploit his own and other traditions for the most apposite terms, it will always be difficult to determine when cases in which different terms are used are similar just as it is when terms which no longer have conventional meanings are used.

Most religious language, either because terms have lost their descriptive function or because a multiplicity of terms are used and it is not clear when we should reduce them, would appear to deny us access to experience and, at the very least, make comparison of cases uncertain. Coupled with other forms of expression which obscure the portrayal being offered us, it may be wondered whether, at the descriptive level, mystical experience could ever be safely compared and typified. It is possible by the use of follow-up questionnaires in modern cases, that some of our doubts about the original terms chosen could be resolved. Laski offering her respondents a range of alternative conceptions - expansion/contraction, height/depth etc. - sought to elicit the lowest common denominators from their various descriptions. My suspicion of pre-cast moulds apart, I wonder whether the price of achieving comparability in this way may not be too high. Not only will much subtle information be lost in this reduction but it is quite possible that nothing worth characterizing will be left and, in the absence of defining characteristics, fundamentally dissimilar cases may still be grouped together.

3) IDEOLOGY.

One of the central issues for any study of mystical experience, which I shall discuss in the following chapter, is how far our objective experience is shaped by the mentalistic or acquired concepts we bring to it and how far it is something ineluctable and forced upon us. Here, I wish to make the quite separate point that, for a variety of different reasons, each to do with interpretation, whatever position we take with respect to this issue, there is little likelihood of our demonstrating that we are characterizing comparable and value free descriptions of mystical experience. I intend to outline the three principle positions one could take towards experience and interpretation

and argue that in each case we are unable to eliminate interpretation or reduce accounts to comparability at any level.

1. IDEOLOGIES ARE INCALCULABLE.

The first model, which I favour in most cases, is that there is at least a hypothetical distinction between our perceptions and the experience we have at a physical or quasi physical level. As an example, a primitive may well describe a Boeing 747 as a "thundering bird". In this case it could be defined ostensively, that both terms have a common reference and further determined that, as a sensory event, an airplane is much the same* for the primitive as for a westerner as for both there is noise, speed, height, colour etc. We might check on this latter point by asking the primitive to mimic the noise, draw the shape etc. However, though at two levels we can say the accounts are comparable, at a third, the interpretive or conceptual, we cannot. Though the concepts employed have many points in common - noise, flight etc. - they clearly have many dissimilarities reflecting the different ways in which the same sensory stimuli as a whole have been construed. There is nothing indeterminate about these stimuli but they have been fashioned into

*I say much the same, for in the next chapter I introduce two hypothetical processes affecting our consciousness of sensory events, enhancement and selective attention. These might make some difference but not enough for us to say that the westerner and the primitive, at a sensory level, live in different worlds.

different concepts according to the best constructions individuals with different backgrounds can place upon them. (It is, in fact, quite possible the primitive will say 'like a thundering bird' recognizing that whilst it is like a bird it is unlike any other he has previously seen). In this example we might, dissimilarities of conception notwithstanding, feel justified in reducing both accounts to one or other of the comparable levels but the problem in mystical experience is that we have no idea what the comparable level of description is and thus can only compare the conceptions.

Assuming some hypothetical level at which mystical experience would present a common picture, my argument here is that we are unable to reduce the accounts to recover and typify this level because the various factors which determine the way we will conceive of things are incalculable. Osis and Harraldsson made 'allowances' for the cultural input in the naming of figures in 'near-death' experience as we might for children whose fanciful descriptions we recognize, but I would suggest the problem goes a great deal deeper in most cases. As I see it we are not dealing with a few identifiable and discrete religio-cultural conceptions, such as names, but with a complex of cultural and idiosyncratic factors - for which the term ideological seems appropriate - that have an incalculable effect on the way quasi-physical events, even identical quasi-physical events, will be construed. There are broad cultural factors. Society can be religious or secular, scientific or prerational, though few societies were ever homogeneous and none ever static. There are particular cultural factors

not only the type of religion that may predominate but the local peculiarities it has developed and one may talk about fashions in this respect. Most complex of all are the personal factors which shape the experient's conceptions. Everything from age, I.Q., state of health, acquaintance with specific religious or scientific knowledge, sub-cultural influences to simply idiosyncrasy, affect the way we think. In combination with the broader factors it seems impossible to discount all of these influences on the way we will interpret, and it would seem that, as many psychologists have noted, at the conceptual level we each live in a world of our own. It is possible to pick out some of the broader factors which shape an experient's thinking, by redaction or by studying the 'school' to which he belongs, to identify the peculiarities of his acquired conceptions, but never to say we know precisely how a subject will conceive of events.

Perhaps, through some exhaustive biographical study such as Von Hugel's Life of Catherine of Genoa, we will gain an insight into the way in which cultural and personal factors mix to shape conceptions but, not only are such works on a large scale beyond our resources, most authors of the reports we have - perhaps especially the modern ones - are shrouded in anonymity. The first problem then is that we cannot discount or bracket out because we simply do not know how to calculate the conceptions each experient brings to his experience. If I am right to give weight to the idiosyncratic factors it would not even be advantageous to analyse cases on a cultural or sociological basis.

It may be argued nonetheless that where conceptions are comparable, either because they are formulated in the same way or because they

embody some highest common factor cross-culturally as Boeing and thundering bird both denoted flight/noise etc., we may assume that we have recovered a common description. However, I do not see it as the phenomenologist's aim to typify conceptions - a function of psychology or sociology - but rather to describe the experience in value-free terms and to point out the comparability of some conceptions does not allow us to assume that this is what we are doing. One central question which raises this problem in an acute form is whether or not - unless we wish to make it a matter of definition - mystical experience must be interpreted in religious terms. Though the great majority of cases are conceived of in broadly religious terms, we cannot say that 'God' is part of some basic level of description at which cases are comparable, for some cases which we might wish to include are not conceived of in this way. For instance, Capra described an experience he had solely in terms of high-energy physics, 'atoms' and 'cascades of energy' (13), and others have used the conceptions of Jungian psychology. Unless we adopt the complex solution of saying that there are religious experiences, experiences of physics etc. it might be argued that God is simply an interpretation which we commonly encounter because hitherto religion has universally been the language of all that is stirring and inexplicable in human experience. I am not suggesting that high-energy physics does give us any more 'objective' or clearer picture of the experience than that given by deity or super-naturalism but only that a feature common to most conceptions may, at a hypothetical descriptive level, have no validity. Is God another ideological interpretation that should be bracketed out to allow for the comparison of all the cases we might wish to characterize or not?

The answer to this question, if there is one, is perhaps of less importance for us than the fact that we do not know whether 'deity' forms a part of some basic description of mystical experience or not, even though most experiencers conceive of their experience in this way. However, it raises a point of interest which is perhaps worth mentioning here. It could be argued that, just as when experiencers report simple quasi-physical feelings, heat, tingling and so forth, deity is a natural and ineluctable concept for which no alternative conception is possible, Capra et al notwithstanding. Even many non-religious individuals appear to find it necessary to conceive of their experiences in religious terms and many claim that their certainty that it is 'God' that they are experiencing - whatever exactly this means - is beyond doubt, something known 'by secret intuitions too strong to be misunderstood' (Teresa of Avila). It could then be that God - though somewhat unpredicated - is a simply descriptive term much as 'burning', is for fever, for we might use this expression and only this expression even though we knew we were not on fire. I shall look at natural concepts - those forced upon us, whether or not, like 'deity', they are also at another level culturally shaped conceptions - elsewhere, the point here being only that we do not know how to take all but the simplest expressions used and cannot look to a cross-cultural comparison of conceptions to enlighten us.

Another form of comparison of conceptions, which I believe is equally unhelpful, is their reduction to lowest common denominators. Iaski, for example, gave her respondents a range of simple and contrasting terms such as 'height/depth', 'expansion/contraction' so that regardless of the higher-order interpretations of the events, at the most basic

level cases might be compared. Assuming that there is a hypothetical distinction between interpretation and experience at a quasi-physical level, this would certainly appear to get round the difficulty of ideology. However, my criticism of this approach is that the description of the experience which emerges is so characterless that we have little idea what the result represents and, since we have no typifying or defining characteristics, do not know if fundamentally dissimilar cases are not being grouped together, for even at this level some quite mundane experiences might be so described. It is possible, by using this technique, to show that there are sub-types - groups of cases which may share many common quasi-physical features - but it seems no basis for a descriptive characterization of the class as a whole.

My objection is not then to this model but to any claim that in practice we can set aside the ideology which determines the way in which whatever it is that forms a comparable level of description is, in each case, construed. We have no way of knowing how much of the description is ideological and cannot set aside what is interpretative, for the factors involved in conceptualization are too complex and idiosyncratic to compute. Neither can we hope to recover the basic or valuefree level through a comparison of concepts or a reduction of these to the most elementary level. If this pessimistic assessment is reasonable, even if there is a simple, comparable level of description we cannot know what it is - unless medics can give us a physiological description and the one or two attempts in this direction will be discussed later - because the ideologies in which this level is enmeshed are impenetrable.

ii. SOME MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE MAY BE INDETERMINABLE.

The second model of experience and interpretation also assumes a hypothetical distinction between the two, though in this case, in principle, the interpretation offered is irreducible. This model may be thought to apply to some mystical experiences as so many are non-visual. It would not seem possible - whether or not we recognised what we see or, as in the gestalt shift, could picture this in different ways - that we can be in doubt about the stimuli of which sight is composed. What we see is large/small, red/blue, square/round etc. and this information is 'hard' or ineluctable, for it is 'forced upon us' and I cannot see the blue and white of the page before me, say, other than as it is. This is not however the case with all non-visual stimuli, for a number seem inherently ambiguous or otherwise ill-defined or indeterminate. For example, during 'flu' we may feel hot, cold/clammy or, in some way, both at the same time. Equally in neuritis the pains may be thought of as burning or pricking and quite often we cannot decide whether some feeling is pleasurable or painful. One simply does not know whether the stimuli in some mystical experiences described in terms of 'fusion with', 'penetration by' or 'presence of' the divine are inherently ambiguous or not though, as we rarely find two cases construed in exactly the same way, it is possible that they are. My point is that, if they are ambiguous, there is no way, even in theory, that we might separate the stimuli from the way in which these are interpreted. Hot or cold, that 'flu' feeling is irreducible though we might alternate between the conceptions we have of it. One may distinguish ambiguity from that which is otherwise indefinable except in ideological terms,

idiosyncratic or conventional. We all know which frisson is meant by a 'ghost has walked over my grave' but without this format this feeling would be quite indescribable and to remove the ideological in this case is to render the feelings involved wholly inaccessible. As, in the case of mystical experience, there are no conventional conceptions, if the stimuli are like this no insight at all into what is being described would be possible. At a hypothetical level though, there remains a distinction for only some concepts are appropriate, which is not the case in the third model I look at. It is possible to say of the 'flu' feeling that you may feel hot, cold or both but not that you are being stabbed or possessed or whatever, just as we might say of the 'duck/rabbit' test, you can see it as one or other but not as an elephant. It is then possible that one or more of the stimuli involved in some mystical experience have no precise identification at any level and, whilst a grouping of the concepts used might, as in the case of hot/cold/both, give us some idea of what the feeling was like, in the case of mystical experience we could not know, when experiencers conceived of a feeling in wholly different ways, whether they were comparable or not.

As an example of this difficulty of comparing conceptions of non-visual stimuli, it is perhaps worth mentioning an unnamed, yet not uncommon, sensation that I am familiar with. One night I felt the cat settle down on the bed as usual by my legs - others report someone sitting down on the edge of the bed - and having reached out my hand I discovered that there was nothing there though I could distinctly feel her padding about. For a time I was convinced of the existence of a

phantom cat until it emerged that the cause was a localised stimulation of calf muscles. Since then I have been able to conceive of such feelings both in terms of the cat and in physiological terms the legitimacy of each conception depending only on whether the cat is present or not. The sheer incompatibility of my conceptions of one and the same type of stimuli suggests that, if ambiguity is a problem in the case of mystical experience, we could never recover a value free description nor even judge when one case had a resemblance to another. Possibly there are degrees of difficulty here. In some cases it may be appropriate to offer wholly incompatible conceptions whilst in others, the sense of presence perhaps, the interpretation must be set within narrow limits such that it is legitimate to describe this feeling in terms of x or y and only in such terms. I do not know whether this model is relevant or not but only that, if it is, there would be no possibility of determining when cases were comparable or grounds for believing that we could ever distil a value free description from the various ideological construction of events we are being offered.

iii. EXPERIENCE MAY BE PARASITIC ON IDEOLOGY.

The third model, favoured by such psychologists as Sunden and hard contextualists such as Katz, envisages no hypothetical distinction between what we experience and the way we experience it. I group together with these authors another, Bharati, for though his 'zero experience', 'tasteless and colourless', offers a slightly different conception of what is taking place, the effect of both views is that at all levels there is only an ideologically constructed experience and not even the theoretical possibility of recovering some value free residuum. I will consider this model carefully in the next chapter but here it is sufficient to note that, though on this view-if we ignore personal factors-we may typify conceptions in terms

of their common cultural origins and the like, it makes no sense at all to characterize mystical experience as a class for so many of the conceptions brought to it worldwide are incomparable. A Buddhist's 'Nirvana' and a theist's 'union' could only be understood in terms of the respective cultures which produced them and not only are both irreducible but, in so far as these cultures have little, conceptually, in common, are beyond comparison also.

It has been my argument that, whatever view we take of mystical experience, in practice it will never be possible to recover a comparable level of description from the various conceptions we are offered either because ideology is incalculable, the stimuli are indeterminate and the only access we have is through the interpretations placed upon them, or because there is nothing but ideology and since, conceptually 'we are worlds apart' no such description is possible even in principle. Trying to find some comparable and characterizable level of experience from the many and varied concepts we are offered is perhaps the greatest obstacle to a description of these experiences. Taken in conjunction with the problems of language and the doubts we may have about our sources, it would seem fair to say that the phenomena of mystical experience as a class are beyond any detailed characterization or classification. Perhaps the best we may hope for is to point to some general features that can be recognised in every case regardless of its origins, the language in which it is written and the ideology of the experient. As mentioned above, I believe only two features can be found which are beyond all question manifest in each and every case we could conceivably wish to treat as mystical, that is, to the experient, they appear both real and meaningful.

In conclusion it is perhaps worth noting that there are other difficulties in the way of describing mystical phenomena beyond that of finding a comparable level of description. Sample size and the background of the experients is a relevant consideration. Laski, for example, drew on '63 people I knew' presumably from similiar backgrounds in both sociological and cultural terms whilst Greeley culled 600 people who claimed such experience from a large-scale national survey. Presumably the features Greeley found - 'peace', 'altruism', 'optimism' etc. (14) - are more reliable than those drawn from a smaller and, in sociological terms, narrower base. Perhaps more important are the criteria used for the selection of cases to be described which may present an insoluble problem. On the one hand Hardy accepted cases solely on the basis that respondents felt their experiences sufficiently important to recount. There is the strong possibility that any description of his material will characterize not only mystical experience - if there is such a type- but psychotic experience, say, also which few would wish to include with it. On the other hand any preselection which has no theoretical basis cannot be justified for it is valiative and will undoubtedly distort the results quite as much. Stace decided, prior to his study rather than as a result of it, 'that the most typical as well as the most important type of mystical experience is non-sensuous'(15) and therefore eschewed on the grounds of non-sensuousness and morality, cases of visions and voices and any other which displayed 'excessive emotionalism' such as raptures and trances. The outcome was that, not only were some cases unreasonably excluded, but that the features were to a large extent predetermined. One may well argue that the 'introvertive experience', like Laski's 'Ecstasy' or Paffard's

'Unattended Moment' are each the product of preselection. It is not that one would not recognize these but that, as seems to be in the case of Margolis' 'mystical/psychotic' dichotomy, our recognition has a basis in preconception rather than in a value free characterization of our data. Iaski's grouping and averaging of her cases with prechosen religious and literary texts makes her characterization especially doubtful and its only justification could be that she wanted to describe a sub-type, 'ecstasy', as a preliminary to establishing that it had an empirical identity. Perhaps there is no solution to this problem until such time as we have acknowledged criteria for the identification of mystical experience. Until then maybe all we can do is juggle between valuative selection and an open-mindedness about which cases to include in our data base though this can give us little confidence that we are being presented with a neutral and 'objective' description even if we believed that, in itself, this was worth having.

I do not wish however to rule out entirely the possibility that we may note features that suggest genuine descriptive sub-types as distinct from the artificial creations of some authors who have selected their material and ordered it in valuative ways. If such exist, it might be difficult to show that, as distinct forms of experience, they have even a 'family resemblance' with other types and the concept of mystical experience as a class might well break down into a loosely related group of experiences each of which could be shown to have some descriptive validity. There are, for example, a group of quasi-physical features, heat, tingling, light etc. that so often appear together in conjunction with a sense of presence of

God that one might suggest that there is sufficient basis for comparison, the interpretive element notwithstanding, to identify a type that can be distinguished from others. Beardsworth gave many examples of this type of case in the Sense of Presence and if we were to list a sufficient number of features that must be reported in combination, the group's distinctive identity could be justified. Another type is known as the 'near-death experience' though this shows up the difficulties in establishing what it is that constitutes a descriptive identity. Moody offered a 'theoretically ideal' or 'complete experience which embodies all of the common elements in the order in which it is typical for them to occur' (16). These elements - the dark tunnel, out-of-the-body, seeing spirits of relatives, the being of light, paradisaic feelings etc. - though frequently grouped do not necessarily occur in this order, nor are most usually present, besides which no such grouping is unique to clinical death-resuscitation situations. As Moody accepts, 'no two accounts are identical, no one person reports every single component of the composite experience' and 'there is no one element of the composite experience which every single person has reported'. Is this type no more than a valuative paradigm imposed on and thereby linking cases which have no more than a passing resemblance or is there a true 'family resemblance' between cases which all researchers would feel the necessity to confirm? It is hard to tell. As we are dealing with descriptive features, perhaps it is impossible to tell whether there is here a type unless it is so precisely structured that it is impossible to mistake. It is equally possible to argue, on the basis of definition alone, that there are theistic and monistic types of experience, Buddhist, Judaic and Christian

but these classifications, even more so than the others, appear to have no theoretical relevance whatsoever unless one introduces a 'contextual' model of the experience and demonstrates empirically that such experiences, and only such experiences, follow from holding the requisite set of beliefs. I would not then rule out the possibility that common features might be identified in some cases and that, if there were sufficient simply reported quasi-physical feelings - which if not quantifiable nevertheless appear more reliable identifications - that a sub-typology of mystical experience might be justified descriptively. However, by and large, I would still argue that very little can be achieved in this way because of the difficulties mentioned. More to the point, even if we could justify a descriptive characterization or typology, it would remain no more than that. For a scientific classification, if the common element in the material or the distinctions are not quantifiable, it is necessary that these be made to serve some theoretical purpose and it is hard to see what theoretical purpose the few features we might justify selecting descriptively could be made to serve.

In view of the foregoing discussion it is my intention to make a case, albeit neither completed nor confirmed in this work, that two aspects of the phenomena of mystical experience have a central importance for any understanding of what it is that constitutes the common identity of the class as a whole. My task is made easier by the fact that, simply at the descriptive level, the selection of 'reality' and meaningfulness could be supported in all the cases we would wish to include and excludes only those cases about which many mystics and researchers have already expressed reservations.

The justification of their use as defining characteristics of mystical experience - though not in themselves a definition of mystical experience - will be made later in this work, principally in chapters 3 and 6, but if I am right to identify these features it will show that the subjective experience, however limited our access to it is and however tenuous the theoretical insight that it provides, plays a not unimportant part in our assessment of what it is that is taking place.

1) A SENSORY OR QUASI-SENSORY PHENOMENON

'This, at least we can say ... (mystical) experiences are proved real to their possessor, because they remain with him when brought closest in to contact with the objective realities of life. Dreams cannot stand this test. We wake from them to find that they are but dreams. Wanderings of an overwrought brain do not stand this test. These highest experiences that I have had of God's presence have been rare and brief - flashes of consciousness which have compelled me to exclaim with surprise - God is here! ..I have severely questioned the worth of these moments. To no soul have I named them, lest I should be building my life and work on mere phantasies of the brain. But I find that after every questioning and test, they stand out today as the most real experiences of my life ...'

J. Trevor quoted by James.

I shall argue here that the one outstanding characteristic of mystical experience is that it appears real to the subject both at the time and for a long period afterwards. I shall analyse some of the factors which may give the experience this quality and argue that the only analogy possible is with other sensory or quasi-sensory experience. There are however a number of points which require clarification before I begin this discussion.

The first of these is that the identification of such a descriptive feature - apparent realness - is not new. Amongst researchers Stace gave 'sense of objectivity or reality' as the first common feature in his list, Deikman 'intense realness' (17), Pahnke and Richards 'objectivity and reality' (18) and Margolis the perception of 'higher or greater reality' (19). Some mystics too have concentrated on this point as in the example of Trevor above or as Teresa of Avila did when she rejected 'imaginal visions' precisely because they did not have this quality - 'I do not believe it is a vision but rather some overmastering idea which causes the imagination to fancy it sees something; but this illusion is only like a dead image in comparison with the living reality of the other case' (20).

The second is that I treat it as a defining feature whose selection can be justified both at the descriptive and theoretical level. Not only do other researchers and mystics confirm the selection but I believe it is central to the concept we each have of mystical experience for without it the concept would break down. If we dream, day-dream, imagine or hallucinate some supernatural world, we would not wish to call our experience mystical and would only do so if we had a 'concrete' perception of something non-natural or discontinuous with our mundane experience - see Appendix A - which appeared to us as real/valid/objective. There may well be borderline cases, the psychotic may for a time believe that their hallucinations are real and the drug-taker whilst this experience lasts but the appearance of reality in the long term would seem to distinguish that group of cases at the descriptive level in which we are most interested and the feature is usually explicitly mentioned or otherwise strongly

indicated. The selection of this feature, distinguishing between that which appears to be real and that which doesn't, can be justified as the basis of a typology if, as I shall do, we relate it at the theoretical level to a particular group of psycho-physiological processes which are a sufficient condition for this feature. Apparent reality is not merely a descriptive characteristic therefore which some cases possess that we have fastened on to and on the basis of which we have arbitrarily defined the class of mystical experience but one that has an experimental identity albeit shrouded in controversy. If, as seems likely, sensory processes alone give rise to experience we recognise as real whilst other apprehensions such as the mental imagery of the hypnagogic state - which we do not recognise as real - are accounted for in terms of other, non-sensory, processes, the distinction between the two and the exclusion of the latter, is not arbitrary but has an empirical basis as well as a descriptive one.

The third point is that I am discussing the appearance of reality only and this appearance would not seem to be affected either by the particular nature of the perception which a mystic has or his beliefs about it. It is unusual to draw the distinction between the qualities of one's perception or as Wittgenstein called it 'the state of experiencing' and the belief one holds about the ontological status of the perception. Except in the case of illusions, it is enough to say "but I saw x" to imply existence or "I dreamed y" to deny it but in the case of mystical experience I shall argue that it appears real regardless of the view which is

taken about the existence of the object. Trevor recognized the distinction when considering the possibility that despite all appearances he could be deluded, others, such as Teresa of Avila, did not. Teresa seems to have believed that if the experience passed all the introspective 'tests' for judging reality then the object of perception was real also. This conclusion is today a non sequitur* but in the cosmology of her time the connection would have appeared logical enough for, not only was God then a legitimate object of apprehension, but He was taken to be the benchmark of reality such that only in having an experience of God could we know what a real experience felt like. (It was however tautologous to argue, as Teresa and John of the Cross both did, that only experiences of the divine which pass all the tests for reality an experienced mystic might wish to apply, are truly divine experiences as distinct from being authentically mystical, for the distinction between genuine and counterfeit experiences of God i.e. divine/demonically inspired only holds if, by definition, divine experiences alone appear real in all respects.) The view I take is that, nowadays, in the cultural mainstream at least, no non-natural perception is legitimate and hence it matters not at all what caused it or whether the perception is of God or devil, cosmic void or 'unitive'insight so long as the experience has the quality

* It is nonetheless an interesting argument that only real things appear real. It is asking a lot for us to believe that the appearance of reality is only accidentally present in the case of real objects. Perhaps, if we could show that only real impressions appear real in all respects then some sort of ontological argument could be developed on this basis. It is perhaps worth reviewing our experience of illusions, to determine if qualitatively our experience of these is just the same as our experiences of objects with proven existence.

of appearing real, for in no case is existence implied - though this is not to rule out the possibility that only one of these types does appear real. In short the ontological status of the object of perception is, in the mystical case, wholly irrelevant to whether the experience appears real or not and in claiming that the experience appears real no existence claim is necessarily being made at all.

The second point I wish to make is that it would appear to make no difference to the seeming reality of mystical experience whether the subject believes his perception to be real or not. Trevor and other thinking mystics faced an intolerable dilemma when their experience seems to be telling them one thing about the world and the wisdom of their age another, yet even so, as occasionally some do, they abandon a belief in the existence of the objects of their experience none is able to remember his experience except as something which appeared wholly real. Someone who was 'not in the least religious - in fact rather the opposite' can write 'suddenly I was aware of a "presence" ... it enveloped me in a surrounding of perfect love ... I was quite certain that I had been in the presence of God' (21) and another 'wide awake, my brain clear with a peculiar, wonderful sensation; the room was alive and someone was speaking. The voice said "I am with you always". It was the voice of God, Creator or whatever you like to call it, and not the imagination of a disordered mind. I am no Christian or religious fanatic ...' (22). The insistence of mystics about the felt reality of their experience is perhaps surprising if it is the case that, if we have an unsupported,

mundane experience, we might be persuaded not merely that it was non-veridical but that we did not really 'see' it at all, at least we might try to persuade ourselves of this since we depend upon our senses so much to tell us about reality. This is however arguable for in everyday cases we might equally fall back on the irrefutable "I know what I saw" even if we also accept we were deluded. Does it make a difference if we think the conjuror has sawn the lady in half or merely tricked us? If it makes no difference to the quality of the mystical experience whether it is more or less credible to us, we may argue that the appearance of reality is in no way contingent but as an intrinsic characteristic of the state. However, the 'objectivity' and especially 'validity' of the mystical perception mentioned by some authors does, as in the example of the sceptics above, appear contingent for there is no necessary connection between our having an apparently real experience and believing that it is real.

The fourth point is that the quality of appearing to be real is not something about which it appears mystics can be mistaken. I have mentioned the insistence of mystics on this point and it contrasts with a variety of other non-veridical apprehensions which, if not immediately self-evidently unreal, come to be regarded as such in the course of time. The drug taker, psychotic or dreamer may have an experience so vivid or powerful that for a time it appears quite real, whether or not it is believed to be so, but recognition of its counterfeit nature will occur at some point unless all powers of discrimination have been lost. Previous experience of such phenomena may play a part in the speed with which the false note is discerned. 'My last manic episode began with the usual curious change in sense-

perception of the outer world. I can only describe it by saying that the "lights go up", as if a kind of switch were turned in my psycho-physical system. Everything seems different, somehow brighter and clearer - it is quite easily recognizable and bitter experience has taught me that I should take immediate steps to go into hospital' (23). Certainly it took me some time to discover in which ways 'lucid dreaming' did not ring true though its non-veridicality was quickly apparent. Yet in the case of mystics such a moment never seems to come for I have never come across "it seemed at the time like" or "I only thought I saw". Despite the social pressures and the occasional acceptance by mystics that their experiences are non-veridical, none seems able to discern anything counterfeit about the experience itself and I take it that a continuing assertion, perhaps over a lifetime, that whatever else the experience appeared real and does so still, is a mark of its authenticity.

The apparent reality of the experience comes through very strongly in all the accounts we have. Teresa of Avila wrote 'a person who was unexpectedly plunged into water could not fail to be aware of it; here the case is the same but even more evident' (24) whilst others speak of the experience as 'leaving no room for doubt', 'concrete', 'unmistakably real' etc. I wish here to attempt to analyse what it is that this apparent reality consists of and argue that we can only think of it in terms of other sensory or quasi-sensory experiences with which we are more familiar. Though this is a very grey area indeed, I shall suggest that three factors are involved in the case of mystical perception: A) lucidity or clarity,

B) stability and C) coherence each of which gives it a comparability with the commoner sorts of sense perception. I could not say that these sufficiently typify what it is that gives experience, mundane and mystical, the appearance of reality or whether all need to be present before we perceive our experience to be real but argue nonetheless that they are certainly amongst the cues we 'look for' when we scrutinize our experience both in the short and long term.

A) LUCIDITY OR CLARITY. The ideation in mystical experience as in some mundane perception is, peculiarly, unmistakable. This is not the same as vividness of visual imagery frequently reported in dreams and psychedelic cases for the clarity of mystical or mundane comprehensions would not appear to depend on heightened perception or intensity. In a case such as 'I seemed to feel rather than see ... I had no doubt that this was a vision of heaven. The memory of it has never left me' (25), the certainty the subject has would not appear to owe anything to vividness yet, nevertheless, the stimuli are recognizable in a way that leaves no doubt in the experient's mind about the fact of experiencing and what it is that is experienced and which perhaps helps to make the experience unforgettable. Searle has suggested that the best analogy for human consciousness is 'a footprint on wet sand'; that is, we are made aware, not by computation, but by a kind of imprinting or branding. The image seems appropriate, for whatever role ideology plays in determining the meaning of our experience, there is something in the way that mystical and some sense perceptions strike us that leaves us in no doubt that we have had such an experience. In the case of mundane perception, one might ascribe this to the effect that a real and objective stimulus has upon us - usually a new experience or in one of those rare moments when "everything comes alive/stands out" as on the first day of a holiday - but there is no reason why any sensory

stimuli, external or physiological in origin, should not make this impression upon us. Coup de foudre might better describe the impact which mystical experience makes for it is the strikingness, sharpness or standing out of these events in the mind that I am attempting to portray. This quality may also have some connection with the claim that mystical experience appears more real than everyday perception. Just as 'first love' or one of those rare moments when we really feel 'alive' seems so much closer to reality than our perceptions of a world to which we have become habituated and stand out in the mind as something about which we cannot be mistaken, so might mystical experience appear in relation to all mundane perceptions perhaps on account of its novelty or because we do not inhibit our conscious awareness of it as we seem able to do in so many other cases. Even in mundane sense perception there is a continuum of felt reality ranging from the insubstantiality of a variety of states to the felt intensity of new or delightful sensations and mystical experience may take a place near the top of this range though it is only a subjective perception and one relative to the other experiences with which the mystic can compare it.

B) STABILITY. Perhaps the most important disanalogy with a variety of experiences which fail, at least in the long run, to persuade us that they are real, is the stability of perception manifest both in mystical and mundane sense experience. To illustrate this point it is easiest to use visual examples though stability is by no means confined to sight alone. A psychotropic drug-induced experience has been described in these terms: 'he looked at me, elongated his mouth like a trumpet until it reached my ear. Suddenly I saw my own father standing in the middle of the peyote field, but the field had vanished and the scene was my old home ..

he just listened and then was pulled or sucked away. I walked through the peyote field ... something emerged from a strange starlike light on a plant etc. etc.' (26). Such a description would do for many types of hallucination, dreaming (though not 'lucid dreaming'), hypnagogic imagery and so forth which involve ever-changing and kaleidoscopic patterns of ideation and mood which are presumably associative in nature. Compare this with 'I was in a field, a large empty field and it had high golden grass that was very soft, so bright. I was really very happy in that place, wherever it was ... soft, silky very brilliant gold. The grass swayed it was very peaceful, very quiet. The grass was so outstandingly beautiful that I will never forget it' (27). In this second case the whole experience comprised an awareness of this field and there was no flux or fluidity of ideation or variation in mood. This is usual in the case of mystical experience, e.g. 'without warning, I felt I was in Heaven - an inward state of peace and joy and assurance, indescribably intense, accompanied with a sense of being bathed in a warm glow of light ... this deep emotion lasted, only gradually passing away' (28). Some mystical experiences may be sequential, as are our perceptions of the world, but do not seem to involve this inherent instability which we are familiar with in dreams. The comparability of mystical experience and sense perception in this respect is important for it is the dependability or stability of the mundane world that must give it much of that air of reality we ascribe to it.

c) COHERENCE. This third point of similarity with everyday perception and dissimilarity with some other types of non-veridical experience may be related to stability and is perhaps best characterized by contrast

with surrealism. In surreal experience events have an 'Alice in Wonderland' quality in that they have no logical structure. For example, in a Salvador Dali painting whales fly, the sky is green in colour and all objects stand in a totally meaningless relationship with each other, their identities only obliquely related to that which they have in a world of meaning. A surrealistic experience may not be wholly unrecognizable but shades into incoherence for any meaning we found in it is entirely idiosyncratic-as in Mr. Porter's dream; 'these paper wounds, four in type were gradually and correctly understood to mean stop' (29). The point about surreal experience is that it cannot be mistaken for 'real' experience for it would appear to be part of our conception of reality that our experience of it is logically structured. At the sub-atomic level we know that reality is not logically structured but perhaps it is no coincidence that this 'Alice in Wonderland' world is beyond sense experience and can only be technologically measured. In the case of mystical experience, be it a vision of paradisaal fields or some more complex non-visual experience of a greater whole or deity, there would appear to be nothing in it that is not self-consistent and thus make the mystic doubt that it is real. One wonders whether Teresa of Avila, for example, rejected some experiences as 'false' or demonically inspired on the grounds that the 'picture' presented did not cohere. Experiences of God which left a bitter taste - 'aridity of soul' - or which aroused the lower passions, though not unstable, may not merely have offended her preconceptions as to what a divine experience should be like but may not have 'jelled', appearing in some way like a surrealistic experience to be inconsistent, self-contradictory and hence untrustworthy. Since we rarely have any clear idea as to what a mystic's experience is like, the only point I wish to make is that the claim that it appeared real seems to

entail that the experience formed a self-consistent whole, for otherwise, as in the case of surreal or fantastic experience, it could not seem real to us for long.

These three characteristics or qualities of the mystical experience perhaps help us understand why it appears real, provide grounds for disanalogy with perhaps all other non-veridical experience except for illusions caused by external stimuli and enable us to view the experience in important respects in sensory or quasi-sensory terms. The apparent realness or concreteness of the mystical experience would not appear simply to be a descriptive feature, for the appearance of reality in the mundane world can be explained in terms of specific, if ill-understood, psycho-physiological processes and it cannot be mere chance that mystical experience also manifests this particular quality. As suggested by the experiment on sheep mentioned in the first chapter, things may only become real for us when there is sufficient stimulation of various neuro-physiological systems. If the 'firing' of these systems alone gives rise to 'real' experience - a lucid, stable and coherent experience - then 'real' experience has an empirical as well as a descriptive identity. This is not an ontological argument for I am merely making the point that sense experience is understood to constitute a distinct class of experience which may be defined and distinguished from other types - even if we are not qualified to give a neuro-physiological definition - and in so far as in important respects mystical experience is a member of this class it shares in this distinctive identity and the theoretical as well as descriptive basis it entails. Apparent reality appears to me to be by far the most important feature that we can identify in the subjective accounts of the experience we are offered and some of its implications are explored in the following chapter.



2) MEANINGFULNESS.

The second characteristic of mystical experience I wish to draw attention to is the meaning it has for the mystic and a wider audience. For the subject, the experience itself is both cogent and profoundly significant and subsequently has an impact on values and beliefs and the interpretation of other, mundane, experience. The peculiarity here is the emphasis mystics lay on the significance their experience has, and continues to have, for them. It also has meaning for others and can be discussed intelligibly in terms of religious systems. This is a point of considerable disanalogy with most other non-veridical apprehensions for, even if these have a continuing subjective significance - which is unlikely - they remain essentially private experiences beyond discussion and analysis. Altogether, meaningfulness is a striking descriptive feature that can be recognized whether or not we understand precisely what meaning it is the subject finds in his experience for it is usually explicitly mentioned and evident in the subsequent importance he attaches to it. The theoretical value of this feature is more obscure. In the following chapter I consider the view that mystical experience is parasitic upon sets of acquired religio-cultural beliefs and thus its sense and meaningfulness is pre-ordained, but reject this view on several grounds. However, I nonetheless find meaningfulness to be highly suggestive for I do not believe it is chance that we find 'supernatural' experience meaningful both at the subjective and cultural level. In the final chapter I will try to develop some ideas, that will scarcely merit being called a hypothesis, on the theme that our ability to recognize a supernatural world with its own values and alogical connections is not a consequence of our being heirs to religious traditions but rather part of the evidence for a self-contained psycho-physical world that runs in conjunction with the one we are more familiar with. Though it is fair to note, in the

light of my comments above on the invalidity of descriptive characterizations, that I do believe this feature has theoretical significance, this is not the place to elucidate these ideas but rather simply observe that meaningfulness is a striking feature which helps typify and, to some extent, distinguish mystical experience.

A) For the individual the mystical experience is usually found instantaneously to be meaningful, generally in a peculiarly profound or intense way. I shall discuss in turn the intentionality of the mystical experience, its felt importance and its continuing significance-which may indeed be closely related-for each raises questions which are of considerable interest. These wider issues do not however affect the only point I aim to establish which is that, for the subject, mystical experience is invariably significant over a long period of time and found to be so in a peculiarly intense way.

In all cases mystical experience is intentional, that is, it is perceived to be about something, e.g. 'knowing vivid and real ... the inexhaustible love of God for us'. (30) Mystics may take it to show God's existence, a revelation of our place in the scheme of things or some more personal message but it is never said "I had an experience which meant nothing to me". Even if the mystic is, unusually, a radical sceptic who does not believe that his insight has any validity, the experience is nonetheless said to be comprehensible. In the example of scepticism given above, just as we might recognize an oasis, knowing it to be a mirage, it was still an experience of God's presence. Some would argue that the point is scarcely worth making as it is an analytic requirement that experience must be intentional. However, there would not in fact seem to be a logical relationship between experience and meaning for in 'agnosia', an admittedly rare condition caused by brain injury, there can be full sensory experience

to which the victim can attach no meaning at all, though his intellectual capacities remain unimpaired. More commonly we are aware of sundry images, as in the hypnagogic state, to which we attach no significance and it would not appear to be an analytic requirement that we must make all experience intelligible by construing it and structuring it in meaningful ways. I do not suggest that in itself intentionality distinguishes mystical experience from all but the most incoherent states of awareness but I nonetheless find it surprising, given the types of meanings ascribed to the experience - God, eternity etc. - and bearing in mind that not all mystics have a background of religious or existential knowledge, that non-natural experience is always found to make sense at the subjective level.

Though it makes no difference to the fact that mystics perceive their experience to be about something, it is an interesting question whether or not the sense they find in it is logically derived from the perception - as for a motorist a red traffic signal means stop, something alogically related to it or something illogically invested in it. In the case of a woman dressed in blue with an infant in her arms, a recognition that this is the Virgin could be explained as a deduction from religious knowledge but in most cases it is difficult to see how the meanings found could be logically derived from the experience. It might reasonably be asked how a mystic knows this is God or that he is part of eternity since few religions give any clear rules of inference which in any event would scarcely be applicable to the strange and largely non-visual sensations which mystics commonly report. There are two further arguments against treating the sense a mystic finds in his experience as having been logically derived from what he perceives. In the first place there is no logical connection in many cases nor, in some, is there even a possibility of this. In 'I knew without any doubt whatever, that if I could only hold

on to that moment, I should know and understand everything in the world'(31), since the experient made no claim to knowledge of anything, the belief that he was so close to a revelation could not have been logically deduced. Nor is it clear how, say, 'the luminescence of the night sky, the forms of the trees and the perfect silence of the place' logically leads to 'then it was I knew for certain that I was a living part of something eternal'.(32) In some cases there is no conscious experience at all from which anything may be derived other than the instant of illumination in which something becomes known, 'in a particular moment I became absolutely certain that God exists. This certainty is more exact than any findings of science ...' (33) Clearly in such cases there is no parallel with our mundane 'knowledge by acquaintance' for the sense is not derived from conscious experience. Equally, in most cases, no time elapses in which complex deductions could take place for it is usually 'a sudden and momentous conviction' that x is the case which is not preceded by a period of uncertainty or pondering which we might expect. There never seems to be a case in which it is said "I was uncertain at first" or "I came to the conclusion that" but always "I knew irrefutably, totally and instantaneously". Though not all recognition of the meaning an experience has is simultaneous with the experience, like Bharati's 'zero experience', Teresa of Avila mentions experiences during which 'the spirit is both blind and dumb ... thus preventing its knowing whence or how it enjoys this grace ... during the actual moment of divine union the soul feels nothing, all its powers being entirely lost', (34) in these cases there is no evidence of computation or creativity and when recognition comes it does so with the usual force and completeness common to other cases. I do not rule out a logical deduction in some cases but the sense a mystic finds would not often seem to be arrived at in this way.

This would seem to leave three possibilities. 1. The mystic invests his experience with such sense as he may, ideologically and idiosyncratically. 2. That there is an alogical relationship and 3. That there is a logical relationship but the sense the mystic finds is often derived from subliminal experience. The first possibility is perhaps the simplest as there is after all no necessity for us to attach only logically derived meanings to experience. As in Mr. Porter's dream, four paper wounds 'meant stop' and we can attach what meanings we like though this may not be adaptive or, as in the case of a traffic light, safe. If there is no logical relationship between the perceptions a mystic is conscious of and the meaning he invests in them, perhaps mystical experience is superfluous except possibly as the occasion for the 'illumination'. Can we say "this is God" in the context of any number of natural or non-natural perceptions? My objection to this is that it ignores the distinction between cases which appear both real and meaningful and those which are simply meaningful. Not all meaningful experiences are recognized as real and we may be consciously aware that we are investing in our experiences a significance they do not in reality have. It is not, for example, uncommon to treat another as if he were a departed loved one 'seeing' in him the person we wish to 'see'. There are no doubt gradations but, unless we have lost all judgment and become deluded, we are able to recognize that, at one level, this is some quite different person than the one we miss and that the meaning we invest our experience with is subjective and does not form part of the reality our senses present us with. Apart from young children and the deluded, few would think that believing x to be the case, is to make it part of the 'objective' reality of our experience. As there is no evidence that all mystics have lost 'their grip on reality' and they uniformly claim both in the short and long term that theirs was not an act of imagination but, on the contrary,

the sense of their experience was part of the reality/validity/objectivity their experience had - for it unmistakably had such and such a meaning for them- I think we should hesitate before ascribing the sense found in mystical experience solely to subjective and ideological imposition for, if mystics idiosyncratically supply their own meanings, I would suggest they could not for long seem real or objective.

If not derived logically from conscious experience and if the connection is not illogical either, we may have to look at the other two possibilities which might explain better how it is that 'a sublime knowledge is infused in the soul, imbuing it with the certainty of the truth that ...' (35). Alogical relationships would account for the claim that the experience was real/valid, instantaneous recognition and for the fact that often no logical connection can be discerned. I am not here thinking of conditioned or idiosyncratic connections which are essentially illogical but rather the 'sun makes us happy' type. I believe we can recognize that there is a connection between tranquilly looking at the night sky and feelings/thoughts of eternity which is not deductive but either associative or at some subliminal and archaic level symbolic. In a case such as 'the newly risen sun sent flickering over the long, low, glassy mounds of the rolling swells a series of elastic reflections which expanded and contracted and zigzagged as they travelled in stately and regular motion toward me ... the heiro-glyphics upon the waters seemed to flash through me, pass through my body ... recognizable as Arabic of a peculiar kind - golden letters in a Holy Book ... being written on the sea by the sun, himself a poet' (36) the train of events would not seem to suggest that the connections made are illogical but rather that the recognition that the scene was meaningful in some way comes out of/follows on from this type of perception. A speculation

perhaps but aggregates of form, shape, colour etc. naturally or non-naturally perceived, may make sense to us in a way that owes nothing to logic or our individual imagination. The final possibility is that there is a logical relationship between experience and significance but we are not always consciously aware of the experience from which the meaning we recognize is derived. It is a scientific fact that we can take strong and unmistakable likes and dislikes to people on the basis of our detection of their pherones and other chemical output of which we are not consciously aware. In this case there is a necessary and not a subjective or illogical connection though we are not individually aware of its cause. It is not unimaginable that something similar is happening in mystical experience and that is why we know something unmistakably and instantaneously and in a completely real/sensory way yet not always be able to say why. Let us say that the recognition that everything is joined, part of a whole, arises from an awareness of some early stage in the sensory process, for it is not unlikely that, whilst we are usually only aware of the end product before image enhancement and resolution have taken place, there are earlier stages during which there are no discrete identities but only objects fused, unfocussed, from which we can recognize no distinctions even our own separate identity. Some mystics see the world in this way, momentarily, others do not but are nonetheless in no doubt that this is the way it is and perhaps both are 'tuned' in to this - hypothetical - phase in the sensory process prior to resolution and definition. It would account for the reality both claim as part of their experience and explain why, in one case, there is an obvious connection between perception and meaning and, in the other, merely a 'knowing'. Satisfactory or not, some such hypothesis is necessary to explain why it is mystics believe in the reality and validity of their insight yet cannot always say how they come by it.

The second feature of the immediate experience worth drawing attention to is the profound felt importance of the insight; indeed it is more a revelation than a simple recognition. It is true that this has little to do with the intelligibility of the experience with which all of the other points are concerned but is a noteworthy concomitant of meaningfulness, for not only are mystical 'truths' understood in capital letters, so to speak, but the importance attached to these 'truths' by the individual is very considerable also and this forms a part of what we understand by meaningful/significant in relation to subjective experience. Most mystics do not simply become aware that x is the case but find that this 'truth' 'bursts in/blazes through their mind' as a 'revelation of unutterable importance' that often excludes an awareness of all else - God's love, for instance, is sometimes felt to be the only fact of the universe, all else being peripheral. There may be a parallel here with creativity, with that moment we shout 'Eureka' after a long search for a solution when all else is momentarily driven from our minds. There is almost certainly a relationship with the lucidity or clarity mentioned above as part of the apparent realness of the experience for we focus on the mystical insight which captures our attention. Though the mystic feels himself to be making some momentous discovery, this feeling appears independent of whether or not he has any particular insight: 'when I walk in the fields I am oppressed now and then with the feeling that everything I see has a meaning, if I could but understand it. And this feeling of being surrounded with truths which I cannot grasp amounts to indescribable awe'. (37) The emphatic nature of mystical 'illuminations' seems to shade into a number of different qualities, apparent reality - though this cannot be the prime reason for mystics to believe in the validity of their insights as so much everyday comprehension lacks this quality - awefulness or numinosity of the 'truth' apprehended and into a state of ecstasy or

exultation. It would be misleading to say that every mystical insight was accompanied by a sense of revelation, for there appears to be something of a continuum, though it is rare to find a case in which the moment of recognition is reported in a wholly matter of fact sort of way. There is also, though less easy to elucidate, usually an enormous sense of the personal importance of the revelation. This is not the same as the importance attributed to a revelation, for we may know, even have x revealed to us, without feeling that it is personally significant whereas we can feel a tremendous sense of identity with the perception of a trifle. After trauma or shock, as in many battlefield accounts for example, there is often a paradoxical phase in which some normally insignificant perception, the shape of a twig, say, assumes an enormous personal significance and meaning whilst the main events round-about are all but forgotten. These moments seem to be treasured and remembered less for what we understood as for the peculiarly personal significance that the experience had for us. This sense of personal meaningfulness is common to many drug-induced experiences but, in the case of mystical experience, usually combines with some religious or metaphysical insight that in its own right seems to the individual concerned to be undeniably important as well. Both these aspects of felt importance will be recognized by anyone familiar with first-hand accounts of mystical experience and whilst not state-specific help characterize the state and may yet provide us with an insight as to the nature of the processes involved.

LONG TERM SIGNIFICANCE.

It is in the long term that I believe the continuing meaningfulness of mystical experience becomes a ground of clear disanalogy with other, non-veridical apprehensions. In the very short-term a variety of experiences can appear meaningful and then cease to be so when the experient returns

to everyday consciousness. The drug-taker may, for a while, find meaning in the 'universe is a red line', say, but the claim quickly becomes unintelligible to him whilst, whether we believe them to have to do with reality or not, dreams can also leave us for a time with a disturbing sense of their significance which diminishes on waking. Occasionally, as when the mystic believes he has grasped the meaning of the universe, it is stated that he no longer comprehends what this meaning was but, even in these cases, the subjective significance of the event does not seem to be diminished for it was still the moment of contact with the almighty or a higher realm. We may remember vivid dreams over many years but it is not only that we forget what meaning they had for us but that they have little continuing relevance either - I underline that I am discussing only the subjective perception of significance and not, say, freudian analysis in terms of which the dream might be thought of as giving valid information. Perhaps continuing significance is linked to the appearance of reality and the validity the experience is thought to have and it could be that, in other cultures than ours in which dreams are treated as predictive, these also might be felt to have a continuing importance and be seen as the lynch-pin to which all experience is compared and related. However, it is rare indeed to hear of anyone say of any other type of non-veridical experience 'this has been the anchor of my life which has given it meaning for over thirty years' and which 'I rely on and turn to when troubled' and in terms of which 'I understand all that has subsequently happened to me'. It would be rare indeed to find a veridical experience of which such things could be said.

One of the curiosities of long-term significance is that so much that subsequently happens to the experient can be understood in terms of a

perception that is non-natural or discontinuous with mundane existence. It appears to the individuals concerned that the meaning or significance of the mystical event is ever unfolding, strengthening them in adversity - 'if I live to be 100, I shall never forget, I knew I would never be alone again' (38) - re-inforcing or bringing a new positive approach to life - 'I could not look at my fellow men without remembering that the spirit of God burned in each of them and we were in the truest sense brothers' - and in many other ways affecting the outlook and life style of the experient. Horne introduced a 'casual' and 'serious' dichotomy to distinguish between those cases in which the long-term consequences were marked and those in which they seemed slight but whether in reality lives were changed by this sort of experience, the subject invariably has the perception that it has been changed markedly and in not one but many ways. The comprehensive nature of the effect mystical experience has is difficult to account for. It would be understandable if one's religious knowledge increased as a result of a mystical experience, but that one should see the whole of one's life experience in a different light is a remarkable tribute to the power and felt importance of these insights. Even if we believed that a memorable dream was predictive it is unlikely that this would re-orientate us and would come to dominate all our thinking and none but the most traumatic earthly experiences would colour our perception of all subsequent experience for the rest of our days. It is possible that, since all the reports of mystical experience we have have been volunteered, that this characteristic is over-represented or over-emphasised. Presumably, if the experience had no continuing significance, it would be disregarded and not reported at all, though we have no reason to suppose this is the case. Nor are the effects quantifiable and we only have a subjective perception to go on that there is a diminution of neurosis, a sense of increased optimism, comfort and altruism and so forth yet the firm impression is that these experiences are felt to exert a powerful, comprehensive and continuing effect on the

way individuals subsequently interpret the world and live their lives.

Some psychologists, such as Batson and Ventis, treat this feature as evidence that cognitive processes have been radically restructured. I shall later offer a number of considerations against this view, not least that whilst the changed view of self and the world lasts a very long time, it can be intermittent in nature also, but perhaps the most important question for now is whether we should think of this continuing significance as something logically related to the original experience or as something contingent. Psychological and physiological explanations aside, one might argue that there is a logical connection between the intrusion of a seemingly real non-natural experience and the subsequent development of what Margolis describes as 'a metaphysical world view', increased altruism etc. as one could not have such an experience without attempting to incorporate it with all the meaning it is found to have in one's world view with largely predictable results. Alternatively one might suggest that the development of new beliefs and patterns of behaviour are only contingently related to the experience depending more on religio-cultural background, personal predispositions and all the other fortuitous encounters of life. In this latter case the significance reported is largely retrospective and, whilst we could still say that, like other traumatic events, the mystical experience is a kind of landmark in the life of the experient, it is one which has no intrinsic meaning long-term but only that which is subsequently invested in it. This might be the case, but it is noteworthy that mystics claim that the experience is imprinted in their memories. If this can be accepted they are not free to add or take away from the meaning it was originally felt to have to accommodate subsequent needs. This is not to say that the subjective perception of the mystical event is fixed and without evolution for a lifetime, only that mystics do not

appear to keep 'changing their story' on the basis of personal need or suggestion as hysterics or the feeble-minded might nor, come to that, would they appear to embroider or elaborate on the main events as the years go past. This consistency not merely shows them, as a rule, to be credible witnesses but suggests that the continuing significance is related to the impact the experience first made rather than that a traumatic event is simply used as a focus for whatever hopes or fears the individual might subsequently wish it to embody for them. I certainly incline towards the former view, partly because, short of repressing the memory of it, which mystics manifestly do not, there is a psychological necessity for us to make a coherent whole out of our experience, however diverse, and, psychologically, it would not be possible for us to keep this striking memory on a shelf apart from our other experience. Perhaps, more importantly, because we have the evidence of many cases where life-long commitments have been made on the basis of such experiences and kept. After any number of real and non-veridical experiences, we may make commitments and rapidly become disillusioned with them but there are many, often anecdotal, accounts of mystics perceiving that such and such is the only course their life can take and never regretting building a new life around this premiss whatever vicissitudes they might meet. Clearly not every mystic feels himself called to a vocation but where the experience is understood to be a personal call, this would appear to provide sufficient reason and motivation to embark on a new life, despite the scepticism of the modern world, and a sufficiently strong conviction to sustain this course. This is pure speculation in the absence of a detailed analysis of what mystics themselves would offer as the inspiration for any changes that subsequently came about, but a number of biographers suggest that, for their subjects, there is one experience

which proves a turning point and which motivates them for the rest of their lives in a way which suggests a logical or even organic connection between mystical experience and the way this comes to dominate subsequent beliefs and actions. It certainly seems reasonable to say that mystical experiences are perceived to be good, sometimes compelling, reasons for believing or doing something, and even in the long-term they are offered as sufficient justification for a belief or course of action.

The meaningfulness of the experience for the subject both in the short and long term and the degree of felt importance this has, distinguishes mystical experience as a class, though the feature may not be state-specific as individual cases of memorable dreams, traumatic, mundane experience and the like may share all these features to some extent. It poses many questions for the philosophy of mind and the psychology of belief for which no certain solutions exist, but it is perhaps sufficient to note here that non-natural experience is found to be intensely meaningful at a subjective level in a way that many other experiences, veridical and private, are not.

2) MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE IS MEANINGFUL FOR A WIDER AUDIENCE ALSO.

"The universe is love" is intelligible in a way that the "universe is a red line" is not. Perhaps it is no more than an accidental consonance with man's long religious traditions but it seems that most mystical claims about the meaning and nature of such experience can be understood widely, perhaps universally. We each, given the slightest acquaintance with religious thought, can comprehend to our own satisfaction at least - what it is that mystics are saying. Their more complex expressions may not be immediately cogitable - 'the presence of the Holy Trinity' requires specific religious knowledge - and, as noted above, we rapidly run into problems when mystics use

religious language, but their experiences are meaningful to us to some degree and this raises a number of issues which cannot be done justice to here. The relationship between individual experience of the divine and the growth of religious traditions, for example, is obviously a complex and contentious question and it is perhaps sufficient to note here that because religions do provide contexts in terms of which mystics can describe their experience, we find what they are saying both intelligible and to some degree significant. This may be no more noteworthy than the fact that "the bishop moves diagonally" is intelligible to us in the context of the rules of chess but it is interesting that we find mystical experience meaningful and can, rightly or wrongly, apply the logical considerations of theology to it when virtually all other non-natural experience is a closed book to us. This is not to deny that psycho-analysts, amongst others, have found meanings in dreams or that we can recognize patterns in hallucinations, say - the tunnel, the spiral etc. - only that reporting talking in a dream to one's grandfather, say, or seeing "pink elephants", is not significant in the way that a recognition of eternity, divinity etc. is held by many to be, for such claims are simply thought of as private and without any intrinsic meaning or wider relevance.

This semantic feature can go beyond finding a minimal intelligibility in the claims of mystics for we can discuss and analyse these claims in terms of the structured beliefs of traditions in the context of which they make sense. We might ask, for example, whether this was an authentic experience of Jesus or how it is that a man is able to experience eternity or infinity. I am not convinced that it is useful to ask such questions but merely note that they can be meaningfully asked whereas we would not think it meaningful to have asked De Quincey,

say, whether the 'damned crocodile' which haunted his dreams was authentic or how it was possible for it to be 'multiplied in a thousand repetitions'.(39) Is it a mere predilection on our part for religio-philosophical questions that makes us think that we can ask meaningful questions about mystical claims but not about the others, or is there something about this class of claim - the apparent universal relevance of the signs employed perhaps, that makes it more than a game we have chosen to play with a few arbitrarily selected utterances? It is unfortunately rare to find philosophers of religion who concern themselves with the 'semiotics' of religious language, but that they do analyse mystical claims and find this activity meaningful is enough to distinguish these claims from others which are widely regarded as private.

It may be objected that not all mystical claims are meaningful and there are certainly some which seem to fall beyond sense. In Zen, the master gives his pupil a Koan - a quite senseless riddle - and it is only when this is 'understood' that the pupil makes the grade. Clearly one cannot discuss the meaning of the riddle or of what is taking place but it could be argued that something meaningful is taking place for the master recognizes when the pupil has 'understood' and there are many accounts, not all apocryphal, of the apparently senseless conversations which then ensue with every sign of mutual recognition. Even in this extreme case it might then still be possible to argue that the meaning a mystic finds is not only subjective but can be and is shared by a wider, though limited, audience. One also occasionally encounters what appears to be a simple incoherence. Attar's 'I went from God to God, until they cried from me in me, saying, "O thou I" for I have reached annihilation in God', for example, appears beyond comprehension. It could however be that such a form was chosen on the Koan principle or because, in some way, it evokes the significance the experience was felt to have. I would

not wish to argue that there is any conventional way to understand such sentences but as drunks sometimes understand each other when no one else can, perhaps other ecstasies could penetrate Attar's meaning though the recognition would not be logical. Such cases present us with a considerable difficulty for, if they have any wider significance, it is only for those who are in an appropriate frame of mind and it becomes a moot point whether we can talk of a valid recognition of their meaning as distinct from being found meaningful at a subjective level. It might be simpler to accept that these are atypical examples which, like many other non-veridical experiences, are inherently vacuous though felt by the experient to be charged with meaning but as I, at least, associate mystical experience with wider significance and as so many cases have this quality, I would prefer to argue either that they can be comprehended or alternatively that they are not authentically mystical. It seems to me that the concept of the mystical must break down if we are only discussing the subjective perception of meaning, for they could have no common identity even at the descriptive level and would be beyond typification. As I am attempting to characterize the mystical experience I naturally do not wish to be forced to this conclusion too soon.

I have then argued that mystical experience is intensely significant at the subjective level and that the sense it appears to have does not seem to be idiosyncratically invested in the experience but rather related to the nature of the perception the mystic has in either a logical or an alogical way. I have also argued that the sense of significance continues indefinitely and that it can be shared with others even to the point of being logically analysed. If I am justified in making these points, we have taken an important step in characterizing the experience and distinguishing it from others which either do not

appear meaningful for long or which have an entirely private significance. Naturally I recognize that these criteria are, at this stage, entirely arbitrary and are, as descriptive features, valuable at all only in so far as they preserve that special identity that mystical experiences have always been thought to have i.e. that they are about something which has a relevance for mankind as distinct from being private and, at best, accidentally intelligible. Beyond noting that the meaning these experiences have is non-natural and discontinuous, I would not wish further to specify what it consists of, though I mention one feature below which is commonly reported. I will however wish to argue later that the meaning which these experiences appear to have is in itself significant and we may hypothesize from this about its causes. Without this further step I do not believe it would be easy to justify the selection of this feature as a descriptive characteristic though ~~any~~ testable theory based on it is clearly a very long way off.

Before concluding this chapter it is worth mentioning that a case could be made for other descriptive features that may better typify mystical experience than the two I have chosen. I have omitted a number of emotions - joy, for example, - feelings; peace, quasi-physical feelings; heat, tingling and the like. I have done this partly because no one of these is necessarily reported though in various combinations, where we have any information, they usually seem to be present, partly because, as James noted, many such effects are shared with 'persons of non-mystical mind' and thus may 'have no essential mystical significance' (40) and partly because if one does concentrate on these and other aspects of the 'state of experiencing' at too early a stage it would tend to dominate the analysis. Emotions and quasi-physical feelings do suggest naturalistic processes and these will be looked at later. I wanted here to see

if an analysis of the experience suggested anything else as well. One might mention transience, though not all mystical experiences are momentary, for some can last with greater or lesser intensity for months. The problem with transience is that whilst most experiences are short this often does not well typify the subjective perception which, in wholly experiential terms, is often said to be immeasurable. One might finally mention 'inner subjective quality', a phrase borrowed from Hood. Whatever it is the mystic is aware of, it is never a lifeless state, but in some sense vibrant and living. Berenson's experience of carvings illustrates this quality as well as any; 'suddenly stem, tendril and foliage became alive ... I felt as one illumined, and beheld a world where every outline, every edge and every surface was in a living relation to me and not, as hitherto, in a merely cognitive one'. (41)

Even self-annihilation or the 'void' is not perceived in wholly negative terms for 'this is the brightly pure', 'the teeming emptiness' etc. I do not doubt that this well typifies mystical experience and distinguishes it as a class from mundane experience and other non-natural ones as well which can be dead/'flat' etc. but, whilst it may be related both to reality and meaningfulness, I cannot see a theoretical use for it and would not wish to argue either that it defines the experience for it is not unequivocally reported in every case.

SUMMARY.

I have argued:

1. That there are two limitations on analysing the mystical experience from the reports we are given of it. Firstly, that any characterization we make has in itself no empirical validity and, since it is unquantifiable, must be made to serve some theoretical purpose which can be tested. Secondly, in the case of mystical experience, there are formidable problems in the

way of even a descriptive characterization, for our sources are uncertain, the language obscure and we do not, in any event, know how far we are being offered a comparable picture as opposed to an ideological construction, or even whether there is such a thing as a 'basic' mystical experience. For these two reasons, if one is to analyse the accounts, one must select features which are quite unequivocally present and further demonstrate that they are relevant to the explanation of what is taking place. Without doing this it could never be shown that the selection of cases is other than arbitrary for it cannot be said that mystical experience manifestly constitutes an identifiable and self-defining class at the descriptive level.

2. In view of these limitations I believe it is possible to pick out only two characteristics which I treat as defining, though far from typifying what we understand by mystical experience. A. Mystical experience invariably appears real and because it shares features in common - clarity, stability and coherence - I suggest the reason for this is that, like our everyday, waking experience, it is a sensory or quasi-sensory phenomenon. It may be unclear what we mean by a sensory phenomenon but that we mean something by it, and distinguish it from other experiences of imagination etc., is certain. I use this distinction in the next chapter to make a theoretical point and whilst we must wait on science to explain what experimental basis the distinction has, it seems likely that it will provide an empirical basis for the identification of mystical experience as a class.

B. Mystical experience is invariably found by the subject to be meaningful both in the short and long term and has a wider significance as well. Taken together as one characteristic, meaningfulness also

appears to distinguish mystical experience as a class. There are a variety of uncertainties here. Is the meaning arbitrarily invested in his experience by the subject on ideological grounds alone or might there be a logical or alogical connection with the meaning found in it? Do others find mysticism significant because it is about factors relevant to the human condition which most can recognize or is it simply an accident that we find it significant because we happen to have a history of supernatural beliefs in terms of which mystical claims can be construed? Clearly any theoretical move from the fact that mystical experience is found to be meaningful will be contentious but, taken in conjunction with apparent reality and some other features of the class still to be discussed, I believe it will be possible to make some observations from it that will suggest that it relates to a factor which could give the class an empirical as well as a descriptive identity.

I then offer these two characteristics not merely because they characterize an arbitrarily selected group but because it is possible they will be found to give this group a theoretical identity. If one day this is established it will show up the shortsightedness of many empiricists, such as Moehle, who have dismissed any analysis of mystical claims in favour of church attendance and other more quantifiable factors but I accept there is a long way to go before it can be shown that any analysis of the subjective claims can contribute to our understanding of what it is that is really taking place. Certainly, apart from apparent reality and meaningfulness, there is very little more we can say about the subjective experience or, if we could, that there is any conceivable point in saying it.

CHAPTER 3

A MENTALISTIC EXPLANATION?

'Nature is a dull affair, soundless, scentless, colourless, merely the hurrying of material endlessly, meaninglessly' - A.N. Whitehead.

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'There is no such order as "Now see this leaf green" - Wittgenstein.

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I wish now to address the epistemological issue that surfaced in the last chapter which plays a central role in any understanding of mystical experience. Though I will elucidate it further below, at its simplest the question is this. Are the experiences we have, mystical and mundane, the product of a mentalistic or, in its true sense, psychological structuring of an otherwise 'soundless, scentless, colourless' world or is it that the world of experience, in part at least, is something 'forced upon us' whether or not we have acquired concepts from our social environment? This question relates to a much wider-ranging controversy that divides psychologists and researchers of mystical experience alike but I underline that I am only interested in the narrower issue of whether the structures which make experience possible are acquired and mutable, i.e. psychological or innate. Our whole explanatory approach hangs upon this single question. Influential authors such as Katz and Sunden take a mentalistic line derived from S-H-R psychology and argue that mystical experience can only be understood in terms of the cognitive structures that mystics acquire from their respective traditions which shape the experience they have. I, on the other hand, as others have before, reject this account on both analytic and empirical grounds. Whilst accepting that psychological constructions play a major role in human consciousness, I do not accept that these have anything more than a peripheral effect on sense perception which, I shall argue, constitutes a distinct category of experience. If my arguments are persuasive neither

sensory stimuli nor our subjective experience of these can be accounted for in terms of 'schemas' or structures that are anything other than innate or necessary and thus we are looking for physiological processes and the triggers which bring these into play rather than towards religious traditions and other ideological factors which may mould only our psychological experience.

In this chapter there are in fact two principal arguments. Firstly that sense perception is not much affected by psychological processes and, secondly, that mystical experience is a form of sense perception. The second argument is necessary for, whilst the first may be accepted, this does not entail that we treat mystical experience as a sub-species of sense perception for it could be treated as are a number of other quasi-experiential phenomena which may be accounted for wholly in mentalistic terms. Though I believe both arguments to be interesting in their own right, I shall endeavour to treat the first as concisely as possible for, whilst this epistemological question is of fundamental importance to all that follows, the mentalistic position is nevertheless an issue which has been imported, perhaps unnecessarily, into the study of mystical experience and in this form is one which relates to wider questions which are only of marginal interest to us. Before beginning my discussion of the mentalistic argument it is perhaps advisable to enter here a series of caveats and explanations which will deal with some extraneous issues and more fully define the line of argument I shall be taking.

1) In arguing that mystical experience is a sensory phenomenon, I am not attempting to reopen the ontological question, as it were, by the back door. There is not even an implication of existence for reasons

discussed in chapter 1, if the experience of God is found to arise from innate sensory processes rather than from psychological ones. As, for example, in the case of the 'phantom limb' syndrome, all existence claims arising from mystical perceptions as a class may be false. My position is not then one of naive realism and indeed it makes no difference to my argument whether our sensory experience, mystical and mundane alike, is veridical or not. Since I include sensory experience arising from sensory damage, e.g. tinnitus, within the class of sense perception, there can be no implication concerning the ontological status of this class. However, conversely, it also needs to be said that as I do not use the phrase sense perception to imply existence but only to refer to a particular type of experience exhibiting certain characteristics the lack of empirical evidence to support mystical claims is no reason to adopt a mentalistic rather than a physiological account in this case. Certainly there is nothing in the concept of sense perception that rules out the possibility that the claims arising from a particular sub-class of sense experience are in every instance false. I suspect that part of the reason that mentalistic explanations have been so readily adopted in the case of mystical experience at the expense of naturalistic accounts is due to the fact that there is no empirical evidence for mystical claims. Mainstream psychology has always been constrained by physical and biological factors and it is only in cases such as mystical experience that wholly mentalistic accounts could seem plausible at all though I shall argue that this plausibility is achieved only by ignoring the biological parameters implicit in the sensory form mystical experience takes.

2) Though the first section is devoted to explaining why sense perception should not be accounted for in terms of structures which are variable and tend to abstraction, I wish here to give my reasons

for distinguishing sense perception from a more general and all-embracing notion of experience, a distinction which is central to my argument. Unlike, say, Fodor I do not take a 'formalist' position with respect to consciousness and therefore do not reject the notion that many of the structures involved in thought and awareness are acquired rather than innate or rigidly fixed responses. In the previous chapter I accepted the role of ideology, a notion which encompasses acquired religio-cultural conceptions, creativity etc. in the matrix of higher order conceptualization through which we recognize, interpret and explain the world and find in it meanings, associations and personal significance. It is not clear how far this matrix is free from physical constraints - for example, it seems that our recognition of kinship is chemical, see also the discussion of the 'visual cliff' below - but it is evident enough that we learn, compute and that our memory edits and confabulates past experience to such a degree that an account of consciousness must include a psychological dimension. Accepting this, however, is not to say that mentalistic structures explain or are relevant to everything we are conscious of.

Wittgenstein drew attention to the distinction between sense experience and other, psychological, forms of experience: 'seeing as .. is not part of perception. And for that reason it is like seeing and again not like .. the flashing of an aspect (i.e. a psychological construction) on us seems half visual experience, half thought' (1). I believe he is correct to point out that there is a qualitative difference between sense perceptions and other aspects of our experience. The ink blot or Rorschach tests embody this distinction for at the level of sense perception these are merely disordered patches of shading - which we can see as such - yet they can also be 'seen as' a number of different

things according to the psychological constructions we place upon them. The distinction - at the level of subjective experience - to the sane mind at least - is unmistakable. The former is something concrete presenting us with ostensibly valid information about the world, in short has the appearance of reality, whereas the latter forms no part of the 'objective' reality our senses present us with. Seeing you 'as' my friend, for example, is not at all the same as seeing that you are white or black, tall or short. Whatever the reason I have for my conception of your status, your friendship is not something 'forced upon me' as your size is for it is a non-concrete perception which, at most, has some intangible effect on my concrete impressions. I do not rule out the possibility that psychological factors may influence our sense perceptions, it is possible that two processes - in particular - selective attention and enhancement, discussed below - both have some impact on the concrete reality we are presented with but not to the extent that we can treat sense perceptions and other forms of perception/conception as interchangeable. It is not simply that there is a qualitative difference but that sense perception and other forms of experience, and this is the main thrust of my argument, have different characteristics which are not easily explained in terms of a mentalistic account alone. In particular I will argue that sense perceptions are immutable and universal quite unlike psychological conceptions which are mutable and idiosyncratic. We, I will argue, must all agree, if our attention is drawn to it, that you are white or black and we cannot see you now as one colour now as another whereas the question of whether you are likeable is a matter of individual preference and it is quite feasible for me to like you one moment and dislike you the next.

It will be my contention that 'experience' requires a more complex

analysis than is usually given. On the one hand there are concrete impressions which, I shall argue, are immutable and universal and on the other a wider consciousness that is malleable, idiosyncratic and contains no necessary contents. We may lose universality of explanation by giving these distinctions a theoretical basis but I believe any attempt to describe consciousness solely in terms of idiosyncratic abstractions on the one hand or 'formalistic' constraints on the other is bound to fail in view of the tensions between the different types of experience we have. Rather than try to wed the two schools of thought to produce a compromise that might explain all our experience as a mixture of biology and mentalistic structures, I prefer simply to argue that biology explains one type and psychology the other for I find few reasons to believe that mentalistic abstractions play any role in sense perception. The epistemological framework from which we work is central to our understanding of mystical experience. I shall argue that in mystical experience - indeed what in large part defines mystical experience - we find these same sensory or concrete qualities that we do in our direct perceptions of the world and if the latter are best understood in biological terms, so are the former which is to reduce mentalistic structures and the social influences upon them to a marginal role in the explanation of what is taking place. Two examples of the different types of religious experience we may have shows a parallel dichotomy to that between sense perception and other forms of awareness in mundane experience. In this perception/conception of the divine there is no direct, concrete experience of 'God': 'the entire bone-dry earth was living then, covered by new shoots green ... I was greatly moved and felt God's hand behind everything' (2). Whereas in 'the Holy Spirit descended upon me in a manner that seemed to go through me, body and soul. I could feel the impression like a wave

of electricity going through and through me ... in waves of liquid love ... I can recollect distinctly that it seemed to fan me like immense wings' (3), the perception of divinity has a concrete directness about it which is fully analogous to our sense impressions of the physical environment. My argument is then that sense perceptions require a quite different explanation to that given other forms of awareness and that mystical experience can be defined as a sub-species of sense perception.

It is perhaps worthwhile, in passing, to mention here that throughout I use vision as my paradigm of sense experiences. Whilst I believe that the other senses have analogies with vision to a greater or lesser degree, I am not suggesting that the points I make about vision are equally relevant to all five senses though they share in its concrete and universal nature. For example, I shall argue that we cannot see red as blue for any psychological reason whatsoever whereas one could conceivably take the burning sensations of extreme cold to be heat. Nevertheless there seem to be sufficient analogies between the senses for me to discuss sense perception rather than vision alone.

3) In the previous chapter I **accepted that, in the case of mystical experience, we can get no more than a general idea of what the sensory or quasi-sensory experience - and if my arguments are persuasive we can use this term - is like for, lacking objective reference or even an appeal to common experience, we can only get at the 'experience itself' or 'raw data' through the ideological constructions and language in which mystics report them and this layer can never be wholly discounted or peeled back.** Thus far I cannot but agree with Katz when he writes that

'the only evidence we have ... is the account given by the mystics of their experience ... no scholar can get behind the autobiographical fragment to the putative "pure experience" whatever one holds that to be'.(4) However, it does not follow that 'these (accounts) are therefore the data for study and analysis'. (5) Simply because we only have culturally conditioned reports to work with it is not necessarily valid to attempt to explain mystical experience in terms of correlations between religious traditions and the claims made or even analyse mystical reports in any detail. The only validity such procedures have is if, as Katz does, one believes that socially acquired concepts 'preform', 'structure' and 'limit' the sensory or quasi-sensory experience mystics have as well as the terms in which they report these. If one does not believe this the 'conservative' nature of mystical reports, say, is without significance for it is entirely predictable that mystics will use the concepts that are available to them in order to describe their experience but this is all but irrelevant to any causal account of the experience or even to any clear understanding of what it felt like to have such an experience. The fact that the only record we have of these experiences is in terms of socially acquired concepts does not entail that we adopt a mentalistic approach nor does it give validity to forms of analysis suggested by such an approach for such methods are only worthwhile if the epistemological model which underpins them is justified and are not valid regardless of 'whatever one holds that to be'. I am therefore arguing that one can take a view on the epistemological question and posit a distinction between the experience mystics have and their report of it, for the reasons given in this chapter, even though we cannot get a clear picture of what this experience is like.

4) I use the terms mentalistic, psychological and contextual interchangeably

to refer to structures or concepts which are acquired, mutable and which are not a necessary factor in human consciousness, though no doubt in many cultures certain acquired concepts are difficult to avoid. I should also make clear that I am not much concerned with the mentalistic-physical problem but only with whether the structures involved in mystical experience might be acquired or innate. The mind-body problem is simply how can mentalistic structures affect physical processes when, as Hyland puts it, this breaks the rule that 'causal relationships cannot exist between hypothetical constructs of differing ontological status' (6) i.e. how can an acquired idea or belief lead to physical or even quasi-physical experience? It is something contextualists might wish to explain though for my part I do not see this as a major criticism of the mentalistic position as acquisition does not rule out a physiological explanation. If we use Searle's image of a footprint on wet sand to describe the way we come to recognize things, there is no reason why acquired concepts should not make some physiological impact which in turn has an effect on the way we experience and recognize the world for there are undoubtedly similarities between mentalistic and physical input when both are reduced to electrical or neuro-chemical impulses. Whatever the explanation of psycho-somatic conditions, I am only using terms such as mentalistic to distinguish those structures we acquire and which may, however difficult it is, be changed from those which appear to be ineluctable.

5) In defining mentalistic structures or concepts as those which are not necessary factors in human consciousness, I am in fact grouping together two distinct psychological positions. On the one hand these concepts may be acquired from our social environment and on the other may be

generated through creativity and computation. Perhaps much of our ideology is a mixture of the two. However, it is with acquired concepts that I am principally concerned here for, whilst it is credible to argue that mystical experiences are the product of various widespread religious traditions, it is not credible to argue that creativity alone - that is without any contextual background - could be responsible for the reports which consistently have so much in common. I shall discuss creativity as formulated by Batson and Ventis, Horne and others later in this chapter but, whilst it obviously forms part of the mentalistic account, it appears to me that this account stands or falls on an analysis of the argument that culture shapes experience and thus creativity, computation, restructuring etc. are secondary to this claim.

6) I also use the terms natural concept/innate structures interchangeably. As this is not a treatise on neurology, I make no attempt here to explain what these processes might be but only make the point that various structures or processes governing sensory experience appear inescapable and appear to be part of the human condition regardless of the social concepts with which we have been inculcated. It is worth pointing out however that, whilst I believe such structures to be inescapable, they are not necessarily unchanging. It is quite possible that even innate structures evolve and develop with time though this is a development over which neither the subject himself nor his social environment exerts any control. As development and decay are so much a part of the human condition, I, at least, find no difficulty in accepting that, if innate structures determine what it is we experience, these too may undergo change with time or may even be changed through injury, such processes as trepanning or chemical intervention and, whilst the latter brings in

the question of volition there appears to me a fundamental distinction between affecting the operation of innate processes with wholly predictable consequences and acquiring particular cognitive structures fortuitously or even at will.

7) Finally it is worth answering here any student of mysticism who may object to my ready acceptance that mystical experience depends upon human structures be they psychological or innate and who prefers instead an older view that such experiences are non-corporeal requiring no intermediary processes. It is perhaps worthwhile giving here my reasons why I believe the central argument to be about what kind of structures are involved in mystical experience rather than whether any structures are involved at all.

Some mystics who claim to know the divine by acquaintance have reported that it is not through bodily senses that they know Him but in spirit and in this their beliefs accord with the understanding of some theologians. It is hard to assess whether the theological argument persuaded some mystics that they 'saw' whatever they saw in the 'spirit' or whether it was the experiential evidence (it would be interesting to know if modern mystics ignorant of the theological niceties claimed as often today as in the past that they were in a non-corporeal state during their experience) but in any event a position grew up that (some) mystical apprehensions were wholly non-bodily. Teresa d'Avila, exhibiting both the influence of theology and experience, describes her 'spiritual marriage' thus: 'I believe no door is required to enter ... the innermost centre of the soul where God Himself must dwell ... I say, no door is required, for all I have hitherto described seems to come through the

senses or faculties ... but what passes in the Union is very different. Here God appears in the soul's centre ... reveals to it His own heavenly glory in a far more subtle way than by any vision or spiritual delight. As far as can be understood, the soul, I mean the spirit of the soul, is made one with God who is Himself a spirit' (7). Teresa uses the analogy of light from two windows that meet to describe a union with God that seems to the experient to take place in a wholly non-physical way.

The theological argument that if God can be conjoined at all it is only through the medium of love or otherwise in 'spirit to spirit' contact - the 'divine spark' argument - appears to have grown out of the metaphysical schema of body-soul-spirit which was useful in preserving such distinctions as creature and creator. In our rational age, to postulate divine predicates and to argue from these to a position that, say, the corrupted body could not possibly be intermingled with the divine substance or infinity be encompassed by our finite senses, is a procedure that carries little weight, for it is the very existence of a divinity about which anything can be predicated that is in question. Equally, the religious schema of body-soul-spirit has little intellectual justification in the post-Humeian era, for it lacks parsimony; far simpler to argue that everything we experience arises through the medium of psycho-physiology. The complexity of her explanation may not have struck Teresa in an age when body-soul-spirit represented received wisdom but epistemological dualism nowadays appears extravagant to explain a sub-type of a rare experience (only some mystical experiences appear to be non-corporeal). It is true that Stace appears to accept this metaphysical extravagance when distinguishing the 'unmediated' from the obviously corporeal visionary experiences etc. but whilst it is true that the former

are more highly prized by mystics and differ experientially, this is no reason to suppose that they have different aetiologies. This is not to say that seemingly unmediated experience can be explained in psycho-physiological terms, only that until the possibility of such an explanation is exhausted, it is simpler to hypothesize that all experience comes through the medium of psycho-physiological structures, especially as Teresa admits that even some mystical experience does. (It might of course be argued that mystical experience apart, there are reasons for positing the existence of a non-corporeal identity. In sub-atomic physics there is a continued common identity of particles which have been separated and between which there is no possibility of material connection. Groups of humans and animals both appear to acquire skills which have been discovered elsewhere independently without the usual forms of communication which suggests that memory and knowledge are common property amongst species yet such examples do not actually demand the hypothesis of a non-material entity). Another difficulty with the body-spirit schema is that it is not easy to comprehend how constructs of differing ontological status can influence each other, yet it is clear from the 'swoons', 'overmastering feelings', 'amorous exclamations', feelings of 'sweetness' or 'aridity' mentioned by Teresa that the 'spiritual' produces bodily effects. Many theologians have treated the spirit-body relationship like a one-way valve that allows love, for instance, to permeate from God who, for His part, cannot be corrupted by physical influences (though the devil, a spiritual being, was said to have been corrupted and fallen to earth). Yet, if this is so, given their differing status, there will be very great difficulty in explaining how spirit and body are linked, far simpler to ascribe a somatic origin to the 'spiritual experience'

and the bodily effects which accompany it. If the epistemological dualism of some theologies is correct, it would follow that no natural factors thrown up by research would be relevant to the explanation of a spiritual experience. However, whilst the scientific/religious debate was more fully discussed in chapter 1, there seems little reason to accept the theological analysis that in mystical experience we are dealing with a wholly different category of experience unmediated by physiology for, as a starting point, it leads to complexity and difficulties of explanation that can quite simply be avoided.

The second argument, that from experience, is not a satisfactory basis for a physical-spiritual dichotomy either. If one feels that one's experience is not bodily and does not come through the senses, this may be the basis for an idiosyncratic belief in bodily and spiritual experiences but is not a grounds for an epistemological argument, though the very feeling is something that needs to be explained. The subjective viewpoint of some mystics in this respect is further undermined by the claim that only some mystical experiences are 'spiritual' - 'all I have hitherto described seems to come through the senses' - and a simpler explanation is needed if it is said that God can be experienced both bodily and spiritually. The 'non-sensory' nature of mystical experience is quite widely reported both in and outside of the context of 'divine union' and it is perhaps worthwhile considering whether this can be viewed in rational terms without the need to posit the existence of a spiritual entity that is capable of experience independent of the body.

An out-of-the-body experience is undeniably a good experiential ground for

accepting an epistemological dualism, St. Paul, for example, reported that he was often out-of-the-body when his experiences of God and his revelations occurred. However, I wish to ignore this type of experience, for autoscopy is very rarely associated with perceptions of the divine and though it is unlikely to be explained in simple naturalistic terms, it is not a compelling reason to accept the body-spirit thesis either. In Teresa's case and in that of most other mystics who believe their experience to have been non-corporeal, there is no perceived separation of soul and body; rather their experience appears to them to be unlike their usual sensory experience in that there are none of the usual points of reference - time, space, subject/object distinction and so forth. Without seeking to explain the phenomenon, the fact that there is no sense of identity and reference does not demonstrate that some other entity, the spirit, is the subject of the experience or that what is taking place is non-physiological. A variety of quite common examples show that awareness is not dependent on a sense of personal identity, physical feelings, sense of time etc. The psychological phenomenon of dissociation, various meditational mind states and chemically induced ones, 'peak' and 'ecstatic' experience all show, in a non-mystical context, that it is possible to be aware of whatever it is that one is aware of in an egoless, often timeless, way. I recall, when having taken a sleeping pill, that my apprehensions became contained in a diminishing circle surrounded by a total darkness. It was as if my mental imagery was taking place within a void for it was divorced from physical feeling or sense of identity or time. It is perhaps also relevant that sometimes in love or hatred these feelings do not always appear to be part of ourselves but rather something outside of us though both are readily

explicable in psycho-physiological terms.* I do not wish to suggest that any of this demonstrates that there is not an egoless, timeless 'spirit', merely that one does not need to posit such an entity to explain a certain mode of awareness. Perhaps 'spirit of the soul' should be read as a descriptive metaphor, though it was clearly not intended to be such, for it seems plausible to argue that the loss of ego in some mystical experiences is evidence of an unusual but natural form of mental functioning.

Taken together, I find that neither the theological argument nor the experiential one is persuasive that we are dealing with a 'spiritual' experience that is unaffected by psycho-physiological findings. The lack of parsimony, the difficulties of linking spirit with bodily effects, the precedent offered by disassociation, meditation etc. are all reasons not to posit the existence of a spirit capable of awareness over and above the sufficiently mysterious mind. It would however be a dull mind that would pretend that the spirit and its activities which are the very

* Benoit expands on this point. 'Man is conscious of this dualism which reveals itself in him by the belief that he is composed of two autonomous parts which he either calls 'body' and 'soul', 'matter' and 'spirit', 'instinct' and 'reason'. The belief in this bipartite composition expresses itself in all sorts of common sayings: 'I am master of myself', 'I cannot prevent myself from' etc. ... there are not in man two distinct parts, but only two distinct aspects of a single being ... the error of our dualistic conception does not lie in the discrimination between two aspects of us - for there are indeed two aspects - but in concluding that these two aspects are two different entities'. Hubert Benoit - The Supreme Doctrine p153 (Viking Press).

mystery the religious celebrate can at present be reduced to structures be they psychological or innate and my reasoning is only intended to show why I think it worthwhile pursuing the argument as to what type of structure might possibly be involved.

In making these seven points I hope to have removed a number of extraneous issues from the discussion which follows. The question I will address first is whether or not mentalistic explanations can be treated as a satisfactory account of that qualitatively distinct sub-type of experience - sense perception. If they are satisfactory then those influences on mentalistic structures, notably religio-cultural conceptions in the case of mystical experience, have a primary role in explaining the form the experience takes and other factors, such as peer group pressure, will explain the occurrence. If, however, as I will argue, sense perception and its analogies can only be understood in terms of innate and necessary structures, then a wholly different type of explanation will be required for this form of experience whenever it occurs.

1.

CAN A MENTALISTIC ACCOUNT BE USED TO EXPLAIN SENSE PERCEPTIONS?

The mentalistic account of experience developed from the work of Piaget and others can take a variety of forms. For my purposes, however, there are no important differences between the types as each explains all our experience as having been fashioned by cognitive structures or 'schemas' that are the acquired and abstract models that enable us to view the world in more or less idiosyncratic ways. There is nothing fixed or necessitated about our experience for these cognitive structures develop from the contingencies of socially acquired conceptions, individual creativity

and past experience. There is one point of difference though that affects the sufficiency of the explanation being offered and whilst not directly relevant to my argument is worth mentioning since it points up difficulties that throw doubt on the credibility of mentalistic accounts or, otherwise, shows them not to be self-sufficient.

STRUCTURING AND OBJECTIVE REALITY.

To give it a name, hard contextualism offers the explanation of schemas as a total account of all the experiences we have. More than any other, through authors such as Katz and Sunden, this explanation has dominated recent approaches to mystical experience and, whilst in the case of mystical experience there is no special problem with this line since mystical claims do not appear to have to do with existence, there is a general problem in accepting it as a universal explanation of experience. This difficulty is that, if human reality is structured in non-necessary ways and the 'participants actually live in different worlds!', then the world revealed by our senses has no ontological status other than that each of us chose to ascribe to it. If the world is merely a 'booming, buzzing confusion' which we each mould into subjective experience without biological constraint, any resemblance the physical world has to our experience of it is wholly accidental. We cannot therefore have any experience of an objective reality for we may only know the world relative to the concepts we bring to it. At issue is whether material science is an account of the way things are or only an account of the way things appear to us to be. One may suspect that in sub-atomic physics scientists do find what they are looking for and it is clear that scientific theories are at best approximations to the truth ever liable to change but none of

this shows that observations of the world, repeatedly and universally demonstrated, are merely psychological facts. The Berkeleyan notion that 'all these bodies which compose the mighty frame of the world have not any subsistence without a mind' (8) gives no weight to observations of the world however well attested for, on this view, all we are studying is our own perceptions of the world and not facts about the world itself. Despite attempts in phenomenism and, latterly, the anthropic principle to justify such an approach, in the face of science's success in utilizing its observations I cannot believe that it is acceptable for psychologists to deny the possibility of an objective description of reality. The problem is then one of squaring 'objective' reality, to which most of us would attest, with the notion that all reality is a human construct. Whether or not it is relevant to the restricted case of mystical experience it would be difficult to contend that hard contextualism is a credible universal explanation of experience. However, if treated as a restricted explanation only it would need to be shown why the model is relevant to mysticism even though its wider application is doubtful and how it is that mystical experience differs from mundane experience in anything other than verification which does not show, that as experiences, they differ at all.

Soft contextualism, on the other hand, not only fails to avoid the above objection but in trying to solve it suffers from unnecessary complexity, for its mentalistic account of experience is not self-sufficient. In this position not only are our schemas said to be moulded by acquired concepts and other psychological influences but by our past experience of interaction with the physical environment as well so that 'no biological or environmental constraints fully determine human thought,

but neither does any schema or cognitive structure'. (9) If this formulation only means that biology determines our impressions of the physical world, as I believe, and psychological constructs the rest of our experience, there is no need for a mentalistic account of sense perception and the problem of squaring structuring and the world is solved. However, this does not appear to be what is meant, rather it is said that all experience is mediated by schemas and all schemas are moulded both by physical and psychological influences which leads us back to the problem that we can never make an observation of the physical world undistorted by the idiosyncratic conceptions we bring to and which fashion our sense perceptions. A less extreme position than totally denying the world but still one which denies human observers any role in material science. More importantly perhaps it gives us two explanatory principles to account for experience, mentalistic structures and environmental and biological constraints. To describe experience one needs to describe these physical influences and spell out precisely what role they play in shaping schemas in addition to detailing psychological influences yet it is noteworthy that the physiological aspect of soft contextual explanations is almost invariably ignored and nowhere more so than in the case of mystical experience where I would have thought the 'raw data', that appears to represent a biological constraint, would have been of particular interest.

The tension between the physical and biological on the one hand and the notion that human experience is shaped by abstractions on the other provides grounds for strong objections to mentalistic models which even in their modified, soft, form cannot avoid the difficulties this tension poses. Since it is no part of my argument that mystical experience has

to do with existence, the criticism has only a background importance yet, if mentalistic explanations are not credible as universal accounts of experience, I wonder why they should have had such an influence on our field. In mainstream psychology there is no consensus about the mentalistic model and many researchers have been put off for just such reasons as those outlined above. Despite a great many experiments its application, even to a restricted type of experience, is widely thought to be problematic and many psychologists, perhaps the majority, would agree that the question of applying a mentalistic framework to sense perception 'simply becomes muddier and muddier ... part of an ever-increasing pile of issues which we weary of but never really settle'. (10)

THE MENTALISTIC ARGUMENT.

The point at which all mentalistic arguments converge is in the contention that all human experience is structured by the 'schemas' we each have evolved. Schemas - and I adapt this long-established Kantian term as representative of a variety of names these hypothetical structures are given - 'are the conceptual dimensions on which we scale our experience ...this ability to classify and differentiate experience enables us to construct a reality'. (11) There can be no experience without schemas and even though past experience is one factor in the development of schemas there is no direct experience of the sensory world for all present experience is mediated by past experience as well as by derived preconceptions about the way reality should appear to us to be. Psychological influences - acquired concepts, creativity etc. - apart, it could still not be argued that our experience of the world comes down to a time-lapse i.e. the red I see today is in fact the red I saw in the past - for the schemas we each have developed are not said to be

simply carbon copies of past experience but more or less abstract representations that additionally are shaped by a wide variety of psychological influences. Schemas therefore develop through learning - 'all perception involves prior learning' (12) - from past experience and from our social environment as well as through computation and creativity to form an increasingly complex set of structures which do not merely determine what our impressions of the world will be like but interlink these giving them meanings and associations, determining our reactions and so forth. It is perhaps important to underline here that these interlinked cognitive structures are said to be as responsible for our sensory impressions as for our higher order conceptualizations. 'Adults structure colour experiences along dimensions of hue, brightness and saturation ... we employ even more cognitive structures in our perceptions of other people - intelligence, attractiveness etc. The point that reality is constructed often seems unimportant because, at the level of simple direct experience, we have few difficulties in agreeing what reality is. The heat of the fire and the chill of ice are as real for you as they are for us. But the importance of the point becomes apparent when one considers more complex experiences'. (13)

The mentalistic account was developed to explain why our experience - a term to be understood in the widest sense of embracing all conscious contents - seems to be something mutable and idiosyncratic. Children, it is pointed out, go through stages in which their view of the world evolves whilst all of us have idiosyncratic approaches to the things we take note of, find meaningful, associations etc. that may change from time to time for wholly contingent reasons. In general I find the language of mentalism when applied to higher order experience quite

unexceptionable but, if my sketch is a fair one, I find the difficulties arise when we consider the case of sense perception. The problem is not the mind-body one, though it is never explained how it is these schemas structure physical processes, nor is it the denial of any direct experience of the physical world but that sense perceptions, those qualitatively distinct concrete impressions which have about them the appearance of giving us real and valid information about our environment, appear neither to evolve nor to be idiosyncratic as is required by any form of mentalistic explanation.

Exponents of the mentalistic position generally give five pieces of experimental evidence to show that sense experience, as much as any other element of consciousness, is something shaped and structured by the abstractions we each, uniquely, develop. These are 1) selective attention, 2) perceptual constancy, 3) Gestalt shifts, 4) closure and 5) misperception. I wish to examine these but before doing so wish first to take a general look at the acceptability of mentalistic accounts of sense perception for if, as I believe, there is no good reason in principle to adopt a psychological account there may be other, better, ways to look at the evidence that has been offered for it. As will be seen, I do not wholly deny a role for psychology in sense perception, two processes- selective attention and enhancement - in particular appear relevant though each has only a peripheral role. However, I wish to concentrate on the three propositions that form the basis of any mentalistic account: a) that our sensory capacities develop, b) that sense perception is idiosyncratic and c) that it is mutable and argue that the first gives no reason to adopt a mentalistic account and that the latter two are patently false. If, as I believe, there is no general reason to adopt mentalistic accounts as there is no evidence

that they are relevant to sense perception we may find that the experiments have insufficient weight to carry conviction and can be best understood in other ways.

A) The development of sense perception.

Mentalistic arguments from development appear to presume that development involves psychological factors - described in the language of mentalism as learning, acquisition of schemas etc. - but I wish to argue that there is no reason why in the rare cases development is manifest it should be understood in this way at all. Three points appear relevant to this discussion: I) that development of sense perception is most uncommon, II) that where it does occur it is more simply explained in the language of fulfilling innate potential and III) that the notion of innate potential is confirmed by the rigid limits set on the development of sensory capacities.

I) There seems little scope for using arguments from the development of sense perception in the case of most of our sensory experience. There never was a time, say, when I had partially developed colour vision. Though some individuals cannot perceive some colours for biological reasons or injury, I cannot imagine what would be meant by "he's just now starting to see green". Colours have been integral parts of my experience since I first became conscious of the world and, though I only have memory to rely on, apples have not become more green in the intervening years nor pillar boxes more red. It would be a complex argument to say that this is a trick of memory colouring in my earliest impressions and an incredible one in so far as no one has claimed that

green is different for a child than for an adult. As with colour so with much else that gives us concrete impressions of our environment. There is therefore no need to introduce arguments from development into an account of most elements of sense perception.

II) In the literature of development a curious example is frequently given which concerns a pigmy who, it is said, 'did not interpret his sensory information as a distant herd of buffalo ... rather he believed them to be nearby insects ... in other words, the usual image was interpreted according to his own conceptual expectations. Since his ordinary environment did not include this much depth (out on the plains) he did not have a set to perceive it'. (14) It is just as well for those who wish to argue from development that we have better examples of this phenomenon from studies of newly-sighted adults who, for a short time, have little appreciation of depth but, whilst such examples show that depth perception is not coterminous with vision and that depth perception is something which can develop in time, I cannot see that these form a basis even for a psychological account of depth perception let alone for sense perception in general. There are two questions I would like to ask about the pigmy's case. Firstly did his perception of distance still differ in any way at all from that of his companions after a few weeks? Secondly, if it did not, could it have developed in any other form than it in fact did? We know from studies of the newly-sighted that they soon develop an entirely normal appreciation of depth so the question really is not whether depth perception develops but whether there are any variables in the way that it will develop.

Since only those with brain damage will misjudge distance in normal circumstances - if it were otherwise I hope driving examiners would not merely ask whether we can see at a distance but also how far we think we can see - I have no reason to suppose that depth perception does develop in variable or idiosyncratic ways. In this case there are simpler ways of understanding development than introducing the notion of abstractions to account for the way the development takes place. One may argue that the development of depth perception follows a wholly innate and predetermined pattern. It is not necessary to suggest that the neural pathways or whatever they are that give us a capacity to experience depth pre-exist exposure to the appropriate environmental stimuli for it may be that only repeated exposure to stimulation will develop these channels and bring them into operation. As there is no indication of variables playing a part in the way depth perception develops, one might use the analogy of the way river systems in a natural environment develop. If we know all the relevant factors, gravity, hardness of rocks, amount of rainwater etc. we find that the development and evolution of catchment areas is entirely necessitated and predetermined. If this is reasonable, given that all human physiology is the same, we might talk of an entirely innate potential for depth perception that exposure to the appropriate stimuli will fulfill.

III) The development of an innate potential through the appropriate stimulation appears to be confirmed by the fact that there are strict limits to the possibilities of development. As the abilities of hunters show, many of us may operate without realizing our full sensory potential in those areas where development seems possible at all - depth, hearing

etc. - but none of us can go beyond the constraints of stimulation and biology which one would expect if abstractions played a part in shaping the concrete perceptions we may have. For example, though I have watched television for many years, I have not been able to give the characters on it a concrete three-dimensionability such as the objects in the 'real' world have. I have an awareness of the spatial relationships of the characters but this does not result in a visual perception of their discrete identities, of space, and the only way I can achieve this is by using the once fashionable '3D glasses' which alter the innate processes which convert stimuli into conscious awareness. If it were simply a matter of imposing structure on stimuli, there is no reason why I should not have developed, like the pigmy, a concrete depth perception in this case. As I have not, I can only conclude that TV images cannot be processed in the way environmental ones can be and thus that I am constrained by biology and stimuli in what I can and cannot experience in a concrete and sensory way.

Taken together these points seem to offer us no compelling reason to adopt a mentalistic account simply because in a few cases we find that a sense develops in response to exposure to the appropriate stimulation.

B) Sense perception is not idiosyncratic.

Unless sense perception is thought to vary from individual to individual for reasons other than failing faculties or injury, there is little need to postulate a theory in terms of which variations may occur. It is relevant therefore that neither scientific accounts nor human society recognize any such general idiosyncrasy. If one takes the standard account of

colour perception there appears to be no room for variables. For example, a wavelength of visible light, say at 480NM, triggers a certain group of sensors and we therefore experience the surface reflecting this wavelength as blue whereas at 520NM different sensors are triggered and we see green. Though much may not be known, the process appears to be entirely automatic and determined for nowhere in the literature is it suggested that in the presence of a wavelength of 480NM one stands, say, only a 60% chance of seeing blue, it is blue and only blue that we see. Society too works on the principle that at the level of 'simple direct experience, reality is the same for you as it is for us'. I have mentioned already that if our depth perception were not the same we could not drive and equally, if we did not all see red in response to the appropriate stimuli, traffic lights would be redundant. The fact that an identifiable group - the colour blind - cannot see all colours or repeatedly get the wrong impression from specified stimuli, presumably for biological and even possibly genetic reasons, only serves to highlight the point that for most of mankind there is no such problem. The colour blind are not at the extreme end of some spectrum of variation, one is colour blind or one is not. In all other spheres of life the assumption is made that the world of sense experience is something shared by all those who have a common physiology and a common exposure to stimuli and until I learn of the tribe who, though having certain stimuli in their environment, have nonetheless failed to develop the appropriate sensory experience, I cannot but accept that the common assumption is well founded.

There is one area only that, on the face of it, a case could be made for

idiosyncrasy or in other words that we each live in a sensory world of our own. Witnesses to crime, sporting events - did the ball cross the line? - and such like occasions notoriously offer different descriptions of what they saw which cannot be wholly explained in terms of failing faculties, angle of vision etc. On the principle that "hard cases make bad law", I would not wish to argue that, on this basis alone, we must adopt a mentalistic position and then find reasons why, in the normal course of events, sense perception seems so standardized. Though comprehensive, such an approach to explanation is extraordinarily complex and without apparent relevance in all but this small group of cases. It appears simpler to argue that the events in question constitute a special case. Disagreement about what it is that happened appears only to occur when the event people witness is momentary. It appears to me that we do not really SEE that momentary event, the 'L.B.W.' or the traffic accident, at all or at least not in the same way that we SEE, given a long, cool look, that this rose is red. It is not so much a question of excitement or shock affecting our perception, though this may enter it, but that witnesses who briefly glimpse something often seem so unsure, readily changing their minds as to what it is they did or did not see. I would take a lot of convincing that the rose I gaze at is not red but little persuasion that the face I glimpsed in the crowd today was not in fact someone I knew. There is more than a little 'half vision - half thought' about momentary perceptions for these impressions do not appear to have taken on the qualities of reality, hardening into a concrete awareness which seems only to develop when we have had time 'to take it in'. One might suggest a parallel between sense perception and an old TV set that takes time to 'warm up', certainly it is questionable whether we can have instantaneous sensory awareness - perhaps we need to 'tune in' and if the stimuli are so brief, perhaps we just do not have time. This

is not to suggest that sense perception requires context or continuity. 'L.B.W.' disputes have both yet there is still doubt, it is the brevity which seems all-important in these cases. To suggest that we need to be 'tuned in/warmed up' before we experience the sensory world as 'real', concrete, indisputably the case, is not to invite a mentalistic explanation at all for we may simply say the sensory machine is not focussed and running smoothly which seems sufficient explanation for other cases in which our sensory world lacks concreteness, definition etc. as in illness and tiredness. In fact, since being imaginative, we may, for example, glimpse an overcoat in the half-light of the hall and for a moment believe that a burglar has got in yet find it quickly forced upon us that this is no burglar, the time-lag before concrete perception takes place betokens a characteristic of the way an innate system works for, in such cases, sensory reality comes to take precedence over contrary impressions clearly shaped by imagination. Whatever the explanation it seems more reasonable to take the agreement of those who are fresh, have sufficient time etc. that they share a common world of sense experience to represent the true position rather than to attempt to make a case from those who disagree under exceptional circumstances.

C) Sense perception is not mutable.

The final possibility for showing a general need to explain sense perception in mentalistic terms is if it could be shown that sense perceptions, fully-developed and occurring under optimum conditions, are nevertheless malleable. If, through volition or brain-washing, we could teach ourselves to SEE red as blue, say, there would be good reason to argue that sense perceptions are shaped by, and develop in line with, our psychological abstractions. Yet I do not believe hypnosis, 'will power' or education are offered as cures for colour blindness and there is precious little

other evidence that our sensory world conforms to our ideas or hopes about it. Certainly, closing our eyes we may imagine a colour, a favourite training device for novices of the supernatural - or indeed imagine anything we like but, whilst in the absence of sensory stimuli we could conceivably believe the object in our mind's eye to be real, its inauthenticity becomes quickly apparent when sense perception returns. If the reader is unsure he might try it for himself but, whilst he may make himself unaware of some feature of his vision - selective attention, discussed below - he cannot alter the shape, colour etc. of what he does see and, at the same time, retain a concrete impression. As Wittgenstein pointed out there is 'no such order as "now see this leaf green"', one simply does and no decision involving short or long term training will make the slightest difference to this. Of course sense perceptions can be changed by drugs, injury, disease or other interference with innate processes and one might even imagine the machine which at the flick of a switch could turn green to blue by activating the appropriate sensors and suppressing the others but none of this suggests a mentalistic account though it does introduce in another way the possibility of volition. I simply cannot SEE this square ashtray as round - I can imagine a round ashtray - or see this blue mug as red and no experiment has been performed other than with 'hysterics' to demonstrate that through training or bribery that I could. By contrast you may show me how to see my enemy as a friend and reverse the perception again or how to appreciate the beauty of the countryside but this only serves to underline the fundamental difference between concrete impressions of the world on the one hand and our psychological experience on the other.

Many of the examples in psychological literature such as the Gestalt shift which will be discussed below, turn on the point that some sense perceptions appear to be mutable. All else aside, I would return to the maxim that "hard cases make bad law" for, if such a creature as the malleable sense perception exists, he is indeed a rarity. I would not deny that some non-visual sensations are inherently ambiguous. When handling some super-chilled object one may indeed feel it as cold or burning hot or alternate from one perception to another. Nor would I deny the possibility that some visual perceptions are insufficiently detailed as to be ambiguous as when a distant object is too far away for us to be sure whether it is square or round or what colour it is. In such cases as this however, it seems only that our perception is deficient in detail due to the limitations of our senses rather than inherently ambiguous for, whilst we may imagine that it is a bird or a plane in the absence of the requisite stimuli, we will not SEE it in all its concrete reality as either. However, my argument for the particular cases to be discussed is that none of them shows reason to adopt a mentalistic explanation, universal in its application, or even perhaps as a restricted account for special circumstances as each is more simply explained if we do not start with the proposition that reality is shaped by variables and there seems no reason to do so for the general run of sense perceptions we have.

In making these observations I have simply wished to point out that there is nothing in the general run of sense perceptions to show that these are tied to acquired and mutable mentalistic structures. Neither development, idiosyncrasy nor mutability, at first sight, give any reason to adopt the more complex explanation that our sense perception of the world is mediated by psychological structures, on the contrary, an account

in terms of innate processes more closely conforms to our experience of sense perception and is simpler. Without expanding on it further, it seems to me that there is nothing in our basic experience of the world that cannot be accounted for in terms of the workings of innate, necessary and predetermined structures operating under exposure to the appropriate stimuli. (Since the stimuli may be provided by damaged physiological systems there is no suggestion here that our sensory experiences are veridical of anything.) Any differences between your perceptions and mine, say, as between witnesses to momentary events can be equally well explained in terms of the way the sensory machine operates, it takes time to get going - indeed length of exposure appears to be a key factor in all the operations of sense perception. There may be borderline areas, as in exhaustion, when the distinction between sense perception and psychological experience - i.e. 'half vision half thought' - is less than clear cut but I would only say that when our sensory processes are operating, as it were, to full capacity the difference is quite unmistakable. Moreover, given that sense perceptions are neither mutable nor idiosyncratic, this difference is not simply qualitative for it seems likely that these special and defining characteristics could be empirically confirmed. If so, we really should be thinking in terms of dividing experience between the psychological and the innate, giving each a quite different sort of explanation. Whatever is the best way to understand this dichotomy, there is no general reason to suppose that mentalistic explanations involving non-necessary and idiosyncratic abstractions are relevant to the case of sense perception.

SPECIFIC EVIDENCE OFFERED IN SUPPORT OF MENTALISTIC ACCOUNTS.

It is, by and large, poor practice to induct general laws from a very few pieces of experimental evidence when the bulk of our observations lend no credence to such interpretation. There are, for example, bits of evidence from the continued common identity of split sub-atomic particles that might suggest that these share some platonic meta-physical identity over and above their quasi-physical one yet to postulate this as a general law to cover one or two oddities would be intolerable unless all other possible explanations for these particular cases and their special circumstances had first been exhausted and their correspondence with other, more general, situations demonstrated. Yet, it appears, S-H-R psychology has built its whole doubtful edifice by induction from a few experiments without attempting to see whether the particular circumstances of these experiments allow for a restricted explanation for these cases nor has it attempted to show the relevance of the resulting universal, mentalistic theory for the general run of subject matter. The evidence offered for the theory that sense perception is structured in idiosyncratic and non-necessary ways falls into five groups each of which is worth discussing in the context of how far it lends weight to a universal mentalistic explanation. I do not question the experimental evidence, it is the conclusions drawn from this that I find so doubtful. The first group of experiments relates to SELECTIVE ATTENTION showing that our perceptions are to some extent regulated by expectation, need and other contingent factors. The second group, PERCEPTUAL CONSTANCY, shows that the perceptions we have are not completely tied to changes in stimulation. The third, GESTALT SHIFT, suggests that sense data is inherently ambiguous and that the perceptions we have are directly linked to the contexts we

impose upon this data. The fourth, CLOSURE, on the evidence of our experience of incomplete data, purports to show that our perceptions are completed or filled in in line with the schemas we are using. The fifth, MISPERCEPTION, seeks to show that 'much of what we perceive is due to our expectations about what we are likely to perceive'.

1) SELECTIVE ATTENTION.

Various experiments have demonstrated that our consciousness of sense data is to some degree regulated by variable and idiosyncratic factors such as need, training, personal preference etc. For example, it has been shown empirically that 'if we are hungry we are more likely to notice food items than non-food items' (15) whilst it is also clear that professionals, such as hunters, have an "eye for detail" and it is a truism that "we listen only to what we want to hear". Such observations demonstrate clearly enough that psychological structures have a bearing*

* I say a bearing for, leaving aside the particular issues considered below, selection on psychological grounds appears to be something of a blunt instrument. It would not seem, for example, that we can isolate just those sense impressions we wish to concentrate on or are skilled at recognizing. Unlike the smile of the Cheshire Cat, I cannot divorce the paper before me entirely from its wider set of relationships of which I must at least be peripherally aware or select just those of its characteristics which are most important to me - its size perhaps rather than its colour. It is said that people can be so captivated by a smile or a tone of voice that they concentrate on these to the exclusion of all else yet I doubt whether one could see the eyes, say, without also being aware of the nose or face more generally however focussed one's attention was. If this is so we at most select packages of sensation only part of which relates to what we wish to be aware of.

on the sense data we will each usually be conscious of but the central question is whether or not this shows, as mentalistic authors claim, that selection demonstrates that sense experience is a product of psychological factors. I will look at the three types of evidence usually given to support the view that selective attention is part of a wider picture in which all sense perception is shaped and constrained by psychological factors but at the outset I wish to make it clear that there is no logical connection between simply showing that we are psychologically motivated to be more conscious of some sense data than of others and showing that whatever sense perceptions we do in fact have are psychologically structured. If, as I have argued above, it is the case that should you and I both have sense impressions of x, our impressions will, in all important respects, be the same, there is no reason to suppose on grounds of idiosyncrasy or mutability that these impressions are structured psychologically. The most that may be said on the basis of selective attention alone is that there is some idiosyncrasy regarding which packets of sense data we are each conscious of. It is not after all claimed that the food items the hungry man is so aware of will appear different to him than they would to anybody else who also happens to notice them. Though I believe none of the examples discussed below do show selective attention to be the tip of an iceberg for none shows that consciousness of sensation is wholly constrained by psychological factors, it is perhaps nevertheless worth pointing out also that even if it were demonstrated that consciousness was entirely structured by schemas this would still not show that sense experience was structured in terms of these schemas. It is one thing to show that psychological factors are a necessary condition for sense perception, quite another to show that they are a sufficient condition. I cannot see a film

without a projector but whilst the limitations of the projector are relevant to what I see, it tells me nothing else about the film. In fact it seems quite reasonable to take the view that sensory processes are entirely autonomous whether or not psychological factors are a necessary condition for our perception of sense data. The police use of hypnosis shows that we each have subliminal impressions of the environment and whilst training or need may make us more conscious of these there is no evidence that conscious impressions differ from subliminal ones. The 'visual cliff' experiment (Gibson & Walk, 1960) showing that the youngest infant avoids what appears to be a long drop long before an age when it could be conscious of such signals or could have learnt to recognize the pattern - let alone its import - also suggests that sensation is quite distinct from consciousness and even that action may be taken solely on the basis of subliminal sense input. Mentalistic authors do not make this distinction but if the three examples they offer were persuasive it would assume some importance, for showing consciousness to be wholly constrained would still not finally settle the epistemological issue I am considering.

The mentalistic argument is that selective attention is part of the evidence which shows that all our perceptions are constrained by psychological factors. Whereas I would treat selective attention on its own merits, mentalistic authors introduce three other examples in an attempt to show that it is part of a wider pattern. These examples are A. that sense awareness can be developed by training and experience, B. that particular perceptions are denied those who lack the requisite structures and C. the case of encryption which purports to show the role of recognition in sense perception. If these examples were convincing

we would accept that psychological factors constrain consciousness and that selective attention - the evidence for which I do not dispute - should be seen in this wider context. This would have implications for the epistemological issue but need not, for reasons outlined above, prove decisive. However, none of these examples persuades me that consciousness is wholly constrained by psychological factors and therefore I see no reason to do other than accept selective attention simply for what it does show and maintain that this in itself has no implications for the sensory-mentalistic dichotomy which I advocate.

A. The first argument for the case that selective attention should not be treated in isolation but should be seen as part of a wider control of consciousness by psychological factors is the claim that training enables one to be aware of a much greater range of sense data than we otherwise could be conscious of. I consider the obverse side of this argument - that we are not conscious until taught - below in B, but a typical example of the claim that sense awareness develops in line with our cognitive structures is given by Batson and Ventis. They cite the case of an engineer who, they say, has a quite different perception of a bridge than that of the layman not trained to see the structure in terms of load, stresses etc. Such claims appear to arise from a confusion of the distinction made by Wittgenstein between conceptual 'half visual .. half thought' awareness and concrete impressions of reality for, whilst I accept that engineers recognize the structure in different terms as a result of their training, I do not believe it could be shown that their sense perceptions of it are markedly different from ours or that these develop in line with their knowledge. I have never heard it said that engineers, undergoing training, find that their

concrete impressions of the world come to resemble a blue print. There appears only one possible argument for showing that sense awareness is likely to change with changing conceptions and this is in the area of awareness of sensory details which have only a conceptual significance. It is quite possible that professionals are more conscious of the minutiae of sense data that relates to their own speciality, engineers may indeed note those cracks and sagging supports which laymen may not ordinarily observe. The question is however not whether they are more aware of these details - selective attention alone suggests they will be - but whether these details can only be apparent to those for whom they have a conceptual importance? Given that our faculties are equally efficient it seems to me that in theory we could all notice the minutiae of sense data whether or not the images had any significance for us. I find it hard to believe that we could not notice a crack, a bolt or that the building is leaning slightly whether or not we ordinarily would do so. There was recently featured a severely retarded child who nevertheless had a great artistic gift. Taken briefly to any new surroundings he could sketch all the visual information to be found there - styles of architecture proportions, technical defects, however slight, antennae etc. - though he had no comprehension of their function or meaning at all. Agnosia victims are conscious of all the sensory stimuli around them though, as when my own cat closely examines patterns and marks on the carpet, such sensory information is entirely without significance for them. The point is that, if we all may notice even detailed sense data that has no relevance for us and that in seeing these objects etc. they do not appear differently to us than to the professional, sense perception is not constrained by psychological factors even peripherally and therefore there is no evidence that schemas are a necessary condition for sense

perception let alone a sufficient one. That professionals may more quickly and regularly observe that which has a conceptual importance for them only raises the separate question of whether recognition or merely attention better accounts for their increased awareness, an issue discussed below in C, but either way there is no evidence from their ability that recognition is a precondition for consciousness and thus that perception of sense data is to be explained in mentalistic terms.

B. The obverse way of arguing that consciousness of sensation is determined by schemas would be to demonstrate that we cannot be conscious at all of some sense data without prior instruction. Since I do not believe that we must necessarily remain unaware of sensory details that have only a technical significance, I am not inclined to accept that whole sections of sensory information must elude our consciousness if we have not been psychologically prepared to be aware of them. Indeed the evidence for this view is minimal and a peculiarly unsatisfying example is often given in the literature. First reported in *The Cornhill Magazine*, it is said that the fishermen of Terra del Fuego could not see Darwin's Beagle on account of its unaccustomed size. If, as is likely, the natives had reasons for feigning ignorance this is surely a very slim foundation on which to base the universal claim that sense perception requires prior learning and one which leads to considerable difficulties. As there is no evidence that the perception of magnitude, unlike that of depth-perception, can be developed - though it was not even reported that the natives saw the Beagle as canoe-sized, a size with which they were certainly familiar - the argument from this example appears to be that if the sensory information is larger, brighter, louder than we have had previous experience of we will have no consciousness of it at all. Can there really be a noise too loud to be heard or a mountain

too large to be seen? Do we have technological evidence that there are massive phenomena in the visible or audible wavelengths that no one who might have noticed had noticed? The notion flies in the face of all human experience. I do not doubt, as Koestler pointed out in *Janus*, that we can quickly learn to suppress impressions to which we have become habituated or which have no relevance for us, a skill Yogins are especially adept in, but even they are initially disturbed by intrusive stimuli as has been empirically confirmed. Contrary to the arguments of those who use the example of the *Beagle*, I suggest it is just the unusual or unexpected phenomenon that we are all most likely to be conscious of, our preconceptions and level of conceptual development notwithstanding, for new sights and sounds have a way of forcing themselves upon our attention. It would take more than The Cornhill's anecdote to persuade me that we cannot be conscious of sense data without prior psychological preparation.

C. The final argument that consciousness is wholly determined by psychological factors arises from the very special circumstances of encryption or camouflage. Natural examples of this are rare, a stick-insect amongst twigs, say, but a number of two-dimensional tests have been devised in which an image, say of a face, has been concealed amongst much extraneous visual information - coloured dots or montage etc. It is said that, if one moment I see nothing in the jam jar but twigs and the next moment I see the stick-insect there amongst them, my subsequent perception is to be accounted for in terms of recognition. Noting that my latter perception may be triggered if someone points out the shape of the insect to me, the mentalists argue that I am matching the minute discontinuities of colour, texture etc. to a model and only when this complex procedure involving prior learning and computation has been completed will the image take shape. If I did not know about stick-insects or even that images

may be encrypted I would presumably never be able to see one. There are two points to be made at the outset. In the first place, as noted above, even if it is shown that there are psychological preconditions for conscious awareness in this case, this does not establish that the sense perception, should I have one, is to be explained mentalistically. Schemas or not, if as in our usual run of sense perceptions I am entirely constrained in what I can possibly see - if anything at all, I see a stick-insect and nothing else - there is no evidence of idiosyncrasy in the perception of encrypted objects and hence it is simpler to believe that even in these cases the form the sense perception can take is predetermined by innate and necessary factors. If this were not so, given that the visual sense data is so subtle, I would be surprised that everyone who does report anything only reports a stick-insect or a face or whatever rather than other objects which might fit equally well the stimuli presented to us. Since we do not see and cannot be persuaded* to see some creature, half insect - half twig, there is no basis for the suggestion that our perception is to be explained by modelling or schemas, for all sorts of models could fit such complex data yet no such idiosyncratic perceptions are ever reported. If this is so, unlike an ink blot test where any image may be 'seen', even the subtlest sensory information must be perceived in entirely necessary ways. In the second place, even if we accept that in this case psychological factors explain the switch from non-awareness - if indeed we are not immediately aware -

* Hysterics, it is known, can be persuaded to have idiosyncratic perceptions but there is no reason to believe that their case has any universal relevance.

to awareness, there is no reason to assume that this case has universal relevance. Ordinarily we have no problem being aware of sense data - it is not likely that we could look into a small paddock and see it empty one minute and the next perceive horses to be grazing there as we might in the case of the stick-insect, and on the basis that hard cases make bad law recognition would remain relevant only to the restricted case of encryption until its wider relevance was established.

I see no reason why in fact we should not simply explain our occasional perception of encrypted objects in terms of attention or close scrutiny of the images presented to us rather than in terms of recognition though perhaps the two processes are not incompatible. It would certainly be relevant if tests included sensory images that were not at all recognizable as anything rather than using faces and the like which are compatible with a theory of mental models. If it transpired that subjects - suitably motivated - could notice an encrypted random line, shape or patch of discolouration as easily as they could a face, it would be clear that one could be conscious of meaningless sense data quite as much as one is conscious of what ~~one can~~ recognize. I know of no such test though it would be an elementary way of falsifying the mentalistic hypothesis in this case. I have found that when my "mind is empty" all sorts of wholly irrelevant sense data take my attention, the striae in rocks, a colour etc. that I would not usually be aware of and occasionally have never been aware of before. In the absence of other tests, this makes it seem more likely that sense perceptions only require leisure and, quite possibly, sufficient exposure to stimuli rather than that sensory stimuli need to be recognizable as something before we can be conscious of them.

Either way the issue would seem to be a peripheral one but even in this case there is no clear reason to believe that awareness necessitates a mentalistic explanation since there is no evidence from encryption that psychological factors constrain the extent of our awareness of sense data or plays any part in structuring such perceptions as we may have.

None of these three examples persuades me that consciousness is constrained by psychological factors and hence that there is any need to believe that selective attention indicates more than that our awareness of sense data to some degree reflects what we need, are taught or want to be aware of. By itself, selective attention does not invite a mentalistic explanation of whatever sense perception we may have since it does not even show that psychological factors are a necessary condition for sense experience - for it is not said that you must be hungry before you can see food - let alone a sufficient one. That our awareness can to some degree be influenced, regulated or filtered is of course an interesting finding but since it is only relevant to an account of why we are conscious of some sensory data, as distinct from being a causal account of sense perception - rather as a tuner accounts for which pictures I watch but offers no causal explanation for the stream of signals transmitted, any of which might have been received - it would not seem to have any bearing on the issue being addressed in this chapter. The contention that sensation and conception are two distinct categories does not rule out the possibility that, in consciousness, biology and environment are made to serve individuality but this is not at all the same as arguing that the biological is a reflection of individuality.

2) PERCEPTUAL CONSTANCY.

This line of research seeks to show that the perceptions we do in fact have are structured in accordance with our psychological models from 'the fact that we perceive a consistent world in spite of incomplete, ambiguous and potentially confusing sensory information'. (16) Experiments have varied from those of Stratton (1897) and Kohler (1962) who both wore special goggles that reversed the visual field and found that, after a transition period, to some extent their perceptions of the world adapted to such commonplace observations that a man in the distance is not perceived as insect-sized and doors, when they swing open, are not seen changing shape from rectangular to trapezoidal. Changes in the retinal image, it is said, are interpreted by an organizational process so that we perceive a stable and constant environment so that 'snow in dark shadow is perceived as white and coal in bright sunlight is seen as black, even though the amounts of light they reflect are similar under these conditions'. Such examples underline the point that I have been making, that our perceptions of the physical are stable but the assumption, and it is no more than that, that the explanation is that these perceptions arise from a conceptual and computational organization and, by implication, were we so minded, we might take, for instance, snow in the night to be coal, needs to be challenged. In fact, there is no good reason not to treat the process in these cases as one of a high degree of biological sophistication. The binoculars I use do not compute what the landscape looks like at 10x8, it just looks like that through them and one could imagine a variety of back-up biological machinery that comes into play if light conditions are poor or perspectives alter. If it is not so why cannot I see the rose as red at night if this is a 'computer' image which would be to say it looks like this if such and such factors are taken

into account? Momentary blindness, when walking from light into dark, could be explained as a transition from ordinary visual processes to back-up system just as easily as saying this is the time taken to compute. Given that snow and coal do not emit exactly the same light under any conditions, we might guess that even small differences are enough to distinguish them given image enhancement. If we do compute, we certainly do not learn to do so for there is no stage of infancy when we inhabit a cartoon-like world where perceptions of doors are fluid or when we are unaware of the strange light snow gives off at night. If we do not learn to see in this way, what reason is there to treat such perceptions as modified by conception when all we are talking about is automatic systems. One might particularly wonder why, if the perceptual process is computational and we learn that objects keep their shape from whatever angle they are viewed, that the 'railroad' and other illusions occur at all. If we have the means to organize our perceptions and we know that rails stretching into the distance do not in fact meet, why do we not organize our perception better, if we can do so in other cases? It is simpler to treat this and other illusions as evidence only that we lack the right kind of equipment to help us see in a more adaptive way in these cases rather than as failures to compute when, it is said, we compute so well in others. Given such considerations, perceptual constancy would seem only to show that there is flexibility in our sensory apparatus that can cope with a variety of conditions of sensory in-put (different systems?, different modes of a single system?) and there is nothing conceptual or computational about this. I accept a psychological component in image enhancement in other cases, discussed below, but there is no need to introduce such a complex notion for our everyday perceptions of the world especially since we find our experience of it so similar. A biological

account which would predict uniformity is to be preferred to a mentalistic account which would suggest idiosyncrasy for which there is no evidence.

3) GESTALT SHIFTS.

Perhaps the best known evidence for a mentalistic account of sense perception is the Gestalt shift which appears to show that what we see is a product of the context we give the object. Examples range from the 'vase-face' figure-ground reversal in which both white and shaded areas can be treated either as figure or as background to the higher order example of '13' which in context can be read as a numeral or as the letter B. We can learn or be shown to see such examples now in one way and now in another depending on the context in which they are regarded and this might indicate both that objects are inherently ambiguous and that what we see depends on the context given, presumably to the extent that, if we could not give an object a context, we could not see it at all. It has to be said at the outset that, like so much other evidence for the mentalistic theory, these examples are so restricted that they appear to have no universal relevance. It is not without significance that all the examples given are two-dimensional abstractions lacking most of the sensory cues which give us real information about the world. Try mistaking two real heads for a vase, it cannot be done. There is no reason therefore to assume that, in everyday cases, objects of perception have any ambiguity and, in rare cases where Gestalt shifts may occur, it is perhaps better to talk of the objects of perception as having a genuine double identity or aspect rather than some inherent ambiguity which is resolved only by our giving it a perspective. Rather as electricity can be treated as a wave or a particle without any

distortion of the data so some drawings - giving us very little evidence either way - may be legitimately described as a face or a vase. If the context we give the image determines which perception we will have, there is nevertheless nothing idiosyncratic about either perception, we cannot see anything but a face or a vase as we might if, like the ink blot test, these were truly psychological impressions. Given that there is nothing idiosyncratic about our Gestalt perceptions that we see one and not the other can be most simply understood as an example of selective attention. Like need, context and expectation no doubt influence which aspect of the dual image we are most likely to see but this does not mean that we could not make out the outline of the other image even if we could not recognize it given that it is genuinely there. I do not see either that anything can be deduced from the fact that we cannot see both images at the same time. Whilst this may point to our perceptions being tied to quite different models or schemas, it may simply show that, like an old telephone exchange, we cannot handle more than one call at a time. If the automatic processes which, I believe, underlie sense perception are dealing with sensory stimuli in one way perhaps this excludes dealing with the same stimuli simultaneously in another. That for psychological reasons we may trigger the alternate perception is no reason to suppose that the process that gives rise to the alternate perception is other than innate and automatic also. In Gestalt shift, I would argue, the sense data may be processed in alternative ways but in seeing one object now another we are only noticing what is inherent in the data and thus there is nothing psychological about this processing as there is no evidence that we can make of the data what we wish or expect to. Given that one might simply explain such cases, is there any reason to adopt a complex universal theory to account for such oddities?

4) CLOSURE.

This and allied examples are said to demonstrate the role of the model or schema in the perception we have. It is said that an incomplete image such as a dotted outline or an ambiguous one is perceived as what it is thought to represent and not merely as a series of dots or some other incomplete image - 'we fill in the gaps and connect the disconnected elements' (17) and thus complete the visual image on the basis of our psychological structures when the sensory stimuli are incomplete. Perhaps the best natural example is the ascription of figures and shapes to the stars e.g. the constellation of the bear. Apart from the rarity of these cases my principle objection to the argument from 'closure' is that it does not appear to relate to sense perception at all. If you take a dotted outline to represent a dog, say, the image you visualize is not at all the same as having a sense perception of a dog anymore than the constellation of the bear is like SEEING a real bear or even like seeing a bear in a poor photograph. This is surely a case to which Wittgenstein's distinction, on which this whole chapter rests, between 'the half-visual ... half-thought' experience arising from conceptualization and concrete perception applies. In our 'mind's eye' we may visualize some incomplete abstraction in whatever form we like, filling in and connecting up, but this is not to say we are having a sense perception. We may imagine the raincoat in the darkened hall is connected to the shoes on the floor and be under the apprehension that a burglar is standing there - but do we actually SEE him so that we could describe his features later? The difference between 'seeing' this burglar and seeing a real one is not only qualitative, one simply cannot fill in concrete perceptions and it is entirely relevant that closure can be demonstrated only in the case of abstractions which give scope for imagination. You can no more SEE my

legs when I am standing behind a fence - though you know they are there - than you can SEE the face of the phantom burglar. In the case of an unclear image, a distant blob in the sky, you may imagine it to be a bird or a plane but you do not SEE it as either until it resolves itself quite necessarily into a distinct object. There are no doubt some analogies between SEEING and visualizing or 'seeing as' but, given that there are various good grounds for this distinction, by showing that closure is relevant to the latter case gives us no reason to believe it is relevant to an explanation of the former also.

5) MISPERCEPTION.

In this case and this case only is there some evidence that mentalistic factors have a bearing on the form sense perceptions take. I exclude from consideration all illusions such as the ponzo effect and the mirage which do not indicate idiosyncrasy. It would be odd, for example, to explain the perception of a straight stick as bent when it is placed in water in psychological terms when we know it is straight and everyone of us sees it as bent, far simpler, as in other cases, to explain it in terms of a physiological limitation when dealing with certain sorts of stimuli or certain sorts of environmental conditions. If some situation is a sufficient condition for misperception, it is a certain sign that psychological factors play no part. The types of case I have in mind are the idiosyncratic misperceptions caused by expectation and other overtly psychological factors. 'Children from poor homes over-estimate the size of coins' (Bruner & Goodman), fear makes an intruder look larger than he is, we might mistake a stranger for the person we are anxiously looking out for etc. It seems reasonable to suppose that most of these

examples are of sense perceptions and since they are both unadaptive and idiosyncratic that they arise from psychological rather than biological causes.

It may be possible to understand the penny example and that of the intruder in terms of two processes already accepted, selective attention and image enhancement. Focussing on one particular object, for psychological reasons, perhaps we can also magnify it, for psychological reasons, to the limit that our automatic processes of intensification and magnification allow - there is no evidence that the object can appear enlarged beyond a certain size however great the fear or need. If so, image enhancement, like selective attention, is something which could be triggered on occasion by psychological factors though this would not show that such factors structured or shaped the perception simply that they could set in motion a process which operates automatically most of the time. It is perhaps significant in this respect that there is no evidence to show that we diminish the size of objects only that we enlarge them in instances varying from pennies to 'pop idols'. The fact that a perception is unadaptive is not alone sufficient to demonstrate that it is psychologically structured for, apart from our own experience of automatic reaction to changing stimuli, within preset limits, it is known that horses, for example, have a greatly magnified view of the world. The case of the mistaken stranger, often momentary and perhaps based on the kind of recognition of salient features or likeness to be found in closure examples, may well be dismissed as not really a sense perception at all. We do not after all persist in our mistake as it quickly becomes apparent that we have made one. I would not rule out the possibility that here too, by focussing on points of likeness, we do

see something of our friend in the stranger's face but wonder whether we actually SEE our friend in him even for a moment? There are also cases of habituation where we do not notice perhaps that some familiar object is no longer there but these are too closely tied to selective attention and suppression for us to be certain whether they tell us anything about the involvement of psychological factors in the forms our sense perceptions take or are merely relevant to why it is we are conscious or not conscious of some data.

These thoughts are merely aimed at showing that it is possible to explain cases of misperception in which psychological factors obviously play a part within the framework of two distinct processes without having to introduce the more complex explanation that schemas structure all our sense perceptions when this has no obvious relevance to almost all other cases. It is a case of the tail wagging the dog to provide an explanation for all sense perceptions that is designed only to meet the peculiarities of a few isolated examples. I do not profess to know how fear and need, for example, - which are idiosyncratic - if not normally thought of as mentalistic factors - could affect the innate processes I claim underlie all sense perceptions but in the framework I have offered it is not unreasonable to assume that they might. Certainly there seems no necessity to adopt a universal mentalistic explanation simply because poor children see pennies larger than they are.

The five types of empirical evidence usually put forward for the mentalistic view that our sense perceptions are fashioned from abstract models and schemas do little to persuade me that the sensory, conceptual dichotomy is at most a qualitative distinction. Certain refinements need

to be introduced in the light of this evidence but these do not radically alter the model I have advocated throughout. There are grounds to believe that we have an inbuilt image enhancer, rather as some radios can lock onto signals keeping reception stable despite fluctuations, yet the process is innate even if it is possible that it can occasionally be triggered by idiosyncratic factors. There are clear grounds to believe that which sense data we will be conscious of is to some extent a matter of individual need, preference etc. but this neither shows that the perceptions we do have are psychologically modelled nor that consciousness is entirely constrained by idiosyncratic factors. That there is a class of fabricated images that have a dual identity or double aspect, however, whilst adding to the range of our possible experience, seems to tell us nothing about the basic epistemological issue. There appears no reason why we cannot accept selective attention and enhancement and incorporate them within the basic model I propose, accepting that they indicate those borderline areas where the simple perception of sensory stimuli is sometimes subordinated to the requirements of individuality. I find this use of the evidence more acceptable than arguing, on the basis of examples that are both rare and of restricted application, that we must apply mentalistic theories to sense perception universally in order to account for them. Since the mentalistic interpretations of several examples appear to fail to recognize the distinction between the sensory and the conceptual and no attempt is made to show the relevance of the example for the sensory, I cannot but believe that the hypothesis of a universal and comprehensive mentalistic theory, on such a basis as these examples offer, is fundamentally unsound.

Though this discussion of a psychological issue has been regrettably long,

the epistemological question I have addressed is of such fundamental importance to all that follows that it was unavoidable. To summarize the arguments so far:

1. There is a qualitative distinction between sense perception and conceptual experience
2. As may be empirically confirmed, sense perceptions have different characteristics to conceptual experience being universal and non-malleable
3. The mentalistic theory fails to account for the unique characteristics of sense perception and in addition to being unnecessarily complex and without obvious relevance leads to problems concerning the relationship of our experience to the world. This being so it would make sense to treat sense perception and conceptual experience as reflecting two quite different processes, one innate, necessary, biological, the other non-necessary, acquired and psychological. This theoretical distinction accords with our common experience and, I do not doubt, one day will be empirically confirmed.

The point is this. If, as I intend to argue in part 2, mystical experience is a sensory or quasi-sensory experience, those sensations and feelings construed as the presence of God owe little or nothing to the subject's beliefs but are presented to him by physiology, environment or some other source that cannot be explained in terms of his acquired conceptions. Whatever the experience is that he has, at a higher level it will be interpreted in the light of his ideology but an account of his ideology cannot be accepted as a causal account of his experience or the form it takes. It is perhaps not necessary for the reader to be convinced of the fundamental distinction I make between sensation and conceptualization but simply accepting that it is a credible line of argument changes all the presuppositions which have come to dominate the explanations of mystical experience - in addition to our mundane experience - in recent years. If we come to look at mystical

experience from outside of the hermeneutical framework S-H-R authors have imposed, all sorts of new possibilities emerge. In making these comments I do not wish to give the impression that psychology has not benefitted the study of religion. Freud, Runke and Erikson have, from a psycho-analytical standpoint, pointed to a range of factors from fear of death to 'basic trust' which motivate religion. Others have highlighted the importance of milieu and computation in the religious outlook whilst others still, the differences in patterns of religious motivation and behaviour - e.g. 'extrinsic'/'intrinsic'/'quest' - but none of this is relevant to the case of mystical experience if there is no good reason to explain the sensory in terms of the psychological even though, in man, the sensory is bound to occur within the context of individuality and subjectivity.

2) MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE AND MENTALISTIC EXPLANATIONS.

Having made the case for a clear distinction between sensory and other forms of experience and having argued that mentalistic accounts are inapplicable to the former, the question I now wish to address is whether or not we can treat mystical experience as being analogous to mundane sense experience. If we can, though ideology will be relevant to the way these experiences are understood and reported, ideology and other mentalistic factors will offer no causal explanation of why these experiences occur or why they take the form which they do. The question needs to be gone into at length for it is not at all self-evident that sensory and mystical experience have much in common and, for this reason, whatever view they take about sense perception, many researchers might still believe that mystical experience, like 'half vision ... half thought' experience and other forms of experience which are unlike sense perception is best explained in psychological terms. I adopt two lines of argument. Firstly, that mystical experience does in fact have close qualitative analogies with sense perception and secondly, that there are other common characteristics which are best highlighted by the failure of mentalistic explanations to explain the occurrence and form mystical experience takes. I shall look at various theories inspired by S-H-R psychology but find that there is no more evidence that mystical experience is shaped by contingent factors or otherwise conforms to cultural expectations than there is in the case of sense perception, if anything the contrary is indicated. These two arguments persuade me that we have no more reason to apply mentalistic accounts to mystical experience than we have for applying them to sense perceptions and, further, in so far as mystical and sense experience so closely resemble each other, that new lines of explanation in terms of a common process are indicated.

THE ANALOGY BETWEEN MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE AND SENSE PERCEPTION.

My hypothesis, based on two types of consideration, is that mystical and sensory experience arise from very similar, if not identical, processes and this gives them a generic identity which does not lend itself to explanation in mentalistic terms. Since I can offer no physiological account of this process, I can only point to the similarities which indicate a common process and argue that, if there is no reason to adopt a mentalistic account of sense perception, there is no more reason to do so in the case of mystical experience. The indications that a single process is at work in both cases are twofold. Firstly, there are the qualitative indications, introduced in chapter 2, which show that mystical experience, subjectively, is perceived to be on a par with sense experience and, secondly, there are a number of other common characteristics indicative of a common aetiology which I shall discuss in the context of the failure of mentalistic explanations. I shall defend the importance I place on both these types of consideration but first wish to discuss more fully what it is I mean by indications of analogous processes for I am not suggesting that anyone could mistake a mystical experience for a mundane sense perception.

It is quite clear, whatever their aetiology, that one could not equate mystical and mundane perceptions. Mystical claims are, almost invariably, beyond verification having to do with non-natural objects and, in many cases, relate to no clearly defined object of perception at all - one does not see God in the way one might a colour, shape etc. Equally importantly, unlike mundane sense perceptions where all similarly placed will agree, mystical experiences are rarely shared and therefore cannot be explained in terms of identifiable stimuli to which we all have equal access. However,

though in content they appear so different and one could not apply the same type of explanation in each case, it does not follow that the same process is not involved with all the implications this has for the epistemological issue under consideration. If, say, milk and apples are fermented one does not expect the end-products - yoghurt and cider - to bear much relationship nor does the use of this process in one controlled and clearly defined situation, brewing say, preclude it as an explanation in an apparently spontaneous and seemingly dissimilar case such as the breakdown of the compost heap. In the same way I do not find it surprising if an innate process, when linked to environmental stimuli, gives rise to the particular and predictable type of experience we call sense perception whereas, when linked to another set of non-psychological factors, it produces a wholly different and, apparently, inexplicable experience. In subsequent chapters I shall look at some of these factors but it will be my contention that in recognizing the process and the factors linked to it in the mystic's case, we will find that his perception is not - for all its rarity - idiosyncratic but a necessary and predictable consequence of a process operating under peculiar circumstances. Many who might accept that environment and innate processes between them account for sense perception, might, nevertheless, assume that because no one else around him sees what the mystic sees, mystical experience is unlike sense perception and that the singularity of the mystic's claim is best explained in terms of mentalistic factors. This does not necessarily follow for it may be the case that the apparent idiosyncrasy of the mystical claim can best be explained by the unusual combination of factors which trigger the perception in entirely predetermined ways i.e. all truly in the same position as the mystic will see what he did. It is relevant here that, whilst in any particular case the mystic's claim is singular,

the long history and wide spread of these claims gives them a context in which they appear less idiosyncratic. Since the occurrence of mystical experience seems fairly constant from age to age and culture to culture, it has not notably declined in our atheistic society - though the reporting of it may be affected by its social acceptability - the pattern fits in with the notion that the concatenation of factors necessary to trigger the process is rare just as well as it does with any psychological theory. If this is the case, a comparison of mystics with especial regard to the circumstances of their experiences will prove more informative than a comparison of mystics with the non-mystics around them with the appearance this gives that in its isolation the mystical claim can be explained psychologically. Since there is much circumstantial evidence that the same process is at work in both sensory and mystical experience and mentalistic explanations do not cover what few facts we have in the case of mystical experience I believe it is reasonable to argue that both arise from the workings of the same innate and ineluctable process even though, when harnessed to different circumstances, this same process gives rise to such different sorts of experience. Just as by noting the generation of heat etc. we may determine that fermentation is taking place in bread and beer, by noting their hallmarks we might reasonably theorize that the same or a closely allied process is responsible for both mystical and sense perception. The proof that mystical experience is as predetermined, given the right conditions, as I believe sense perception to be which is the central point and the proof that the process involved does closely resemble that of sense perception is a long way off. I would only argue that it is a reasonable hypothesis given the information we presently have.

My selection of certain qualities inherent in both mystical and sense perception along with a few other shared characteristics as evidence of a common process may strike some readers as arbitrary. They might argue that it is a coincidence that mystical and sense perceptions share certain qualities and furthermore that in any event we could deduce little about the nature of the underlying process from a study of the form that our perception takes in any given instance. Whilst I accept that my argument is tenuous, in the absence of a detailed naturalistic account, I do not think it unreasonable to make the comparison I do. To anyone who has seen both there is a great qualitative difference between watching an 8mm film, for example, and a video. Differences in clarity, colour and much else that is instantly recognizable show that certain qualities are tied to the process and as, in the case of 'Technicolour', may be unique to a particular process. I do not wish to take too mechanistic a view of human experience but there is no reason why we should not think of the typical qualitative differences between waking perceptions and dreams, say, in such terms because the differences are quite as characteristic as they are in the case of different forms of filming. If one accepts the possibility that qualitative differences can be indicative of process, my selection begins to appear less arbitrary. Quite what it is we mean by sense perception, being wide awake etc., is not easy to elucidate but central to the concept is concreteness and apparent reality which above, I suggested, might in part be explained by the coherence, stability and lucidity of such perceptions. If this is the hallmark of sense perception - and many a common saying e.g. "I didn't imagine it, I saw him as large as life just as I see you standing there" indicates that it is - I find it hard to believe that

it is an accidental feature of our waking experience of the world especially as it is not characteristically found in any other common form of experience. It is worth mentioning here that, since there is no evidence that things seem real/concrete to us only because in fact they are real/concrete, if anything, this quality is a hallmark of process and is not related to the particular environmental circumstances in which this process is most commonly found to operate. If then we can reasonably assume that concreteness and all that goes with it evidences the operation of a particular process, it would be unnecessarily complex to argue that in the case of mystical experience it was however accidentally present. Far simpler, until evidence is produced to the contrary, to accept that in both cases the presence of these qualities is significant as a guide to the processes which give rise to both perceptions. If precise criteria could be found it may be empirically confirmed that just these two types of experience exhibited these qualities, and always did so, thus backing the long-established distinctions we all make-awake/dreaming/daydreaming etc. - and making it seem more likely, as I believe, that these qualities have a theoretical relevance as well as simply a descriptive one. It is not conclusive that, because sensory and mystical perceptions have major qualitative analogies, that the same process is at work in both cases but it is nonetheless very suggestive especially, as I will later discuss, the two types of perception have other points in common.

The major part of the qualitative analogy is that mystics, familiar with both forms of experience, use the language of sense perception for what they claim to have experienced. Be it God, a timeless, spaceless void or whatever, the terms in which their experience is described always

portray the perception as something direct, immediate, concrete, real, about which they could not be mistaken and so common and manifest is this that I earlier argued it should be treated as a defining characteristic of mystical experience. Leaving to one side the implications of the commonly encountered claim that mystical experience seems more real, concrete etc. than everyday sense perception, I cannot believe that this feature is either of marginal significance or merely a contingent, even accidental, feature of their claims - rather there appears every reason to think that it is not merely descriptive but has a theoretical significance.

Teresa of Avila's 'a person who was unexpectedly plunged into water could not fail to be aware of it, here the case is the same but even more evident' (18) sums up as well as any that quality of mystical experience which gives it such a close resemblance to sense perception. Other examples, taken at random, equally underline the point that in mystical experience we are not discussing 'half vision ... half thought', imagination, dreaming and the like but perceptions which are directly analogous to those sense perceptions which have the strongest impact upon our awareness. 'Flashes of consciousness which have compelled me to exclaim with surprise - God is here' (19), 'it was not imagination, I really felt a divine power', 'I neither saw nor heard Him but there He was and I had no doubt about it (20) etc. all suggest an overwhelming impression that whatever is being experienced is as much a part of 'reality' as the environment our senses normally present us with, each seeming to have an objective validity, an unshakeable and concrete quality etc. In chapter 2 I considered some of the qualities which might play a part in producing this impression - coherence, stability and

lucidity - but whatever part these play 'reality' seems to be something that is either present or not, a quality inherent only in certain sorts of experience, rather than something we read into it or deduce from certain sensory cues. All that really needs to be said here is that mystics are aware of the non-natural in just that way we are all aware of the natural world.

It is relevant that experienced mystics themselves make the same distinction between the 'real' and the psychological as we do, say, between sense experience and dreaming. Teresa of Avila, for example, distinguishes between visions sent by God which are said to lead to rapture etc. and the fancies of the imagination: 'when anyone can contemplate this sight of our Lord for a long time, I do not believe it is a vision but rather some over-mastering idea which causes the imagination to fancy it sees something; but this illusion is only like a dead image in comparison with the living reality of the other case' (21). The 'living reality' of mystical and sense perceptions distinguishes them both from a range of other quasi-experiential phenomena such as hypnagogic imagery which, in the religious case, for clarity we might label religious impressions,* and this continues the parallel. It would

*Though I believe the qualitative distinction I make - recognized by experienced mystics - between mystical experience and other impressions of a religious nature to be quite as clear as that between sense impressions and dreams, there are two practical difficulties in selecting just those cases which have the requisite qualities. The first of these is that, for a variety of reasons, the reports we have may not describe what the experience actually felt like. More interested in describing the content or making theological speculations, some mystics do not actually describe their experience or the way in which they came to know what they claim to know. One can do little with "one night I knew" if we are looking for some mention of the unmistakability of their impression, its concreteness, the fact that what was borne upon them could not be doubted etc. Brevity may not really be a problem if, as seems to be the

continued overleaf

not appear, given the remarks of mystics on the subject, that one can be in any more doubt about whether or not one has had a mystical experience rather than some sundry religious impression than one can be in the case of sense perception. As, when I am dreaming, the mystic may be unsure whether this or that vivid impression is real but as, when I wake up, the mystic has an authentic mystical experience the unreality of what went before is immediately apparent and is likely to produce a basis for future discrimination. The recognition of the difference between a 'real'/concrete type of experience and one lacking its 'living reality' would appear tied to the intrinsic differences between the two types rather than to depend on subjective variables. We might discuss whether someone was really in love, say, he might not know himself but we cannot say "he only thinks he is SEEING" if that is what he claims as we might say "he only thinks he is in love". If this is so the distinction between sense-type experience and other types is something arbitrary which we must all necessarily recognize. Another important point in this context, one already raised, is that there is a continuing belief in the veridicality of sense type experience when other impressions have either been forgotten or have come to be accepted as unreal. We may,

case, the mystical experience is so striking that few mystics will forbear to mention what it felt like or the way in which the content was impressed upon them but even so many researchers, culling quotes, often omit such important details. The second problem is that Margolis' study notwithstanding it may sometimes be difficult to distinguish mystical cases from the reports of the mentally ill when these are of a religious nature. The hyper-suggestible, the psychotic etc. may claim that a notion or some non-sensory type of impression seems quite real/concrete to them just as they might claim that a dream they had is, and appeared to them to be, quite real. Without having criteria, suggested by psychiatry, it may not always be possible, on the basis of written material alone, to be certain whether the distinction all sane minds would make is being recognized or not. Douglas-Smith took the unique step in asking his respondents to take the 'glow-card' test to eliminate any case which had about it the slightest hint of hyper-suggestibility. Perhaps future researchers should extend the range of such tests and glean other relevant information so that in all cases we can be certain that the experience did in fact have certain qualities.

when dreaming, believe the dream to be real and even momentarily upon waking but, unless insanity has robbed us of our powers of discrimination, we recognize that this type of experience, usually, lacks those concrete qualities which we associate only with waking experience of our environment. The truth of our belief is unimportant, it is the fact that we make a distinction between sensory and other types of experience on this ground and, also, less certainly, on the stronger and more lasting impression that some sense experience seems to make on us that is relevant, for this strengthens the analogy between sensory and mystical experience and further distinguishes both, as a type, from all other forms of experience.

There is perhaps little point in adding anything further about the qualitative distinction between sense-type experience and imagination, hypnagogic imagery, dreams etc. when the reader may more easily refer to his own experience and recognize that one does not see a tree in a dream, say, or imagine what something will be like in the same way that one sees the "real thing". That mystics compare their experience to sense experience and similarly distinguish it from other forms of non-sensory experience would appear undeniable and this, on the face of it, gives the two a family resemblance which, I wish to argue, stems from the similarities of the process used in each case. In the discussion following I look to see, the qualitative analogy notwithstanding, if there is any reason why we should think of sense and mystical experience in different terms. If S-H-R accounts did show that the form mystical experience takes, unlike sense perception, was structured by psychological factors or that the pattern of occurrence could be explained in terms of cultural or sub-cultural expectation, I would have to accept that the

qualitative analogy counted for little. There is however no evidence to make me change my mind about the importance of the qualitative analogy or to force me to reexamine the epistemological implications of sensory and mystical experience having a generic resemblance.

THE FAILURE OF MENTALISTIC EXPLANATIONS OF MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE.

Perhaps Sunden, Katz and Glock and Stark are the best known exponents of the view that the mystic's experience is shaped by the expectation he derives from the presence in society of religious traditions and sub-cultures. I do not know whether these authors would apply their mentalistic accounts to all forms of experience, as Batson and Ventis would seem to, and therefore whether they view mystical experience as a special case having clear disanalogies with sense perception or as just another example of the universal explanation that all experience arises from psychological structuring but whichever, I believe it can be argued on the basis of such evidence as there is that there is no more reason to explain mystical experience in contextual terms than there is sense perception. If the discussion below is persuasive, the qualitative analogy remains, *prima facie*, a factor of considerable importance whilst the additional similarities discovered only serve to reinforce the generic resemblance between mystical and sense experience and make it implausible to apply a psychological account to either form of experience. I shall begin by outlining the mentalistic explanation of mystical experience and then offer two objections which appear to render the theory as unuseable in this case as it is in the case of sense perception. Having established that there is no compelling reason to adopt a psychological explanation in the case of mystical experience, I will conclude by looking at three other ways, in addition

to the qualitative analogy, in which mysticism resembles sense perception in the context of the epistemological issue. These supplementary parallels add weight to the argument that neither type of experience lends itself to interpretation in contextual terms and reinforces the possibility of their sharing a generic identity.

THE MENTALISTIC ACCOUNT OF MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE.

Sunden's model of religious experience incorporates both main elements of contextualism namely 1. that religious traditions in society supply the concepts that shape the mystic's experience and 2. that occurrence is related to commitment - a point taken up by Glock and Stark - as well as specifically introducing role playing to account for the form the impression of the divine takes. The main points of Sunden's model, at least those which are relevant to this argument,* are as follows:

- A. Experience is determined by various patterns of motivation of the individual
- B. The religious disposition has developed through learning and been kept current by practice
- C. The pattern in religious disposition is derived from the religious tradition which contains conceptions of interactions between individuals and God(s) - the role system
- D. Divine roles in religious traditions function as structuring perceptual patterns

* I have omitted only one major proposition which is that 'the contents of the experience are given meaning by the disposition of the individual'. This would not appear relevant to the present argument for, as the example of agnosia shows, sense perception does not entail meaningfulness and it is only sense experience which is being discussed and not the separate issue of meaning. There may be some sorts of experience in which the finding of meaning constitutes the whole of the experience but this is not so in the case of mystical experience where there are concrete perceptions in addition to whatever meaningfulness is found in these. I will take up later the question of whether the meaning a mystic finds his experience has is

E. Religious experience arises through the interaction between the religious disposition of the individual and the situation in which the individual takes both the human role in the tradition and simultaneously adopts the divine role (for a fuller account see Unger: On Religious Experience).

It should be pointed out that Sunden, like so many other authors, does not distinguish between those concrete experiences which alone I would call mystical and sundry other non-sensory religious impressions to which some such contextual theory may reasonably be applied. It is its application to the former only to which I object. The model of tradition - adoption by the individual - a structuring of experience in terms of acquired concepts not only requires that all mystics be acquainted, preferably actively, with a recognizable set of religious beliefs but for its confirmation requires that the experience a mystic reports reflects those beliefs, and only those beliefs, he is known to have acquired. Katz has expanded on this predictive aspect of the model. In 'Language, Epistemology and Mysticism' he writes: 'the forms of consciousness which the mystic brings to experience set structured and limiting parameters on what the experience will be ... the experience itself as well as the form is shaped by concepts which the mystic brings to, and which shape his experience ... the Hindu mystic ... has a Hindu experience preformed anticipated' or, more simply, 'there is a clear causal connection between the religious and social structure one brings to experience and the nature of one's actual religious experience'(23). If this is true not only should one find that mystics stand in a tradition that provides them with clear

something entailed by the form the experience takes or is related to the conception he has acquired. This issue follows on from the question I am considering here about the aetiology of concrete perceptions but constitutes a separate and far more debatable point.

models of divine - human interaction but that the experience they report invariably reflects this acquired model. However, I will argue, neither proposition is borne out by such little evidence as we have.

Glock and Stark have attempted to empirically establish the link between commitment to a set of beliefs and the frequency of occurrence of the anticipated type of experience. They set out to test the prediction that the more involved an individual is with certain beliefs and a peer group which adheres to such beliefs the more likely he is to have just that type of experience the group values, encourages and expects. They devised a test 'arranged along a scale of intimacy, complexity, frequency and incitement value according to religious and social norms'(24) to see if the data should, as expected, exhibit a 'developing sequence of felt encounters between men and the supernatural'(25) such that the frequency of favoured types of experience increases with the individual's degree of commitment whilst deviation from expectation - defined amongst the groups they worked with as increasing complexity of experience - was marked by decreasing frequency of occurrence. This study, one of the few that has attempted an empirical demonstration of the 'norm-compliance' theory - apart from Moehle's 'multidimensional scaling' I can think of no other - did manage to show that committed believers did have a high incidence of the favoured 'confirming' experience though there was no evidence about deviation from the norm as represented by the more complex types and no attempt to compare the findings about the experience of church groups with that of a sample of the population at large. Putting aside all criticisms of the design of this experiment - the fourfold typology representing increasing and deviant 'intimacy/complexity' does not provide a clear cut basis for scaling the data nor was the extent to which the attitudes of these subjects might have affected their claims

to such experience assessed - the experiment seemed to show that belief and the occurrence and form of the experience were correlated. However, below I shall argue that nothing at all can be established in a pluralistic society on the basis of the experiences of groups which hold homogenous beliefs but whether or not I am right to argue this, Glock and Stark typify contextualism and the way contextualists expect such data as we have to behave.

There have been other works based on the premises of contextualism, analysing the continuity of concepts in use in mystical 'schools' or traditions, say, or tracing the intellectual background of particular mystics but it is unnecessary to elaborate on these for, in terms of the epistemological issue, the mentalistic explanation of mystical experience stands or falls in relation to two, in principle, empirical questions only. The first of these is can it be shown that all mystics stand in a religious tradition which offers them clear divine roles? and, secondly, is it the case that all those who do stand in a tradition have an experience which reflects their firmly held beliefs? If, as I shall argue, it cannot be shown that prior learning and expectation do play a causal role in mystical experience, then the impression that it has some role may be more easily explained in other ways.

TWO OBJECTIONS TO THE ACCEPTANCE OF THE MENTALISTIC HYPOTHESIS IN THE CASE OF MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE

A. Can Acquired Beliefs Be Shown To Play A Causal Role?

In contextualist theory the acquisition of an appropriate set of religious beliefs is a necessary condition for mystical experience but, I shall argue, it cannot be shown that in all or even the majority of

cases this condition is met. Leaving aside the problems that not all religious faiths offer a clear divine role which the believer may anticipate and that it is difficult, church attendance notwithstanding, to measure the commitment any individual has to the faith he practices, I wish to concentrate on the problems inherent in the two different ways that might be used to show the causal role of acquired belief. The first of these is that there is no evidence that all mystics have a faith prior to their mystical experience, still less could all be thought of as having some clearcut expectation about divine roles. Either cases in which no set of religious beliefs or practice is apparent must be accounted for or contextualism ceases to be a universal explanation of mystical experience. In this discussion I devote space to the rather tenuous argument that, in cases where no overt commitment is apparent, the cause may be in a creative subliminal restructuring schemas feeding off such general and residual religious concepts that anyone may encounter in virtually any society but not only do I find that this notion cannot be put into a testable form, I find no reason for believing that any subliminal creative process is taking place at all. Without any apparent connection with religious tradition in many cases, it simply cannot be argued that acquired religious beliefs play a causal role and it may prove simpler to explain away in other terms those cases in which there is, on the face of it, a correlation between belief and experience than try to make all cases conform to a mould which manifestly is inappropriate to some. The second line of argument, used by Glock and Stark, seeks to draw conclusions from the apparent correlation between the beliefs and experiences of those who are clearly identified with groups or sub-cultures. My argument against this line is that there is no reason, in a pluralistic society, to assume that findings have a wider

relevance and even in the restricted case may more easily be explained in other ways. I shall discuss both points but if there is no evidence that religious traditions play a causal role and no possibility of demonstrating such a role empirically, one of the central propositions of the contextual hypothesis becomes a mere unsupported contention that can provide no reason for our treating mystical experience in different terms than we would use for sense experience.

1. It is a simple point of fact that not all of those reporting a mystical experience believe themselves to have had prior religious convictions. There are no figures but leafing through the reports one finds that such examples as 'but my first experience, as far as I can remember, was not aroused by anything I saw or heard and came as if from nowhere ... the experience of the "wonder of the infinite" has GIVEN ME (my capitals) a sense of God' (26) are not at all uncommon. In such cases there is no reason to assume that prior learning, let alone commitment, played any part in the initial experience especially when this does not obviously reflect any identifiable form of religious belief. If, on other grounds, we had some reason to believe that there was some necessary connection between belief and experience, we might attempt to explain the apparent lack of an appropriate background in such cases in other ways - lack of biographical detail perhaps - but a priori we have no such reason and therefore it would be nonsense to say, in the absence of firm evidence, that because such and such an experience is reported, the mystic must have acquired the appropriate conceptions from somewhere. Nor is it acceptable to argue, especially in an age of cross-cultural fertilization, that as everyone, declared atheist or not, has a minimal acquaintance with the religious beliefs to be found in all societies, this would account for apparently spontaneous cases in which no prior

commitment to a particular tradition could be traced. Even if, as in Von Hugel's study of Catherine of Genoa, we exhaustively traced all the background influences in apparently spontaneous cases we could establish nothing by showing, say, that the experient once or twice attended church or read an article on Buddhism for on this basis we all stand in a religious tradition and, perhaps, we all stand in all traditions. On such a basis as this there is no more reason to think the correlation with religious tradition is causal than there is to think that lung cancer is caused by breathing. To demonstrate the causal role of tradition it is not enough to show that mystics have, or might have had, access to a tradition - a near meaningless universal - but that each did belong unequivocally to a particular tradition and this requires criteria for belonging. It is by no means clear what contextual authors have in mind when they use phrases such as 'acquired from tradition' but the problem is that if they could suggest criteria it is certain that a good number of mystics would fail to meet these and without criteria the notion of tradition is meaningless and the contextual theory beyond demonstration.

There has been, from James to Batson and Ventis, an attempt to circumvent the problem, especially in 'conversion' cases, that there is often no prior history of belief or commitment by suggesting that some subliminal restructuring - problem solving or creativity - is taking place. This however does not answer the criticism made above as in most cases there is no evidence at all of such a process taking place. If it is argued that because someone is converted to a new set of religious ideas and in the process has some form of mystical experience, then clearly prior acquaintance with these beliefs is in this case causal - perhaps because the mystic has existential problems - unless there is clear evidence of

a mechanism - we are back to the problem of correlating 'effect' with a universal 'cause'. The mechanism suggested is, that faced with some personal difficulty or problem of identity, subliminal creativity finds a way to self-transcendence or otherwise solves the problem by adopting dogmatically such religious concepts as are available and which meet the individual's needs. There has to be a role for religious tradition otherwise contextualism is beyond demonstration, besides which, as mentioned earlier, it would be implausible to believe, accept on theological grounds, that many different individuals come up with the same doctrinal solutions through creativity alone. Batson and Ventis detailed the hypothetical stages of the creative process which leads to conversion and religious experience but, whilst I do not doubt that there is a creative process or even that some cases of conversion or confirmation, in which there is clearly a religious background, might fit the suggested pattern on three grounds in particular, I doubt that in most cases we could show that the 'new outlook' is the end product of a subliminal restructuring process that begins with the subliminal adoption or reworking of religious ideas that form our common inheritance.

The first of these objections is that whilst I accept that mystics invariably face personal difficulties prior to their experiences - see chapter 5 - these are often not the sort of difficulties to which the adoption of religious concepts could be thought in the least helpful in solving. Existential dilemmas may well require 'problem -solving' and the subliminal adoption of religious concepts would be a creative solution but when the ostensible cause of the mystical experience and 'new outlook' is fatigue, cold, hunger, trauma etc., as indeed they so often are, it is difficult to see why even the subliminal mind should

seek a solution for these types of problem in religious concepts or how could it be argued that conversion represents a cognitive solution. In a case such as 'whilst convalescing from a long and painful stomach ailment, I suddenly came very weak. Having been on a very light diet for months (there follows an account of a mystical experience and a "new outlook") (27), we have absolutely no reason to treat what followed as a solution to the problems of illness, made possible by some unspecified acquaintance with commonly available religious conceptions, 'blazing' into consciousness. Placing oneself in the context of some wider metaphysical picture may indeed answer some existential problems of meaninglessness, loneliness etc. but if we find that the 'new outlook' occurs in response to all kinds of problem, we can neither treat it as a particular solution to a particular problem or even as an act of individual creativity at all. I shall later argue that the 'new outlook' is a stereotyped reaction, rather than an individual solution, apparent even in cases where the experient remains atheistic after his mystical experience: 'if I were less sceptical, I might easily regard (this experience) as some sort of contact with God ... this something discovered in the depths of one's own being ... is another desire or will, so alien from the everyday "I" as to seem another being ... it is a detailed will for the good ... for the good of the universe ... in some sense this will is a potentiality of all minds' (28). There is one further problem with the cognitive restructuring theory in this respect and that is the 'solution' is often impermanent. If, in the normal course of events we have an intellectual shift, whether or not we later have another, for a time our way of looking at the world is stable. In the case of conversion and 'new outlook' this is not however the usual pattern. The 'new outlook' may be lost, though its loss lamented. Starbuck's survey noted that

despite a zealous devotion to the 'new outlook' most experients felt a 'backsliding' even to the point where they lost their religious outlook altogether. Others lose their 'new outlook' but have 'renewing experiences' that mirror their first conversion whilst in other cases the 'solution' crops up periodically in response to a range of wholly dissimilar personal crises. None of this is what one would expect if conceptual restructuring explained the admitted sequence of problem - mystical experience - 'new outlook'.

The second difficulty in cases where no long term existential or religious questioning is reported is that often insufficient time elapses for a creative problem-solving process to have taken place. One does not know how long it takes for a subliminal restructuring to take place but it stretches credulity to believe that a mystical experience and 'new outlook' following immediately on a road accident, say, arise from a process comparable to that which produces the solutions offered, after a period of prolonged and intense study, by a mathematician or some other researcher. James recognized this difficulty. 'Beyond all question there are persons in whom, quite independently of any exhaustion in the subject's capacity for feeling or even in the absence of any acute previous feeling, the higher condition ... bursts through ... these are the most striking and memorable cases' (29). As in the first objection a background of religious concepts would not appear relevant to all cases since subliminal restructuring is patently inapplicable to some. If this is so, not only is the idea that mystics make use of concepts universally available not corrigible, it is not comprehensive either and the line of argument that many cases can be explained by restructuring but some only by the workings of 'divine Grace' is insufficiently comprehensive to be compelling.

The third objection to the problem-solving hypothesis is that there is usually no evidence of a process of subliminal creativity. In the famous case of Kirkpatrik trying to understand the structure of the benzene ring, the solution to a problem he was consciously working on was prefigured in a dream but we have no such indications of subterranean processes in the case of mystical experience and 'new outlook'. As James noted many cases of conversion experience occur without any warning signs. Were it to be the case that those who report, say, a vision of Jesus or 'hearing' a biblical quote subsequently become committed Christians, one might treat the experience as an indication of a creative process but mystical experiences are rarely like that and cannot be said to prefigure the subsequent change in outlook. There is often no logical relationship between the experience and the outlook which follows as there is between dreaming of benzene in the shape of a ring and understanding its molecular structure in circular terms. Brilliant lights, a sense of presence, feelings of bliss, loss of ego/individuality etc. do not directly lead to a belief, say, in one's immortality or in the Trinity and therefore we have no reason to treat mystical experience in the way we can Kirkpatrik's dream. Nor, often, are there any other signs of acute psychological disturbance which we might expect if mystics were wrestling subconsciously with a difficult problem. Whilst some mystics do mention disturbed behaviour patterns prior to their experience and 'new outlook', many do not, mentioning instead that the whole episode blew up out of a clear blue sky. Certainly mystical experience is not normally associated with patterns of disintegrative behaviour or abnormal anxiety etc. though there undoubtedly have been notable exceptions.

These three points make it difficult to argue that in cases where no prior

religious belief is evident a connection might still be made with those religious concepts so freely disseminated throughout society. Without clear evidence of a subliminal cognitive process linking experience with religious traditions, the claim that there is a hidden causal connection is meaningless, being quite beyond demonstration. There are then too many exceptions to the notion that all mystics stand in some clearly defined tradition for us to accept the principle tenet of contextualism and there is no way in which these exceptions could meaningfully be explained away.

There is nonetheless a lingering impression that in many cases there is some connection between acquired belief and experience but, since this does not amount to a necessary connection, it might better be explained in one of two ways. The first of these, as noted above, is that, unless the experient wishes to coin a private language, the only way open to most mystics to conceive and report their experience is to use such terms as their culture provides them with. It is often not clear whether the terms adopted have any precise meaning or, if they have, that they are being used precisely but, in any event, I do not believe the use of such terms in itself makes any kind of case for the contextualist. It is not at all surprising if most mystics in a Christian or residually-Christian culture, say, use theistic or even specifically Christian terms but all this shows is that they have an acquaintance with a language which is our common inheritance, that can be applied to the experiences they had. It does not show that this acquaintance was causal or otherwise significantly related to the form their experience took whatever this was in fact like. More significant than the common use of names such as God, Jesus etc. to express a direct experience of power or love

is the fact that some experients equally involved with traditional concepts go out of their way not to use terms with which we are all familiar and even practising Christians have been known to report their experiences in the terms used by nature mystics. The appearance given by the majority of cases in which experience is described in familiar terms proves nothing about the epistemological issue and may be thoroughly misleading, certainly it does not show that mystics who use such terms had knowledge of or commitment to particular beliefs above that which is normal in any given culture. The second possible reason was identified by James and arises from the historical policy of religious traditions to collect together just those reports which lend credence to the faith and which were written by the patently devout. As James acknowledges 'the classic religious mysticism is only a privileged case ... an extract, kept true to type by the selection of the fittest specimens and their preservation in schools. It is carved out from a much larger mass and if we take the larger mass as seriously as religious mysticism has taken itself, we find that the supposed unanimity largely disappears'. (30)

Certainly traditions are motivated to select and preserve just those examples which exemplify their beliefs (universities too have unhappily fallen into this pattern, studying Buddhist or Christian mysticism, rather than mysticism in whatever context it occurs) and this gives the appearance that only Christians, say, have and can have Christian type experiences when the wider picture gives the lie to this impression. It is also perhaps worth mentioning a third possible reason. In view of the role selective attention plays in what we will be aware of, it is just possible that our ideology, even if this falls short of any specific commitment to traditional beliefs, tends to make us more aware of those experiences which we find most comprehensible, acceptable, desirable etc.

If so it would not be entirely surprising if a Christian tended to ignore those sensations that a Hindu might find so rewarding but which for him have little or no relevance. Certainly, until recently, the social acceptability of reporting an experience which did not fit the traditional expectation would have been a factor but perhaps both points are marginal if, as seems to be the case, the experience is so overwhelming that it could scarcely be ignored and demands to be reported, acceptable or not. I do not know whether these thoughts fully explain the impression we have that there is a link between belief and the type of experience one will have but in any event there is no necessary connection between the two nor can cases which do not fit the pattern be easily explained away.

2. In the absence of any general evidence that all mystics do stand in a recognizable religious tradition considerable efforts have been made to confirm the contextualist theory by showing that all those who do stand in a clear tradition have experiences that might be explained in terms of that tradition. Glock and Stark's study, amongst others, showing that committed Baptists, say, are most likely to have just those experiences favoured by their church at first sight appears to confirm the contextualist line but whilst I accept the results of such studies there appears to me to be a flaw in the deductions made from such figures. If we discovered a culture where belief was monolithic and found there that the expected and only the expected type of experience occurred with a high degree of frequency the contextual view would be amply confirmed but it does not seem to me that studying the experiences of sub-cultures in a pluralistic society is at all a satisfactory substitute for this ideal testing ground. The problem is that in a pluralistic society

other explanations can be found for the correlation between the nature of belief and type of experience that has been noted in clearly defined sub-cultures, groups, sects etc. With supplementary questioning it might be simply determined whether or not in this restricted case belief can be shown to affect experience but at the present moment we do not know, say, whether those who have certain types of experience become Baptists, or become more committed Baptists, because this church accepts their experience and offers relevant explanations for it rather than that the church itself induced the experiences its members report. I suspect we have much to learn from figures showing how many seek out and join a church or move between churches as a result of their 'supernatural' experience. Again, whatever peer group pressures do for experience 'norm compliance' will certainly affect the reporting of experience. 'In Western culture, talking about personal contact with the dead is often felt to be undesirable ... only rarely were such experiences told to professional people ... the main reason for not discussing the experience was fear of ridicule'(31) whereas in a sympathetic situation others, especially in the younger age groups, may be all too willing to claim an experience that bestows acceptance. At the very least, many must be unsure whether or not the experience they had did conform to the group's anticipations since even in the homogenous society of Baptists, say, 'confirming' experience is difficult to define. Nor could it be ruled out that it was the practices rather than the beliefs of groups which brought about the high frequency of anticipated experience. Fasting, vigils, drumming etc. may well prove to be a relevant factor amongst some groups. Since few practices are unique to particular groups it may be difficult to show the correlation between practice and the form mystical experience will take or the frequency of its occurrence but it is as well to be reminded that membership often involves more than an

adherence to shared beliefs and expectations. Equally a problem, in isolation from a wider picture, figures relating to the experience of sub-cultures prove nothing, not even that in this restricted case there is a link between prior learning and experience. Without knowing how common 'confirming' experiences are in the population at large, we cannot even say that there is an unusual frequency of this type of experience in Baptist circles and even if we guessed that the occurrence of this type was unusually high it still might be explained away by the selection of the group by the experient, pressures on reporting or even theologically in terms of faith. Certainly one could no more argue that the correlation in the case of sub-cultures confirms contextual theory universally than one could induct, say, a theory of heart disease from the study of the lifestyle of some small segment of the population in which such disease was known to occur. Confirmation requires that the factor selected as causal should be operative in all cases and, in the case of prior commitment to a clearly defined set of beliefs, this is just what is lacking.

My first objection to the idea that there is a 'clear causal connection between the religious and social structure one brings to experience and the nature of one's actual religious experience' is then that there is no evidence that all mystics do stand in a clearly defined tradition and nothing can be assumed from studies of the experience of groups who happen to have a clear set of beliefs. Without evidence that prior belief is relevant to the occurrence and form of mystical experience in every case, either as a conscious commitment or in the effects an acquaintance with such beliefs has on a subliminal creative process which aims to alleviate man's existential problems, I cannot see that there are grounds for accepting the role of religious traditions especially as the impression we might have that they do play some role can be explained away. Perhaps

a full and carefully designed empirical survey would throw up new evidence about the role of prior belief but there is no reason at present to believe that it will.

B. My second objection to the contextual theory centres on the problem posed by aberrance. When dealing only with cases in which there is a clearly defined religious background, not infrequently the form the experience is reported to have taken fails - despite the pressures of norm compliance, the role of ideology etc. - to reflect the background the mystic is known to have. If the explanation of mystical experience is that there is a necessary connection between acquired beliefs and the forms experience will take, not only do aberrant cases fall beyond explanation but actually appear to falsify contextualist theory. Ellwood, whilst recognizing the problem fails to give any satisfactory contextualist answer. 'Sometimes in our modern pluralistic world the wires get crossed, so that Westerners have Hindu experiences and Chinese see visions of Christ'. (30) This is scarcely a satisfactory explanation since it suggests either that a set of beliefs can give rise to experiences which are consonant and dissonant with it - to predict that both P and \sim P confirms the theory is meaningless - or, that because x is experienced x must have been acquired. The latter argument is wholly reductionist and, as observed above, is quite incorrigible for, unless there is some specific evidence in each case, in a pluralistic world it might be supposed that we all have had some passing acquaintance with the beliefs of all faiths. If it could be shown that the Westerner had had a prolonged contact with Hindu beliefs - criteria? - or that the Chinese who saw Christ belonged to one or other of the Christian sub-cultures these cases would only test the rule but there is no evidence that

exceptions can be explained in this way or that our problem is a lack of biographical information or knowledge of the mystic's milieu.

I do not know what percentage of cases might properly be called aberrant, it is not even clear what percentage of mystics stand in a clear religious tradition prior to their experience, but it is probably sufficiently large to falsify contextualism. Since it would be quite unparsimonious to argue that there is a 'classic religious mysticism', and, despite some of its cases having a religious background, a mysticism in which religious tradition played no part, counter examples assume a significance out of all proportion to their likely numbers. The clearest cases are those which lead to a conversion from one faith or church to another. James mentions the case of Ratisbonne, a Jew with anti-clerical feelings, who said of himself prior to his vision of the Virgin 'if at this time any one (had said) "Alphonse, in a quarter of an hour you shall be adoring Jesus Christ as your God and Saviour ... you shall lie prostrate at the foot of a priest ... ready to give your life for the Catholic faith ... renounce the world ... your fortune, your hopes ... your betrothed; the affections of your family, the esteem of your friends, and your attachment to the Jewish people etc."' I should have judged that only one person could be more mad than he - whosoever, might believe in the possibility of such senseless folly becoming true'. (33) In this case, as in others, there is no reason to suppose that Ratisbonne had had a sufficiently close prior acquaintance with catholicism for us to use this as an explanation of his experience, his background was entirely Jewish and his contacts with catholicism were no more than ~~were~~ unavoidable in nineteenth century France, yet one could not get a clearer example of a divine role which did not match the expectations raised by the tradition

in which he had been raised and to which he belonged. Another interesting case is that of Joel Goldsmith, an American Jew who became a Christian Scientist before starting on an extraordinarily rich life of mystical experience in which neither of the main strands in his background were represented and as a result of which he abandoned both. (I refer the reader to any of the numerous books he inspired). There are quite a number of such examples, both recent and ancient - from Ruysbrock to any number of outright heretics, it is clear that even when religious belief was a great deal more monolithic than it is today, orthodox divine roles were often not reflected in the experience of mystics - and a great many more in which aberrance might be suspected though there is perhaps insufficient biographical information for us to be certain that prior acquisition of the relevant concepts had not occurred. I accept that this is a difficult area, mystical experiences are often ill-defined, by no means all faiths specify what sort of experience the faithful might expect, we often lack knowledge of background or milieu but even so there are sufficient counter examples to falsify such claims as 'a Hindu mystic ... has a Hindu experience preformed, anticipated'. The only other way to treat this claim is as a meaningless tautology.

Looking at the little data we have, I find that there are no grounds for believing that, as Sunden claimed, all mystics do stand in a religious tradition or that, where they do, their experience always reflects the anticipated divine, and indeed human, roles their culture has provided them with. Looking at the orthodox experience of identifiable groups establishes nothing and there is little evidence either for the view that the mystical experience reflects a subliminal, creative restructuring of schemas fed by a more general acquaintance with religious ideas.

The onus of proof is on the contextualist but at present there is no reason to believe that prior learning plays any causal part in the occurrence of mystical experience or the form it takes and any slight impression we have that it does can easily be explained in other ways. I therefore see no compelling reason to adopt mentalistic accounts in the case of mystical experience or to abandon my belief in the significance of the qualitative analogy with sense perception and the epistemological implications this has.

THREE ANALOGIES WITH SENSE PERCEPTION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL QUESTION

There would appear to be three ways, in addition to the qualitative analogy, in which mystical experience resembles sense perception each of which makes it inappropriate to apply mentalistic explanations to either form of experience. The first is that there is no evidence that the prior acquisition of appropriate concepts is a necessary condition for either experience. The second is that there is no evidence of a development of experiential capacities in line with an increasing complexity of a mystic's beliefs and the third is that the various forms mystical experience may take, like our various sensory experiences, do not appear correlated or otherwise tied to cultural factors rather both occurrence and form may be linked to non-psychological factors. With respect to this final point, I shall argue that just as sense perception is related to environment, mystical experience is related to other non-psychological factors and mentalistic explanations are redundant in either case. That they share these three characteristics does not in itself establish that the same process is at work in both cases but does give grounds for believing that, in terms of the epistemological question, we can treat them as comparable and, in view of the qualitative analogy, makes it not unreasonable to think of the resemblance of the processes involved as being very close.

1) The form and occurrence of mystical experience does not appear constrained by the acquisition of appropriate concepts and expectations. As noted above, there clearly are aberrant cases in which no appropriate background can be discerned and there are many other cases in which no clearly religious background at all appears to exist. Since there is no necessity for prior learning, not only is this a strong objection to mentalistic theories it is, in the context of the epistemological issue, an analogy with sense perception which, I have argued, similarly occurs independently of acquired and non-necessary psychological structures. There is no more reason to suppose that we cannot have some form of mystical experience associated with another culture than that we cannot see a mountain, say, on account of its unaccustomed size. I consider the corollary - that mystical experience, like sense perception, occurs worldwide independently of cultural constraints - below in 3), here I simply wish to make the point that though mystical and sensory experience both usually occur against some cognitive background, this cannot be thought to be causal if it is not a necessary condition. In terms of the epistemological question both mystical and sense experience can only be thought of as innate and necessitated for it would be wholly unparsimonious to argue that there are types of concrete experience whose aetiology is psychological and others where it is not. As in both other parallels to be discussed, there is no reason to treat mystical experience differently in epistemological terms from the way we would treat sensory perception since in neither case is prior learning a precondition for experience.

2) MYSTICAL EXPERIENCES, LIKE SENSE PERCEPTIONS, DO NOT DEVELOP IN LINE WITH COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENTS

It was pointed out above that with one or two exceptions we do not develop

our capacities for sense perception. From our very first moment of consciousness colours, say, are something given, complete and our perception of them undergoes no change even though we may subsequently come to give them a psychological significance or learn a great deal more about them. Similarly, I believe, it can be argued that there is no indication of a development in mystical experience amongst those who have recurring experiences though, over a lifetime, their religious beliefs may develop very considerably. The picture we are sometimes given of the religious progressing from experience to experience until they finally achieve the goal laid down by their tradition - Nirvana or union or whatever - is wholly misleading. It is true that many mystical authors do present us with classifications of increasingly complex experience, Teresa of Avila's 'seven mansions' for example, but none appears to claim that their own experiences followed a straightforwardly developmental pattern from simple to complex/profound. On the mentalistic model we might expect first experiences to simply reflect acquired stereotypes of divine roles and later ones to increasingly elaborate on the initial themes reflecting the growing theological sophistication that comes with a lifetime of study and commitment. One might also expect that, as belief is reinforced by experience, a pattern of increasing frequency should be apparent as it is in many paranoid delusions and other obsessional states. Neither indication, however, seems evident in the biographies and autobiographies of mystics who have had more than one experience. Typically, the individual prone to mystical experience appears to have a quite motley collection of experiences that, in content, have no recurring motifs whilst there is no progressive development in terms of complexity or frequency. Teresa

of Avila, for example, reports - despite her classification - that the, to her, less important contacts with the divine continued intermittently throughout her life and there is no indication that her experiences culminated in 'marriage' - on the contrary this occurred at intervals amidst much other, 'lesser', experience. It is also noteworthy that those experiences which mystics hold to be the most profound tend to be the least stereotyped having in them little if anything that could be traced back to tradition. Charles Finney's celebrated mystical experience was preceded by a stereotyped vision of Christ but that which followed and appeared so real 'arrived without any expectation of it, without any recollection that I had ever heard such a thing mentioned by any person in the world'. (34) The 'wordless essence, a fragrance of eternity' (35), like Teresa of Avila's 'intellectual vision' where 'the soul only recognizes (this was) the presence of God by the (after) effects ... so sublime, mysterious etc. was it' (36) is not the sort of state in which it is possible to point to stereotypes of divinity. It is certainly surprising in contextual terms, if, like Teresa, one is imbued with a tradition yet one's deepest experiences have no recognizable Christian content at all. Neither, in Teresa's case or in any other that I have come across, is there evidence of an increasing frequency of occurrence with age - though conation and milieu should both, on the mentalistic model, conspire to make this likely. If the findings of Douglas-Smith are borne out, peak ages for mystical experience in healthy subjects are late teens (this supported by Paffard in *The Ineffable Moment*) and the mid-thirties (37) whilst there is no indication at all of a pattern of increasing frequency. There is then no indication that mystical experiences develop any more than sense perceptions do and it would make no more sense to talk of a half-developed mystical experience

or a developing sequence of experiences than it would do in the other case treated solely at the level of concrete impressions. Experiences may be more or less like the paradigm laid down by a tradition and mystics may classify them in terms of the traditional paradigm but each, it seems, is self-sufficient having no relationship with any other in some hypothetical developmental sequence.

3) The third way in which mystical experience resembles sense perception at least in terms of the epistemological question, is that there is no evidence of a general correlation between culture and the form mystical experience will take. If it were the case that a large majority of Hindus say, reporting a mystical experience reported an identifiably Hindu experience, a form rare or non-existent outside of that culture, then there might be some grounds - having taken into account the role of ideology in reporting, the social acceptability of the claim, the selectivity of recording etc. - for accepting a role for culture and tradition. However, despite appearances which can be explained in other terms, in addition to aberrant cases, there is no evidence of any correlation between culture and the form mystical experience will take. There has been little cross-cultural research but one study, into 'near-death experience', appears extremely significant. Osis and Haroldsson found that 'in India and the U.S.A. the core phenomena (of N-D.E's) are the same ... an absence of influences by medical and psychological variables was indicated in all three samples ... religion had a comparably slight influence on the main phenomena, though it did of course determine the naming of the religious figures'. (39) Equally importantly, the percentage reporting this type of experience was the same in both cultures.

It is of course a matter of conjecture but in view of this study and the many cases of aberrance which are known to occur despite the pressures of 'norm compliance' it does not seem unlikely that different forms of the experience occur worldwide without regard for religious frontiers. To prove this is quite another matter but Osis and Haroldsson have taken an apparently distinguishable type and shown that its highest common factor of characteristics is identifiable cross-culturally and the frequency of occurrence is correlated only with the common circumstance of near-death or, as I believe, severe trauma more generally. In the event of a taxonomy of mystical experience ever being achieved, ideally the occurrence of a type in a culture in which it accorded with orthodox expectations would be compared with its occurrence in a tradition in which it clearly did not belong to establish if cultural expectations have any effect at all on the form or frequency of occurrence, even a study of the different types occurring within a relatively homogenous background would help. The difficulties would be formidable but it might once and for all settle the, at present, groundless contention that culture shapes the form of the mystic's experience. However, I can see no more reason, now, to believe that mystics are any more predisposed by culture to have the type of experience they do than to believe that culture shapes the sense perceptions we have. Perhaps, if selective attention operates in mystical experience as it does in sensory experience, psychological factors may in fact make us more or less aware of certain data but these are not absolute parameters and even in this case the universality of mystical types would still be apparent. If there is no evidence that prior learning is a necessary condition for, or otherwise shapes or constrains, the types of concrete experience we may have whatever factors are relevant to the occurrence of different types of mystical experience - if indeed we can talk of different types in anything other than a descriptive way - there is, at present, no reason to suppose that these

are of a psychological nature. Instead, as in the case of sense perception they seem likely to be universal and necessary factors comparable to the environment in its necessary effect on innate processes and the resulting sense perception.

These three points together, in the absence of any compelling reason to accept a mentalistic hypothesis, give good grounds to treat mystical experience as comparable to sense perception in the context of the epistemological issue. Whatever processes are involved and whatever factors occurrence and form are related to there is no reason to believe that non-necessary psychological structures are involved in the case of mystical experience anymore than they are in the case of sensory experience. Future findings may change this but, as will later be discussed, my own belief is that some of the factors can be identified and each of these reinforces the picture that we are dealing with an innate process that is activated under certain circumstances in wholly necessary and predetermined ways. I do not of course deny that there is a psychological dimension in which individuality makes of the concrete experience 'forced upon it' what it will but only argue that the cognitive plays no causal role in the occurrence and form of whatever concrete experience we have. Taken together with the qualitative analogy, I can see no reason not to go further and argue that the processes not merely appear similar in terms of the innate-mentalistic issue but actually have a very close identity. As in the 'real' world mystics distinguish their experiences from dreams, acts of imagination etc., find only that the real/concrete is memorable and so forth and along with common qualities inherent in both experiences this must be sufficient for us to take it as a working hypothesis that mystical experience is either a form or sub-type of the class of sense perception or otherwise is a process with very close analogies to it. I can find no reason to treat mystical experience

differently from sense perception and, if the latter is to be explained wholly in terms of the necessary and the innate, it would be unparsimonious - in the absence of powerful reasons to the contrary - to explain analogous phenomena differently.

SUMMARY.

The issue under discussion has been whether or not that type of experience which is characteristically concrete/'real' can be explained in terms of non-necessary, i.e. psychological factors, or is better understood in terms of the innate and necessary. I began by arguing that mundane sense perception does not require a mentalistic explanation though I accepted that subjectivity had an influence on what we are in fact aware of through two hypothetical processes, selective attention and enhancement. I next argued that mystical experience appears analogous to sense perception both qualitatively and in ways which reflect their similarity in the context of the epistemological question and, since there are two clear objections to applying mentalistic explanations to mystical experience, concluded that we should treat mystical experience as a form of sense perception or as a quasi-sense perception. If this view is persuasive, though it remains to be determined what the factors are which, in the case of mystical perception, play a role comparable to that which environmental stimuli play in triggering and constraining sensory experience, it appears most likely that these also are innate, having ineluctable consequences for the concrete experiences mystics have. For these reasons I utterly reject the contextualist explanations of mystical experience for there is no evidence that acquired schemas play any more causal part in this case than they do in the case of sense perception. This is not to deny that we each bring to both types

of experience a whole psychological dimension of meaning and interpretation but simply to argue that this is not relevant in any causal way to an account of the concrete experiences we have. Apart from making the case for a particular approach to the epistemological question that determines the direction my enquiries take in subsequent chapters, I believe this chapter has been helpful in further defining mystical experience. In identifying it with sense perception, distinguishing it from a variety of other types of experience and disassociating it from the religious beliefs in terms of which it is usually reported and understood, I believe we can, at last, begin to examine the phenomenon entire and in isolation from other sorts of experience and the common preconceptions which have, I believe, masked the true nature of what is going on.

For some readers my approach may appear too reductionist. However, I would point out that the chain of environment - innate processes - sense experience and whatever is its counterpart in the case of mystical experience is only one part of what we mean by mind or consciousness. Not only does individuality regulate the sensations we are conscious of - selective attention - and appears to give rise to a range of other quasi-experiential phenomena, but all of us have a distinct layer of psychological or computational contents that gives our concrete experience the meaning it has. That one, definable, part of our experience appears mechanistic is not to argue that all mental contents arise from innate and necessary processes but rather that the acquired and subjective blends with the given to create the diversity and richness of the human mind. It is though difficult to know precisely where the given and the non-necessary meet. Is it the case that we are presented with sense and mystical data and left to make of it what we can or is it that such data imposes its

own lower order level of meaning? In the case of the 'visual cliff' it was demonstrated that not merely were babies aware of perceptual patterns but associated these, in an apparently necessary way, with danger (also incidentally showing once more that there is no connection between the sensory and the ontological.) It is hard to tell how large a role natural as opposed to acquired concepts play in our understanding of the concrete data presented to us but I suspect that much of what is lamely labelled instinctive behaviour could be understood in terms of the meaning entailed by certain groups of sensory input. The question has a particular relevance in the case of mystical experience for it is odd how many,atheists and religious alike, understand their very strange sensations in terms of the presence, internal and external, of an objective spiritual being. The point is of course a quite separate one from that made above - i.e. that the occurrence of these sensations and the form they take is unrelated to acquired conceptions - and perhaps all that needs to be said here is that the meaning given to these experiences could either be explained in terms of acquired concepts or as something entailed, Otto-like, by the sensation itself. Perhaps both are involved and the meaning mystics find in their experience is partly given and partly reinforced and expanded upon by acquired religious conceptions. However, I am not here arguing that because certain stimuli give rise ineluctably to certain forms of experience, we are therefore wholly constrained in the meanings and constructions we place upon them.

Having discussed the ontological question and the requirements of empiricism, the difficulties of drawing more than two conclusions from an analysis of descriptive data and having used one of these conclusions

to make an epistemological point about the aetiology of the experience, I now feel able to proceed to an examination of those factors which are relevant to a causal explanation of mystical experience. I devote each of the next two chapters to a discussion of a major factor in the occurrence of mystical experience.

CHAPTER 4

THE EGO-SPIRITUAL CYCLE

A Necessary Condition for the Occurrence of Mystical Perception

'This Self, this Person, the Immortal, the free from fear: this is Brahman. He is indeed the pure, the stable, the unmoved, the unflurried, free from desire, like a spectator. The recipient of pious works, he conceals himself behind a veil woven from the constituents of NATURE ...'

'Master, there is surely another different self wandering around at the mercy of all manner of dualities? This is the individual self swept by the currents of NATURE, unstable, full of desire, restless, thinking this I am, this is mine. The combination of the two is called the body' - MAITRI UPAKISHAD 112PF.

In this and the subsequent chapter I wish to examine two factors related to the occurrence of mystical experience which give this condition clear definition and, if fully understood, are likely to determine in which framework it is best explained. The first of these factors and the most problematic is a background pattern of shifts in the perception of self-identity at a given point in which mystical experience will, if at all, occur. I call this pattern, which is the subject of this chapter, the ego-spiritual cycle - cycle because it is clear from the autobiographies of those mystics who have a number of mystical experiences that the shift may occur time and again and, perhaps, typically does so. The second factor is a trigger, trauma in

a variety of forms, which facilitates and is a necessary condition for the shift though, by itself, trauma has no integral connection with mystical perception or with personality changes. I consider trauma in chapter 5 and argue there that not only is it the occasion of mystical experience but that many of the features which have been associated with mystical experience by earlier researchers can be explained in terms of relatively simple physiological reactions to trauma. These two factors are, on the face of it, quite distinct elements in the profile of mystical experience that in conjunction allow us to characterize the conditions under which mystical perception will take place. However, though in passing I shall look at some possible explanations of these two factors and of the chain of events their conjunction gives rise to, I shall leave my own assessment of what is happening until the final chapter for there are too many unanswered questions in respect to the ego-spiritual cycle and we can only take an overview of its implications in the light of all the features mystical experience is known to exhibit. I therefore propose for now only to describe these factors and show their relevance for the occurrence of mystical experience thereby completing my definition of this state and making it readily identifiable even if still ill-understood.

In this chapter I intend first to define and characterize the ego and spiritual stages - a necessary precondition for, unless others can recognize these and confirm that the stages are discrete and typifiable, the cycle will not even have a descriptive validity. Secondly, I wish to show that the shift - typically cycles - has a necessary relationship

with the occurrence of mystical experience before finally considering and discarding a variety of explanations for such shifts in the perception of self-identity. Before starting however it will be worthwhile clarifying a number of points about this feature in the occurrence of mystical experience.

1) The ego-spiritual cycle, as defined below, is a descriptive feature to be found in accounts of mystical experience in which the subject's condition and circumstances prior to his experience are reported in addition to the usual descriptions of the experience and its aftermath. It awaits empirical confirmation that such a pattern is recognizable in all cases in which the relevant information is given. Though I have come across no counter example should sensory or quasi sensory experiences of a non-natural kind be reported against a background in which this pattern was not identifiable even though all relevant information was given, these would render the ego-spiritual cycle and my claims for it invalid. It is likely that a greater problem will be the fact that an unknown proportion of accounts of mystical experience omit all reference to the subject's state and circumstances prior to the onset of the experience. Therefore, it simply cannot be confirmed that this factor characterizes all cases though it may be predicted that, where the appropriate questions are asked in relation to experiences of this type, this pattern will be manifested. Since, with the information we currently have, there is no way to show that the cycle appears, in the way I define it, in all cases of mystical experience, the simplest method to further my analysis is to give a few examples which I believe typify the pattern. Until such time that

it is confirmed or falsified there is little point in listing the substantial number of cases in which I know this pattern to be manifest for this establishes nothing though readers may wish to check its general applicability by applying it to cases of which they are aware.

2) In the absence of a confirmation of the descriptive validity of the background pattern in order to show that it is not simply an extraction from the life patterns of one or two mystics I have chosen to regard as paradigmatic, it is necessary to demonstrate experimentally that it has a relevance for the occurrence of mystical experience. This requires that an explanatory model be developed which shows in some testable way that the pattern is connected to the occurrence of mystical perception. I work towards such a model in the final chapter but even if the explanatory outline I present is testable it is regrettably beyond the scope of my work to experimentally confirm it. Should my analysis be thought to justify it this is a job for the future for now I merely wish to make the case that such data as we have suggests that this line of enquiry is worth pursuing.

3) The ego-spiritual cycle, as I characterize it, is perhaps to some extent idealized. The difficulty is that, even if we only use cases in which the antecedent condition and circumstances are described, the amount of relevant detail given varies from case to case. It is natural that I have drawn my typification from the most extended accounts and, whilst I omit anything that appears idiosyncratic or is contradicted in other, briefer, descriptions, it still remains the case that not all accounts in which some antecedent description is given explicitly mention all of the features I list or explicitly confirm the order of

events I suggest. However, this is something that may be established by future researchers or by supplementary questions to recent experiments and though it is possible that the cycle is in fact an idealization, I am at present working on the assumption that if all experiments had given an absolutely full account the complete characterization and specified order would be manifest in each case. Unlike 'NEAR-DEATH experience' the ego-spiritual cycle is not offered as a paradigm to which cases have a greater or lesser resemblance but as a marked and stereotyped syndrome from which little deviation is possible in the event of its manifesting itself at all.

4) There are difficulties in characterizing the ego and spiritual patterns of self-identity in such a way as to make each appear discrete. I believe the shift from one to the other is so sudden, marked and stereotyped that subjectively the difference between the two orientations in this case is unmistakable yet such is the diversity and fluidity of perceptions of the self in the ordinary course of events that it may be questioned how far either have a distinguishable and clear cut identity. It is no doubt the case that in many individuals elements of both patterns I describe are present as apparently inseparable aspects of personality whilst the mixture may vary from individual to individual and constantly change in individuals for a variety of reasons. Shifts in self-identity are not at all uncommon in other contexts. Ego-identity changes with time, even varies with the time of day and is of course affected by a range of factors from state of health, intoxication etc. Though the reader will certainly recognize as distinctive the different outlooks, attitudes and conceptions as to the nature and identity of the self that I associate with the two different types of personality state, perhaps

these are clearly distinguishable only in the context of the shift I associate with mysticism. Here the change is so sudden and dramatic that many experiencers report they have become a different person and have a totally new perception of themselves and their relationship with the world and perhaps in this case only are we entitled to talk of the two orientations as being distinguishable, each having its own clearly defined set of characteristics.

5) I use the term ego throughout to identify a certain set of perceptions and attitudes that are distinguishable at least in the context of the shift I write about, from the spiritual orientation and not in its usual psychological sense. I am not suggesting that in the spiritual state the experiencer typically loses all sense of the personal and subjective as he might in sleep or in some extreme mental disorder only that these undergo change. This is perhaps confusing but, in addition to being 'the subject of all personal acts of consciousness' or the even more complex and all-embracing concept it is in the Freudian system, the term ego is also commonly used to denote characteristics of personality which ties in with the concept I am introducing and it is only in the latter, everyday sense that I am using the term.

6) The ego and the spiritual orientations are both patterns of waking consciousness a term which implies no theory of mind. The difference between them is not, I believe, like that between waking consciousness and an altered state of consciousness be it a yogic trance, the hypnotic state or whatever for they only represent characteristically different patterns of self-identity, values etc. It may be that each is correlated with distinctive profiles of physiological indicators,

brain-wave patterns and the like, but I have no evidence at all that this is so and for the time being, at least, there are no grounds for distinguishing them on any such basis. I therefore do not intend to convey any hypothetical status, ontological or psychological, and the importance of their distinctive identities at a descriptive level, if any, remains to be determined. It is perhaps also worth mentioning that, whilst I observe that each orientation may in fact have a distinctive biological value at different times, my use of the terms ego and spiritual is not valuative though experients invariably prefer the latter state and religions extol it.

7) It is finally worth noting that neither the ego-spiritual cycle nor ego abandonment in the face of trauma - the subject of the next chapter - is an entirely novel concept for in these the reader will notice much that is familiar from a variety of studies ranging from the mystical 'path' or 'way' to 'problem-solving' and 'creativity'. However, whilst freely acknowledging all debts to earlier scholarship, I deliberately avoid using such terms and concepts for they all convey senses which I do not intend here to convey. For example, whereas Teresa of Avila, Underhill and others have recognized not dissimilar changes in outlook to those I shall propose and similarly related these to mystical perception they depict these in the context of a variety of developing and progressive stages in the mystical and religious life whereas I treat the ego-spiritual cycle as a non-progressive alternation between two stereotyped casts of mind. Equally though there may, on the face of it, appear to be similarities between ego abandonment as a simple reaction to trauma and the 'letting go' we find mentioned in the context of creativity and problem-solving, the concepts are not comparable at all

though both interpretations might use one and the same set of descriptions. Such differences as these make it undesirable for me to adopt the more familiar terms these dimly perceived patterns might be known by.

Having made these provisos I first wish to attempt to characterize these two states, especially the spiritual one, before examining the cycle in which they are related to the occurrence of mystical experience and, perhaps, only in the context of which are their distinctive identities fully apparent.

THE EGO ORIENTATION

In the face of human individuality one could not characterize everyday perceptions of self and its relationship to the world in anything but the most formal terms yet in the context of the cycle I am writing about two distinctive patterns are contrasted. I wish here to discuss the ego pattern which is defined by contrast with the subsequent spiritual pattern and identify just those points which distinguish it in this particular circumstance and, further, examine some of the problems which this pattern of self-identity characteristically gives rise to. An example which epitomises the differences I aim to characterize would be; 'I suddenly was aware that my own personality had been transformed. I was no longer a separate, isolated unit. Although I had not lost my identity - indeed for the first time in my life I had really experienced the identity of a whole person - I was in union with all creation and my identity was added to it, giving of its essence to the created whole' (1). In this case and, I will venture to suggest, in all cases in which a mystical perception is reported,

we are presented with an abrupt shift from an acute and often oppressive view of the self as markedly individuated - 'a separate, isolated unit' - to one in which the individual feels himself to be part of some greater whole, a new state that is accompanied by a characteristic set of values and, seemingly, by typifiable changes in mental functioning.

I could not say whether, in the context of this cycle, the perception of self as isolated and highly individuated is more acute than is normal in the population at large or whether it is only made to appear so by comparison with the new perception which follows but it is certainly in no way unique to this cycle. We all, in post-embryonic life, have a 'body image' of ourselves as individual and discrete entities, a perception reinforced every time we look in the mirror and it might be argued that ego-identity is no more than a natural reflection of the physical facts of our existence. Yet, in the ordinary course of events, our sense of separateness is often mitigated by the perception of ourselves as belonging to some wider group as many would define their identity, at least in part, in terms of family or other communal ties. It is also noteworthy that the keenness of the individual's perception of his own singularity and autonomy is tied to other factors ranging from age and state of health to time of day. In the hypnopompic state, for example, the feeling of being a discrete identity is typically much diminished whilst it seems reasonable to suggest that young children are usually less conscious of the gulf which separates them from the rest of creation than their parents are likely to be. Though I would not wish to say that there was anything unadaptive about the sense of isolation mystics feel prior to their experiences, perhaps the intensity of this perception is heightened to a degree which borders on the abnormal. Remarks such as 'I had reached a point where it seemed to me

that men were alonenesses together. I believed our condition was essentially meaningless' (2) or 'during a period of dreadful alone-ness I became ill' (3) indicate that mystics have an acute and unmitigated perception of their own isolation and autonomy to a degree which is not shared by the population at large. The first phase of the cycle is then marked by a, perhaps, unusually intense awareness of the self as a being apart, discrete and independent, a perception which, if adaptive, nonetheless is one which is often accompanied by difficulties.

THE PROBLEMS OF EGO-IDENTITY.

Though ego strength which, as it is used by psychiatrists, implies a clearly delimited sense of self-identity is often regarded as a cardinal virtue enabling the subject to achieve his individual goals in the case of mystics at least a strong sense of individuality is not without its drawbacks. These may be divided into two different types both of which appear relevant to my subsequent arguments.

1. The first problem is that in the case of mystics and other religious and quite possibly more commonly amongst those who have a keen awareness of themselves as isolated, finite and delimited beings, this ego consciousness is accompanied by deep feelings of alienation, depression, anxiety, inadequacy and so forth. Alline's 'I was wandering in the fields lamenting my miserable lost and undone condition, and almost ready to sink under my burden' (4) is not untypical of the feelings that accompany the exaggerated sense of isolation in the first phase of the cycle. These feelings can be even more traumatic for those who have experienced a spiritual sense of inter-relatedness and lost it, returning to the 'desert' and the 'aridity' of a perception of self as a finite and isolated identity. I shall later argue that this sense

of being trapped alone, in a futile individuality may itself in some cases generate sufficient stress to trigger the subsequent shift in personality though there are many other possible triggers and a perception of one's own isolation is not always as distressing as in the case of Alline. It is tempting to think of this type of response to the perception of isolation as neurotic, best dealt with by 'positive thinking' or some such remedy but this is by no means certain. Though I do not wish to examine explanations here, these problems could well be thought of as syndromic symptoms of a state whose main characteristic is an exaggerated sense of personal isolation which would invite a wholly physiological account rather than the charge that mystics lack sufficient 'ego strength' to deal with the vicissitudes of life when they come face to face with the reality of their situation. As almost all religions point out, a sense of identification with and belonging to, a greater scheme of things is the solution or salvation for the individual beset by meaninglessness, insecurity and death but we have no reason per se - I shall argue - to think of the shift in terms of decision making, problem solving or flight from the physical realities of existence and it may be that 'aridity' is an integral part of this phase of the mystic's condition.

2. The second area of difficulty is discussed more fully in chapter 5 and I shall simply outline it here. It is relevant to my hypothesis to observe that in some situations ego-identity is either ill-equipped or superfluous and may actually - in terms of physical survival - be a handicap. There are a range of problems that cannot be dealt with in a self-conscious and rational manner but only by abandoning oneself to 'instinctive' responses. Rather as we must simply 'fall' asleep when overcome by tiredness, it appears in other situations in which

there are no rational courses to pursue, that by losing or diminishing our self-awareness we can bring into play deep seated biological processes sometimes with remarkable results. Fakirs and Yogins testify to some of the remarkable capacities of the body that may be unleashed in trance which are usually beyond conscious control. Various survivors of drowning in icy water, for example, kept up their body temperature by simply 'letting go'. The point here is that in a wide variety of cases from life-threatening situations to a housewife's inability to cope with a harassing day, ego-identity is found to be inadequate to the demands made upon it and it is a commonplace to observe that, in such situations, we only become more stressed if we try to deal with the situation from the stance of ego-identity rather than that of 'letting go' in favour of biological responses which are wholly beyond conscious control. My argument will be that the spiritual orientation is just such an autonomic response, albeit a very peculiar one, and that the prelude to mystical experience will not only characteristically exhibit an intense awareness of ego-identity but also a situation with which ego-identity cannot cope. This situation may be the very concomitant problems that an intense awareness of self-isolation is typically correlated with but there are many other possible threats to well-being for which ego-identity provides no solution. There is nothing inherently 'religious' about this model as for most of us there are, or could be, situations to which we react by diminished ego-identity and conscious responsibility be it an emotional outburst, shock, sleep, perhaps even schizophrenia, by which we cope or restore ourselves to effective functioning. Nor, even in the case of the spiritual response, is there necessarily anything 'religious' about the precipitating crisis for, whilst some may show a long term concern with religious or existential

questions, from the examples we have it is clear that the problem may just as easily be short term and of an everyday type ranging from harassment or exertion to illness or accident.

It is therefore my contention that accounts of mystical perception, if they give any relevant information at all, distinctly show antecedently both an exaggerated sense of self-isolation usually highlighted by problems such as anxiety and alienation and a marked threat to well-being for which a rational and self-conscious response is inappropriate. Taken in the context of the cycle as a whole, ego-identity constitutes a distinctive phase, the more so when contrasted with the abrupt shift to spiritual orientation, a sequence in which, alone, mystical perception appears to occur. Therefore, though there is nothing intrinsically mystical about the ego state, in some form or other it is a common human perception and even in its marked form is not unusual, it appears to be a starting point - even a necessary condition - for a chain of events that will occur given the right conditions.

THE SPIRITUAL ORIENTATION

In the case of mystics the perception of self as isolated and alone gives way, abruptly, to a wholly new perception of self-identity as something related to or part of some greater whole. The sequence of events leading to this shift and the trigger for it will be discussed in the following chapter but, for now, I merely wish to characterize the very distinctive state I call the spiritual orientation. It is not only that the new perception of an extended identity contrasts with the sense of isolation which preceded it but that it is accompanied by a characteristic set of feelings and attitudes which together make

the state recognizably different from any other in waking consciousness. If this is so the descriptive validity of the spiritual orientation should be amenable to empirical confirmation by using methods similar to those employed by Margolis in his 'An Empirical Typology'. Perhaps none of the characteristic feelings or even the perception of self as an entity extended beyond the 'body image' is state specific and each may be evident to a greater or lesser degree in the population at large but, taken together, I believe, they characterize and distinguish a state that is sufficiently stereotyped to be recognized as syndromic rather than as simply an extraction from the infinite individuality and variability of human personality. I shall begin my discussion by examining extended identity and the features associated with it in this state before turning to the cyclic nature of these shifts and their relationship to the occurrence of mystical perception.

Before starting, however, it is well worth making one final introductory remark about the spiritual orientation. Though I believe mystical experience only occurs in the context of a shift from ego to spiritual identity, such shifts can be apparent without mystical experience occurring. For this reason the shift and the subsequent spiritual identity is reported far more widely than in the context of mysticism alone and is a feature of many religious lives and religious conversions in which no explicitly 'supernatural' experience is reported. I am aiming here, however, only to characterize the spiritual syndrome and not a religious outlook in general with which it may be associated but with which it is certainly not synonymous. I consider this distinction more thoroughly in appendix B but its basis, in brief, is that, whilst all those with a spiritual cast of mind may be recognized as religious, not all religious have such a spiritual cast of mind as

I define it here. For this reason I refrain from calling the spiritual orientation simply a religious state or complex and also because such an identification would bring to this syndrome conceptions which a priori, at least, may be inappropriate and disguise rather than clarify what it is that is taking place.

EXTENDED IDENTITY.

'I suddenly knew without any doubts that I was part of a "whole". Not an isolated part but an integral part - I felt a sense of "onement". I knew that I belonged and that nothing could change that. The loss of my farm and livelihood didn't matter any more. I was an important part of the wholeness of things and transient ambitions were secondary'.(5)

'It was as though the great value in every living thing was not so much here and now in ourselves as somewhere else ... certainly that unspeakable importance had to do with our relationship to the great whole .. I did indeed love my neighbour as myself. Nay, more, of myself I was hardly conscious while with my neighbour in every form, I was madly in love' (6).

Such examples as these are typical of the wholly changed perception of personal identity and its place in the scheme of things following the shift to spiritual orientation whether or not a mystical perception has occurred. From an acute and often distressing sense of isolation, experiencers move to a new perception of the self as something more extensive than the 'body image', something which has a common identity with other entities and which is part of some greater whole.

However, the strength of this feeling of shared identity and the precise nature of the perception varies from individual to individual and though formally extended identity is unmistakable - especially in the context of the shift - for these reasons cannot, by itself, be used to characterize the spiritual orientation. Without further definition,

which is difficult to give, kin or class ties, say, would also indicate a spiritual orientation if extended identity was the sole criterion of the state. The problem is twofold. In the first place, whereas some, say, feel themselves to be in 'living relations' with a named religious figure, others may simply perceive themselves to stand within a beneficent universe in which they play a part but which need not even be aware of their existence in any personal sense at all. In both cases personal identity is no longer seen as something self-contained or wholly autonomous yet, so diverse are they, that they bear little more than a generic relationship which, if it were not for the common circumstance of the shift, might seem to be no more than an extraction from the infinite variety of human perceptions. In passing, it is perhaps worth mentioning that I treat this diversity as reflecting the contingencies of ideology and interpretation but believe that the underlying generic feature these cases share cannot be explained in this way. Briefly, a) I do not believe that it can be shown that all who suddenly find themselves with a perception of this type have acquired and internalised religious or other relevant models, and b) it is strange how some individuals, consciously devoted to a religious belief set and desirous of the sense of inter-relatedness, nonetheless often lose it perhaps only to discover it again in circumstances which appear to owe nothing to acquired conceptions. In the second place there is a great variation in the degree to which subjectivity is preserved in this state. Some 'lose' themselves in a greater whole whilst others retain a full measure of subjectivity and autonomy merely feeling, nonetheless, that a new dimension has been added which places self in a wider context - 'one felt at one with all and yet retained ones individuality' (7). Teresa of Avila observes that 'during the actual moment of divine union the soul feels nothing, all its powers being entirely lost ... this presence is not always so distinctly manifest as at first, or it is at

times when God renews this favour, otherwise the recipient could not possibly attend to anything else nor live in society'(8). If Teresa is correct the spiritual orientation is compatible with a continuum of degrees of personal identity that not only varies from individual to individual but in individuals from time to time. Total loss of individuality, which presumably greatly impairs personal efficiency, is consonant with Hood's 'loss of sense of self' but is not typical of the spiritual state and, if it occurs at all, lasts only a brief time. Neither the actual nature of the new extended identity nor the degree to which individuality is lost therefore lends itself to typification. However, it is sufficient for my purposes to note that self-identity shifts abruptly from a perception of self as isolated, finite and delimited to one of inter-relatedness with something greater than the 'body image' and that this involves a diminuation of the sense of individual autonomy and responsibility.

OTHER PRINCIPAL FEATURES OF THE SPIRITUAL ORIENTATION

Though a sudden shift to extended identity is the most obvious hallmark of the spiritual orientation, this occurs in conjunction with other changes in personality which together make spirituality a distinctive and identifiable state. As mentioned above, none of these features characteristic of the state are necessarily state-specific nor am I certain that all need to be manifest before we can identify the spiritual syndrome. Recognition, however, depends on most of them, at least, being reported* in conjunction with extended identity

* As throughout we are hampered by the fact that only those changes in personality which the experient finds remarkable are mentioned and we are left wondering whether much has been omitted or whether we are working with a paradigm which bears little resemblance to any given case.

in the context of a sudden shift from ego-identity at a time when this is faced with pressures with which it cannot deal effectively. These features are: A) METAPHYSICAL OUTLOOK, B) DEVELOPMENT OF A PERSONAL MORALITY, C) 'BASIC TRUST', D) ALTRUISM, E) SIMPLIFICATION OF LIVING and F) Three characteristic mood and sensory changes.

A) METAPHYSICAL OUTLOOK.

By the use of this phrase I aim to depict a very striking outlook which commonly accompanies the change in self-identity. It is composed of two main aspects. The first of these is a seemingly irrational esoterism, 'I know that everything involved in this process is God, is love ... that everything is in migration towards the great awakening to that which, in essence everything is. Nothing is excluded from the redemptive process ... men and rocks and stars and trees are brothers' (9) 'I could see in that light, that the goodness (of God) must be the hidden life of every human being. The light possessed me for years after ... I lived in It and with It pervading all these varied relationships' (10) The second is the perception of an esoteric life purpose and meaning which often leads experients to find immense personal significance and meaning in even the most mundane and, apparently, chance events. The feeling that all life is teeming with some hidden meaning, whether or not the experient claims to know what this is, and that ones own life is intimately tied up with this and can only be judged in terms of it, has a profound effect on the goals, values and responses to events of the spiritual and gives their lives a characteristic sense of meaningfulness and belonging which contrasts markedly with their previous state of alienation. There are many questions to be asked about this mindset which, if it varies in content from one

individual to another, nonetheless can readily be recognized as a distinctive approach to the world and ones place in it. but first I shall examine the two aspects in greater detail.

THE HIDDEN DIMENSION

I am not here drawing attention to any specific esoteric doctrine, a belief in which, in some cultures at least, may simply be rational and logical in the light of prevailing knowledge but to the common claim, in the context of the shift, that one 'feels' in some 'gut' rather than intellectual way, that life events and discrete entities are linked at some deeper level - 'there is always a sense that all happenings are right and in accordance with a plan' (11). The claims made about the true nature of the world are very diverse. Some reflect a recognizable form of gnosticism, some a preoccupation with esoteric systems such as numerology which, as systems, would rarely be called religious at all whilst others appear to be wholly idiosyncratic conceptions but in each case the autonomy of objects in the world as presented to us by our senses is considered to be misleading. Sometimes objects and events are linked in teleological terms, sometimes their relationship comes closer to an aesthetic vision of inner harmony - 'ordinary objects like a kettle, spoon, cigarette end was perfect in itself and in its relation to everything else in the room. It simply was. It was though a dimension had been added - timelessness' (12). This sense of inner workings and relationships has bequeathed spirituality some of its most recognizable imagery and forms of expression. Symbolism, allegory and paradox and the choice of art and poetry have often been used to convey or evoke this feeling ~~that~~ there is some underlying meaning in terms of which discrete objects and events have

significance and value - 'all those that serve relate to me a thousand graces of thee, and all wound me the more. And something they are stammering leaves me dying' (13). Though attempts have often been made to systemize the meaningfulness so keenly sensed in the world around them - John of the Cross wrote volumes of exegesis for his brief poems - many do not feel the need to explain or make explicit the feeling that even trivial things have a profound significance and perhaps these doctrines are best treated as symptoms of a condition rather as conspiracy theories are symptomatic of paranoia. Though this is an age which recognizes inter-connections between that which is apparently discrete, the food-chain for example, or evolution theory, the hidden dimension is not comparable with these at all, for being unfalsifiable, metaphysical speculations are, nowadays, scarcely compelling and besides which they add an extraordinary and unnecessary complexity to the perception of what life is.

SUBJECTIVE SIGNIFICANCE.

It is not only that the world appears, in some way, to be pregnant with inner meaning and purpose but that the subject perceives his own life to be bound up with this. This produces two effects. In the first place, whether or not they find for themselves a clear role in life, the spiritual are able to see that their lives have a profound meaning and value in terms of the greater scheme of things which is reflected in an oft noted increased optimism, fortitude and such like. Treating the vicissitudes of life as part of a greater and, usually, ultimately beneficent plan brings the spiritual comfort and resilience - 'the knowledge that though disaster was moving unavoidably towards me yet in the end "All would be well ... All manner of things would be well" did much to help me over the following bitterly difficult years' (14). 'I knew now that as long as I lived I would never be alone again and

this certainty gave me a great peace of mind' - and may lead towards greater creativity and achievement. There are cases in which God or the great pattern of life is conceived as ordering events in a way injurious to the individual but more commonly there is little doubt of the psychological benefits, the integrative effects, of perceiving one's life in terms of a greater whole especially after the angst of the ego stage even if the fulfillment of the design is thought to be outside of space and time. The second product of this new-found meaningfulness and significance is the very distinctive belief that all life events stand in some personal relationship to the subject in the context of the esoteric meaning he believes his life to have. The most trivial events may be thought of as tests, or fortuitous encounters as providential interventions to meet needs, further development or even as warnings and it may be true to say that, in the spiritual orientation, little or nothing can be construed as chance and, certainly, in this frame of mind, experients are highly sensitized to happenings in the world around them. Whatever their provenance, Castenada's stories give a marvellous insight into this mentality. As, for instance, when a rabbit in a trap is there only 'because the power that guides rabbits had led that particular one into the trap ... the rabbit's death had been a gift for me' (Journey to Ixtlan ch.9). Thus a mundane happening has an esoteric significance and, it transpires, an even deeper personal meaning also. This may be no more than an exaggerated form of a common human propensity, most readily discerned in children, to subjectify all life events and order them in terms of the private significance they have for us. Everything from dreams to world affairs may be placed in a subjective framework that gives these phenomena an order and inter-relatedness that they extrinsically lack yet this order is not necessarily esoteric and it is the irrationality

of the interpretations that the spiritual place upon phenomena and, above all, the scale of this activity which is so striking.

The meaning which the spiritual find in their lives and the significance they attach to life events, I believe, presents us with one of the very great difficulties we come to when attempting to explain the spiritual orientation. To the rational mind the hidden dynamic and the way the individual believes this manifests itself in day to day living, at first sight may appear to be an unnecessarily complex way to view the world, whether or not it brings psychological well-being. It is not a truly rational view of the world despite certain oddities in quantum mechanics, the curious way in which discrete groups of men and animals appear, simultaneously, to acquire new techniques, some statistical evidence for E.S.P. and so forth which each might give some slight basis for the view that all things are linked at some non-material level. I considered the question in chapter 1 and believe, as argued there, that one could not logically justify cosmological theories typical of the spiritual orientation. However, time and again, one is struck by the claim that, in this frame of mind, the world itself does change, providential happenings abound. As I wrote in chapter 1, empirical methods cannot deal with such claims as the life circumstances in which the miraculous events are supposed to have occurred are unrepeatable yet the sheer volume of such claims and the undoubted integrity and sanity of most of the experients make these difficult to dismiss as self-delusion. This brings me to the speculation that in this cast of mind there is an active principle rather than an insight into a whole new level of cosmology which science has not yet uncovered or out-and-out delusion. This third course would treat the miraculous and providential events so widely reported not, as most psychologists

would, as interpretations of straightforward phenomena in the light of a peculiar and esoteric ideology but as products of a peculiar form of psycho-physiological functioning which, in some obscure way, does actually shape events. Were this to be the case, much as religions predict, being protected, provided for etc. is the product of a frame of mind yet it is consonant also with the scientific view of the universe as unselfconscious and only obeying certain laws for it merely opens up the possibility that certain forms of consciousness are themselves a factor in the workings of the cosmos. Perhaps this rather magical suggestion sounds ~~as~~ esoteric as the cosmological claims made by those who have this frame of mind but, in principle, it appears possible to test whether in fact the experience of the spiritual really does confirm their expectations and to make a pragmatic judgment as to whether or not lives or periods of intense spirituality are adaptive. The question would then be do miracles happen to the spiritual? and not, how, in the context of an insentient universe, could miracles happen? Who knows what an examination of the effects - in terms of life events etc. - on the individual who subjectifies the world in a markedly esoteric way, might yield? Perhaps findings would support these very sane individuals who claim that their religious beliefs are pragmatic being re-inforced continually by life events. I make this point for, as in so many other ways, the spiritual orientation is associated with peculiarities that it would be simply bigoted to dismiss as self-deception or fairy tales even though it is equally hard to accept the theories the spiritual themselves offer for these and it is these peculiarities, attested to by thousands over countless years, which give the syndrome I am trying to typify the importance and wider significance, I believe, it has.

Regardless of the way in which we treat the claims, however, it is undoubtedly the case that the metaphysical or esoteric outlook gives the spiritual state one of its most striking and characteristic features which, in general, would contrast markedly with the beliefs of the individual who feels himself to be alone and delimited by physical boundaries. It accounts for the many reports of a newly-discovered awe and interest in the world as it injects beauty, meaning and a personal significance and interest - more generally of a sense of belonging and involvement - into even the most humdrum situations and in part explains some of the goals, values and styles of life the religious typically set themselves. Though the precise nature of this outlook may vary widely, I view it as essentially a stereotyped mind state - though it may also be logically linked to the feeling of extended identity - rather than as a creative response. I shall later argue that we cannot treat the subjectification and unification of life events in metaphysical ways as a solution to problems to which in some cases at least, they have no conceivable relevance. By itself, this feature may not be defining for in some cultures, perhaps some age groups also, it is possible to find that such beliefs about the cosmos and the more intense subjectivisation of the world represent a norm. As with the other features I list, it is only when taken as a group that they appear so distinctive especially so in the context of a shift from some wholly different perception of self-identity, outlook, values etc.

B) THE MARKED DEVELOPMENT OF A PERSONAL MORALITY

The spiritual state is marked by a moral transformation that borders on an obsessive concern with self-transcendence. It is usual to find

such remarks as 'my character and lifestyle began to change' (15), 'it transformed her life, her character and her relationships' (16) or 'the next day things began to change. I gave up alcohol (etc.)' (17) in accounts of conversion and the aftermath of mystical experience. Although rarely described in detail, except in the testimonies of some protestant sects, it appears that the process of moral transformation in the context of the spiritual state can take place in one of two ways. In some cases the reorientation of personal morality is unconscious whether gradual or sudden: 'I found myself growing away from the stimulants (etc.), a process which seemed relative to the experience' (18), 'from that hour drink had had no terrors for me ...the desire for it went and has never returned' (19). Alternatively, the process may be acted out consciously with the experient struggling to conform to a new image of self besides which old habits and behaviour appear unworthy. Augustine's experience, 'there appeared unto me the chaste dignity of continency, serene and cheerful ... enticing me to come and doubt not' (20) is representative of many cases in which the experient becomes aware of new possibilities of personal morality and behaviour with which he feels a compulsion to attempt to conform. In passing it is worth noting that we are dealing with a concern about personal morality and the claim that new levels of integrity and behaviour are achieved which is not, as Batson and Ventis wryly observe, always the same thing as becoming in the eyes of ones peers say, a better or even a more moral, individual.

Although I only wish to note that the spiritual orientation is typified by a sudden and often obsessive concern with personal reformation and

self transcendence, it is worthwhile discussing this feature at greater length for the way in which we interpret this feature has implications for our understanding of the spiritual syndrome as a whole. On the one hand we might view the impulse to purify as something contingent on the acquisition and internalization of models of personal ethics. If individuals in this state are not already aware of one or other of the religious systems which usually contain such models, it is likely they will quickly become so given their feelings of extended identity and the greater design they now discern in life. On the other hand it might be that this impulse owes nothing to the acquisition of a model and indeed to 'problem-solving' but is, as I believe, an intrinsic feature of the state. The two views are not wholly incompatible for, whilst man may contain within himself a drive to self-improvement and self-transcendence, the particular form this takes may be governed and re-inforced by one or other of the conceptual models on offer. However, it is worth giving my reasons why I suspect that the drive to moral development and regeneration in this context is something inextricable from the wider pattern that the spiritual syndrome presents. These reasons are:

1. That in many cases, whether moral change is conscious or unconscious, there is no evidence of a concern with ethics prior to the change in self-identity. Under a Jamesian theory of a sub-conscious maturation one might expect in all cases some medium term evidence of dissatisfaction with lifestyle, inner conflict and interest in alternative models but some cases appear quite spontaneous. This is not to say that 'conversion' cases are not typically preceded by a growing sense of guilt, worthlessness etc. and these might form a distinct sub-type but it is not a characteristic pattern in all cases in which a spiritual identity

occurs and moral change takes place. Assuming that there are cases in which experiments have shown little or no prior interest in personal morality and that the change to an inherently moral outlook takes place very quickly, it would be difficult to argue that the change arises from the internalization of some culturally acquired pattern as there is simply no indication of a maturation process or time in which it might occur.

2. The moral concerns of the spiritual (I do not wish to give the impression of a narrow concern with blatant personality defects but of a concern with the integrity of the character in its widest sense) is more marked in some cases than in others but in a good proportion of cases the concern with personal standards is so extreme and individualistic as to bear little comparison with conventional religious-cultural ethics. For those approaching asceticism ever new visions of rectitude are opened up and these individuals struggle with 'temptations' and 'personality failings' which almost any culture would find insignificant or incomprehensible. Throughout the Philokalia, say, one can find evidence of an obsessive concern with 'purity' that appears to be self-denial and mortification for its own sake. Such authors as John of Karpathos would not have thought of their moral strivings and acute awareness of perceived personal failings as morbid for they rationalized their feelings theologically - sometimes with difficulty - and believed such efforts were conducive to the state of grace. But it is also interesting that this acute concern is more troublesome at certain times than at others, 'there are times when trials and temptations multiply and cause a man, despite his diligence, to deviate from the true path' (21). Though these ascetics may represent an

extreme form of the spiritual concern with personal morality/integrity, any account of what is taking place which ignored them and their highly individualistic concerns would be incomplete for, in many spontaneous cases of spirituality and regeneration following on from mystical perception, much the same pattern and sometimes a similar intensity can be discerned. 'This may seem a silly reaction to you. To match the radiant joy of this Living Light, I just had to take on what seemed joyless' (22).

3. A third, and perhaps minor observation is that few, if any, spiritual understand their new-found concern with morality to be primarily a matter of intellect or the adoption of culturally-transmitted ethics and morals. There is near unanimity that the experient comes into contact with God or some living image of truth, purity etc. and that these forces are 'external' of the personality and have some ontological status of their own. It may be that the experience of some divine force besides which the human self appears unworthy and corrupt, is misleading, though the unanimity in this respect must count for something.

There are then reasons - spontaneity, the sometimes extreme and individualistic nature of moral regeneration, and the feeling that the moral impulse is not acquired through cultural contact - which together give the impression that regeneration stems from, or is a reaction to, certain impulses which typically occur in the spiritual state. If this is so, the moral drive is best understood, despite the individuality of the search for integrity, as a stereotyped pattern, which at most runs parallel with social and religious models of personal

ethics. It will not be easy to explain this often obsessive drive for personal integrity and purity in terms of a psycho-physiological reaction but the suggestion here is that the spiritual orientation is bound up with moral development and other forms of maturation which link it with the very core of human identity. It is perhaps sufficient here to note however that this concern with personal morality is a central feature of this outlook and dominates many spiritual and religious writings. In fact, it appears, that the moral demands which the individual feels are made of him are often the most concrete feelings in this orientation which, more than any other, shape the way in which the divine or greater whole is conceived of, allowing a rationalization of the universe in terms of moral goals, whilst at the same time involving the individual both in his own and a wider destiny. It is interesting to observe that a diminution of the moral impulse is often not welcomed by the spiritual for, though this may lessen the feelings of guilt and sense of unworthiness, it may also give rise to a feeling that God - with which the impulse is often identified - has abandoned the individual who then may feel that the path to 'salvation' through moral striving and self-transcendence has been closed. This feature has been recognized by many other authors, Underhill, for example, who tend to treat it as an initial stage of spiritual development. Given a prolonged spiritual state, it is reasonable to accept that individuals do make many of their most difficult moral efforts early on but in all spiritual writings it is clear that a concern with personal integrity is a continuing feature for old desires may return to assail the individual and new vistas of personal rectitude are constantly opening up. Though I do not exclude a conscious moral development over a period

of time, unlike Underhill, I do not see purgation and self-transcendence as a stage in itself but as an integral feature of a non-progressive state which alone suffices to motivate the individual to moral efforts and without which there is insufficient impulse to make sustained efforts in this direction at all.

c) 'BASIC TRUST'

I adopt Runke's term to describe the first of two characteristic attitudes of the spiritual state which would appear to have two aspects, 1. the environment and life events are perceived in positive terms - a trait noted by a number of authors and 2. there is a tendency towards a reliant stance to life. The antithesis of this frame of mind is 'alienation'.

1. POSITIVE ATTITUDE. Life, whether or not it is construed as purposive, appears to the individual to be benign. The 'new sense of certainty that all things work together for the good' (23) is not untypical of the type of perception that is life-enhancing and produces a psychological benefit by reducing anxiety and promoting an inner assurance and confidence, though there is nothing rational about it. Only the willfully blind could deny that the world appears indifferent to human needs and hopes and yet in this state though 'It seemed to me my heart should have been torn with pity yet all I felt was the deepest peace I have ever known - a peace that had nothing whatever to do with the (images) in my mind' (24). This contradiction between the facts of the world and the positive perceptions the spiritual have of it is well brought out by Alyosha's position in the Brothers Karamazov (25).

2. RELIANCE takes many forms but I do not intend to imply fatalism so much as a sense of partnership in which individual needs and aspirations are respected and a feeling that one cannot achieve one's ends entirely unaided. 'I felt I was a free man. Oh, the precious feeling of safety, of freedom, of resting on Jesus' (26). (It is interesting to note that the feeling of dependence on or a partnership with life is not necessarily a theistic conception to be expressed in prayer for there are monistic cases such as '...a sense of becoming aware that one aspect of my being is actually part of Being which is eternal, infinite and sustains the created world'(27).) The feeling of reliance may range from a certainty of protection in all circumstances or a reliance on something greater than self in life-threatening situations only to a contractual relationship based on propitiation, prayer, right living etc. The feeling that one is protected, aided or succoured is more than a feeling for, in many cases, it is used as a behavioural stratagem. Missionaries etc. have set off into the 'blue' with breathtaking assurance and in doing so have not merely proclaimed their belief but put a stratagem to a pragmatic test. I suggested above that such esoteric beliefs might possibly be justified but whether this is so or not one would undoubtedly need to introduce reliance to explain the motivation of much spiritual behaviour.

A positive view of life and reliance have a variety of possible explanations. They might be viewed simply as a consequence or logical product of the esoteric mind-set noted above that makes all things appear meaningful and, ultimately, valuable or as a characteristic mood that suggests physiological changes in this state, a possibility increased by other characteristic states of mind discussed below. Tranquillizers after all induce a not dissimilar outlook. They might, on the other hand, be explained as a common, human inheritance. It is possible to

understand 'basic trust' in terms, say, of residual infantile feelings, which, as Runke believed, are necessary for a healthy psyche, and in so far as such attitudes are not specific to the spiritual state, some such explanation may be more appropriate. However, though the attitude of 'basic trust' is a commonplace one with which most individuals at some time or another are familiar, it is particularly marked throughout the duration of the spiritual state.

D) ALTRUISM.

The second attitude characteristically associated with spirituality is altruism. Several studies of mystical perception, Pahnke and Richards (1969), for example, have noted a subsequent unfocussed and intense feeling of benign, even loving, compassion sometimes directed towards all things, animate and inanimate, and such feelings, I believe, are typical of the spiritual state. 'I experienced a sense of profoundest kinship with each and every person there. I loved them all, but with a kind of love I had never felt before' (28) is not untypical of the reports about this feeling. It should be stressed that it is a subjective feeling rather than a marked pattern of behaviour and whilst it may produce results in the world and be the motivation for many 'selfless' acts of kindness, it need not be translated into action at all.

Whilst altruism clearly owes something to the change in the identity of the self, esoteric outlook and the religious perception of the world as part of, or a product of, God, it is difficult to find any single explanation for this, as for so many other human attitudes. In so far as this feeling of altruism/compassion is universal in scope and is unconditional i.e. is non-discriminatory, say, between deserving and undeserving, it is clearly not utilitarian in nature. Some religions do specify the objects of charity, widows and orphans etc. but even so

in the christian tradition at least, 'works', taken by themselves, are not held in high esteem for it is the inner motivation behind them that is important - hence the reference to 'whited sepulchres' etc. It is interesting to observe that not unusually in this state, expressions of altruism are designed to give vent to this feeling rather than to maximise the benefit to the recipient. It is striking how often the religious pray for others, in secret, knowing that their prayers often might be ineffective in any given case. This is not a cynical observation but a reason for distinguishing 'spiritual altruism' from utilitarian or biological kinds. The Jains, for example, run animal sanctuaries in which the animals are kept alive as long as possible even if in great and incurable pain. The motivations for such behaviour are complex but such cases shed light on the religious attitude which puts satisfaction of an attitude before any calculation of benefit. There is a closer resemblance to biological altruism, which is presumably, in the lower animals at least, also instinctive and affective. There are many examples in nature where kinship appears to motivate a reflexive self-sacrifice of the individual for the benefit either of the group or more especially those members of it necessary for the survival of the genetic strain. The difference is one of scope however and, whereas in biological cases a reason for such behaviour can be given in genetic terms, this is not apparent in cases of spiritual altruism. It might be argued that the spiritual are manifesting a drive usually reserved for family and kin in an unfocussed and displaced way for, as in man at least, it is not uncommon for group identity to be adoptive rather than genetic in character, it may be that the spiritual feeling is only a further extension of this. There are variations in the spiritual feeling which lend weight to this view for whereas some seem to feel kinship - and

the altruistic feelings associated with this - only with members of the same species, and some feel it for all living things, others feel it for everything animate and inanimate alike. This is not especially convincing, however, for there is no evidence 1. that in nature, biological altruism - as distinct from symbiosis - is ever felt for others outside of the genetic group, 11. that the spiritual necessarily feel kinship with those on whom they feel moved to bestow their affection, and sometimes, their help or 111. that they are moved to action only when the group with which they are supposed to identify is under threat as may be expected if biological altruism explained their motivation. All that can be said is that the spiritual, as do many others, feel for and are disposed to assist without expectation of advantage or even the hope of achieving very much, others with whom they have no genetic or social obligation. The difference between this and the more common forms of goodwill and caring however, is that it can be an extraordinarily intense feeling and, in scope, it is often quite unrestricted, being at times all-embracing.

E) SIMPLIFICATION OF LIVING.

The spiritual state would also appear to give rise to a behaviour pattern and style of life that is typical of the state though not unique to it. Three characteristics seem central to this pattern; simplicity, freedom from personal responsibility and natural living which together appear to lead to a simplification of the demands made upon the individual, especially a reduction in the number of social roles such individuals are required to play. The change in lifestyle consequent on a shift in perceived identity is often marked if the shift is maintained for a long period. As an example of this type

of change I cannot do better than quote a Starbuck case which illustrates the changes brought about during the spiritual orientation though does not necessarily represent a life-long pattern of those who intermittently experience this state. 'She had been a member of one of the most active and progressive churches ... she grew more and more out of sympathy with the church ... at last she withdrew from fellowship with any church. The writer found her living alone in a little room on the top storey of a cheap boarding house, quite out of touch with all human relations, but apparently happy in the enjoyment of her own spiritual blessings ... They get out of tune with other people ... grow careless of their social political and financial obligations'. (28) There are obvious stereotypes of reduced social interaction to be found in religious orders but I do not wish to concentrate on these as it is a moot point how far some individuals take religious vows of poverty, chastity and obedience etc. because these cater for their felt needs and how far they do so perceiving this to be the way to God though they find such a role restricting (there is also the difficulty that some in religious orders, especially in the past, have been there only for social or even political reasons).

SIMPLICITY.

Though isolation is not a necessary consequence of spirituality, for some may choose communal living in traditional religious orders or other communes, it is noteworthy that many who adopt the 'spiritual life' shed as many of their roles as possible and in some cases are encouraged to do so by religious doctrine. Family and social life, for instance, may be abandoned in favour of a single role be it mendicant, teacher, hermit or whatever. It is not only role-playing that changes but anything

that makes life more complex - possessions, technology etc. that are often treated as a burden and as far as possible abandoned, though simplicity is not incompatible with scholarship. Certain religious activities, for example, pilgrimages, seem designed for such feelings in so far as the role of the pilgrim was once stereotyped and uncomplicated and meant abandoning family etc. and making do with very few possessions.

FREEDOM FROM PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY.

Perhaps a corollary of simplicity and the desire to avoid distraction it often appears that the religious eschew leadership and other roles which place them under obligations or continuing commitments. Whilst it is true that in some notable cases, Schweitzer perhaps, others come to depend or thrust leadership upon them, it does seem the rule to avoid the psychological conflicts and dilemmas which responsibilities and commitments inevitably bring with them.

NATURAL LIVING.

The spiritual often opt for a rural environment, and, if working at all, take up simple skills such as carpentry and farming. Perhaps not all would go as far as Neilos the Ascetic, 'the saints left the inhabited regions and wandered in deserts and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth, going about in sheepskins, being destitute, they fled the sophisticated wickedness of men and from all the unnatural things of which the towns are full, not wishing to be swept off their feet and carried along with all the others into the whirlpool of confusion' (30). but they probably share his sentiments. This urge to escape the city and the artificial is as old as history and should not be confused with a rational desire to escape from particular urban problems such as present day crime, decay etc. It may be that cities and their complex

relationships are distractions and are less conducive to a feeling of being in God's world which is typically associated with nature but I feel that the simplest answer may be that they make complex demands on the individual with which a spiritual mentality cannot cope.

Despite the individuality of responses to a spiritual orientation, simplification is a common theme which may give an important clue to the nature of this mind state. It might be argued that the spiritual are simply following models of behaviour provided by most religions and that this pattern is best suited to 'the happy enjoyment of spiritual blessings' but it could equally be viewed as a change necessitated by an alteration in mental functioning which has been concealed by the language of individual response and choice. An analogy for the type of change I have in mind might be the process of growing old during which the speed and efficiency of response to new or complex situations deteriorates and individuals, where they can, give up the more demanding tasks and alter their lifestyle and behaviour in line with their reduced capacity. (I am not saying that mystics, or indeed the elderly, become mentally impaired but rather lose their capacity to adapt rapidly or handle a multiplicity of demands simultaneously as is required in a complex environment). It might be empirically demonstrated that in the spiritual orientation individuals tend towards a lower level of personal effectiveness and poorer adaptivity. In the case of the spiritual, if such a change is taking place, it is possibly not in most cases irreversible. The notion of a characteristic change in mental functioning bringing about the alterations in attitude, behaviour etc. typically associated with the religious would radically change our perspective of the role of religion and religious ideals in the life of the spiritual. No longer could religion be treated as a model but only as a rationalization of spiritual behaviour lending dignity with the

language of faith, vocation etc. to a shift which, as in ageing, mental illness etc., may be more readily comprehensible in neuropsychological terms.

F) OTHER INDICATORS OF THE SPIRITUAL STATE.

There are a variety of other feelings and changes which are commonly mentioned in relation to the spiritual state, most notably 1. a feeling of increased energy, 2. a sense of great peace and tranquility and 3. a heightened sensory awareness.

1. INCREASED ENERGY.

'I was greatly invigorated and refreshed and very much alive', 'for months after I was filled with indescribable energy' are frequent observations about this state. Whether or not people in this state have more energy than others is an open question, though I shall later argue that ego abandonment does lead to physical capacities beyond the normal, but certainly they feel more vital than formerly, which is where the true comparison lies.

2. TRANQUILITY.

'I had gained greater peace and happiness than I had ever expected to experience' (31), 'the draining of all tension, the absolute catharsis, the peace that passeth all understanding ... a sustained and invigorating, serene and fear-dispelling after effect that lasted for days' (32), 'great serenity', 'unutterable peace' etc. all attest to a very notable feature of the mental state of the spiritual. Though the presence of such feelings as this is valued by experients and helps them delineate their spiritual periods since often they are, subjectively, perhaps the mcsr

immediately recognizable effects or symptoms of the state, they are rarely given prominence in accounts being overshadowed by the changes in identity and the new insights into the nature of the world. Unlike ecstasy or 'peak' experience, the spiritual state is rarely recorded for posterity simply because it was pleasurable. This is perhaps unfortunate for, in tranquility especially, we have a mood state that strongly indicates neuro-chemical changes which presumably would, if understood, give the whole spiritual orientation an experimental definition. In conjunction with a positive and untroubled frame of mind, feelings of great energy etc. we are, I believe, beginning to see a very distinctive profile that, as will be discussed below, can be seen as a reaction to stress and which may give some indication as to the physiological basis of the syndrome as a whole.

3. HEIGHTENED SENSORY AWARENESS.

Though not an altered state of consciousness nor associated with hallucinations, there is nonetheless a greater immediacy and, one might say, vividness about sense perceptions in this state, 'I had emerged into a dawn fresh and excitingly life-filled dimension' (33). Smells, sound and especially light have a new and vivid impact - "woken up to one's surroundings" is a phrase often encountered. 'All the following week I walked about in great happiness, with a crystal vision which gave a greater luminosity to the air and all but made the people and the buildings around me transparent' (34). One might think of this in terms of changes in selective attention, experients simply becoming more conscious of the stimuli with which we are all bombarded or, I think more simply, in terms of a greater stimulation of the sensory processes which makes input difficult to ignore. There are medicinal

drugs which produce such effects though there is no reason to think of this heightened awareness as an abnormal or artificial state since it is possible that some individuals naturally experience their environment more vividly than do others and, one fondly remembers, in childhood the world seemed brighter, making a greater impact than it has done subsequently. It is beyond my competence to guess how this quality fits in with the other changes which suggest a physiological condition underlying the spiritual state but that it has some diagnostic value I do not doubt.

A SUMMARY OF THE SPIRITUAL ORIENTATION.

1. The seven features I have listed ranging from characteristic perceptions about the nature of self-identity and the world, through a moral transformation and attitudes such as 'basic trust' and altruism to a very marked behaviour pattern and feeling-mood state, constitute a recognizable condition that cannot be mistaken for a normal change of mood or attitudes, especially as it is manifest only after a sudden shift from a starkly contrasting state of mind. There are any number of examples of an abrupt shift to this orientation in the annals of mysticism and religious conversion which make the descriptive validity of this complex hard to refute e.g.

'In a moment (there follows a description of a mystical perception) ... I was left with a breath-taking sense of the limitless power and certainty of God, and a tranquility which can only be described as "the peace which passeth all understanding". I was left with a new sense of certainty that all things work together for good!(35)

Following a mystical perception - 'I had the same feelings of peace as on the previous occasion. For days I find my

energy levels very high. I also feel in close contact with other people and my surroundings during these periods and my thoughts and intuitions seem to be particularly sharp and in focus ...their general effect has been to enrich the quality of my life and to give me a sense of continuity and meaning which has taken me through times of great personal crisis, when it seemed that everything was crumbling away. I have also gained a profound sense of wonder and mystery about the earth we inhabit and an ever-deepening respect for all life' (36).

Though such examples, culled at random, may not mention all seven features, they represent the list well enough to make the state immediately recognizable, especially given the context in which the state occurred. My identification would appear, in principle, to be empirically corrigible.

2. The spiritual phase is normally short-term lasting from an hour or two - in which case it is often described as an 'afterglow' if a mystical perception has occurred.- or, more commonly, is mentioned as a distinct phase lasting days or weeks. In a few cases the state is reported to have persisted in a marked form for six months or more and Teresa of Avila found in her later years that it had become a 'semi-permanent condition'. The markedness of the state varies greatly from individual to individual and, if prolonged, within individuals at different times though, generally becomes less pronounced with the passage of time. Where an individual experiences this state more than once it is often found that one or other feature is more pronounced on one occasion than another.

3. I treat the spiritual orientation as an autonomic reaction to difficulties with which a clearly delineated ego-identity - involving personal responsibility and decision-making - cannot cope and as such is comparable to other states in which ego control is lost, such as sleep. Though I believe it can only be treated as a stereotyped reaction or syndrome - I shall argue that there is no logical connection with mystical perception since this does not occur in every case and it is clearly not a creative response to the problems faced by ego-identity, since the same reaction may be observed in the face of many different problems - it will be my thesis that this reaction differs in kind from any other. Though, like sleep etc., I believe the spiritual state serves short-term biological functions, namely that it protects and restores the individual, I believe also that its peculiarities suggest that it is more than a simple physiological reaction. I have already mentioned the oddity that the individual's environment seems to respond to his needs in this frame of mind and to this I would add two other considerations. The first of these is the connection this state appears to have with the development of personal morality and more generally with processes of maturation. It is my view, expanded below, that this state is intimately bound up with the long-term development of full human personality and is either symptomatic of maturation processes or in fact triggers them - the peak ages for mystical experience appear very significant. The second area of interest is that, whilst it lasts, the syndromic outlook is internally coherent and self-sufficient. Even highly rational subjects in the modern age find that they cannot but perceive the world in a metaphysical way and their usually total commitment to this outlook testifies to the meaningfulness

and coherence they find it to have. We may rationally reject dreams but not, it seems, the spiritual outlook and even after the state has passed subjects generally find their beliefs about self and the world have been indelibly changed. Maybe this meaningfulness is accidental but, with the exception of paranoia, few other complexes are sufficiently internally coherent to have this effect.

4. Though I have no evidence it seems probable that the spiritual orientation has a physiological profile and thus an experimental identity rather as sleep is characterized by R.F.H., brain-wave changes etc. The changes in outlook and mental functioning - suggested by the need to simplify responses - are very characteristic and the pronounced mood states especially give weight to the speculation that the condition might be clinically diagnosed. I noted certain similarities with ageing though clearly this condition is normally reversible and there is no reason to view it as morbid or even to believe that the outlook it gives rise to is unadaptive.

I have described two patterns of waking consciousness which, in contrast with one another, are clearly identifiable even amidst the great variety of human personality and perceptions. I now wish to examine the shift from one to another and its relationship with mystical perception.

THE EGO-SPIRITUAL CYCLE.

It is my view that a shift from an ego to a spiritual outlook is a

necessary condition for the occurrence of mystical experience. The triggers for the shift and the precise sequence of events in which, if at all, mystical experience will occur will be examined in the next chapter for an account of this involves a separate factor. Here I only wish to show that the shift is related to the occurrence of mystical perception and to consider some of the implications of this background for an understanding of mystical perception. Though mystical perception seems only to occur in this one circumstance, I will also wish to consider the cyclic or oscillating nature of ego-spiritual identity as a whole for this has implications for the way we interpret the mystical and, more generally, the religious life. Though a separate and to some degree a side issue, I wish to argue that in terms of the cycle, the mystical life is composed of an essentially static alternation between two distinctive outlooks and is not, as has been widely supposed, a progressive development. The concept of the 'path' or 'way' has been very influential but I believe obscures the true nature of a life beset by the intrusion of spirituality.

THE SHIFT AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH MYSTICAL PERCEPTION.

The sequence in which mystical perception occurs is ego-identity beset by some problem with which it cannot deal - abrupt loss of ego-control often marked by mystical experience - phase of spiritual orientation. It should be pointed out that this is an uncommon and very specific sequence with which mystical perception is related. Abrupt loss of ego control is not in itself unusual and may be followed by a variety of states from daze or shock to emotional outburst or sleep but in some of these cases is mystical perception reported. We are dealing

then with one specific pattern only and, whilst I could not guess how frequently this pattern crops up, it must be sufficiently unusual for us to think of the correlation as being highly significant. I give three examples to illustrate this sequence and its relationship with mystical perception. As I have chosen them with a view to showing the sequence rather than for the strikingness of their accounts of mystical perception, I underline this latter element for clarity.

'In a state which I didn't know about, being young, that I know now as "the dark night of the soul". I sat dejected and absolutely lost on a wet, cold Monday afternoon. Suddenly my great anguish vanished and I felt free of earthly bonds of time and space and was absolutely surrounded, around me and within myself, by vivid light ... and though I didn't see anyone, I felt a deep sense of love such as I had never known before ... a state of unadulterated bliss ... following this experience ... I felt at one with the world and everything in it - the waving grass, birds singing, myself, all seemed to have formed a completed whole. This feeling didn't last for long, but whilst it did, it was delightful' (37).

'I met with frustration and difficulty both in my private and professional life, my sister died ... I began to despair. One day, as I wandered in the fields near my home, I became aware suddenly of a great change in the landscape, especially in the sky ... a vision of what appeared to be a shining host. At the same time everything around me took on a much more

vivid, colourful and living appearance. The trees and flowers were friendly, they almost spoke to me. This appearance around me continued (it seems for quite a prolonged period) ...people I now met were illumined. But how could I speak of strangers now. We were all one family, one Living Unity. My feeling of estrangement, of being one apart from others had gone ... I was humble and small in the presence of an Eternal Majesty and yet I was elevated' (38).

'It produced a fundamental alteration of my whole outlook and grasp on life. It brought me into a direct contact with God and was the commencement of a total change of heart and mind and consciousness, the centre of my consciousness, without any effort of my own, suddenly moving bodily from a concentration on the visible or earthly, to a living and absorbed concentration on ...the Invisible God - a most amazing, undreamed-of change, which remained permanent, though fluctuating, through innumerable degrees of intensity before coming to a state of equilibrium' (39).

One could give any number of such examples and, to my knowledge, there are no counter-examples where mystical perceptions have occurred in some quite different context - though of course in many cases we are simply not given the context at all. The shift may be marked by the profoundest experiences, if I may use such a term, relatively minor ones such as those above or by no experience at all, sometimes indeed the shift is marked only by a period of unconsciousness. In some cases

it may be difficult to distinguish the mystical perception from the onset of the spiritual orientation so striking can this be in itself. As in the second example, heightened sensory awareness coupled with the overwhelming conviction of the unity of things and, in this case, an awareness of divinity are almost mystical in themselves though they stop short of supernatural sense perceptions. There would not appear to be any link between the degree of pressure that ego-identity is under or the markedness of the spiritual state that follows and either the likelihood of mystical experience occurring or the 'depth' of the experience reported. Though I later cite some 'classic' cases where very profound experiences are reported in the context of pronounced ego and spiritual phases, much the same effect can be produced where the preceding and subsequent states are far less marked whilst in many dramatic conversion cases no supernatural experience is reported at all. If my observations are correct we may then treat the ego-spiritual shift as a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for the occurrence of mystical experience.

THE CYCLE.

In a few cases the spiritual orientation, once manifest, permanently characterizes the experient's outlook but I wish to argue that these cases are not typical. The general pattern appears to be that the subject returns, after some period of time, to ego-functioning and, whilst his beliefs may have been indelibly changed by his experience, he no longer experiences his extended identity or the esoteric world with the same immediacy and directness. James covered this point well. Besides giving two, rather untypical, examples of 'reverse conversion', an abrupt return to ego-identity and control, in neither of which was

a mystical perception reported, he cites Starbuck on the more usual gradual loss of the spiritual sense. Starbuck noted that even converts to fundamentalist religion, in which reinforcement plays a major part, felt a falling away or 'backsliding' even though this caused sadness and guilt - 93% of women and 77% of men (40) - and some gave up their religion altogether. Though no doubt the memory of their spiritual phase leaves a mark, perhaps acting as an anchor and maybe permanently changing intellectual outlook - 'persons who have passed through conversion, having once taken a stand for the religious life, tend to feel themselves identified with it no matter how much their religious enthusiasm declines' (41) - typically this phase passes. In some individuals the cycle, ego - spiritual - ego', may be a one-off leaving them much as they were before though with perhaps an outlook modified by their spiritual experience but very often we find the cycle repeated time and again.

From many case histories of mystics and indeed from the accounts of those who report renewing or confirming experiences without mystical perception, it is clear that the cycle may be repeated many times. Teresa of Avila describes a very acute ego phase, see Interior Castle 6.11.3 FF quoted at length in the next chapter - which recurred many times in her experience and observes that 'God brings (the soul in this agony) comfort. This He usually does by a deep trance or by some vision'. Another, more recent case which illustrates the repetitive nature of the shift is:- 'I just couldn't go on in the way I was living (there follows a long account of a mystical perception then) ... I felt like it was just being born. It was a revelation ... all the great truths that I'd heard

became meaningful for the first time. I realised that if I wanted to change the world I must first change myself ... Two years later, Trevor Watts again felt at breaking point. He had a second experience but this time it spread over several days and its effects were lasting' (42). It is the repetition of the pattern of shift which, I believe, entirely accounts for the fact that some individuals have a number of mystical experiences whereas others report only one in a lifetime, quite simply the more shifts the more opportunity for mystical perception to occur.

Though a single cycle, ego- spiritual - ego', is likely to be life-enhancing, bringing long-term psychological benefits such as resilience, sense of comfort and assurance, it is worth noting here that in cases where the cycle is repeated, the loss of the spiritual orientation is traumatic (a trauma, I shall later argue, which in some individuals is alone sufficient to set the cycle going again). The sense of loss, alienation, lack of direction and motivation and, often guilt in those who have had an intense spiritual period and found it slipped away, is sometimes monumental and, if loosely labelled, is widely recognized as the 'Dark Night of the Soul'. I do not know whether the 'pit after pit of black despair' when the soul 'is unable to raise its affection or its mind to God, neither can it pray to Him finding that God has set a cloud before it through which its prayers cannot pass' (43) and 'feels a strange loneliness, finding no companionship in any earthly creature' (44) is simply a psychological reaction to the return to ego control. It may just be that the loss of the prized state so intimately bound up with their beliefs and life goals causes the religious to find an ordinary ego state more than usually unpalatable but one might equally treat it as a form of depression with physiological

overtones. John of the Cross interestingly observes that, whilst these periods of alienation may last years, 'the purgative process allows intervals of relief, wherein this dark contemplation ceases to assail the soul' (45) which sounds more like clinical depression than a neurotic pining. This reaction, whatever its cause, is useful in so far as its frequent mention highlights the cyclic nature of the experiences of those who devote their lives to spirituality. There is not one period of 'Dark Night' in the life of the spiritual but many, interspersing the phases when they again feel in tune with the Almighty and the spiritual destiny they believe they have: 'God wishing His elect to realize their own misery often temporarily withdraws His favours: no more is needed to prove to us in a very short time what we really are ... Our faith is so dead' etc. (46). It may be that in some cases the cycle eventually comes more or less to an end. Teresa observes 'for such a transformation has been worked in her that she no longer recognizes herself - but seems entirely occupied in seeking God's interests ... the dryness and disturbance felt in all the rest (of the preceding periods) at times hardly ever enter here' (47). However, whether or not there is ultimately an end to the cycle in all cases - and if there is it seems as possible for it to end in a clearly delineated ego-identity as in a spiritual one - in many subjects it is not reached before a great many ego-spiritual oscillations have occurred. From the evidence we have therefore we cannot treat the ego-spiritual shift in isolation from the wider pattern of the cycle and the possibility of there being a prolonged period of repeated cycles.

THE CYCLE AND 'THE WAY'.

Though I am primarily concerned with the occurrence of mystical perception

in the shift from ego to spiritual identity and the broader pattern of the cycle is only of consequence in so far as it shows that those who report a number of such perceptions over a lifetime do so in the context of repeated shifts, a form of confirmation, it is of interest to look more closely at the implications the notion of a cyclic change in personality has for our understanding of the spiritual life.

My hypothesis, backed I believe by the autobiographies of mystics, is that the lives of those who quest for God is dominated by a series of cycles, each manifesting a period of ego-identity - often described as 'the Dark Night' - followed by an abrupt return to 'grace' and that in this there is nothing intrinsically progressive or dynamic. One spiritual phase may be very deep or marked but the next less keenly felt, for we have no reason to suppose that successive cycles become more and more pronounced. There is of course another dimension to all of this, the intellectual or ideological, in which these alternations are rationalized - a return to the ego state as a test, perhaps, or the consequence of personal failings - in terms of the conceived life purpose and religious goal. I do not therefore mean to suggest that religious ideas do not develop in the light of experience and learning or that the mystic cannot conceive of his experience in the light of religious belief as developmental and as each cycle, let alone the passage of time, leaves a legacy, long term changes in belief and personality no doubt do take place but none of this is to treat spiritual experience - those feelings of inter-relationship say or the moral impetus - in progressive terms. It is an open question how far one can develop through practice alone a feeling of altruism, say, or trust but, judging from the accounts of the 'dark night', intellectual belief in

these virtues and a lifetime of practising them do not alone suffice to bring alive or keep going the orientation in which they are second nature. Old devils return, 'aridity' and 'barrenness' set in at times even late in the lives of those who have had a lifelong commitment to religious goals and a lifetime of religious practice and devotion. It may be relevant to observe that many mystics express a longing for death simply in order to escape the feelings of separation from God and carnal desire which beset them so regularly despite their best endeavours and which they view as an inescapable part of mortal existence. My position therefore is that, whilst there is an intellectual dimension tied in with acquired religious beliefs that may develop over the years and may enable subjects to view their experience as developing towards some goal, this really has little bearing on the spiritual experiences which the religious have in their lifetimes which arise solely from a cyclic intrusion of a stereotyped orientation. If this is a reasonable analysis, spiritual experience itself changes little over the years, at least whilst these cycles last, and it makes no sense to talk of a development of or stages in the development of spiritual experience.

My view clearly contrasts with that held by most religious traditions and many authors. There is a long history to the 'path' or 'way' in which it is believed the 'pilgrim' moves through various sequential stages on his spiritual journey towards God. Though in some cases the pilgrim's ascent is not treated as straightforwardly developmental, the 'spiral' and the 'maze', for instance, appear to be attempts to take into account the simple fact of a recurrent 'dark night' or falling back from the desired state, most offer a staged and developmental idealization of the

spiritual life. From S. Bernard's 'five stages of love' and S. Teresa of Avila's 'seven mansions' to Underhill's 'Awakening/conversion, self-knowledge/purgation, illumination, surrender/dark night, Union' the spiritual life is portrayed as a progressive sequence leading in the direction of 'Union', 'self-annihilation' or whatever the ultimate goal of developing the spiritual nature is thought to be. Though one may recognize these themes as characteristic of one or other of the main phases of the cycle, they are not distinct stages and certainly not sequential stages in some hypothetical linear development. Teresa herself admitted that her schema was a retrospective idealization with which her own experience of the 'path' did not conform. 'Union', 'purgation' and 'the Dark Night' were wont to occur at any time and in any order and, most importantly, occur again and again. Experiences she considers as belonging to the earlier stages continued throughout her life whilst her efforts did not culminate in 'marriage' for this occurred occasionally over long periods interspersed with many other types of experiences and states of mind including repeated episodes of the 'dark night'. In none of the autobiographies I know of is such an order and progressive development to be found and whilst these idealizations may represent the hopes and beliefs of the spiritual that their erratic patterns are ultimately purposive I know of no life history which bears out the interpretation of a progressive development in spiritual experience towards ever more profound states. For this reason I treat the notion of a 'path' or 'way' as a theological imposition on such evidence as we have about spirituality albeit one believed in by many who have devoted themselves to an introspective quest for God. Most of us, after all, need to believe that we have goals to attain, in terms of which our lives may be judged, and in this respect the spiritual are no

different from others but against their own descriptions of their lives, such beliefs and interpretations are unimportant in so far as they are at variance with the recorded facts.* I am, it is clear, interested only in these patterns which may corrigibly be discerned in the mystic's life and not in his own interpretation which for many in the past has constituted an important part of the total mind state that mysticism represents. Since there is no evidence of ever-deepening spiritual experience, indeed the high-points may come early in life, I reject the concept of the 'way' - even though it may play a large part in the mystic's self-understanding - for it bears little relationship to the occurrence and type of spiritual experience or orientation that mystics themselves report.

THE EGO-SPIRITUAL CYCLE - A SUMMARY.

1. In the context of an abrupt shift there are two identifiable orientations or distinctive patterns of consciousness which should prove to have descriptive validity.

* In passing I should mention that I am wary of biography, as distinct from autobiography, in connection with the question of whether or not a mystic's life was one of ever-deepening spirituality or only a bewildering series of contrasting outlooks held together by the belief that these in some way must be linked in a purposive pattern. I doubt that many mystics, however much they believe in doctrine, would subordinate their memory and reorder their accounts to meet doctrinal needs. Biographers, however, may not only have an interest in reordering their material to make it appear purposive but may not in fact realise that they are doing this. It is easier, say, to deal with a mystic's 'dark night' in one chapter rather than scatter references throughout the book though this then gives a misleading impression of sequence and order. So subtle is the material and so difficult is it to place introspective changes in proper chronological order that it may be difficult for anyone other than the experient himself not to impose some unwarranted order upon it.

2. A characteristic spiritual identity only appears to occur in the context of an abrupt loss of ego control though, even in this context, it is a fairly uncommon reaction to an individuated identity under pressure.
3. Spiritual orientation is sufficiently stereotyped to be thought of as syndromic for its main characteristics are recognizable despite the variations in individual claims though, for an autonomic reaction, it has three peculiarities.
4. Typically the spiritual phase is short-lived giving way, once more, to ego personality or to an ego personality modified by the experience and the beliefs and practices it engenders therefore we are dealing with a cycle of which the abrupt shift is but one part.
5. This complete cycle may be repeated any number of times and is sufficient to explain the patterns and concerns of those who pursue the spiritual quest for spirituality may be explained largely in terms of the repeated oscillations that certain individuals experience.
6. Mystical perception occurs only in the shift from ego to spiritual orientation a background, which taken as a whole, is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for its occurrence. This background is sufficiently uncommon for us to think of the correlation as highly significant.
7. The greater the frequency of such shifts, i.e. the more cycles there are, the greater the chance of an individual having a number of mystical perceptions in a lifetime.

The identification of a sequence in which mystical experience occurs is, I believe a substantial step forward for it further defines the condition and gives it a basis for predicting its occurrence. However, before

dealing with the second factor in my model of occurrence and looking in detail at the place of mystical perception in the shift and the role it appears to play there, I intend first to examine some possible explanations of what it is this sequence signifies and how it might be related to mystical perception. Though I have already stated that I believe spirituality to be an autonomic reaction, if this is so, it is a very peculiar one and one which is likely to have far-reaching implications for our understanding of mind and the workings of human personality.

POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS OF THE SPIRITUAL STATE.

It is possible to look at the spiritual state in many different ways and one's interpretation will decide how we explain mystical perception and the significance it has. For example, Batson and Ventis, Horne and others have treated it as the end product of a creative or problem-solving sequence with mystical perception marking the 'bursting into consciousness' of the subliminally rearranged cognitive structures. Whilst I accept such a view keeps close to the observable sequence of events, as mentioned above, I feel such an interpretation is flawed. Quite apart from the problem of explaining sense perceptions, however 'supernatural', in mentalistic terms and the total lack of evidence for a subliminal process, in the case of mystics we run into the problem of the stereotyped nature of the 'answer' - which may have no relationship with the problem the mystic is facing - rather is the reaction to whatever problem the mystic faces - and must also wonder why, if it is a solution, it normally suffices for such a short time whether or

not there is continuing intellectual commitment to religious beliefs. Alternatively there are theological explanations in terms of a soul, be it an integral part of human identity or something that is born within us by the grace of God. The difficulties with this sort of view were outlined in chapter 1, it being impossible to justify a dualistic cosmology even though the states which religions attempt to explain are, I accept, experienced by quite a large number of individuals. However, that said, the spiritual orientation and self-identity I have described, stripped of its theological context, are recognizable as 'the soul' and I am not prepared to deny that this appears to have many of the characteristics and powers which religions ascribe to it. The third type of explanation, which I intend to examine, is biological. There has been a variety of explanations offered for this sort of mind-state, some treating it as a biological inheritance, some as a functional state, others as a morbid one. However, whilst I prefer such directions since alone they promise to explain mystical sense perceptions and characteristic changes of mood etc. in a rational context, none, it appears to me, offers an entirely satisfactory account of the complex or of the peculiarities it has i.e. it appears to be an active principle, its links with maturation and its internal coherence - let alone of its relationship with mystical perception.

INHERITANCE THEORIES.

I shall outline and comment on three such theories before discussing the general problems inherent in this approach.

1. ALASTAIR HARDY'S hypothesis, put forward in THE BIOLOGY OF GOD, treats spirituality as an evolutionary survival. He treats passiveness, submission and laying oneself open to a greater power in the face of threats to well-being as a relic of our animal past which may represent a universal reaction to danger. As in the case of dogs, smaller animals frequently submit to larger animals and by so doing may often protect themselves from injury, so some of us may repeat this pattern instinctively in the face of perceived threats. Though I do not doubt that there is a survival stratagem such as Hardy describes and it certainly seems to be the case that spirituality is a reaction to threats to well-being, I find three particular problems in the way of identifying the spiritual orientation with this stratagem.

In the first place, though Hardy's theory explains some of the elements characteristic of the spiritual state, it does not explain them all. Indeed it would be difficult to think of any evolutionary situation which would account for the complex as a whole. Whilst Hardy's theory for example, may account for 'basic trust' and even the non-competitiveness implicit in the withdrawal from society in the pattern of simplification of living, it does not account for feelings of altruism or the impetus towards a moral transformation. (It might be possible to argue that various evolutionary relics have coalesced into a single pattern thus altruism derives from biological altruism, 'basic trust' from animal submission etc. but there would be no way at all of confirming such an argument). The second difficulty is that if spirituality is a powerful, instinctive legacy it is odd that many, even in life-threatening situations, do not report this form of reaction at all.

There is no necessity for ego control to be lost and, if it is, it is more likely to be followed by emotional outburst or sleep than by the spiritual orientation. Why should the relic be so marked in some but not in others? Induction from a relatively few cases to a universal theory is not acceptable if its lack of general application cannot be explained. The third and most significant problem is that, whilst much human behaviour and feeling is instinctive and can be explained in evolutionary terms, as a rule, no other instinctive reactions have for us any religious or quasi-religious significance so why should spirituality, if this is only another behavioural stratagem? Whilst it is true that the Greeks, say, deified certain emotions and some of us may, with the poets, speak of love and hate as divine forces driving us, as it were, from outside of ourselves, we rarely attach such notions even to our strongest natural drives, sexuality, territoriality and personal domination, and certainly do not do so consistently. Yet the striking feature of spirituality is that both the state itself and everything with which the subject comes into contact is imbued with a profound religious or metaphysical significance as a matter of course and there is nothing idiosyncratic about this perception, for it goes with the state of mind. It therefore needs to be explained why the legacy of an animal rolling on its back should have been encrypted in this characteristic and unusual religious form.

2. VICTOR TURNER, the anthropologist, coined the term 'communitas' for 'primordial human yearnings' that run counter to our normal social

structures and the identity these impose upon us. His theory is that when outwardly imposed identity and roles are removed, as they are in moments of transition or on socially-sanctioned occasions such as feast days etc. in Ellwood's words 'one is in I - thou relations with everyone. Intersubjectivity and the inward desire to actualize love can take their full course without hindrance from social convention etc.' (48). Whilst I accept Turner's notion that the dropping of ego-identity with all its social roles and conventions is a necessary preliminary to the emergence of spirituality, with which for the sake of argument 'communitas' can here be identified, and it may be worth considering the situations he writes about in terms of triggers, I find myself unable to accept the Rousseauesque notion that we all have some archaic spiritual inheritance merely awaiting release from the straightjacket of social conventions. In Saturnalia, as in rites of passage or in drunkenness, the throwing off of an identity fashioned by 'body image' and society does not always lead to an unfocussed out-pouring of fraternal love, common purpose and goodwill. On the contrary, it is potluck what you find, for which reason society may have invented the straightjacket of social roles. One knows what Turner means but there is no standard response to ego-abandonment, certainly nothing as characteristic as the spiritual orientation. Nor, even if there were a universal response to ego-abandonment that resembled spirituality, would we be entitled to think of it as some 'primordial yearning'. This touches on a larger question I will discuss below, suffice to say here that even though many mystics feel that there is something primordial about their state of mind - 'even so have I seen an ancient path' (49) - the simple fact that opportunities for

the loss of ego-control appear to have been institutionalized in many traditional societies proves nothing about the place in our development of any feelings which emerge. Take 'the lid off' modern man and he will doubtless react in much the same way as the primitive, it is simply that modern society no longer recognizes the importance of releasing these feelings and institutionalizing their expression. Much has been written about hunter-gatherer mentalities and the customs of surviving primitive cultures, but there is really nothing to show that such feelings were stronger in the past or that we should interpret any modern expression of such feelings as a diminishing residue of feelings characteristic of an earlier age.

3. One final inheritance theory worthy of consideration is that the spiritual orientation is nothing less than the imprinted memory of our embryonic life in the womb. Leaving aside 'oceanic' feelings, in the womb the embryo is physically inter-related with another and dependent on this other for the means of life and it is not unreasonable to suppose that this important phase, so unlike any of our other experience, is stored as an imprinted pattern perhaps even remembered. If this were the explanation for the spiritual orientation, we must regard it as a regression to a pattern which in no real sense is acquired or idiosyncratic since it is formed by a situation that is universal and standardized. If there were an explanation for spirituality in terms of inheritance, I believe this might be the best candidate, for the main characteristics of spirituality, extended identity especially, could be understood in terms of the conditions prevailing during this stage and the contrast between ego and spiritual identities is only reflected

in our history in the pre and post natal phases. Whilst having the merit of simplicity and, unlike 'communitas', refers to a pattern we might all be expected to have acquired, there are nonetheless objections to it. We may in this pattern feel inter-relatedness, feelings of pleasure and comfort, an expectation of sustenance and so forth yet it is hard to understand the imperative for moral development in terms of this complex. Not is it understandable why only some experience a return to the embryonic state when this is both universal and, apparently, leaves such a profound imprint. The triggers for ego-abandonment are common, the spiritual state is not. Again I wonder why if, as religions claim, spirituality 'works', it should 'work' in conditions which bear no relationship to our embryonic stage. Others may not be so convinced by this last argument but I believe the apparent adaptivity of the spiritual phase which mystics themselves and other religious value, stands against any attempt to explain the state in terms of a legacy from the past be it an evolutionary stage or a common phase in the personal history of us all.

These and other similar explanations in terms of inheritance all suffer from the weakness that in the end they can never be confirmed. It might be shown that a certain state of mind is connected with activity, say, only in our reptilian brains but, as there are no 'fossil records', without such a link, demonstrating the connection between a state of mind and some earlier phase of our development, any connection can be no more than conjectual. The conjecture is especially tenuous in the case of spirituality for one is not attempting to link a universal, human condition with a past phase, it is an uncommon occurrence and as such

begs the question - if a past imprint can produce such an effect, why does it not do so more reliably if it really is a universal inheritance? This brings me to the central question which relates to all inheritance theories. It is simply a presumption that, because an identifiable state of mind occurs, in some Freudian sense therefore that state has an existence outside of those occasions when it is manifest. 'Primordial yearnings', embryonic or animal imprints and the like all suggest, quite unwarrantably, that we each carry around with us patterns of which, though normally we are unaware, are, as it were, waiting an opportunity to manifest themselves. Whilst I accept the idea of subliminal intellectual activity, creative or not, for we all have experience of this, I am far from convinced that we can extend the idea of a sub-conscious life to any other type of experience of which we are only intermittently and, in the case of spirituality, not even universally aware. If, as in problem-solving, we can trace a link between question and answer, then we are justified in accepting the ongoing nature of the process even if this is wholly subconscious, even an indication of such a process - a dream foreshadowing the solution, perhaps, would do - but in so many cases there simply are no grounds for assuming that any activity is occurring other than when it is manifest. We have, perhaps, been a little over-conditioned by the psycho-analysts for, even in the case of dreaming, there is no reason to treat this other than as a state specific phenomenon. Why should we accord dreams any hypothetical status when they only occur during sleep? They may or may not symbolize universal or highly individual needs but in either case there is not the slightest need to postulate a sub-conscious for it is indubitable that they symptomize the common condition of sleep and nothing more and perhaps we should look for the explanation of dreaming and any significance dreams have in terms of the conditions in which they

occur. Some would wish to argue that the sub-conscious is evidenced by the sad state of the mentally ill, overwhelmed by various psychic contents and complexes that are usually hidden but one may, as in the case of dreaming, turn this around and say that the various delusions etc. are no more than the concomitants of a morbid state and that in looking at the delusions etc. we are addressing symptoms and not their cause. This question has particular relevance in the case of spiritual orientation, for, as I will argue in the next chapter, this is so intimately bound up with trauma and the physiological changes consequent upon this that it is difficult not to see it as a state tied to or symptomatic only of a specific condition produced by these changes. I do not say that there is any clear answer to this question but, on grounds of parsimony alone, if there is no need to postulate the existence of a spiritual complex, distinct from its manifestation during a condition to which it appears tied, we should not do so and thus we dispense with the need to explain the state other than in terms of the physiological condition in which it arises. (Broader questions about property identity and other issues in naturalistic reduction will be looked at in the final chapter). It proves nothing that the same state of mind may recur for this does not indicate continuity, merely that the same conditions prevail on each occasion. We would not, after all, believe, say, that a puncture in a tyre evidenced some predisposition normally latent to flatness or that a second puncture in that tyre strengthened this argument but only that each instance was discrete, arising from the occurrence of a similar set of circumstances. By analogy, even though mystics may believe their spiritual episodes are linked, much as we may believe our dreams to have a common underlying identity which each instance of dreaming

evidences - a deception of our subjectivity? - it is simplest to take the view that where specific circumstances can be identified, much that we are conscious of is a product of circumstance alone and has no other status independent of these circumstances. If this view is justifiable, is it then to be wondered whether explanations of states of mind, other than in terms of the conditions in which these occur, are not wholly superfluous?

BIOLOGICAL VALUE OR FUNCTIONS OF THE SPIRITUAL STATE.

To explain a state of mind in terms of its function sidesteps the above-mentioned difficulty of knowing whether we need to ascribe to it a status independent of the condition in which it occurs. If we treat spirituality as Maslow did 'peak states', we might look upon it as a valuable and beneficial state that occurs simple because it is valuable and beneficial. 'Peak states' are not only valued by individuals but may, as in athletics, say, contribute towards our performance enabling us to release energies and function effectively in the face of certain demands. It may be that spiritual phases serve some similar purpose by reducing stress or trauma in the face of situations with which we cannot cope and, quite possibly, contributing towards survival - 'near-death experience' - and restoration as the body responds in ways that are normally inhibited by ego-control. The miseries of 'falling away' in those who have repeated spiritual phases, in contrast to the strengthening of those who experience it rarely or but once, may be explained in terms of some chronic condition which these individuals suffer from and from which these spiritual interludes provide some intermittent and temporary relief at the times of greatest threat to

well-being. There are many circumstantial reasons for believing that life-long mystics do suffer from some chronic, if unidentifiable, condition for which spirituality is a relief and which allows them to function reasonably effectively or it may be only a case of 'bad adrenalin' - a defence mechanism which too readily comes into play.

I do not doubt that spirituality, like sleep, is a condition which produces benefits, albeit difficult to define exactly what threats to functioning it provides a defence for. The problem is though, however valuable such states are it is not clear that function and value alone are sufficient to explain why a state occurs. In terms of evolution it is often said that if something contributes to survival - and spirituality may be looked upon as a back-up system for individual survival or even as a state that benefits the species leading as it does to non-aggression etc. - this alone suffices to explain why it has developed and why it continues to occur. Yet I fail to see why we should not look upon its biological value only as something accidental or fortuitous especially as, in the case of spirituality, this value probably makes only a marginal contribution to survival.

Paranoia, for instance, would not appear to be a very useful state in biological terms, though not incompatible with survival, and we could not use functional explanations in this case and, even though we feel better for sleep, there is, as yet, no reason to suppose that it is an evolutionary answer to some inherent design problem in the human organism rather than an accidental and essentially decorative component in our make-up. Because it is there does not entail that it has to be there even if we find some advantages in it, for, if I understand evolutionary theory correctly, survival makes no difference to factors which are not relevant to genetic survival. If this is so and

spirituality neither now nor in the past has given the species significant advantages or disadvantages, there is no reason to view it in terms of function though, of course, it is relevant to describe such benefits as it brings. It is for this reason that I am uncertain as to what weight we should attach to any of the benefits of this state which range from a sense of well-being and making death easier to face to, possibly, a direct role in individual survival in some circumstances. At the very least I would be unhappy viewing the state solely from a biological perspective ignoring as this does all that the experients find most striking about it for though it is one legitimate form of analysis it does not seem to be the right yardstick for it appears to address issues that in this case are essentially peripheral. Though it would equally be possible to think of the spiritual phase solely as an accident or by-product of human design - we are "hard-wired" to see God under certain circumstances - an irrelevant, if quaint, characteristic of the human make-up, I suspect that function does play a part but, if it is to be the whole description, this will need to be much more sophisticated - going into maturation, say, as well as survival - than the accounts presently offer.

MORBIDITY.

The simplest form of explanation would be a reduction in terms of morbidity. Various explanations have been given in terms of hypoxia, the excitement of the limbic structures and so forth. There is one great advantage to these for they may be used to account both for mystical perception itself and the state which follows it. None of the other explanations give us any account of why it is mystical perception characteristically is followed by a spiritual stage which here may be viewed as a readjustment phase following on the severe changes which induced the perception

in the first place. Whilst I accept the role of trauma, including physical illness or injury, in the occurrence of these states (see chapter 5) and do not deny that there are grounds for treating spirituality as a form of impaired functioning - a less flexible and creative state of mind which, on the face of it, is less than rational - I find four main problems with such simple accounts. The first of these is that we are used to finding that highly marked states - and both the spiritual orientation and the sequence of mystical perception → spiritual orientation, I have argued, are highly marked - are linked to marked and specifiable conditions. Alcoholism, say, as a physiological condition, is in every way as marked as its effects ranging from the delusions of sclerosis to mental incompetence, loss of memory etc. Yet in the case of the spiritual state experients have no marked physiological condition in common - and, if there is any relationship between the severity of the symptoms and the severity of the cause, it would need to be marked - but only some common circumstances that have no clear physiological implications. Some mystics may well be ill but many are patently not. There is neither reason to assume morbidity nor that circumstances have produced severe physiological changes in the case, say, of an over-busy housewife who has happened to stop to look at the sunset. Secondly, we have few precedents for believing that sense perceptions - as distinct from hallucinations however vivid - arise from pathological conditions. Apart from tinnitus, which is a very localized condition, I can think of no other example which might lead us to believe that morbidity is the cause of the sequence or of any parallel at all to make us think that morbidity can give rise to characteristic changes in waking consciousness. Thirdly, there is the problem of property identity to be discussed in chapter 6 -

it is not easy to reduce God to Hypoxia - or to offer any detailed account of the mechanism which might enable one to do so. Finally, there is the paramount difficulty that the spiritual state is not clearly morbid at all. If mental functioning becomes less effective, nonetheless experiencers profess themselves never to have felt better or more vital and alive - am I wrong in assuming that morbidity, especially if prolonged, must always have deleterious effects on the sense of well-being? - and, if their outlook is typically irrational, it is not typically incoherent or indeed, for certain, unadaptive. In the face of these points, without some hard empirical evidence that all those who report this state share a significant physiological abnormality, I do not think morbidity is an obvious starting point for explaining the spiritual syndrome however much we may suspect that changes in physiology play a part in the explanation.

I have reviewed a variety of explanations of the spiritual state none of which lend any clear insight into the nature of the spiritual orientation still less into its relationship with mystical perception. Inheritance theories are fun but not only do none of them match up with the spiritual syndrome, there is no prima facie reason for us to assume that it needs to be explained in this way. Though we might look at spirituality in terms of its biological value, and some aspects of a multi-faceted problem can be looked at in this way, there is no reason why we should look at the problem in these terms alone, certainly they do not provide us with a rounded view. Equally there are difficulties

with morbidity, problem-solving - for which there is no evidence - and theology which, whilst more than any other approach addresses the experience in its entirety yet fails to do so in a rational context. I will return to this very difficult question of finding the most appropriate context in which the spiritual syndrome and its relationship with mystical perception can be understood in the final chapter but for now I wish to go on to examine a second factor in the occurrence of mystical perception which may explain a lot about how it comes about and advance our ideas about the nature of **this background cycle** which is so important for the definition of the phenomenon and gives its occurrence a context.

CHAPTER 5

THE SHIFT

In this chapter I wish to examine the sequence of events which leads from ego-control to spiritual identity with the primary aim of showing that we are dealing with two separate processes rather than some single dynamic. My argument will be that mystical perception and the emergence of a spiritual identity takes place against the background of a quite distinct and commonplace trigger-reaction sequence, known as traumatization. In Part 1 I will discuss traumatization, its triggers, the operative conditions for these and the reaction itself and hope to show not only that in these terms we can give a context to all the diverse conditions under which mystical experience is known to occur but also explain many of the features associated with that state of mind in which mystical perception takes place. This first phase - the vulnerability of ego-control to certain forms of threat and the triggering of a reaction in which ego-control is lost under certain conditions - is an entirely mundane phenomenon that, for reasons that are not at all clear, is a sine qua non for mystical experience. In Part 2 I go on to look at the occurrence of mystical experience and the shift to spirituality with which this is linked against the background of traumatization. Here I shelve the major problems of interpretation until the final chapter for I am more concerned with completing my characterization of mystical experience. Certainly, traumatization in conjunction with a shift to spirituality, gives it a very distinctive profile and, by showing that we are dealing with two separate elements in the profile of mystical experience, it becomes clear that no single explanation of its profile as a whole is possible.

I conclude this chapter with a review of other factors possibly related to the occurrence of mystical perception and a complete characterization of the experience.

I

TRIGGER-REACTION.

Central to my model of mystical experience is an everyday sequence of trauma/stress that triggers a metabolic reaction causing a loss of ego-identity and a number of the other changes in feeling and mood. Most of us are familiar with some form of shock or daze whether or not this is preceded by a period of unconsciousness brought on by such diverse conditions as injury or illness, pain or exhaustion, fear and anxiety, harassment, exertion etc. As I understand it any of these can, under the right conditions, trigger an entirely autonomic endocrinal reaction releasing an array of chemicals into the bloodstream with certain characteristic effects on our perception of self-identity, our awareness of time and locality and on our feeling and mood, a change which is not merely descriptive but one which can be diagnosed also. Though I do not intend to go into the bio-chemistry of these changes for I assume a sufficient acquaintance with this reaction on the part of the reader for my purposes here - there are a number of detailed studies especially in the context of athletics to which the reader might wish to refer - I do wish to examine this sequence in some detail for I believe exactly the same sequence occurs in mystical cases as in the more mundane case of shock and allied conditions. Before beginning with a discussion of the triggers of trauma which are the same in mystical and mundane cases, I wish first to make a number of points about traumatization which will help clarify my subsequent argument.

1. Traumatization has no integral relationship with mystical experience. Though I will contend that all cases of mystical experience occur against a background of traumatization, a, presumably, small percentage of trauma cases actually result in mystical experience and a shift to spirituality. Most individuals - after an interval of trauma - simply return to ordinary ego-functioning. For this reason we cannot treat mystical experience as an effect of trauma but must look for another explanation of mystical experience - spiritual orientation though one which accounts for why it is this only crops up in the context of traumatization. This is a significant point for, if I am right about the trigger-reaction sequence, there is no possibility of explaining all the stages mystics go through in terms of a single dynamic be it creativity or something more naturalistic. Trigger-reaction will account for much but not those parts of the sequence - supernatural perception and spirituality - that I am most interested in though it is relevant to their occurrence.

2. A precipitating crisis is a necessary condition for trauma but not a sufficient one. In discussing only those cases in which a trigger has induced trauma, it might appear that we all have our 'breaking point' and that the triggers I discuss will always have this effect. However, even under the right conditions - which will be discussed in detail - there is no guarantee that the severest threats to well-being will trigger such a reaction in everyone and therefore, though I do not discuss this aspect, the nature of the individual's personality or his susceptibility to this type of reaction is a factor in the equation. Nor, even in the most general terms, could we hope to quantify the degree of threat which has produced a reaction in those cases we are interested in.

In each case we can note that there was a threat to well-being or, at the very least, a perception of a threat to well-being which, as observers, we may or may not agree was well-founded but the point at which the reaction will, if at all, occur seems to be entirely an idiosyncratic matter. We may well imagine the shock of a traffic accident or the distress caused by hunger but sometimes the traumatic effects of anxiety, fear, guilt, everyday harassment etc. appear hard to understand yet there is no reason to suppose that the relatively trivial discomforts faced in some circumstances cannot precipitate a reaction in some individuals quite as much as some more dramatic event.

3. The most important aspect of traumatization, so far as this argument is concerned, is the loss of subjective control and, often, the awareness of subjectivity itself. Normally, I will argue, at a descriptive level this loss of subjectivity is clear cut for, as an acute sense of individuality renders the subject more vulnerable to trauma, the contrast between a prior exaggerated sense of self-identity and its subsequent loss is large. However, intense self-awareness is not a necessary condition for traumatization and hence it may be possible for those with a weak or ill-defined perception of self-identity to experience trauma in which case any further loss of subjective control may be difficult to detect. Ego-abandonment therefore is a concept that can be characterized formally but one which in reality covers a great variety of changes from dramatic loss of self-identity to those in which the preceding condition of ego-control would hardly be recognized as such by other, more clearly defined, personalities.

4. Though, below, I characterize the reactive phase, it is as well to point out here that the metabolic reaction triggered can vary in intensity from individual to individual. Some are in a state of utter euphoria whilst others merely mildly affected just as there are similarly many degrees of everyday shock. The point is an important one since, though I am claiming that there is a recognizable state of mind and, indeed, clinical state in which mystical experience occurs, I also accept that there is a huge variation in the symptomatology of this state. It has, hitherto, been a contentious issue as to whether or not mystical perception is a total mind-state involving euphoria, loss of all sense of time etc. Traumatization solves the question for it is compatible both with mystical perception occurring under conditions of ecstasy and with it occurring under apparently near-normal conditions - some report of slight trembling or whatever indicating, in the latter case, that the subjects are nonetheless traumatized.

THE TRIGGER.

Trauma, in all its possible forms, provides the common thread for all the varied circumstances in which mystical experience is reported to have occurred. The high incidence of mystical, i.e. 'near-death' experience, amongst the terminally ill - over 40% - for example, is explicable in the very conditions of acute illness be it stress, fear of death, pain or metabolic change. Many other famous cases, such as those of Julian of Norwich, Ignatius Loyola etc. have also occurred under conditions of acute, if not fatal, illness or injury. Sexual activity or other exertions are commonly mentioned. Fasting or other practices - in or out of a religious context - which tend to exhaustion such as vigils and repetitive chanting all may play a part, in addition to existential fears and anxieties, in traumatizing an individual to a degree where a reaction is provoked. Such circumstances as these

have long been associated with the occurrence of mystical experience but since none is a sufficient condition, their collective significance has perhaps been overlooked. I shall therefore contend that the trigger in all cases is an event which traumatizes and very often we find the same types of trigger in mystical cases as we do in everyday shock and other commonplace reactive states. I shall begin this discussion by looking at two forms of this trigger and then consider the conditions under which they appear to operate most efficiently.

In the previous chapter I mentioned two forms of problem encountered by ego-identity. The first, and most often encountered in religious reports, are those very problems which are inherent in an acutely-felt individuality and the second are those accidents of life which ego-control can do little about. I shall discuss each separately for though, as both are well represented in accounts of mystical experience, there is no doubt that the same process is involved in each case - it is too complex to argue that there are cases which can be explained in terms of problem-solving though which equally might be explained by trauma and cases which can only be explained in terms of trauma - in the first type the role of trauma is not always as obvious as it is in the second.

A. THE PROBLEMS OF EGO-IDENTITY.

In mystical cases a very common circumstance is found namely an obsessive concern with religious and existential questions which give rise to fears and anxieties quite sufficient to traumatize the individual. At the outset it is worth making three points about this. Firstly, that

whilst we find this circumstance commonly in mystical cases, I have no reason to believe that traumatization from this cause is unique to these cases. Many individuals may have 'nervous breakdowns' or otherwise reduce themselves to a state of shock by 'a gnawing, carking questioning and effort for philosophic relief' (1), as James calls it, without any mystical or spiritual interlude. Secondly, the trigger, I believe, is the questioning and the fears this gives rise to rather than the acute perception of ego-identity which goes hand in hand with this frame of mind. As will later be discussed, the distinction may be artificial but I shall argue that, whilst an acute perception of one's isolation etc. makes ego-control vulnerable to threats of any type, the precipitating crisis in just these cases is the existential dilemma that happens commonly to go with such a perception. There do appear to be cases in which an acute perception of isolation goes hand in hand with existential worries yet the immediate cause of the reaction is not anxiety but something else quite accidental. In such a case we have a precipitating crisis - injury or whatever - and an important condition for reaction - acute sense of one's individuality - and the existential aspect and the fears these give rise to are of no consequence (see below the case of Major Haswell). Thirdly, at first sight the 'gnawing, carking questioning' may put us on the wrong track suggesting 'problem-solving' explanations but I believe it can be shown that the reaction is caused solely by the deleterious effects of anxiety and, as in other cases, the intellectual content is itself without any causal significance.

Teresa of Avila, for example, frequently had short-lived periods of acute anxiety and fear arising from the estrangement she felt from God and these

agonies of mind were only relieved by a trance state or vision which, as I shall discuss under reaction, often mark the onset of traumatization. She describes the sudden onset of these states as a 'blow' that 'wounds us severely ... not I think in that part of our nature subject to physical pain but in the very depths and centre of the soul ... do not think I am exaggerating ... the understanding realizes acutely what cause there is for grief in separation from God ... this increases the anguish to such a degree that the sufferer gives vent to loud cries ... you may ask why she does not conform herself to the will of God since she has so completely surrendered herself to it. Hitherto she has been able to do so and she consecrated her life to it; but now she cannot because her reason is reduced to such a state ... why should she seek to live apart from her only God? She feels a strange loneliness, finding no companionship in any earthly creature ... all society is a torture to her. She is like one suspended in mid-air, who can neither touch the earth nor mount to heaven; she is unable to reach the water while parched with thirst and this is not a thirst that can be borne ... this (spiritual) agony does not continue for long ... in one case, where it lasted only a quarter of an hour, the sufferer was left utterly exhausted; indeed so violent was the attack that she completely lost consciousness. This occurred when she unexpectedly heard some verses to the effect that life seemed unending'. Of this same instance she continues, 'All Eastertide she had suffered such aridity as hardly to realize what mystery was being celebrated ... These feelings cannot be concealed ... her desire for death which so oppresses her soul with grief that it appears on the point of leaving her body, yet her mind, terrified at the thought, tries

to still its pain so as to keep death at bay. Evidently, this fear arises from human infirmity, for the soul's longings for death do not abate nor can its sorrows be stilled until God brings it comfort. This He usually does by a deep trance or by some vision whereby the true comforter consoles and strengthens the heart which thus becomes resigned to live as long as He wills' (2). In this account there are all the classic features of this form of self-generated stress. There is the strong sense of self-isolation and the vulnerability this gives rise to, the questioning and doubts and the fears and anxieties which actually trigger the reaction, a tripwire - in this case some meaningful verse - which I shall discuss further below and finally there is the onset of traumatization.

I do not think that it can be doubted that the operative factor in such a case is the fear and anxiety which left Teresa 'utterly exhausted'. William James offers a fine collection of cases in his 'the sick soul', 'the divided self' and 'conversion' which show just how severe and stressful these periods of existential doubt can be. For instance, Jouffroy's account, 'I shall never forget that night of December ... anxiously I followed my thoughts as from layer to layer they descended towards the foundation of my consciousness ... I clung to these last beliefs as a ship-wrecked sailor clings to the fragments of his vessel: vainly frightened at the unknown void ... I turned with them towards my childhood, my family, my country, all that was dear and sacred to me. The ineffable current of my thought was too strong - parents, family, meaning, beliefs, it forced me to let go of everything. The investigation went on more obstinate and more severe as it drew near its term ... I knew then that in the depth of my mind nothing was left that stood erect.

That moment was a frightful one' (3). Though the ostensible cause may vary from case to case, fear of death, loss of ideals, the meaninglessness of life etc., I think it indisputable that the primary effect of all this soul-searching is to create stress through fear and anxiety which, as a threat to well-being, is quite the equal of a road accident. I think it significant that, as in the two examples quoted above, typically the onset of this phase of questioning and self-doubt is often very sudden, short-lived and climactic in nature. There may be cases of chronic angst and self-doubt that end in trauma but certainly these appear to be infrequent in the records which leads me to suppose that it is the stress generated by a sudden and climactic episode which is probably not equalled in long-term worry that is the important factor and not any intellectual aspect which is common to both types of case.

Presumably, because existential and religious questioning figure so prominently in this type of case, some authors from James himself to Horne and Batson and Ventis have tried to understand this and subsequent stages in terms of some single creative or problem-solving sequence. My reasons for not accepting this view and for here treating fear and anxiety, rather than the intellectual content, as the sole cause of the next stage are as follows. 1. The same reaction - see below - follows from diverse causes, as much, say, from injury etc. as from existential questioning and there are cases where one subject has experienced the same reaction more than once in the face of quite different conditions. The reaction may solve the subject's difficulties but this is no reason to think of it in terms of problem-solving if the answer has no logical relationship with the difficulties faced but represents a stereotyped

and universal response to adversity of all kinds. I do not doubt that there are cases that could be understood in either way. The case of Mr. Bradley's confirming experience, for example, might be construed as trauma or problem-solving. Nine years after his conversion Mr. Bradley 'went to hear the Methodist ... He spoke of the ushering in of the day of general judgement, and he set it forth in such a solemn and terrible manner as I never heard before. The scene of that day appeared to be taking place and so awakened were all the powers of my mind that I trembled involuntarily on the bench. I went directly home and I wondered what made me feel so stupid ... about five minutes later ... I began to feel my heart beat very quick all on a sudden ... my heart increased in its beating which soon convinced me that it was the Holy Spirit from the effect it had on me. I began to feel exceedingly happy and humble and such a sense of unworthiness ... a stream resembling air in feeling came into my mouth and heart in a more sensible manner than that of drinking anything ... it took complete possession of my soul'(4).

A case might here be made for cognitive restructuring in the face of the Methodist's words but it is overly complex to explain one type of case in this way and 'spontaneous' cases, those without any intellectual background - as James does - in terms of 'divine will' when accounts of all types are compatible with the trauma model. 2. If we are dealing with problem-solving it is odd how many subjects find that the 'solution' fails to satisfy for long. As in Teresa's case some shortly find themselves back in the same plight as before or at the very least, as Starbuck noted, feel a 'backsliding' until some further confirming experience occurs. This pattern, however, is precisely what we would expect if we are dealing with a metabolic reaction which is inevitably short-lived. 3. Since rarely can we think of the subsequent state as a rational solution to particular existential problems and there is

nothing in these cases comparable to Kirkcaldy's dream of the benzene ring, we simply have no evidence for subliminal intellectual processes but strong grounds, wherever background is given, for supposing in each case that the subject is traumatized. Nor, often, is there a reasonable lapse of time between cause and 'solution' for intellectual activity to have taken place - there are instantaneous cases of mystical perception and conversion following accidents in which no history of existential or religious questioning is recorded - such spontaneous cases present no problem in the trauma model. 4. Though it may be, if an acute ego-identity is most vulnerable to trauma, that we find some history of personal doubts in most cases, it is important to note that sometimes, despite such a history, such questioning cannot conceivably be the operative factor. In an interesting case, that of Major Haswell, we are told that he was 'predisposed to religion' but one wonders what relevance this had for his experience or his subsequent ordination when the immediate circumstance of his experience and the new perception this gave rise to was 'shells coming in one after the other exploding about three feet above the ground ... the noise about us was deafening, the flash of flame ... we expected to be cut to pieces as we emerged' (5). These four points convince me that even in cases where existential questioning precedes a shift the intellectual aspect is significant only in so far as it serves to generate stress, the one point which will link these with so many other cases in which the same sequence is observed but in which no intellectual aspect is apparent.

Though this crisis of questioning and alienation characterizes this particular form of personal crisis very well, there is good reason to

wonder whether these psychological and intellectual aspects do, in fact, even play so much a role as that of generating stress. It may be that mentalistic problems can traumatize an individual and, if they can, it may be that the intelligent, those who have religious beliefs or who have experienced the spiritual state before find the ego-perception of self as isolated especially upsetting and this renders such individuals particularly vulnerable to traumatization in this way. Certainly in many case histories there are signs of long-term preoccupation with religious and existential concerns and this is especially true of many well-known mystics who have had more than one mystical episode. Yet there are grounds for supposing that problems of meaningfulness, fear of death etc. are, like the acute perception of self-isolation with which they are correlated, no more than symptoms of some underlying physiological condition that itself brings the individual to the point of metabolic reaction. It makes no difference one way or the other to my argument what the cause of trauma is but there is something in the suddenness of onset of existential anxiety - often without ostensible cause - its normally short duration, its climactic nature and above all its cyclic nature which leads me to suppose that there is more to this phase than a neurotic or exaggerated concern with existence. Do we have here some metabolic disturbance that intensifies subjectivity and brings out the fears and anxieties inherent in this state, which proves unsustainable in so far as at a physiological level it becomes such a threat to bodily functioning that, at a certain point, it triggers a reaction? I feel this may be a more sensible way to look at the descriptions we have - after all we use tranquillizers to reduce anxiety and promote a sense of contentment - though the adoption of this line of thought would have

very far-reaching implications for our understanding of mental contents and personality. Such little evidence as we have may be looked at in either way. The agreement of Pafford and Douglas-Smith that there is at least one peak age - possibly more - for mystical experience i.e. late adolescence, could be understood either in mentalistic terms as a product of the general uncertainty about self-identity, hence a greater vulnerability and also the concern with existential questioning common to this age group or as the product of metabolic changes, in this case, associated with the process of maturation. It is an interesting question. However, whichever way we chose to understand these bouts of meaningfulness, fear of death etc., there is little doubt that a traumatic reaction is induced be it through the stress of mentalistic fears or, as in other cases, through some underlying physiological process.

B. OTHER TYPES OF CRISIS WHICH TRIGGER TRAUMATIC REACTION.

It is central to my hypothesis that, as in everyday shock etc., there are many other triggers for the reactive state in mystics quite apart from the problems and dilemmas of ego-identity discussed above. We have cases occasioned by injury or illness - e.g. 'while convalescing from a long and painful stomach ailment, I suddenly became very weak. Having been on a very light diet for months, this weakness was understandable - (there follows a good account of mystical perception in a reactive state and no mention of prior existential concerns)' (6). Other cases arise from a psychological shock; 'when the all-clear went some of us went up to a high hill above the city, and looked down on the terrible scene ... buildings that were mere shells with flames raging inside them ... suddenly - (there follows an account of mystical perception)' (7). Some of the upsets are patently trivial - 'the following occurred at a time when I had no feeling for religion ... A certain event had hurt

and humiliated me. I rushed to my room in a state of despair, feeling as worthless as an empty shell ...suddenly my separate self ceased to exist etc.' (8). (In passing it is worth noting that at the level of human reaction to threats to well-being, it appears that a distinction between psychological and physiological causation is too crude since some minor embarrassment and a bomb blast can both induce a similar reaction). We have many cases occurring in contexts which both occur naturally and which are reflected in religious practices. Fasts - which may well produce an 'insulin shock' effect - exhaustion be it from overwork or vigils and many other situations which place a strain on physiology are all reported and I think it matters little whether the stressful situation occurs accidentally or, as in many religious practices, is contrived. As in David Brainerd's account, quoted by James (9), we may find several possible causes of reaction given - existential anxiety, fasting, long vigils - and in such cases each factor may contribute cumulatively to the effect produced. In the context of trauma such cases are no longer, in James' words, 'spontaneous'. They have a background and it is the same background as we find in 'classic' cases where there is only a preoccupation with existential and religious concerns. On this view it is no longer surprising that we find so many cases occurring in evidently stressful situations - the death-bed (40% or so have 'N-D e...'), the battlefield, religious practices and many other, less common, situations, physiological and psychological alike. I have no figures but leafing through the reports, where background information is given at all, we find sex, exertion, athletics, everyday harassment, illness etc. mentioned quite as frequently as obsessive concern with identity and religion and I take this to be conclusive for the trauma model, in terms of which alone, all these

various occasions assume a significance. We also find that all these 'non-religious' occasions can give rise to everyday traumatization without mystical experience or the shift to spiritual orientation and for this reason I believe there is no difference in kind between the reactive states of mystics - however these might be caused - and those mundane reactive states most of us will experience at some time or other when under threat. It is therefore my contention that, wherever a detailed background to mystical experience is given, we will find such reports as 'on at least two occasions when I was deeply troubled I had the very definite sensation of someone being next to me, and an overwhelming assurance etc.' (10), 'living under great stress, I had the experience of a voice ...' (11), 'I was grief-stricken', 'I was deeply distressed', 'in a state of intense wretchedness' (12) and either existential anxiety or some mundane factor - illness, say, - offered as the cause.

It is worth mentioning here that there may be another type of threat to well-being which induces traumatization though, unlike accident or anxiety, it is difficult to point to the precise cause of the stress. It appears possible that in circumstances of extreme monotony be it sensory deprivation, "mind-numbing" chanting or the mind-stilling exercises of Yoga or even perhaps where self-identity is deliberately abandoned as in Turner's socially-sanctioned rites of passage, that a high level of stress can be induced. Teresa of Avila specifically warns her novices against the trance-like reaction which arises from an absorption in devotion and the author Jack London offers a very good account of the reaction and subsequent experiences arising from the stresses of solitary confinement. Perhaps this can be an important trigger in those unused to isolation, though apart from noting that the cause does not appear to be introspective questioning of the type James

gives examples of, I do not know why monotony and a reduction in the re-inforcement of our ego-identity should have this effect.

It is then my argument that in every case of mystical experience, as in many commonplace experiences, we will find some threat to well-being, at least a perceived threat, that suffices to trigger the reactive phase I shall discuss below. Such is the variation in human reaction to threat that we may find the threat to be profound in one case and trivial in another but in any event it does not matter what the trigger is so long as it serves to produce this effect on an individual. If I am right about this the first stage in the events leading to mystical experience arises entirely from the accidents of life though, in one case - where an intense perception of self-identity is linked with problems inherent in such a perception - the likelihood of trauma can be predicted. If, in all these cases, we find the same reaction occurring I believe it will be beyond doubt that we are dealing with a simple and commonplace metabolic sequence that gives a recognizable background to mystical cases and explains why it is ego-control is lost.

THE CONDITIONS FOR TRAUMATIZATION.

I do not think it is enough to argue that in each case we come across there is at least a perceived threat to well-being for it is clear that the conditions under which the threat occurs are relevant to the outcome - since no trigger is a sufficient cause of reaction in itself - and, in examining these conditions, from what we know about mystical experience we can tie its occurrence more closely to the model of traumatization. I identify four main conditions which make it more likely that a reaction will occur though I accept that, even under optimum conditions, the severest threat may not produce a reaction - such is human variability.

I am not suggesting that these conditions are necessary for traumatization but only that, in the face of a recognizable threat to well-being, their presence will increase the probability of traumatization occurring and thus the possibility of mystical experience.

A. ACUTE EGO-IDENTITY.

This first condition has already been mentioned above. It is my contention that the sharper the perception of self as an isolated, finite and wholly autonomous being the greater the vulnerability to stress and trauma in whatever form these may occur. I have discussed the existential crises which often go hand in hand with an acute perception of this form of self-identity and believe this explains the frequency with which we encounter this type of background but would argue that this sort of self-perception is a condition for trauma whether or not there is evidence of concomitant existential anxieties. It is to be remembered that this sort of acute perception of individuality is not the normal condition of mankind. Interrogators have to induce this state in many by isolating them from family, peers and even place with which they might otherwise identify themselves and revivalists similarly need to encourage the sense of individual guilt and sin. It is also relevant that the intensity of this perception varies even in those for which it represents a norm. In the hypnopompic state we have, as do the very young, less self-consciousness, similarly in drunkenness. Whatever the cause of this perception may be, I would argue that the individual who believes himself to be alone not only may have self-doubts etc. but is far more vulnerable to the destabilization of his self-perception than would be the individual who sees himself in terms of a broader pattern be it an ideal, clan or whatever. Though you might destroy an aboriginal's sense of identity

by destroying his locale, it is difficult to "shake" the firm believer who identifies with something greater than his own finite body-image just as, I believe, it is near impossible to shock a sleeping or comatose man. It may be that some severe physiological threat will traumatize even those with a minimum of subjectivity but it does seem to be the case that the greater the sense of subjectivity the greater is the proneness to traumatization and identity-loss in the face of some vicissitude. As in mundane cases the acuteness of ego-identity seems to be a factor in mystical experience and conversion. Even when the subject does not report an existential crisis or that he is labouring under the burdens of guilt and sin, there are often clues that there is an intense perception of self-isolation etc. though it is not itself offered as the cause of the subsequent ego-abandonment which may be any one of the accidents of life discussed above, illness etc. In these 'spontaneous' cases we often come across terms such as 'aloneness', 'feeling the weight of responsibilities' etc. which indicate such a frame of mind though these are not given as the trigger for the experiences which follow. There is no way to quantify this condition though - cases of existential anxiety, guilt etc. apart - we can note that in a great many cases it is explicitly indicated and, whilst I cannot explain the link, I find this correlation entirely cogitable.

B. THE REDUNDANCY OF EGO-CONTROL.

Though for many there may be shocks to the system which cannot be borne for a moment - many 'black out' immediately after a car crash say, whether or not they are seriously injured - as in the case of delayed shock, in other reports, there is evidence of a volitional element in the abandoning

of ego-control. In most cases we find that little point is served by conscious control; 'I was ski-ing ... I broke a leg, and students took four hours to carry me back to our huts. During the accident and on the way down the mountain, I had the most vivid awareness of the Presence of God. I was unaware of the passage of time' (13). We sometimes read of a case where, though severely injured, the subject drives himself to hospital before collapsing or otherwise retains conscious control for as long as this serves some important purpose. Similarly, in mystical cases, we sometimes find that the reaction sets in only when the usefulness of conscious and rational action is exhausted or the danger passed, it is safe to react - in other circumstances the subject simply has time to react. In the case of Major Haswell's battlefield experience, though under heavy fire, it is noteworthy that the experience did not come until ordered to make a dash for safety there was nothing further he could do for himself or his men but run pell-mell through the field of fire. Though in this case there was nothing intentional about 'trusting to instinct', I suspect that hitherto the responsibility he obviously felt had inhibited traumatization earlier just as the initial shock of bereavement, say, is often postponed until the formalities have been completed. We find such a postponement, until a suitable moment, in many mystical cases. Individuals, though ill, exhausted or harassed keep going until an opportune moment arises - they have got home, are sitting on a bus or a train with time to spare - 'After an exhausting day, I had thrown myself down on my bed tired out, I seemed immediately ..' (14) for them to be able to relax ego-control. In some circumstances we may seek the release of ego-abandonment, in sex, say, or athletics, for the pleasure of it or for the enhanced prowess it brings and

whilst I doubt, any more than in sleep, many can will this condition, it is significant that many features of the religious life are geared to making the abandoning of ego-control easier. Freedom from personal responsibilities and commitments and, in the convents of the past, the taking away from the individual of even the most minor decisions has surely had the effect of making the retention of ego-control all but superfluous. My belief is then that the activities of conscious control may, in many cases, inhibit the onset of a reaction despite some powerful trigger and it is only when one's designs are stilled or all hope of effective action is despaired of that the reaction can occur. Some situations are beyond self-help - drowning alone miles from land etc. - and in such circumstances there may be no delay but in others there is an element of compliance in the reaction though this could rarely be called self-surrender.

C. RELAXATION OF CONTROL.

If the superfluity of ego-control is important, it appears that the relaxation of this control and the inhibiting effect it has is not easy whether ego-control is serving a purpose or not. Both this third and the final condition discussed below appear important in so far as they favour a 'letting go' taking place in the face of a crisis which is not overwhelming. Three situations especially figure prominently in the reports we have, each of which favours a relaxation of ego-control. The first is solitude, the second natural surroundings and the aesthetic and these two are often found together - 'the phenomenon invariably occurs out of doors, more often than not when I am alone' (15) - and the third is prayer.

1. It is not difficult to understand that when we are interacting with someone else, even with somebody we are at ease with, that there is sufficient stimulation and re-inforcement of our identity to inhibit a relaxation of ego-control. Cases may occur in crowded places but almost never when

the subject is actively interacting with those around him. The only exception I can think of is if a crowd has gathered for the common purpose of being taken out of themselves, a revivalist meeting, perhaps, or at a 'miraculous' shrine, in short where the relaxation of ego-control is sanctioned. In passing, this appears to be a point of difference between the reactive states in which mystical experience will, if at all, occur and epilepsy and other forms of mental illness which, I understand, can occur regardless of immediate circumstances. 2. Mystical experience has long been associated with the natural environment and the aesthetic - if Iaski's figures are correct it is even more common in the face of beauty than nature (16) - yet the only way, I believe, we can understand this correlation is in terms of the effect these have on reducing our grip on self-awareness. Though some direct environmental effect cannot always be ruled out - sun through poplar trees can cause blackouts - nature and beauty do have mood-changing effects that may make us less conscious of ourselves, our hopes and fears. 'One day when I was playing golf my companion lost a ball. As I searched for it I stopped beside a young wattle tree coming into blossom. I stood and gazed at it quite delighted, taking in every detail, giving it my whole attention. Then a really indescribable thing happened ... '(17). I am not suggesting that nature is likely to induce the ecstasies some poets report, merely that it will facilitate the relaxation of a form of self-perception that inhibits autonomic reactions. Though I would describe them simply as unfavourable conditions rather than 'anti-triggers', as Iaski does, it is self-evident that the drab and artless are not conducive to that mood of relaxation and 'letting go' that assists the loss of ego-control. It is significant that mystical experience is rarely reported against

such backgrounds except when the precipitating crisis is over-whelming - the battlefield, hypothermia etc. Some might wish to argue that nature and solitude are irrelevant, for nature - even if it is only a public park - is still one of the commonest of human back-cloths and, if mystics are troubled individuals, as likely as not, they will be alone when their experiences occur. Yet, though not necessary conditions, I would argue that the frequent mention of nature and solitude is significant in the context of the relaxation of self-identity and the fact, as Iaski has shown, that ego-abandonment does not occur in conditions which do not favour such a relaxation, appears to me to show that relaxation is an operative factor in the sequence I am considering.

3. PRAYER.

The third form of relaxation figures very prominently in the cases under study here. For instance, Mr. J.H. Hadley, cited by James, beset by personality problems, alcoholism and guilt found that having 'halted but a moment and then with a breaking heart, I said, "Dear Jesus, can you help me? Never with mortal tongue can I describe that moment. Although up to that moment my soul had been filled with indescribable gloom, I felt the glorious brightness of the noonday sun shine into my heart' (18), an experience shared by many others. 'I forgot myself more completely than I have ever done before ... I turned to my God in a soul-expanding worship .. a great wave or cloud swept over me - this tremendous love enveloping me .. in that instant a great light was present ... and the transfusing radiance was about to unite with my very being to become part of my real self. I knew that to give myself utterly to God was to change my personality absolutely' (19). Some would favour theological explanations but I think we need look no further than the placing of personal responsibility into

other hands and sometimes, in praying for others, simply a forgetting of self. I do not see prayer as a trigger but only as a condition, like nature or art, which helps to take the individual, already under threat, "out of himself" so to speak and thereby breaks down the inhibiting effects of an overstrong delimitation of one's own identity. Many authors refer to 'self-surrender' in a psychological or religious context but the usual forms of prayer, at least, cannot be treated in this way for the individual is already under pressure and prayer merely facilitates a reaction which may occur anyway. Perhaps there are some forms of prayer, amongst the many types discerned by the spiritual, that could be treated as triggers. Mind-emptying or mind-numbing repetitions may serve both to generate stress and breakdown ego-control but in most everyday cases we come across prayer seems to serve, like counting sheep at bedtime, as a way of reducing self-awareness.

One could discuss these factors at great length but I think it unnecessary in so far as these recognized correlates can all be understood simply as ways to reduce the inhibiting effect that ego-control has on autonomic reactions. Some mystics have their own ways, sometimes highly idiosyncratic, of inducing that frame of mind in which their sought-after experiences are known to occur but in finding prayer, solitude and nature reported as the immediate circumstances in so many cases leads one to think that, in this sequence, some means to relax a strong sense of self-identity is often required and that these are good illustrations of the way in which this can come about.

D. THE TRIP-WIRE.

Given an acute sense of self-identity under threat and a moment in which

the subject cannot merely afford to relax but is in circumstances conducive to the relaxation of self-identity with the shedding of all the responsibility and possibilities for action that autonomy entails, the reaction, like sleep, sometimes, may not come until a final condition is met. I call this final condition a trip-wire, an event without inherent significance which captures the attention and allows the autonomic reaction - in this case traumatization - to be released. From the records, it seems, anything may serve this function, a bird suddenly taking to the air, a sunset, an overheard word, a sudden stumbling, anything in fact which momentarily takes our mind off the subjectivity of our own impressions. The impression experiments of trauma have, mystical and mundane alike, is that their attention is suddenly caught or enraptured by a trivial detail in their environment - the shape of a twig, the comical expression on another's face - which would normally escape detection and which suddenly assumes a momentous significance. Many earthquake victims, say, report that their last clear memory was of some trifle, a shoe perhaps or the incongruity of some detail around them and similarly, in many mystical cases, we find the subject dwelling on some word or some other insignificant detail that appears to have momentous implications, smells are also commonly reported in this context. 'I remember once sitting on a sofa smoking and looking at an ordinary copper ashtray. Suddenly I felt I was beginning to understand what the ashtray was, and, at the same time, with a certain wonder and almost fear, I felt that I had never understood it before ... the ashtray roused a whirlwind of thoughts and images. It contained such an infinite number of facts, of events' (20). 'The significance of this swept over me like a wave. The wave had originated in an articulate verbal insight; but this evaporated at once leaving only a wordless essence ... '(21).

Such significance as the trip-wire has is clearly imposed by the subject, an action which serves as an involuntary self-release mechanism but in mundane cases there is no reason to suppose that the trip-wire is hallucinatory or self-generated. However, in mystical cases, there is some reason to believe that on occasion, not merely does the mind invest some trifle with undue significance, but actually conjures up its own trip-wire to trigger the shift from ego-control. In Teresa of Avila's case, if she did not go straight into trance, she frequently had visions and how else can we understand the role played, say, by Finney's vision of Christ which preceded his celebrated mystical experience and subsequent conversion? In much distress Charles Finney, we are told, entered a room 'there was no fire and no light nevertheless it appeared to me as if it were perfectly light ... it seemed as if I met the Lord Jesus face to face. It did not occur to me then, nor did it for some time afterwards, that it was wholly a mental state. On the contrary, it seemed to me that I saw Him as I would any other man. He said nothing, but looked at me in such a manner as to break me right down at His feet. I have always regarded this as a most remarkable state of mind; for it seemed to me a reality that He stood before me and I fell down at His feet and poured out my soul to Him, I wept aloud like a child ...' (22).

In other cases the trip-wire is what might be called an auditory thought. We find that 'it flashed through my mind "This is the Holy Spirit"' (23) is the prelude to an awareness of divine presence and similarly many Biblical announcements are reported as terminating ego-control. I do not attempt to explain these phenomena and would only suggest that they serve to breakdown ego-control in much the same way as seeing a shoe in the rubble has done in the case of earthquake victims. They may be indicative of a subliminal preoccupation but since they are infrequent,

even in mystical cases, I would not care to base a theory upon them.

Taken in the context of a precipitating crisis of some kind and the characterizable reaction which follows - discussed below - I believe finding these four conditions to be operative in mystical cases confirms the traumatization hypothesis. We find such cases as 'I was in bed at the time it happened, and my elder son was very ill. I lay there some time worrying about him and then realized no good could come of that, so I deliberately set to work to relax ... Finally, I was meditating on God ... and lingering mentally on what was implied by these wonderful words (Psalm 23)... Suddenly I became aware ... '(24) so commonly that the background must be thought of as having significance and it is only in terms of trauma' that a heightened sense of self-isolation, the opportune moment and the other immediate circumstances we associate with mystical experience have a significance. By this model we can understand why such factors are important though not necessary conditions for what follows and together they flesh out the first part of the sequence leading through mystical experience to spirituality, making it very distinctive. With the exception of the self-generated trip-wire in some cases, I have no reason to believe that the loss of ego-identity and its replacement by an autonomic state of functioning differs as a process in mystical cases from that in mundane traumatization for all the same preliminary factors are involved and, as I hope to show, so is the same reaction. In terms of threat and the conditions which enable threat to produce a traumatic reaction we are able to weld together all the diverse circumstances reported as background to mystical experience and by understanding the reaction we will be able to recognize much about the immediate circumstance in which mystical experiences occur.

THE REACTION.

A piquant example in a mundane context of the trigger-traumatization sequence I have in mind would be; 'Suddenly a crackling was heard; all of us were alarmed, and in an instant a tiger, rushing out of the jungle, pounced upon one of the party ... the rush of the animal, and the crush of the poor victim's bones in his mouth, and his last cry of distress, "Ho hai " involuntarily re-echoed by all of us, was over in three seconds and then I do not know what happened till I returned to my senses, when I found myself lying down on the ground ... our limbs stiffened, our power of speech ceased and our hearts beat violently, and only a whisper of the same "Ho hai " was heard from us ... after this everyone of us was attacked with fever, attended with shivering in which deplorable state we remained till morning' (25). The same type of reaction which this example illustrates so graphically can, I believe, be discerned also in those cases in which mystical experience occurs where it arises for precisely the same reasons - severe stress or trauma occurring under conditions such as the redundancy of ego-control etc. In so far as the reaction, in all cases arises from endocrinal changes, it is a condition with an empirical identity but, as mentioned above, the effects can be very variable depending in part at least on circumstances and the idiosyncracies of individual metabolisms. Shock alone can be "mild", "deep", instantaneous or delayed, short-lived or lasting besides which there are many other forms of reaction ranging from unconsciousness or trance to daze or a mild "switching off", euphoria, emotional outburst etc. This recognized variability, however, helps explain why it is in some cases a clear picture of trauma emerges and in others only a few minor clues are offered as to the state of mind against which mystical experience occurs but I shall contend that in all mystical cases the experient is

traumatized and this explains much that has hitherto been associated with these non-natural perceptions. This is not, however, to say that we can understand mystical experience and the subsequent shift to spiritual orientation in terms of trauma for, variable or not, no definition of trauma alone would include the possibility of such subsequent events but it does give mystical experience a very identifiable background and does give us a base from which to predict its occurrence.

Here, despite the considerable variations in the form traumatic reaction will take, I wish to characterize this state and show that mystics are in this condition when their perceptions occur and that it is the same condition as we find in cases of mundane shock etc. I propose first to discuss the clinical features of trauma, for it is a diagnosable condition and then proceed to the features of trauma as a subjective experience which are also characteristic if not always state-specific. These descriptive features are ego-abandonment, a feeling of timelessness, disorientation and dislocation, feelings of warmth, peace, euphoria and, finally, a number of quasi-physical sensations such as tingling. If we can recognize such features as typical of the background against which mystical experience occurs, in conjunction with the triggers and conditions for these experiences, I believe we have a model which fully explains the first stage of a two-fold process.

DIAGNOSIS.

Traumatization can be readily diagnosed by anybody with knowledge of the condition even if, as is so often the case even in mundane cases, the metabolic changes which have occurred have not been chemically analysed.

The most common signs are an initial period of unconsciousness - a 'dead faint' - uncontrollable trembling and, often, hypothermia, a period of very poor responsiveness - an inability to focus, speak clearly or concentrate, dilated pupils etc. etc. Should we find such symptoms in mystical cases there will be every reason, *prima facie*, to conclude that our subjects are in a state of shock for, together, such symptoms are not typical of any other common condition.

As in the tiger example, often the first observable sign of shock is a sudden faint. Teresa of Avila tells us that 'when He intends ravishing the soul He takes away the power of speech, and although occasionally the other faculties are retained rather longer, no word can be uttered. Sometimes the person is at once deprived of all the senses, the hands and body becoming as cold as if the soul had fled, occasionally no breathing can be detected. This condition lasts but a short while; I mean in the same degree, for when this profound suspension diminishes the body seems to come to itself (but still) it leaves the will so inebriated and the mind so transported out of itself that for a day, or sometimes for several days such a person is incapable of attending to anything' (26). If fainting does occur as in Teresa's account, it appears that the subject may sometimes first be 'struck dumb', there being a moment of rigidity before collapse which is borne out in a number of other accounts. For example, Curtayne tells us that on one occasion Catherine of Siena having 'made an unusually prolonged thanksgiving ... suddenly Delle Vigne noticed Catherine look up at the Crucifix ... then her eyes closed, she knelt upright, her face flushing and flung out her arms. She remained so a few seconds, while all those

in the church watched her uneasily. Two of the women were just rising to go to her, when she collapsed into utter inertness ... one would have said 'life was extinct' (27). Collapse, whether or not preceded by a moment of rigidity, is fairly common in the accounts - James offers us many in the context of conversion e.g. 'the last I remember was falling back with the same unseen hand at my throat ... when I came round' (28) - and 'swoons' and 'spiritual slumbers' pepper 'classic' autobiographies and many, like the revivalist Edwards, thought them evidence of miraculous intervention. I do not know whether collapse is indicative of the severity of the metabolic reaction or whether there is something hysterical about it for, though it is common enough also in everyday life, it seems to have occurred with particular frequency in monastic settings where one might suppose the felt changes in metabolism struck the subjects as being particularly portentous. Whatever is the case, if faint occurs, this is not a mere "nodding off" but a cataleptic state recognizable by the rigidity and coldness of the body, the low pulse rate and all but undetectable breathing.

Whether or not catalepsy has occurred, trauma is most easily recognized by the dazed or trance-like condition of the subject which usually only gradually passes away. The pupils are dilated, the subject appears to have little awareness of his surroundings, fails to react to stimuli, if able to speak either speaks unnaturally slowly and deliberately or else is incoherent, in short a condition often compared with drunkenness but one whose symptomology can vary very considerably. Teresa of Avila writes much about these states and interestingly shows that she experienced them both in and out of the context of mystical perception, the only difference between these contexts being that, where mystical experience

occurred, the trance state was briefer. When the trance occurred without divine experience, she recognized its true cause, which she attributed solely to 'their penances, prayers and vigils even merely because of debility of health ... their bodies being languid and weak, they fall into a slumber and abandon themselves to a sort of intoxication ... this state lasted with a certain person for eight hours, during which time she was neither insensible, nor had she any thought of God. She was cured by being made to eat and sleep well and to leave off some of her penances' (29) but in the divine 'ravishings' we still find the same 'langour both of mind and body'. Elsewhere Teresa discussing the 'prayer of quiet', describes someone in this wholly distracted condition taking more than an hour to recite the Lord's Prayer which is so very reminiscent of the 'Ho hai' being muttered by the survivors of the tiger attack. Naturally enough such observations rarely appear in subjective accounts of the experience and the only objective descriptions we have of the trance state and the picture of slowed reactions come from witnesses, if any. The subject may not at all be aware that he is dazed or that his reactions and thought processes are slow and unreliable for, apart from the distraction caused by mystical experience, he has lost the ability to judge his own performance.

One very marked feature of shock is uncontrollable trembling which in various religious movements has been interpreted as a proof of divine intervention. Von Hugel tells us that Catherine of Genoa had states - which interestingly she herself described as 'a giddiness' - that 'lasted for about three hours, her body trembling like a leaf and then her body became quiet again but was now so broken and weak that it was necessary to give her minced chicken to revive her and a good many days had to pass before she returned to her vigour' (30). And that on other occasions 'when all her body trembled it was impossible to move her from her bed;

she did not eat, drank next to nothing, and did not sleep' (31). Though in some cases the subject has some awareness of his condition, 'I was just like shaking all over and crying' (32), 'I was paralyzed - I could'nt move ... (I had) feelings of being whipped around by a 90 mile an hour wind' (33) as in mundane cases, the subject himself is often unaware that he is manifesting such symptoms and we are forced to rely on the coterie of admirers, if any, who have observed such signs though fortunately, so remarkable can these episodes appear, such details are rarely ignored. Other symptoms of the trance in a mystical context are reported, such as 'the bones become all out of joint', which perhaps attests to the violence of the reaction in some cases but being uncommon would not seem to shed much further light on the state.

There are then three main clinical symptoms, catalepsy, trance and trembling one or other of which, at least, is invariably mentioned by witnesses to these episodes. Sometimes we are presented with a picture of out and out shock - fainting, lack of awareness of surroundings for days violent shaking, sometimes of a mild daze-like condition - 'his countenance assumed a blank, far-away expression, he no longer seemed to be aware of where he was or that an audience sat before him'. Whether or not some specific illness plays a part in bringing about their condition, I do not believe that such pictures of mystics as we are presented with indicate anything other than a state of reactive traumatization especially since they must be viewed in the light of a precipitating crisis. The sudden onset, the gradual diminution, even the treatments prescribed by admirers all point to shock - "mild" or "deep", immediate or delayed - which is quite the same as we find in mundane cases. Experimental confirmation may have to await the chance of a mystic having an experience

in the laboratory but on objective grounds alone there is no reason to doubt that it is against this background of reaction that their experiences take place.

The subject's own descriptions also support this diagnosis though, as in mundane cases, those aspects of the state which the experients are aware of are quite different from the clinical symptomatology. Since in the case of mystical experience we have many more descriptions of how traumatization feels than objective observations about how it appears to others, it is well worth characterizing these partly to give grounds for arguing that all mystics are traumatized and partly so that we can distinguish between these elements which relate to trauma and those which relate to mystical experience and subsequent spirituality.

1. EGO-ABANDONMENT.

Perhaps the most prominent descriptive feature of traumatization is the loss, in some degree, of subjectivity. Whether or not a period of unconsciousness has occurred, we invariably find that self-awareness is greatly diminished. This greatly reduced sense of subjectivity is compatible with varying degrees of conscious awareness. In the case of mystics, though aware of the manifestations of the divine presence, for some it is against the background of a blank reverie, 'the soul is asleep, fast asleep as regards the world and itself ... deprived of all feeling whatsoever, being unable to think on any subject ... neither the imagination, the understanding nor the memory has the power to hinder the graces bestowed ... blessed state ... the delight and satisfaction, peace and happiness' (34). For others, however, there is a depersonalized awareness of the environment, subjectivity having been diminished or,

interestingly, sometimes reduced to the role of a bystander and, in such states, consciousness can be clear, indeed, sometimes experiencers say that they see the world around them properly for the first time. So in these cases we find that 'throughout the entire experience I was always aware of being conscious, but ... I was no longer conscious of the personality nor of being in any kind of body' (35) or 'I suddenly ceased to be me (that is in the sense of me I had thought I was - living in a particular house etc.) ... of a consciousness that take(s) in everything without limit but reacted to nothing in the sense of "knowing" and "loving"' (36). The loss of subjectivity is so commonly encountered - 'I saw things without a subject/object duality' (37), 'my separate self ceased to exist', 'the I had ceased to exist. I refer to a concrete experience that is verbally incommunicable - yet real' (38) - both in mystical and mundane cases that it must be thought of as characteristic of traumatization - though not state specific as it occurs in the hypnopompic state, for example, as well. This ability to uncouple subjectivity from consciousness be it of the environment, mystical perception or, in some cases, both simultaneously, raises a number of questions which I shall later address. However, for now it is sufficient to note that the framework of subjectivity which usually surrounds all that we are conscious of, is reduced whether or not consciousness itself is much affected.

2. TIMELESSNESS, DISORIENTATION.

Whatever consciousness remains, in both mystical and mundane cases subjects typically lose all sense of time passing, often any clear idea of where they are, and any sense of continuity with past events - indeed usually, if remembered at all, this phase stands outside of all the

parameters which normally circumscribe our perceptions and give them particularity. We always find such comments as 'I do not know how long it lasted but it could only have been ...' or 'I had quite forgotten where I was' and Koestler could not even remember that he was due to be executed (39). In mundane shock there is a clear relationship between dazed appearance and this "forgetfulness" of all that gives order to consciousness though it is not remembered as a state of confusion such as might arise from psychotropic drugs. It is an atemporal state of mind rather than one where sense of time, say, is distorted. In mystical cases there is of course an acute awareness of some supernatural perception and the subject's experience in this respect does not match his outward appearance but in so far as he has no sense of time, locality etc. there is nevertheless that same relationship with appearance as in mundane cases for his awareness is unrelated to those parameters which give an everyday experience order and which allows us to show ourselves to be responsive to the environment. This 'transcendence' of or freedom from the framework which gives everyday perceptions particularity is invariably valued by experients and, whilst there can be little that we associate with personal effectiveness in this state, there is in fact no reason to suppose that reactions to environmental stimuli or physiological needs are impaired. On the contrary, though there is no conscious interaction with the environment, it is quite possible that we nonetheless respond appropriately - survivors of icy waters, say, often have no recollection of how they kept afloat and kept warm. Presumably this 'transcendence' of the finitude of our everyday experience is connected to the reduction or loss of subjectivity, an uncoupling of all those regulatory mechanisms that give a sense of personal order to the experiences we have.

3. WARMTH AND PEACE.

In hypothermia, for example, subjects report how they sank into a drowsy, lethargic state in which they felt totally warm, comfortable and at peace and since mystics report the same sort of feelings I can only assume that, in their case also, such feelings characterize traumatization. 'A feeling of overwhelming well-being and complete relaxation (40), heat began to suffuse me, creeping down my arms and body right through my legs to my feet ... feelings of peace' (41), 'there was such a warmth, feeling of security' (42). Though some endocrine reactions may, for example, raise body temperature, it is as well to point out that there is no connection between such feelings and the physical conditions prevailing and many must have died of the cold so pleasantly without a xenophon to beat them back to harsh reality. This immediate sense of warm tranquility should be distinguished both from the localised sensations of heat and burning, discussed below, and from the longer term 'profound tranquility' reported in relation to the spiritual orientation for though, in the latter case, there may be a connection the contexts in which they occur are quite different. In this case peace goes with lethargy and drowsiness, in the other it goes with greatly increased energy and a felt, clarity of mind.

4. EUPHORIA.

In some cases, beyond a general sense of release and well-being, there are marked feelings of expansion and euphoria. 'I was swept up and out of myself altogether into a flood of white Glory. I had no sense of time or place. The ecstasy was terrific whilst it lasted' (43), 'an indescribable sensation as if the whole universe were being poured into me or rather, more as if the whole universe was welling out of me

from some deep centre. My "soul" thrilled and swelled and kept expanding' (44)

Laski in her study of ecstasy describes the onset of this state as a 'tumescence' a rising level of excitement that becomes an overwhelming surge of joy and uplift - 'it came over me like a wave. It was so much of an incredible rush' (45) - that only slowly subsides. Such cases have always posed a problem, for some authors have treated cases of euphoria as mystical - whether or not non-natural perceptions are actually reported - whilst others from Laski to Davidson - 'from a large variety of first-hand descriptions of enlightenment experiences from Buddhist, Hindu or other sources, the subject appears to be in a state of great excitement' (46) - have assumed that mystical perceptions always occur against a background of rapture. However, I would only treat euphoria as one of a family of symptoms of trauma, one that is commonly present in some degree but not necessarily so in every case and a symptom that, in itself, has no integral relationship with mystical experience as I define it. When euphoria becomes overwhelming, unlike the ancients, I see no reason to treat the subject as being in a mystical state unless some perception of the divine is reported, for the subject himself is usually aware of nothing - 'in these great (experiences) one doesn't know this was heaven until after you come down' - there is here a parallel with 'possession' the supernatural element only being apparent to the observer or in hindsight and not in the form of direct experience. In those cases where mystical perception occurs there is no clear indication of a high level of excitation, though, as would be expected from a study of mundane cases of trauma, there is great variation between cases in this respect. It may be, unlike mundane cases of euphoria which are reported for the dizzying pleasure they bring, that in mystical cases even a strong elation could be ignored because they are being reported for the 'supernatural'

insights gained rather than for the pleasure they bring but since we have cases in which any emotion is denied - 'I was in its presence. No emotion, only interest ... I mention the lack of emotion because ... I would distrust any experience of emotional intensity' (47) - there seems no reason to assume that any high level of excitation is necessary for mystical experience. If this is a reasonable view, euphoria/elation are symptoms of trauma and which, if severe, could be used to characterize one form of traumatic reaction, though such a classification would not seem to serve much purpose, but whilst we would expect frequently to see this symptom in the background of mystical cases, it has no more relationship with, 'supernatural' perceptions than, say, reports of warmth, peace or tingling. The state that mystics are all in is the one of trauma and 'traumatic reaction is sometimes felt to be dizzying.

5. QUASI-PHYSICAL SENSATIONS.

In many reports a variety of sensations are reported, the most common of which are a localized tingling, burning, numbness and pressure, especially in the hands, feet and heart and, sometimes, weakness and pain are reported in the same areas. Occasionally such symptoms are severe. Teresa of Avila, for example, complaining that 'all the joints are dislocated so that for two or three days afterwards the suffering is too severe for the person to have even the strength to hold a pen' (48). More usually it causes little distress, 'All at once I felt someone near me, a Presence - dazed I knelt ... and here is the physical phenomenon that has recurred many times since. Into my heart came a great warmth..... my hand raised in prayer also glowed from tips to wrist with a blessed warmth and heat' (49). In some cases these sensations

may be idiosyncratic but since they are so common particularly in mystical cases, though tingling is characteristic of mundane cases also, they should be treated as symptomatic of the state but not state-specific. One might speculate here that in trauma there is an affectation of the peripheral nervous system and that, because in mystics these symptoms are more pronounced, that in their case some degeneration of the peripheral nervous system is indicated. If such speculations could be justified, one might wonder just how far one could interpret mystical experience in these terms. If, as in tinnitus, mystics are suffering from degeneration of sensory tissues, could some of the grosser sensations - 'sense of presence', 'penetration', the 'gripping' of hands or heart, 'burning' or 'wounding' be explained similarly as the effect of arousal on damaged tissue, a sensory effect misinterpreted by credulous subjects? It may be a line worth pursuing though the mystical perceptions reported, where sensory at all - as distinct from quasi-sensory - do not normally lend themselves to this type of interpretation. 'Waves of liquid love' are not typical of neuritis but it may be a thought in some cases where localized sensations are reported but, in any event, we do find such reports in all forms of trauma and they are especially frequent in mystical cases.

The state of trauma can then be characterized both objectively and descriptively and, so far as one can tell, mystics are invariably in this state when their unique perceptions occur and this state, taken in isolation, is no different for them than for experiencers of mundane shock. Given the context of a precipitating crisis and the conditions under which this is most likely to trigger the reaction, the diagnosis appears almost certain. In theory, at least, the model

is falsifiable though I would not care to induce trauma in individuals prone to mystical experience for the sake of empirically establishing the link. The model has the advantage of giving all the various known backgrounds of mystical experience a common significance and helps us understand why it is the state of mind against which mystical perceptions occur can vary in the way it does. Deep trance or merely a lessening of self-awareness, a dizzying excitement and euphoria or a mild elation can all be understood in terms of the family resemblance which these reactive states have, that on the one hand gives them a generic identity and on the other allows for a substantial variation between cases. Since trauma normally peters out and does not usually lead to mystical experience, though a necessary condition for it, we are compelled to treat the trigger - reaction sequence as a distinct and self-contained element in the profile of mystical experience and thus to abandon attempts to treat all the stages leading to spirituality in terms of any single dynamic. If this view is correct there is nothing unique about the background to the occurrence of mystical experience - an uncommon proportion having existential anxieties and, the possibility, of a self-generated trip-wire apart - or indeed about many of the features of the state in which it occurs. The difficulty will be to explain why the uncommon mystical perception and the subsequent shift to spiritual orientation with which it is linked occur only against this background.

Though it is of no immediate consequence here, before moving on to consider mystical experience against a background of reaction, I would like to point out that a model such as the one I am using has considerable implications for our notions of personality. If self-identity and subjectivity can in trauma as in sleep, be replaced by other forms

of functioning and are only apparent under certain metabolic conditions which prevail only when this form of consciousness has a utility perhaps subjectivity is not the central fact of existence many of us fondly believe it to be. I do not doubt the efficiency of individuality and self-awareness but only wonder, as many religious have before, whether it amounts only to a tool which the organism has developed and uses when conditions favour its use. Such speculations are no doubt idle but one cannot help wondering, what price subjectivity when it comes and goes in accordance with a range of factors largely outside our control? Depersonalization affects us all for about eight hours a day and we often experience a diminution of subjectivity, large or small, in some reactive state or other. It is comforting to say "I was sleeping", "he was shocked and not himself" etc. but if we do indeed obey biological programmes responsive to our environment but not necessarily to our own wills, perhaps we really should be defined in terms other than those which lay emphasis on our subjectivity and individuality. Certainly it appears difficult to talk of identity other than in relation to the forms of metabolic functioning in which that identity is manifest. The reactive state has implications, reinforced by the spiritual identity I have already characterized, for our notions of subjectivity and everyday personality and an understanding of these implications seems to lie at the heart of the conundrum that mystical experience presents us with.

II

MYSTICAL PERCEPTION AGAINST A BACKGROUND OF TRAUMATIZATION.

My contention is that mystical experience occurs, if at all, against a background of traumatization and is always succeeded by a shift to spiritual identity. Though in principle this is a very distinctive profile, in practice it is often difficult to separate the three elements in reports and I wish here to illustrate that mystical experience is distinct from

the background of trauma in which it occurs and similarly that though spirituality occurs against the same background, it too can be distinguished as a recognizable state within a state.

Descriptively, at least, there is a clear distinction between traumatization on the one hand and mystical experience on the other. It will be recalled that Teresa of Avila, quoted above, was no stranger both to traumatization and to mystical experience in the context of traumatization and she found these to be very different experiences. Reactive trances were described which, she admits, initially she mistook for divine experience - 'she had unintentionally deceived both her confessor and other people, as well as herself' (50) - but when mystical experience does occur the difference is quite unmistakable.

'It should be known that when God bestows such favours on the soul, although there may be langour, both of mind and body, it is not shared by the soul, which feels great delight at seeing itself so near God, nor does this state ever continue for more than a very short time. Although the soul may become absorbed again, yet ... unless already feeble, the body suffers neither exhaustion nor pain' (51). It is difficult to get any clear impression of what the soul's delight consists of in Teresa's case but perhaps Finney's account is as illustrative as any. Having entered a reactive phase after breaking down before his trip-wire vision of Jesus - indicated by his loss of awareness of the passage of time and indeed any clear memory of this first phase - Finney suddenly found that 'the Holy Spirit descended upon me in a manner that seemed to go through me, body and soul. I could feel the impression, like a wave of electricity going through and through me.

Indeed, it seemed to come in waves and waves of liquid love. I can recollect distinctly that it seemed to fan me like immense wings' (52). Clear cut impressions of a sensory type such as these distinguish mystical experience from the state of trauma in which they occur for a sense of overwhelming love, in the context of a numinous presence that is not recognized as part of one's own personality, is not reported even in the most euphoric of everyday reactive states. The occurrence of mystical perception would then seem to add something extra to the reactive state and change its outcome both shortening it and leading to a new sense of self-identity rather than a gradual return to the old. In a case such as 'my body became immovably rooted; breath was drawn out of my lungs as if by some huge magnet. Soul and mind instantly lost their physical bondage ... The flesh was as though dead yet in my intense awareness I knew that never before had I been fully alive. My sense of identity was no longer narrowly confined to a body but embraced the circumambient atoms. People in distant streets seemed to be moving gently over my own remote periphery ... My ordinary frontal vision was now changed to a spherical sight, simultaneously all-perceptive. All objects within my panoramic gaze trembled and vibrated like quick motion pictures ... all became violently agitated until all melted into a luminescent sea ... The unifying light alternated with materializations of form ... an oceanic joy ... the Spirit of God, I realized, is exhaustless bliss ... the entire cosmos, gently luminous, like a city seen afar at night, glimmered within the infinitude of my being ... suddenly the breath returned to my lungs' (53), it might be possible to argue about precisely which feelings and sensations ensue from trauma and which belong to mystical perception but not that the latter mystical element, is something distinctive and discrete which adds something wholly new and untypical to the experience of trauma.

In general it appears that mystical experience occurs very shortly after the onset of reaction and ego-abandonment. As discussed above, some odd visions and voices are reported immediately prior to the reactive stage in some cases which appear to play the role of trip-wire but since neither Finney nor Teresa of Avila were, for long, convinced of the veridicality of these impressions, I see no reason to treat them as we would the experiences which follow. It appears to be the case that only those perceptions which occur within traumatization have that quality of making it impossible for the subject to doubt their veridicality at any later stage, which, above, I argued was a hallmark of mystical perception. As in many cases mystical experience occurs almost immediately after the onset of traumatic reaction, it is perhaps not surprising that few can distinguish between them and thus it often seems that loss of ego-control, feelings of heat, euphoria etc. are an integral part of mystical perception. However, in some cases, sufficient time may elapse for the sequence of reaction - mystical experience to be observed. For example, in a case such as 'After the choking and stifling had passed away, I seemed at first in a state of utter blankness, then came flashes of light ... I thought that I was near to death; when suddenly my soul became aware of God, who was manifestly dealing with me, handling me in an intense personal present reality. I felt Him streaming in upon me ...' (54) the order of the two quite distinct stages is clear. The way in which mystical experience does, if at all, occur so shortly after the onset of traumatization rather than at some later stage when the effects of traumatization are starting to wear off certainly appears significant. Though one is entering entirely uncharted seas here it seems plausible enough to suggest that there is a connection between the sudden metabolic changes characteristic of traumatization and the triggering of the second mystical sequence in some individuals usually only moments later.

The mystical experience itself is usually brief and ends with an abrupt shift to spiritual identity or otherwise merges into this new identity but throughout it must be assumed that the subject remains traumatized. In the interesting, because detailed, case of Mr Bradley we find that the mystical experience - in this case likened to a stream of air which took possession of body and soul - lasted about five minutes. Then 'I desired the Lord not to give me any more happiness, for it seemed as if I could not contain what I had got. My heart seemed as if it would burst, (a fear also voiced by Teresa of Avila amongst others) but it did not stop until I felt as if I was unutterably full of the love and grace of God ... and all the time that my heart was a-beating, it made me groan like a person in distress which was not very easy to stop, though I was in no pain at all ... I lay reflecting, after my heart stopped beating, feeling as if my soul was full of the Holy Spirit - (next morning) I got up to dress myself, and found to my surprise that I could but just stand. It appeared to me as if it were a little heaven upon earth. My soul felt as completely raised above the fears... I then told my parents of it, and told them that I thought that they must see when I spoke, that it was not my own voice, for it appeared so to me. My speech seemed entirely under the control of the Spirit within me' (55). Mr. Bradley gives us a marvellous insight here into the condition of a person affected by two entirely distinct though not incompatible processes. On the one hand we have the mystical experience - the stream resembling air in feeling that 'came into my mouth and heart in a more sensible manner than that of drinking anything' - followed by a spiritual state of joy, happiness, oneness with the Spirit (and also the Angels he felt to be about him) - that lasted, it seems, for a prolonged period. On the other hand, a picture of trauma; violent trembling, palpitations, groaning and, later, real unsteadiness, a trance-like

disassociation with the immediate environment, an affectation of speech - slurring perhaps - Certainly a sense of distance from or disconnection with the words he spoke etc. Teresa thought that, where mystical experience occurred, the trance state was shortened but it does not seem to be so though, unlike Mr. Bradley, most probably are no longer aware of the effects of traumatization so preoccupied are they by their experience and the wondrous new world presented to them by spiritual orientation. Given that the shock can be very slow to wear off, it is not impossible that it is coterminous with spiritual orientation both only gradually diminishing over a period of days, even months, though the obvious signs appear to wear off long before the change in self-identity, attitudes etc. does whenever the spiritual stage is prolonged. There is then a difficulty in deciding how long the subsequent spiritual identity goes hand in hand with traumatization and a greater difficulty in deciding how much of the description of this later phase can be explained in terms of trauma. The feeling of freedom from or uninvolvement with everyday concerns, the peace, the sense of well-being, the feeling of looking at the world with detachment, noticing its incongruities as well as its beauty and, above all, the greatly reduced awareness of subjectivity suggest a lingering paradoxical or trance-like state related to continuing traumatization, yet such features may also characterize the spiritual identity, in which case the two states are perhaps mutually re-inforcing. Too little is known about this area to say anything for certain other than that the shift to spiritual identity occurs against the backdrop of trauma and that the two processes have a close and, presumably, continuing relationship.

If I am on the right lines, the sequence - trigger/reaction-plays an

important and continuing role in the occurrence of mystical experience and the shift to a new identity. Not only does it account for the abandonment of ego-identity but the reactive phase can be discerned as the background to all the subsequent events which occur in just those cases we are interested in. I shall leave interpretation of this model until the next chapter but it is an interesting as well as distinctive, picture with which we are presented. We might diagnose the mystic during and after his experience as suffering from traumatization yet, though he may himself be aware of some of those descriptive features characteristic of shock, he is also aware of another set of feelings and attitudes which have no place in everyday shock. That the two are not incompatible is worth noting and, in so far as the spiritual orientation is perhaps only possible after a breakdown of subjectivity and a general distancing of self from the environment, the relationship may have a logical necessity. It would be difficult after all to enjoy one's spiritual blessings if one were, as is normally the case, fully aware of the stimuli with which we are constantly bombarded but which we are less conscious of in the reactive phase. Trigger-reaction, however, plays only a fortuitous part in the occurrence of mystical perception. Without this experience no mystical perception may occur but it has no integral relationship with the events which follow and to explain these we need to understand in other terms, why it is mystics are aware of divine love etc. in a concrete way when - being traumatized - they may be aware of very little else.

III

OTHER CORRELATES OF MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE.

Before concluding my description of mystical experience, it is perhaps

worthwhile briefly considering whether there are any other factors thought to be relevant to its occurrence whether or not these might easily fit into the two-fold model I have proposed. There is, unfortunately, very little information on the physiology of mystical experience. Apart from Das and Gastoud's report that in the 'Samadhi experience' there is 'increased heart rate, hyper-aroused EEG and flat EMG' (56) - which is consonant with the model outlined above - there is almost nothing which purports to relate to mystical experience reliable or otherwise. Other areas have been a little better explored - demographic factors, sociological and behavioural aspects - and I will review these to see if they add anything to the characterization suggested.

A) DEMOGRAPHIC CORRELATIONS.

Age, gender, I.Q. social class and race all could conceivably have some bearing on the occurrence of mystical experience as they are each relevant to physical and 'mental' illness. Hysteria, for example, occurs largely amongst women of low intelligence and sickle-cell anaemia only in negroes. Should we find anything similar in the case of mystical experience, it would clearly be of considerable significance in determining the direction future research should take but there is nothing of such a marked nature in demographic terms to distinguish mystics as a group or which would force me to go beyond the hypothesis outlined above.

AGE.

This is one demographic area in which there may be correlation but, if there is a link, it is by no means clear what such a link would imply. I have already alluded to the findings of Pafford - the Unattended Moment - and of Douglas-Smith - Mystics Come to Harley Street - in which both authors find there to be a peak of mystical experience in the late teenage years. Douglas-Smith suggests a further peak around the age of 35 years.

In the first place it needs to be said that, whilst their common conclusion appears significant, it needs to be treated with considerable reserve. A greater problem than statistical quirks is the very real problem that neither used criteria for the cases they analysed or sought to confirm the impression their correspondents gave by comparing results with a study of the experience of other age groups. Whilst many of their cases would qualify as mystical by the standards I suggest, many would not and in Pafford's study not a few would count only as ecstatic or 'peak' experience as no sensory impressions of 'divinity' were reported. If such cases have no relationship with mystical experience, these authors are averaging-out quite different conditions to no effect though if, as I believe, trauma is the common background both for ecstatic and mystical experience, the findings would have relevance but only in this context. Though Pafford's study showed the incidence of mystical experience was associated with early adulthood rather than puberty, since he only studied students, we have no way of knowing how the peak he noted at age 19 in males, slightly earlier in females, compares with other stages later in life. Nor do we know how much the 'campus factor' - i.e. a greater willingness to discuss personal experience - affected the percentage reporting such experiences in Pafford's study or distorted Douglas-Smith's post-bag. That more 19 year olds than 49 year olds respond to such studies may not give a true indication as to what is or is not the case. Perhaps only a survey across all age groups, using clear cut criteria for what constitutes mystical experience, could establish how much truth there is in the link with age.

That said, if there were such a link, I see no reason to look beyond the hypothesis already given. Unlike some morbid condition which only

strikes some particular age group thus suggesting a cause in the metabolic peculiarities of that group, mystical experience can and does occur from earliest childhood to old-age and therefore it would only be necessary to suggest why some group was more susceptible than others. In terms of trauma and its operative conditions, I feel we might reasonably predict a teen-age peak without needing to resort to arguments which might tie mystical experience exclusively with this age-group. It is not far-fetched to argue that this group is more vulnerable to trauma and that their social habits are more likely to put them in the way of triggers for reaction. It may be a generalization though the reader will understand when I suggest that the late adolescent typically has rather an exaggerated awareness of self-identity that is perhaps not very secure and, certainly, a mixture of inexperience of dealing with life's problems and the very real effects of sexual activity, late nights, an absorption in existential questions etc. which together may combine to make the incidence of trauma more likely than in later life. Another angle would be to relate mystical experience to personality development - something I consider in the next chapter - and thus this is one age when we would expect a peak - it would be very interesting to know whether, as Douglas-Smith suggests, there are other peaks and whether these relate to stages in emotional maturation and also to recognized periods in which the self-identity is vulnerable such as the 'mid-life' crisis. These thoughts are not conclusive but only aimed at showing, should correlations with age be established, that we could understand these quite simply in terms of the trauma model. One final point about age is, as Douglas-Smith says, that a teen-age peak gives us good grounds for distinguishing mystical experience from any other recognized form of mental illness all of which typically have quite different ages of onset.

GENDER.

In some conditions, hysteria, for example, there is a marked difference between the respective percentage of men and women but this is not apparent in the case of mystical experience. Back and Bourque's 1970 findings did show that 44% of cases are reported by women and only 36% by men and Douglas-Smith's findings also showed a slight predominance of women but these figures are not statistically significant. In any event, a predominance of women might be explained in terms of social stereotyping for it is perhaps socially more acceptable for women to admit to such experiences than for men to. The expectations of organized religion might play a part in this and a cross-cultural comparison in this respect might be most revealing. (It would be interesting to know also whether or not cultural stereotyping showed itself in the relative numbers of men and women who, having had a mystic experience, then adopt a lifestyle consonant with their insight. On the face of it, for cultural reasons, it is easier for a Hindu male to leave his family and possessions than for a Hindu woman, whereas the reverse might be true in the west where clearly defined male social roles might conspire against such an action. In any event it is quite likely that such stereotyping influences the number of cases reported much as the 'campus factor' is significant in studies of age). This slight imbalance has, in the past, led to a host of theories about the causes of religious experience, from the greater involvement of women in organized religion to socially induced female guilt and submissiveness and Freudian notions of infantile attachment to male religious figures but none of this can possibly be justified. Unlike the case when one is dealing with a disease such as haemophilia which only attacks men, we cannot use a marginal imbalance as evidence for the causal role played by gender,

be it in physiological, psychological or sociological terms, in the occurrence of an experience common to both sexes. One can account for the difference between the genders in terms relating to women but not attempt to explain the experience itself in these terms as the Freudian notion, for example, appears to. However, gender would not appear to be an important factor, especially, I fancy, if we had figures specifically for mystical perception rather than religious experience in general and stereotyping appears sufficient explanation for any discrepancy that might occur.

I.Q.

Though Back and Bourque use terms such as 'blue collar' which might imply a certain educational level in addition to social status, I prefer to distinguish the two as there is no necessary relationship between them and in mysticism it may even be the case that an experient chooses to belong to the lowest social class despite a strong intellect. The evidence in the case of I.Q. is slender. Douglas-Smith noted that his respondents were, on the whole, markedly literate. This may be a case of the 'middle class novel' factor (only middle class people have the time, the education and quite possibly the motivation to describe something as complex as their own experience for there is a certain tradition of such writing) a comment which might also apply to Laski's group, yet Douglas-Smith is probably quite right to argue that there is no reason to associate mystical experience characteristically with low I.Q. as there is hysteria. It would however be hard - and probably quite meaningless - to attempt to relate mysticism to high I.Q. since the proportion of those less able and confident in describing it

can never accurately be ascertained. Certainly some R.E.R.U. cases lack the elegance and religious allusions that we traditionally expect from the best mystical writers and in so far as they are also rather incoherent and seemingly more defensive about their claims, one could argue that mystical experience occurs against the background of all intelligence levels. Any apparent correlation between intelligence and mystical perception can then probably be more simply explained in other terms and it would require a quantitative survey to show that I.Q. (so difficult to gauge in a meaningful way anyway) was a relevant factor.

CLASS.

Douglas-Smith and Back and Bourque report conflicting findings about the social status of experiencers. Douglas-Smith found a preponderance of his respondents were of socio-economic groups 2 & 3, perhaps because of the 'middle class novel' factor, whilst Back and Bourque found a higher proportion amongst lower socio-economic groups but perhaps this was because they were researching religious rather than specifically mystical experience. In the U.S.A., it seems, there is a greater involvement in church activity amongst the poorer classes, coloureds, recent immigrants etc. and often the churches which cater for such groups - Baptists, Pentecostals etc. - stress experience of the charismatic variety. Such experience might involve altered states of consciousness and strong 'religious' feelings (one thinks of revivalist and negro pentecostalist meetings) yet these experiences do not necessarily involve perception of 'divine things' at least in the concrete sensory sense being used here. Such reasoning may explain these different findings in sociological terms and if it does, there

is little evidence to connect mystical experience to social class though Batson and Ventis, for example, opine towards Back and Bourque's analysis. Nevertheless there are two points of interest if there are no clear indications one way or the other. The first of these is that mystical experience, unlike mental illness, is not strongly correlated with the very lowest social groups. Whatever their respective aetiologies it might be that because mental illness is often prolonged, there is an easily envisaged correlation with poor social and economic achievement whereas mystical experience is brief and infrequent, and, treated as a self-contained event, is likely to have little impact on performance (might one predict that the greater number of mystical experiences an individual has, the worse his social and economic performance? If so, the explanation might prove very complex). The second point is that there is little evidence that modern-day mystics as a class choose the way of poverty and ascetism as was expected of such individuals in earlier times. Surveys show a professed increased 'altruism' but little general sign of the renunciation of worldly life as chosen by, for example, Francis of Assisi who followed the beliefs derived from his own experience to lead a very singular existence. Clearly prevailing religio-cultural beliefs and conventions shape the behaviour of mystics as much as anybody else but, if modern mystical experience carries something of the life-changing force that it seems to have done in the past, one would expect, at least in some cases, modern mystics to pursue other goals than worldly ones even though this drive is not socially re-inforced. (The divergence of beliefs and directions based on personal mystical experience and those laid down by modern secular society might make an interesting study. What factors are involved in the renunciation of worldly aims by a modern individual

against all contemporary notions of self-interest? Why do some, whilst professing greater altruism etc. having had a seemingly profound experience, try to isolate their experience and maintain their former lifestyles?) There may indeed be a sub-culture of individuals who have deliberately chosen a reclusive existence to work in low paid, low status, jobs with the needy etc. and as many who have lost their 'taste' for the world and thus are low achievers in worldly terms though they have made no clear decision to renounce the world. If such a group were to be identified, it would be interesting to know if their behaviour was primarily determined by the profound and sustained nature of their experience or whether it is best explained in terms of their individual psychological reactions to their experience. I speculate that there may indeed be a relationship between a sub-group of mystics and low status but there is no indication that this is generally the case and unlike 'mental' illness, no clear pattern emerges in this respect.

RACE.

The last demographic factor which might conceivably have any relevance to the occurrence of mystical experience is ethnic origin. Back and Bourque's study in the U.S.A. showed that blacks more frequently reported religious experience than whites and there is a more general association of mysticism and race(s) as in the case of Hindus in India. Back and Bourque's study can be discounted for a variety of reasons - the problem of 'religious' as opposed to 'mystical' experience, the possibility that stereotyping induces/allows more blacks to report such experience and, most importantly, because blacks tend to have their own distinctive style of religion, the respective roles of race and religion cannot be distinguished. This last point is in fact a widespread problem, for

Hinduism is common to a few identifiable racial groups and there are the Jews, shinto and Zen/Japanese etc. Unlike 'sickle cell anaemia', mystical experience is not limited to any group of races and there is little reason to suppose that some racial groups (as distinct from religious cultures) are more prone to mystical experience than others. One might guess that 'primitive' peoples generally are more prone to these types of experience than those in the mainstream of western thought - Ginzburg makes the point that growing rationalism ended the 'benandanti' movement in the 17th century, Fiule district of Italy - but in this case, race is co-incident and one would be looking at sociological and anthropological factors rather than racial ones for the explanation .

B) SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS.

Of all the possible correlations with social structures that with religion has been concentrated on to the exclusion of all else. Since I have discussed elsewhere my reasons for doubting whether the apparent link between mystical experience and organized religion stands up, I will only recapitulate why it is I believe this link is more apparent than real. However, before doing so it is worth pointing out that religious tradition does not exist within a vacuum and, when looking for possible causes of mystical experience in society, sociologists might spread their net wider. For example, it might be wondered whether mystical religion is associated with times when religious beliefs represent cultural orthodoxy or rather with periods of instability in intellectual outlook. The uncertainty of life for individuals in any age apart, it seems to me possible that the scientific rationale of our own age or the clash of ideologies at other times may, perhaps through a general increase in anxiety, have more of a bearing on the

occurrence of mystical experience than the ingrained expectations of the faithful in more settled times. It would indeed be a paradox if atheism, like war, fear of famine etc., prompted an increase in the occurrence of mystical experience. Certainly there is no evidence that mystical experience has declined along with traditional beliefs - though the reporting of this experience may be more inhibited and its social role marginalized. It may be difficult to make a case for such correlations but if one does not assume a simple relationship between religious tradition and experience, there is a possibility that instructive links may be established with other aspects of society in so far as these are revealed in outbreaks of uncommon experience at the individual level. The fear of war, famine or simple angst may provide more of a clue than to the background of cases than an examination of the intellectual content of religious tradition. It is perhaps also worth pointing out here that because a human experience has a social dimension, it does not mean that the social value it has explains its occurrence. As anthropologists tell us many cultures have come to be built around the mystical experiences of shamans and saints and that these have been used to validate beliefs and customs and give positive expression to communal identity. Yet this social dimension, in some cases, forms no part of the explanation of the experience if you find, say, that ritualized practices leading to excitation or trauma - penances, drugs, frenzied dancing etc. alone provide the common thread cementing these experiences with others that serve no social purpose. The institutional role in these cases will only account for why some cultures indulge in practices which make the desired experiences more likely. One must treat with suspicion any claim that there is some simple direct connection between society and its institutions and the actual experience

of any of its members.

It will be recalled that I objected to the link with religious tradition on two main grounds a) that it could not be shown that all mystics belonged, in any meaningful way, to a religious tradition and b) that we might explain the apparent incidence of confirming experience amongst sub-cultures in other ways. Taken together with the difficulty of justifying the whole 'contextual' hermeneutic - our sensory experience is simply not conditioned by acquired 'cognitive structures' - I see no reason to accept that the existence of religious beliefs, whether as a prevailing orthodoxy or sub-culturally, has any relationship with the occurrence of mystical experience or the form that it takes. When we discover that the religious settings, say, prayer, church services etc. are mentioned as the background to under 10% of Iaski's cases and in only 20% of her 'religious' group - and that only one third of her subjects claimed to be religious (57) I am not persuaded of the causal role of religious tradition in these experiences. In Lynn Moehle's study of the experience of the religious, though we find a link between the type of religious experience of the young and their church affiliations, no significant denominational pattern emerged amongst the adults nor was the mean of their adherence to their religion at all high (58). The 'student group' findings can be explained in other ways and even here many experiences reported were 'non-traditional' and outside of the context of church involvement - an almost 'secular definition of a religious experience' (59). If, as in Sunden's analysis, spiritual experience incorporates traditional relationships between man and God, one wonders why these roles are identifiable at all in

spectacularly few religious cases let alone amongst those with no religious involvement. Though such studies are merely straws in the wind, taken together with theoretical problems I can see no reason for accepting that religious belief makes any impact on the occurrence of these experiences - save in so far as any practices they promote may happen to replicate the physiological conditions that make occurrence more likely. Indeed, given the fact of cross-cultural fertilization of religious traditions, I fail to see how the link, were there to be one, could ever be demonstrated. For these reasons the only role I see for religious tradition is in the general way subjects will choose to interpret their experience. The 'naming of the religious figure' in 'Near-death experience' was ascribed to cultural influence - though there was no other difference between the Hindu and Christian in this case (60)- and perhaps the very concept of contact with divinity is borrowed by mystics from religious tradition, though, if it didn't already exist, I suspect, they would have had to invent it. It is then my contention that though interpretations of mystical experience may, up to a point, be 'conservative' reflecting society's understanding of the 'supernatural' and though society may impose roles, even self-understanding, on the mystic there is no evidence at all that religious beliefs are correlated with the occurrence of the experience and whatever form it takes.

C) BEHAVIOURAL FACTORS.

One might wish to make something of the oft-noted long term improvement in behaviour and attitude following mystical experience, at least in those cases where such experience occurs infrequently. Margolis talks of 'feelings of great happiness, security and peacefulness', Ludwig of

'feelings of rejuvenation, Pahnke of a 'positive change in attitude' and Hood of 'optimism and confidence in personal survival', in short most are agreed about the 'integrative effects' of such experiences. The question however is not whether such beneficial changes occur or provide a point of distinction with most forms of mental illness but whether they tell us anything about the experience. Do these improvements, which happen to be life-enhancing, merely arise contingently from the subject's interpretation of his experience? It would not be hard to accept that the belief in a personal God and wider personal meaning and value that mystical experience appears to validate, in itself brings psychological benefits. I am not here discussing the marked spiritual phase but only making the point that any experience of love and protection which makes the individual feel valuable will, regardless of context, allow the subject to face life with greater confidence. If mystics were to believe that their experiences were delusory or theology interpreted them as a demonic trick, would the same benefits nonetheless occur? It helps little to adopt the old theological line, as Wainright and many psychologists have done, that if, in the long run, it is beneficial, it is an authentic mystical experience for this does not establish whether the effects are a direct consequence of the experience or simply an accident arising from the way in which the individual has been conditioned to interpret it. It is perhaps not unimportant in this context that what we mean by positive effects has changed in accordance with our values. 'Classic' mystics such as John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila and Diadochos of Photiki believed that long-lasting 'prayerfulness', 'humility' and freedom from worldly desires betokened a genuine mystical experience whereas modern psychologists might find

such traits morbid, concentrating instead on sense of well-being and greater personal effectiveness. My own view is that we can read very little into long-term changes in attitude and behaviour beyond saying in general terms that the experience of receiving supernatural aid and comfort when we most needed it is likely to be a formative or anchor experience with quite natural effects on our subsequent outlook. If this is so we can deduce nothing about the experience itself from these effects even if, for the sake of argument, we accept that they are typically life-enhancing for, at most, they show that in many cultures we interpret mystical experience as a good thing but not, in the long term, that these experiences of necessity give rise to a characterizable outlook which, like paranoia, one might treat as symptomatic and having a diagnostic value.

Though we may often find long-term improvements in individuals, sometimes in marked contrast to a previous state of deep existential anxiety and a general interest in religion amongst mystics, at least subsequent to their experience, the possibility of there being a peak age for such experience alone seems relevant to an understanding of what does take place and this can be understood in terms of the model already proposed. If there are other correlates of the experience yet to be discovered which would define the condition in terms incompatible with the two-fold hypothesis, I cannot guess what they might be.

IV

THE CHARACTERIZATION OF MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE - A SUMMARY.

If the view taken in this and the preceding chapters is justified, mystical experience can be seen as a very distinctive phenomenon that takes place

within the context of an easily recognized background. The background consists of two, apparently, quite distinct sequences:-

1. TRIGGER-REACTION SEQUENCE.

A. Precipitating crisis that causes stress, anxiety, injury. As in mundane cases this may be any one of life's vicissitudes though we frequently encounter an existential/spiritual crisis that is typical of the exaggerated sense of self-isolation normally found in this phase.

B. Four conditions which facilitate the triggering of the reaction which are 1. an acute sense of ego-identity, 2. the redundancy of ego-control, 3. conditions which favour the relaxation of ego-control and 4. a trip-wire, perhaps sometimes self-generated in the case of mystics, which allows the metabolic reaction generated by the threat to well-being to take place.

C. The autonomic reaction, once triggered, appears to be the same in mystical cases as in everyday cases of shock and allied conditions. Metabolic changes undoubtedly occur and the condition is diagnosable by the initial unconsciousness of the subject, trance/daze and general poor responsiveness to the environment and such symptoms as uncontrollable shaking, palpitations, incoherence etc. The condition is also characterizable descriptively - 1. Ego-abandonment i.e. a reduction in subjectivity and, often, a loss of all consciousness in mundane cases and all environmental awareness in mystical cases, 2. Disorientation and a loss of sense of time and continuity. 3. Feelings of warmth and peace. 4. Frequently euphoria or, at least, an excited and emotional state of mind. 5. Quasi-physical sensations such as tingling and numbness. It is my contention that when we encounter these characteristics - which may be more marked on some occasions than others due to the great variation in the symptomology of this reaction - we can attribute them

to this commonplace reaction rather than to the mystical experience which, if at all, will occur against this background. As shock can take some time to wear off, all that subsequently happens only in the case of mystics, does so in this context, though, if the spiritual state is very prolonged, it may be reasonable to suppose that in its latter stages shock is no longer an important factor. This sequence occurs commonly and has no integral connection with mystical experience - mystics such as Teresa of Avila may have experienced both, with and without any mystical experience occurring - though, as I have argued, it is a necessary condition for the occurrence of the second sequence.

2. MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE AND SHIFT TO SPIRITUALITY.

This second sequence, takes place against the background of traumatization but does so only rarely. The shift to spirituality may also occur against this background without a mystical perception being reported. The mystical perception normally takes place immediately after the traumatic reaction and adds a wholly new aspect to the traumatic state against which it takes place. The subject becomes aware, in a very concrete sensory way, of a supernatural force that usually radiates love. The content of these experiences varies very considerably. Sometimes there is felt to be a union 'outside' of time and space, sometimes penetration or simply presence, sometimes the experience is visual, more often it is not. As discussed in chapter 2, there are very real difficulties in the way of understanding exactly what it is the mystic experiences at this moment beyond the fact that these sensations make the profoundest impression and, for him at least, carry a wealth of meaning. We may distinguish these, short lived, perceptions from other experiences involving religious imagery etc. simply on the basis that once experienced, never forgotten. Indeed they are so striking that

the veridicality of these experiences is never seriously doubted. Though the subject may continue to be aware of the features characteristic of his traumatization, the mystical perception is something quite distinct from these though, at the moment, we have no reason to believe that diagnostically it constitutes a separate state such that the observer could distinguish between someone in a state of shock and someone having a mystical experience in a state of shock (in one interesting example Catherine of Siena felt herself to be receiving the stigmata whilst to observers she was in a 'dead faint' (61).)

The mystical perception, usually brief, gives way to what I have termed the spiritual orientation which always succeeds it - though this can occur without mystical perception and which is a marked state with characteristic features that can last from an hour or so or for several weeks or even longer. Though during this phase there are no further concrete 'supernatural' perceptions the subject feels himself 1. to have an identity extended beyond the body-image, 2. has a marked understanding of the world and his place in it in metaphysical terms, 3. feels a moral impulsion towards self-improvement, 4. has a new attitude to life characterized by 'basic trust', 5. has an unfocused feeling of altruism for his fellows and often all living things, 6. radically simplifies life-style and 7. experiences a range of changes such as increased energy, a rare tranquility and a heightened sensory awareness. None of these impressions is incompatible with a continuing, though diminishing level of traumatization though clearly this frame of mind differs from that to be found in mundane cases of trauma where the victim returns to normal functioning. Despite considering a number of possibilities, I found no easy way of accounting for this state which always follows mystical experience and is so frequently ushered in by it.

After an indeterminate period of spirituality the subject gradually returns to ego-functioning though his beliefs may have been indelibly changed by his experiences and many positive effects on personality and outlook may be reported. Not uncommonly this cycle occurs more than once. A feeling of isolation once again sets in and, given another threat to well-being the reaction - with the possibility this has for further mystical experience and the deep sense of well-being spirituality brings - occurs again. It may be that some mystics attempt to manipulate this process but, whether they do or not, the cycle may be repeated many times before these violent swings in self-identity settle down.

If this picture is accurate, and I certainly believe it can be justified by the data we have, we may treat mystical experience as a very distinctive phenomenon that takes place under very identifiable circumstances. Given the explanation of the first phase or sequence in naturalistic terms there is the suggestion that the second might also be explained in this way. However, apart from understanding the apparent adaptivity of the subject's mind-state in mystical and subsequent spiritual experience, its meaningfulness and coherence for him and the development or maturation of personality with which it seems tied, there are many difficulties in seeking to explain mystical experience naturalistically and it is to these that I now turn in the light of all that I have discussed so far.

CHAPTER 6.

A NATURALISTIC EXPIANATION?

Various reasonings have led me to believe that the only way we might understand mystical perception is in terms of the workings of the human organism. I have rejected both mentalistic accounts of mystical experience - chapter 3 - and theological ones - chapter 1 - though I did accept that theology addressed those aspects of the experience which are most thought-provoking. Also in chapter 3 - see caveat 7 - I argued that it was simplest to understand all forms of mystical experience in terms which could be related to physiology, a view strengthened by its sensory or quasi-sensory nature and by its relationship with trauma both of which have a metabolic basis. In the first section of this chapter I survey what little we do know about the physiology of mystical experience and point out that for any naturalistic account we must both identify relevant physiological factors and, even more difficult, trace the mechanism through which the operation of these factors is transcribed into perception. It is clear we can offer no account of mystical experience in these terms which is not surprising as we can offer no full account even of mundane perception in these terms either. However, as a result of this unpromising survey, all that follows must of necessity be speculation. In section II I make the assumption that we could offer a full naturalistic account and ask whether, on the basis of this assumption, we would wish to accept a naturalistic description as a full and final account of mystical experience. The question of reduction can be broached in the absence of any particular physiological account as both of the principal considerations - A. the information value the experience has and B. the problem of whether even epiphenomena may require a higher

order of explanation than a physical account alone could give are unrelated to the type of natural description which might be given. I also consider here, in passing, the general question of epiphenomenalism versus idealism, i.e. the possibility that experience belongs to a wholly different category from physiology, but suggest that this particular query is of little weight. As a result of this discussion I find no good reason to take the simple option and reduce, or rather expect to reduce, mystical experience to whatever naturalistic account may one day be offered and consequently, in section III, I go on to consider what we might learn from it beyond filling out our knowledge of physiology. I select here three areas in which mystical experience poses a problem in a natural context for any comprehensive understanding of the human being. These problems have to do with the nature of human identity, human personality and the meaningfulness these non-empirical and non-tautological claims have for us. My attempt to resolve these difficulties leads to an explanation of mystical experience which has both particular and universal application. This explanation, though only a sketch, I hope will suggest to others that mystical experience has a pivotal place in any understanding of humanity besides shedding light on the nature of divinity and other questions mystical claims obviously raise but which I see no reason to tackle directly. The value of my model can really only be judged in relation to its universal application for, I believe there is little progress to be made in attempting to understand mystical experience in isolation from the general biological framework in which we function. The three questions I raise and the explanation of them I offer may, if nothing else, point out directions for future research for I am persuaded that mystical experience

is an immensely significant phenomenon and not some footnote to physiology and hope in this chapter to persuade others to be of like opinion.

I

A PHYSIOLOGICAL DESCRIPTION OF MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE?

Beginning with a review of the few better known attempts to describe the physiology of mystical experience, I shall move on to a discussion of the problems inherent in all such attempts. Firstly I consider the two ways in which we might look for a physiological basis, the identification of specific factors or by an overall physiological state exhibiting a particular level or profile of metabolic activity and will argue that not only do we have no firm evidence, it is not even clear in which direction we might go in order to find some. Secondly, I move on to the problem of trying to identify mechanisms which would link metabolism and perception, a problem which affects not only studies of mystical experience but of mundane experience also. This discussion, if largely unfruitful, is a necessary preliminary for the discussions which follow and it will do no harm to remind ourselves how little we know about the major questions of human functioning, especially of the relationship between mind and personality and body, which haunt the study of mystical experience. There is one proviso I need to make before beginning which is that my interest in naturalistic descriptions is solely analytic and I have no detailed empirical knowledge of physiology. Given the lack of progress by the medical profession in the areas under scrutiny here, this is perhaps no bad thing but it should be remembered that when suggesting a line of enquiry or criticizing the work of others, I do so only on philosophical grounds and am not basing my observations on experimental work of any kind.

SOME ATTEMPTS TO DESCRIBE THE PHYSIOLOGICAL BASIS OF MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE.

DAVIDSON, following Gellhorn, argues that there are 'two anatomically separate systems represented at all levels of the nervous system' namely the 'ergotropic' and the 'trophotropic'. Normally, it is said, one system cancels out or balances the other but, for reasons unexplained, an imbalance between the two or a 'breakdown of reciprocity and congruence' can occur with marked consequences for the nature of our experience. When this happens our neural systems become uncoordinated and 'the resulting imbalances lead finally to simultaneous ergotropic and trophotropic discharges ... whereby, after cessation of trophotropic excitation, strong ergotropic activation supervenes' (1). In other words, after a period of erratic and frenzied neural activity, a clear pattern emerges which is identified with the mystical state of consciousness. Leaving aside a range of questions one might wish to ask about the relationship between a 'strong ergotropic activation' on the one hand and 'mystical states of consciousness' on the other I find two central difficulties with this account. In the first place Gellhorn's dichotomy describing the nervous system in terms of two distinct processes is entirely without empirical basis and appears to me to be unnecessarily complex. Granted that there are changes in neural functioning leading to meditational states, I can see no reason to suppose that they arise from imbalances between two distinct systems. 'Ergotropic' and 'trophotropic' may, like Yin and Yang, have a descriptive identity but, given the complexity of the nervous system, why should we not treat the diversity of human functioning as the product of changes in the operation of one unified and integrated process? It is certainly more parsimonious to treat the difference between sleep and waking consciousness, say, as resulting from the level of activation in a single system than complicating matters by suggesting that such states arise from the level of activation

of two separate systems and the balance between them. I can see no hypothetical reason why, if it were shown that the neural activity of mystics formed a distinctive pattern, this should not also, in the first place at least, be ascribed to a particular mode of an integrated neural machine. A computer stores and analyses information but we can also play 'space invaders' on it. We do not have two machines for both functions are explicable in the lay-out of just one piece of equipment that may be used in different ways. My second objection is that Davidson offers no reason for our using the findings from the quite well studied case of meditation - however these might be explained - in the wholly separate case of mystical perception. Meditators may sometimes have mystical perceptions - 'she enjoyed pure contemplation while saying the Paternoster, and occasionally God raised her to perfect union with Himself' (2) - but not all meditators have mystical experiences, however characterizable their heart and brain-wave patterns may be and clearly a great many mystical experiences occur outside of the context of meditation. There are difficulties in distinguishing between meditative and mystical experience at the descriptive level but, unless a meditator reports a concrete perception of divinity, I see no reason to treat his experience as mystical however deep his trance. One could quite simply explain the occurrence of mystical experience against a background of meditation, as in other cases, in terms of stress, if it is the case that "mind-stilling" exercises can generate sufficient tension for a metabolic reaction to occur and in this context the highly excited state of meditators is significant. Unlike a 'typical' meditative mind state, there appears to be no such thing as a 'mystical state of consciousness' but only mystical experience against a variety of states of mind which are linked only by the fact that each could be explained in terms of trauma. In this case the brain-wave

patterns and EEG profiles typical of meditators, whether or not they arise from ergotropic activities, simply have no relevance for the phenomena I am studying here and only a monitoring of mystical experience, in whatever context it should occur, can be of any consequence for an understanding of the physiological factors involved.

STOCKSMEYER'S theory of 'selective neuronal death' was formulated to explain tinnitus but perhaps, more than any other theory suggested, could have a relevance for mystical perception also. The brain, as can be demonstrated, produces many more neurones than are required for adaptive sense perception and many of these surplus connections are separate from the main clusters and 'fire' independently rather than in conjunction with the main clusters on which our adaptive sense perceptions depend. The neurones - adaptive and unadaptive alike - are produced in quantity to replace damaged tissue caused by injury or, as is so often the case in neural problems, by vitamin deficiencies. Stocksmeier's theory is that in healthy individuals the great majority of surplus neurones are culled through some selective process geared towards adaptivity but in some individuals, especially those with vitamin deficiencies, the culling process breaks down. Hence in the case of vitamin deficiency not only is there neural damage to which the body responds by producing great amounts of new material but a breakdown of the culling system so that large amounts of unadaptive material accumulates giving rise to non-veridical yet wholly authentic-seeming sense impressions. One might speculate that such a process could account for a mystical 'sense of presence', feelings of penetration etc. for these too are concrete and yet, apparently, non-veridical. This line of thought is strengthened by the common signs of a disorder of the peripheral nervous system in mystics

-tingling, burning etc. discussed above - and the likelihood that, in many religious cases at least, prolonged fasting would in fact give rise to vitamin deficiency. As the condition is reversible, it may be that changes in the eating habits of mystics might explain the cyclic or periodic nature of their experience. Neither would it be far-fetched to argue that the metabolic changes in traumatization triggered large clusters of unadaptive neurones as tinnitus is certainly affected by changes in metabolism. Though entirely speculation this theory does have the virtue of being testable. Those mystics who reported recent mystical experience could be tested for vitamin deficiency and it may be possible to identify a super-abundance of neurones which appear to serve no adaptive purpose. However, though this may be relevant to the occurrence of mystical perception I can see no way to relate Stockmeyer's theory to the spiritual orientation which always succeeds it for no non-natural perceptions are reported in this latter phase. No theory which fails to address both aspects of mystical experience could be wholly satisfactory. Neither is it clear why an accumulation of unadaptive neurones should give rise to the coherent impressions mystics report. God, for them, is not comparable to the random noises tinnitus sufferers hear but a total and integrated experience that is anything but localized and uncoordinated. If surplus neurones are responsible, there must be a great many of them and they must act in a synchronized way.

DEIKMAN suggests that mystical experience occurs when rational consciousness breaks down in the face of 'overload' or 'deprivation' of stimulation. Though I accept that deprivation of stimulation is one possible cause since I do not believe one can 'overload' the mind, I interpret subsequent

changes in terms of the stress or tiredness that are associated with undue mental activity or the lack of it. The intellect does not seem to be a system that requires a steady degree of activity nor do there appear to be limits to intellectual activity but only a price to be paid as for any other form of exertion. My real objection to Deikman's picture however is that there is no evidence that all mundane processes must dissolve in the face of frenzied and uncoordinated neural activity before mystical experience can occur. As argued above, in some cases there may be euphoria and a complete breakdown of rationality but in others mystical experience occurs against a near-normal background - 'I was in its presence ... no emotion ... only interest' (3), a continuum that may only be explained in terms of traumatization. In some cases mystical perceptions are said to be simultaneously subjected to rational analysis 'It was breathing all around me, till the breath was coming through me ... I stood still for a long time, some words which I must (once) have heard came to me: "God is Spirit". So that was what Spirit meant ... Now, somehow I knew what the words meant' (4) so there is no reason to believe either that the brain is running riot or that its functioning is incompatible with rational processes. There may be excitation caused by the metabolic reactions of trauma but we have no reason to talk of mystical experience as if, like epilepsy, it was a state of uncontrolled neural activity incompatible with rational processes and which, at most, allowed some fevered and disordered awareness. Mystical perceptions are subjectively coherent and the experient is by no means always out of control. I therefore neither accept that there is 'a mystical state of consciousness' as distinct from mystical perception against whatever background this may occur nor that the mystic's perceptions arise from a level of tumultuous and disordered brain activity that would break down all the functions of mundane waking consciousness.

The notion that mundane consciousness depends upon a certain level of electrical activity in the brain and, should one increase the level of activity beyond a certain point, mundane consciousness breaks down to be replaced by ecstatic and eventually mystical forms of awareness is frequently met with but is one which I find odd. It does not agree with the facts and appears unduly simplistic. Everyday consciousness does not appear to arise from a process like nuclear reaction - too hot and it becomes uncontrolled too cold and it stops - for in sleep there is very considerable brain activity yet no mundane awareness. If we may explain any excitement and changes in personality and awareness simply enough in terms of traumatization, there is nothing to connect mystical experience with a violent level of electrical activity in the brain.

MAVEN'S idea is the novel one that mystics are reliving the primal moment of conception. 'And if, as we must assume, the unicellular organism is capable of recording its experiences so that they can be played back it may be that the record will be duplicated in every cell of the multicellular organism that develops from the zygote. The duplication might account for the felt immediacy of a playback which has led some mystics to say they felt the experience in the very marrow of their bones' (5). So it might but, if we must have an inheritance theory, I suspect the foetus may have a better memory than the cell. Apart from the manifest impossibility of proving Maven's idea, - how could one demonstrate that a single cell has acquired memories? - I would be interested to know how Maven might explain a perception such as 'He was in a particular place about five feet from me - all-embracing love ...everything fitted into a marvellous pattern' (6) in terms of his theory. Maven is right

to point out that mystical perceptions appear to mystics to come from the very roots of their being, an uncontroversial and unalloyed awareness that sometimes seems so direct that the sensory processes are thought not to be involved at all but I trust we will not need to resurrect the zygote hypothesis to explain this.

Two other ideas in particular, hypoxia and the excitation of the limbic structures, deserve mention in this eclectic review. Hypoxia, oxygen starvation of the brain, has frequently been suggested since it is known that in this state there is a good deal of mental imagery along with drowsiness, if not outright unconsciousness, which presents a picture superficially resembling mystical experience. There appear to be two particular objections in this case apart from the more general difficulties facing naturalistic reductions to be discussed later. The first is that there is no evidence that mystics typically are in circumstances which induce oxygen deficiency. Psychotropic drugs such as L.S.D. apparently affect the blood circulation in the brain and it may be that some earlier anaesthesia cases, such as those mentioned by James, could be explained in this way, perhaps even those arising from breath-control exercises. However, I am not aware that exertion, worry or hunger, for example, have any relationship with hypoxia or that traumatization in any way affects the blood supply to the brain. Not only is there no evidence for hypoxia in any of our case studies, in very few would we have any reason to suspect it. The second objection relates to the distinction made in chapter 3 between the concrete sense perception of mystical experience and a range of other phenomena which, if they seem to the experient to be real at all, do not appear to be so for long. In carbon monoxide poisoning, for instance, many victims report vivid mental imagery but

no more than in dreams is this taken to be real, a reason for changing ones views about the world, an anchor experience that cannot be doubted over the course of a lifetime. This difference is central and whilst mystical experience may occur against such a background sometimes - hypoxia may well relate to a life-threatening situation - this background would not appear to have any particular significance for experiences of the mystical type. The excitation of limbic structures has been nominated recently for, tentatively, these are identified as the seat of our feelings of love and since love sometimes is such a prominent feature of mystical cases, the idea is that, for reasons unknown, these structures have been over-stimulated. I do not doubt that some psycho-neurological centres are aroused during mystical experience and it may be that the limbic structures are one such group but alone they will not suffice to account for mystical experience for not all perceptions of divinity involve love - some are related to fear or awe rather than love - and mystical perception in any event is not simply a matter of any one emotion however over-powering this might be. Mystics are not simply awash with love for, if they feel this at all, it is the love emanating from another entity whose presence is acutely perceived. We have no reason to believe that mystics, like the ancient Greeks, are deifying some over-whelming emotion in some formal way rather it is the presence, the source of love, and the perceived purpose of his revealing it that is central to the experience. Limbic structures may be related to our feelings of love but are they also related to a 'sense of presence' or to the feeling, for example, that some transcendental knowledge is being imparted? Love is, in many cases, a secondary feature of the experience characterizing a predominant feeling but subordinate to the experiential fact of some super-natural contact with a being greater than ourselves, a mind or heavenly knowledge etc. with which the feeling

is associated. Mystical experience is far more complex and intentional than simple emotional experience and if limbic structures are involved at all they could only play a part in the naturalistic description of some cases.

This brief survey of the better-known naturalistic explanations on offer, if nothing else, may serve to show how little understanding we have of the physiology of mystical experience. There is not a shred of evidence to link mystical experience with the over-activity of neurones or limbic structures, an accumulation of mal-adaptive neurones, a breakdown in congruence between two nervous systems, hypoxia or cellular memories, nor any reason, in view of the criticisms offered, to suppose that any such evidence will be forth-coming. In view of our limited knowledge of the workings of human experience in general and mystical experience in particular, I do not intend to add my pennyworth of speculation but rather look at those criteria which will need to be met before we accept that a naturalistic description is both plausible and adequate and seek to assess how far we are from meeting these.

There would appear to be two elements in the naturalistic description of experience, A) the identification of factors relevant to the occurrence of the experience - physiological and environmental and B) a mechanism through which these factors can be shown to shape the experience we have. We may of course identify the factors without understanding the mechanism and, for this reason, I shall consider the two elements separately but it will be my contention that we can take no view about the causes of experience until both are fully understood.

A) PHYSIOLOGICAL FACTORS IN EXPERIENCE.

There would appear to be two quite different ways in which experience may be shown to be related to physiology. In the first it may be shown that different aspects of sense perception are tied to particular metabolic functions as, for example, when the perception of a colour can be shown to arise from the activation of certain sensors etc. In the second we may show that an experience is the product of a syndromic form of metabolism - dreams are specific to sleep - whether or not we can identify any particular organ or process as their cause. I shall discuss each separately for it is by no means clear whether we should expect to describe mystical experience in terms of some particular process or only in terms of a marked and characterizable change in the functioning of the whole body.

NATURAL DESCRIPTIONS OF SENSE PERCEPTION.

Though most commonly associated with mundane waking consciousness, sense perceptions are not state-specific. We may hear the phone ring in our sleep and ecstasies may see the most brilliant colours. For this reason attempts to describe the physiology of sense perception are best directed at particular metabolic processes rather than at whatever characterizable overall state of functioning the perception occurs in. It is after all no explanation of my sensation of heat rather than cold to say that I am in a state of waking consciousness. Our knowledge of the processes to which our sense perceptions are tied is still very rudimentary but in some cases it can be shown that a perception is parasitic on a particular process even if we do not understand how the physical process translates into perception. For

instance, it is known that stimulation of certain sensors in the eye is a necessary and sufficient condition for seeing colour. As different groups of cells react to different stimuli, we can relate any one colour to the activation of a particular group of sensors. It is not important here that in everyday cases environment provides the various wave-lengths of radiation which stimulate the sensors for I am not discussing adaptivity but only the point that, however they are activated, the perception of a colour is tied to the stimulation of particular sensors and lasts only as long as that stimulation continues. The hypothalamus controls our perception of temperature. Depending on its level of activity we will feel hot or cold regardless of whether or not this level is coordinated with the environment. In jaundice, patients' visual impressions have a distinct and characteristic hue, a perception which only occurs when the liver is diseased and one which is coterminous with the severest phases of disruption of this organ.

It is as well to point out here that, even in these cases, all we are in fact discussing is the correlation of specific metabolic activities with changes in perception for, in themselves, none can be proved to be causal factors in perception. There need be no direct relationship between the stimulation of x or the morbidity of y and changes in perception even if these are entirely automatic and characteristic. The relationship between some bodily activity and perception could be indirect involving perhaps the interaction of two distinct but inter-locking systems or otherwise involve intermediary processes which alone have effects on perception. For example, it might be the case that jaundice is related to perception not by any direct impact the liver has on sight but because, in this condition, the liver fails to remove waste products resulting in a build up of toxicity which alone affects the activity of sensory systems. Since

we are only talking about correlated metabolic states, it may not always be possible even to assume that these play any causal role, direct or indirect, at all. One could imagine all sorts of complexities in sorting out which was the operative factor. Though we may know, for example, that sclerosis of the liver can give rise to hallucinations, since these in turn may cause terror and a subsequent racing pulse we might make the mistake of thinking that the high pulse rate characteristic of such terrors was part of the cause rather than the effect. In the case of mystical perception where we know nothing at all about the causation, if a number of physiological correlates were found, the identification of operative factors could be a problem. The real difficulty however in the case of mystical perception is whether we should ever expect to find that these experiences - whatever the exact nature of the relationship - are parasitic upon the activation of some marked and identifiable process as was the case with the mundane examples given above.

There are two reasons for doubting whether we are looking for any simple metabolic process the activation of which, and only the activation of which, will result in mystical experience. The first of these is that, unlike any of the examples given above, mystical experience is a complex phenomenon involving wide, rather than limited, changes often in more than one sensory system. If, as colour experiments show, our metabolism in relation to perception is highly specialized, we could not expect to identify any simple gland and to account for more complex changes we would need an account of such sophistication involving many processes and their inter-relationships that it is clearly beyond our present ability to describe. The second is that in all the above examples, whatever the mechanisms involved, identifiable processes have characterizable effects.

In the case of mystical experience however, not only are the 'effects' complex but quite beyond characterization. We are less likely to believe a group of sensors plays any precise role in colour perception if, on their activation, we sometimes see green, sometimes red and even if we could find out precisely what the effects on perception in the case of mystical experience were, in all probability they have no more than a generic identity at most.

Regarding complexity, unlike, say, the characteristic misperceptions of brain lesions, mystical perceptions are not limited to one particular aspect of perception but are affectations of a whole, and often more than one, sensory system which does not make it seem likely that any god-gland or group of cells is responsible. Such naturalistic descriptions of perception as we have, morbid or otherwise, usually only account for one aspect of a perception - depth, colour or perhaps even only hue or brightness etc. - and working on the basis that metabolic processes are highly specialized, complex changes, will require complex descriptions. More often than not mystical perceptions involve inter-locking changes in more than one sensory system perhaps, as in some 'sense of presence' cases, visual as well as tactile or in others olfactory and visual. To make matters worse, many are said to relate to no human sensory system at all and, whilst some appear to exclude everyday sensations, others seem compatible with everyday sensations of all types. Even if only one sensory system is affected, a perception of divinity is rarely reported as some limited change in normal perception might be - an odd sensation, another colour - but is something which monopolizes the entire sensory system. In an example such as a 'progressive obliteration of space, time, sensation, and the multitudinous factors of experience - in proportion as these conditions

of ordinary consciousness were subtracted, the sense of an underlying or essential consciousness acquired intensity. At last nothing remained but a pure, absolute, abstract Self' (7) we see the sheer scale of the description required to explain just why so much of everyday perception is over-ridden, nevermind the new perception which follows. If all that I am aware of at this moment - colours, shapes, depths, sounds, warmth, the hardness of the chair etc. etc. - requires a myriad of inter-locking descriptions of different processes, it is quite beyond our powers to give an overall account even if we understood each process singly. It is one thing to explain green in terms of x group of sensors but probably quite meaningless to attempt to explain something as complex as sight as a compound of such processes. I therefore doubt that we are looking for any one group of cells or a morbid gland and, if we are not, whether we could ever hope to give a meaningful description if more than one factor is involved. There are cases where simple causes can produce widespread effects, an anaesthetic can close down all sensory systems but since there is no evidence of any such factor in the background of mystical cases, the odds are against some pineal gland/hypoxia type explanation which would explain a complex phenomenon in simple terms.

The second difficulty in the case of mystical experience would seem to count not only against the identification of any one physical process - a diseased organ or whatever - but against any simple explanation of the hypoxia type also. If we expect physiological factors to have characteristic effects and, if they did not, the whole thrust of naturalistic description would collapse, there are two problems in the case of mystical perception which, singly or together, make such a description unlikely. The first, discussed in chapter 2, is that we

have no way of knowing for sure what mystical perceptions are like or whether they are alike. If, as a matter of fact, we cannot characterize the effect, we have no way of arguing that it is typical of whatever factor we nominate as the cause. It would be curious to identify a disease if we could not also identify its symptoms - though I have met doctors who have said "it must be a virus" in the face of many different symptoms. The second is that, even if we were to unwrap the bare sensory details from layers of interpretation, we should probably find, by and large, that cases have very little resemblance to each other. On the face of it should we expect that when stripped to the essentials a case such as 'then I felt a pressure that was Christ's body pressed full-length on mine ... the closeness was intimate and strong as intercourse - then while remaining in full possession of my body, he went through into the very centre of my being' (8) would be found to be like 'at last nothing remained but a pure absolute Self. The universe became without form and void on context' (9)? I think not and either we would be reduced to arguing that one cause could have quite different effects - "x group of sensors make us see blue, red and green" appears quite meaningless - or that there was more than one causal factor. Since some would argue that sub-species of mystical perception, 'Near-death Experience' perhaps, or 'sense of presence' can be recognized, there is the possibility that more than one process can give rise to mystical experience but, not only would we find it difficult to categorize most mystical perceptions in this way, were quite different causes to be identified, mystical experience as a class would probably collapse for, at a naturalistic level, they may not have a family resemblance at all.

In view of the difficulties in characterizing the perception and in view

of the complex nature of the changes mystical experience presents, I doubt that it could ever be shown that such perceptions are parasitic on any simple physiological factor. If ever we are to have a naturalistic description, my guess is that it will not be in terms of any one factor, morbid or otherwise, but in more sophisticated terms of the way in which a variety of complex systems interact. In view of the experimental problems involved in showing that some simple group of cells is related to some aspect of mundane perception, I suspect that any sophisticated description of the type indicated is a very long way off. In fact obtaining evidence of any sort may provide us with as many difficulties as analysis does. Mystical experience is not, like epilepsy say, treated as a disease either by subjects or doctors and, even if it were, since mystics may have only one or two experiences in a lifetime, clinical studies would be well-nigh impossible to arrange. It may be, even if we knew under which conditions mystical experience was most likely to occur, that mystical experience was a phenomenon that could not occur under laboratory conditions. Such conditions could conceivably act as 'anti-triggers' preventing the volitional relaxation of ego-control and thus mystical experience might never occur in the only circumstances in which the identification of the metabolic changes involved is feasible - it is significant here that Pavlov only discovered paradoxicality in his laboratory dogs through the chance event of a flood.

In view of these remarks it is not surprising that we have very few indications about the metabolism of mysticism. It is possible that the combination of traumatization and the suspicion of peripheral neural damage may suggest a hypothesis in terms of the impact endocrinal changes have on a degenerate nervous system or - following Stockmeyer - on unadaptive neurones. Quite why a degenerated system should give rise to such striking

thematic - super-natural revelation is a theme even if it is for all practical purposes uncharacterizable - perceptions when normally neuritis, for example, only gives rise to random sensations and, often, pain which is rarely reported in mystical cases I could not say besides which it scarcely appears to be an appropriate explanation for those cases which are declared to be non-bodily. In fact, apart from some localized burning and tingling sensations, there appears to be no reason to think in terms of morbidity at all either of specific issues or arising from injurious conditions such as the lack of oxygen. Though the rare and occasional nature of mystical experience may allow us to think in terms of aberration, the very brevity of mystical experience argues against disease. Though epilepsy is of short duration also it is of more frequent and regular occurrence than mystical experience whilst other illnesses with psychotropic effects, malaria say, last days at a time not minutes. Certainly accident, hypoxia, say, or injury are not universally indicated. It is also noteworthy that 'mental' illness in general has a number of quite clear-cut profiles yet, peak-age apart, there is nothing in the background of mystics to make us assume that there is any sort of common condition at all and, if chronic disease is responsible, it is remarkably well concealed most of the time. One might speculate, on the lines of the excitation of limbic structures, that traumatization activates a number of brain centres or perhaps reduces the restraints on their activity in a perfectly natural way. However, since mystical perception cannot be characterized and it is quite clear cases vary markedly - love, say, is prominent in one case but not in another - the complexity of the description required makes any such hypothesis meaningless. Besides which, not only have we no evidence for increased neural activity, general or particular, over and above that which is explicable in terms of trauma but one might wonder, if the increase in activity is entirely natural, why mystical experience does not occur more often since trauma

and the abandonment of inhibiting ego-control is not at all uncommon. Certainly, apart from the background of traumatization and the symptoms characteristic of this, mystical experience - in so far as the obscurity of the reports allows us access at all - offers no symptomatology that is likely to lead to any universal explanation. Experiences vary and many of the features occasionally reported may have no diagnostic value since they may only indicate some unrelated condition. In fact in this latter context, it may be quite misleading to attempt to induct a naturalistic description of mystical experience from some detailed biography or autobiography. No one mystic's experience, however frequent or revealing, can be thought to typify or even illustrate the range of mystical perception and the identification of some disease in a 'classic' mystic may prove to have no relevance in his own case or that of any other. I do not doubt that a naturalistic description of mystical experience is theoretically possible for, odd though it is, there is no reason to assume that the mystical constitutes a quite separate category of experience rather than some sub-species of experience, some of which has already been naturalistically described. However, in view of the problems discussed, we appear to be a long way from identifying the physical factors involved - a point which makes all further discussion highly speculative.

A STATE-SPECIFIC PHENOMENON?

Dreams are a characteristic and state-specific phenomenon of sleep - such that it suffices to say "I was dreaming I must have been asleep". It is not at all clear how dreams relate to the metabolic state of sleep but, since they only occur in this state, the assumption is that they are related to the overall form of functioning rather than to the activity of some particular dream gland. It may equally be possible to understand

'cosmic consciousness' arising from Transcendental Meditation in such terms for it is said that T.M. practices result in lowered oxygen intake, heart rate, blood pressure and lactates (10) which together constitute a recognizable metabolic condition that is linked to the occurrence of the very characteristic state of mind 'cosmic consciousness' is said to present. Tart and others have fully represented this idea in 'Altered States of Consciousness' suggesting that various states of mind are specific to various meditational and religious practices and the specifiable metabolic states these induce and whilst the notion, say, of ten distinguishable yogic states of mind tied to equally distinguishable practices is not without its difficulties, the principle of syndromic mental activity is well established. Though various explanations of dreams, for example, have been given, short of giving a full description of how they come about, I see no reason for saying anything at all about such phenomena other than that dreaming is simply something we do in sleep. This is not to say that they do not also give us information, perhaps about our metabolism, subliminal intellectual processes etc., but only that any such observation would be unwarrantable as an explanation. It would be tempting to treat mystical experience as the product of some little known psycho-physiological state but the central problems in showing this to be the case are not only is it difficult to characterize mystical experience, at least formally, in the way we might dreams or otherwise show that it constitutes a characterizable state of mind but that we have no distinguishable metabolic state to tie the phenomenon to. Whereas sleep constitutes a definable form of metabolic functioning - brain wave patterns and the like - and we can even show the specific

sleep patterns to which dreams are correlated, there is no evidence that mystical experience is tied to any other state besides traumatization on which, by itself, it cannot be held to be parasitic. Though traumatization is a recognizable psycho-physiological state, and, if I am right, is a necessary condition for mystical experience, if, say, only one in a hundred cases of shock result in mystical perception, we cannot treat it as a syndromic feature. We may not dream everytime we sleep but we do so often enough to think of sleep as the operative factor but this is not the case with mystical experience - trauma and, at most, the link is likely to be an indirect one. One could guess that trauma triggers a second autonomic reaction only in mystics but, until we are able to identify the metabolic peculiarities of this state and - feelings of great energy, tranquility etc. apart - we have no reason to suspect there is another form of definable physiological functioning over and above traumatic reaction, such guesses and the whole thrust of this type of argument are meaningless.

For the reasons given above it is also difficult to show that mystical perceptions, as impressions, are sufficiently alike to constitute a state-specific phenomenon in the way that hypnogogic imagery or dreams are. It is difficult to argue that x is a state-specific phenomenon if x cannot be typified descriptively. Equally difficult is that there would appear to be no specific qualities associated with the 'state of experiencing' in which mystical perception takes place other than their apparent reality, which would enable us to describe mystical experience as a distinctive form of consciousness as we can in the case of the hypnopompic state, say. Mystical perception would appear to occur against the background of any mind-state consonant with a degree of

trauma - including a more or less normal waking consciousness - and thus there are no unique mystical qualities about the states of mind in which these perceptions occur. If this is so they are not comparable with altered states of consciousness arising from meditation etc. which each have a feeling-tone and other qualities that adepts recognize as distinctive. If we cannot say "mystic-like" as we can "dream-like", we have no reason to distinguish mystical states of mind or try to treat them, on this basis, as a product of some specific form of psycho-physiological functioning. All precedent points to the fact that state-specific phenomena have specific qualities, that we do not find this in mystical cases or rather we cannot show that there are such qualities is a strong reason for assuming that they are not tied to some marked change in psycho-physiological functioning. Even the spiritual outlook, characterized above, does not represent a change in the state of consciousness but merely a change in the way self-identity and the world are perceived. Though the change is marked there is no suggestion that the spiritual are in anything other than a mundane waking state and even though peace etc. may give this state a certain distinctive tone that everyday states lack, there is nothing sufficiently distinctive about the 'state of experiencing' or the contents of consciousness to distinguish it as a unique and identifiable state of mind. If there is no distinctive state of mind and mystical perceptions do not clearly form a type, taken in conjunction with the fact that we have not identified any physiological state, there appears to be no basis for an analogy with sleep-dreaming.

There is one third consideration on which I would place a lot of weight. As argued in chapter 3, there is a qualitative difference between perceptions, including mystical perceptions, and every other kind of mental imagery

and impression which, if they appear real to us at all, do not do so for long. Dreams and hypnogogic imagery, for example, belong to the latter class as do all other state-specific phenomena with the possible exception of the borderline case of 'lucid dreaming' and we therefore have no precedent for believing that sensory or quasi-sensory perceptions are specific to particular forms of metabolic functioning. If concrete perceptions are tied only to whatever particular processes underlie sensation and not to whatever is the overall form of metabolic functioning, we could never say of a perception as we can of a dream "you only feel/hear that because you are in a particular form of functioning". Even mirages are not tied to any syndromic activity of the body. The weight of this point depends on whether, as I do, you believe that there is a fundamental distinction between perception and, for a want of a better all-embracing term, imagination that is both descriptive and empirical but taken all in all there appears to be very little reason to pursue a syndromic form of explanation as there is no evidence that the mystic is in any identifiable psycho-physiological state, trauma apart, and this by itself will not suffice to explain mystical perception as sleep does dreams.

B) A MECHANISM LINKING PHYSIOLOGY AND PERCEPTION.

If ever we were to identify the physiological factors relevant to the occurrence of mystical perception it would still be necessary to describe the process through which these factors affect perception. It is not enough to say "x sensors have been activated he will see green" for, without showing how activation results in this specific perception, it cannot be assumed that the activation and perception belong to one and the same integrated process. There are, in fact, good reasons for

supposing that awareness may be a product of some quite separate system from that of sensory stimulation even if it is parasitic on this. The principal reason is that sensory stimulation does not entail awareness. In sleep, for example, like the lower organisms we are stimulated by and manage to respond to the environment - thus showing that as organisms we have been stimulated quite adequately yet we may not be aware of any of this activity. It can be shown that in sleep we register changes of temperature, that our neurones fire in their specialized way to noises and our bodies respond automatically - increasing heat, shaking off blankets, moving away from pressure points etc. Even when awake there is a great deal of stimulation and response taking place all the time which we are not normally aware of unless our attention is drawn to it. We are rarely aware of our own 'body language', let alone our more subtle responses and, as discussed in 'selective attention' in chapter 3, there is always a great deal more that we might be aware of at any one moment than we are actually aware of. If this is so there is no direct connection between stimulation of various nerves etc. on the one hand and awareness arising from such activity on the other and, whilst it may be that filtering processes are built in to an integrated system, it could be that perception is the product of an altogether separate system albeit one parasitic on stimulation. One might liken perception in this latter case to a video monitor that decodes stimuli which can be activated automatically by noise, movement etc. within its range or which can be turned on and off, zoomed in and out by hand or according to a programme which bears little relationship to whatever level of activity is within its potential to monitor. Such a model might fit the nature of experience in relation to stimulation quite well but, whatever is the case, since

if x sensors are stimulated - though, if we see anything as a result we will only see green, say - we do not necessarily see anything at all as a result of this activation it is naive to assume that identification of whatever physiological activity is correlated with perception is 9/10ths of the description.

It has to be said that our knowledge of the relationship between stimulation and perception in mundane cases, let alone mystical ones, is almost nil. Kluver has offered an account of the way physiology shapes perception in the case of drug-induced experiences. Identifying four basic forms drug-induced experience takes, 'the lattice, the cobweb, the tunnel and the spiral', he offers an explanation of how each of these characteristic impressions are related to changes in metabolism. For instance, 'the tunnel' may arise from 'the way in which retinal space is mapped onto cortical space. If a straight line in the visual cortex represents a circular pattern on the retina, then stimulation is straight lines occurring in states of cortical excitation could produce a sensation of concentric rings, or a tunnel form' (11). Though in the case of mystical perception we have nothing as characteristic as the 'tunnel' perception to work with, were we able to offer some account of the perception in terms of the particular forms of stimulation with which the experience was associated, we could accept that we had a full naturalistic description. However, though I do not doubt that the mechanisms might one day be understood - in the light not only of television but of self-monitoring robotics, I see no insuperable barrier to understanding perception in naturalistic terms - since we have neither identified the processes correlated with mystical experience nor the mechanisms that transcribe their activities into perception, that day is clearly a long

way off and, for the time being therefore, no causal theory of perception, mystical or otherwise, can be offered.

Despite the various hypotheses reviewed at the beginning of the section, it is clear that we have, as yet, nothing resembling a compelling naturalistic description of mystical experience either in terms of some particular process or in state-specific terms. This is not to rule out the possibility that limbic structures, say, or neuropathy, have some relevance but only that alone they would not begin to answer all the questions we might wish to ask about the physiology of mystical perceptions. Apart from the difficulty of getting any physiological evidence in the case of mystical perception the main obstacle to progress would appear to be the difficulty we have in characterizing these perceptions. If we could take, say, Charles Finney's account - quoted above - strip it of its religious claims without distorting or over-simplifying it and treat the sensation of waves of electricity described there as typical of all mystical experience, we might begin to home in on the processes that could be responsible or at least eliminate much that is irrelevant to our enquiry. However, this we cannot do for, in so far as we can penetrate the ideology of the descriptions at all, it is clear mystical perception is a blanket term for a great variety of experience and, worse, in each case the alterations to perception are not limited and specifiable but complex changes in one or more sensory systems. If the 'divine', defined so differently in every case, does not point to some single process, it may not only be that we are looking for a number of different metabolic correlates but, if this is the case, a number of different mechanisms linking physical activity and perception also. In spite of these difficulties, I nonetheless remain committed to the possibility of a

a physiological description whether or not, should we ever have one, we could understand the experience fully in such terms. My reasoning is that, since there is evidently a general relationship between perception and physiology as also between some mystical perceptions and physiology, it is simpler to explain all cases of perception in terms of such a relationship than to try to introduce theological concepts which, apart from being beyond verification, are applicable only to some cases or mentalistic concepts which appear quite superfluous in addition to creating insuperable problems. My view is re-inforced in the case of mystical perception by its relationship with traumatization - a psycho-physiological condition - that clearly plays a role in the description of these cases albeit one that I cannot describe. However, it is one thing to assert reasonably enough that a description of mystical experience is possible within a biological framework and quite another to show where this might lead us if a description of the framework cannot be provided.

II

NATURAL DESCRIPTIONS AND THE REDUCTION OF EXPERIENCE.

Given the possibility of some naturalistic description of mystical experience, the question begged is whether or not we would accept it as a full account of the experience. There are three points to be considered, in the first two of which the completeness of the description on offer is irrelevant. 1. Does the experience inform us about anything other than the workings of our metabolism? If it does not the commonest criterion for reduction to naturalistic terms has been met. 2. Regardless of our answer to the first question, is it ever possible to say of a perception - however maladaptive - that it is one and the same thing as the processes which give rise to it? This is a question about the level of description required to account for a phenomenon for, even if we take the epiphenomenalist view that perception arises from and can be entirely

explained in terms of physical processes, it is not at all clear that such an explanation provides us with a useful description of the product.

3. If we can show a relationship between perception and physiology but cannot show how a process transcribes into the experience we have, there is room for a third argument as to the sufficiency of a naturalistic account. This is that, not only may perception arise from a quite different process than the one indicated by the identification of a correlated physiological activity, but that there is no necessity that the two processes - if there are two - even have the same ontological status. Being a creature of the times I am not smitten by idealism and if there are peculiarities about the workings of mind and perception - as there undoubtedly are in the case of mystical experience - I would prefer to trace these back to the mysteries of metabolism than to complicate matters further by adding a world of mind to that of matter. Yet idealism has a long history and will not go away until the fullest description of mind/perception has been given in naturalistic terms and no discussion of reduction would be complete without at least mentioning the possibility that in no event is reduction justified. I consider these questions to see if there is any simple course to take should a natural description one day be given. My conclusion, based on the first two considerations alone, is that simple reduction will not be an option in the case of mystical experience whatever description of the physiology of this experience we are one day offered. It is for this reason that, in the final section, I go on to examine the implications mystical experience appears to have for an understanding of ourselves and the world notwithstanding my acceptance that a physiological description of it may also be given.

1. PERCEPTION AND THE WORLD.

The sole criterion normally used to determine whether a naturalistic

account is a sufficient description is the information value our perceptions are thought to have. If it is the case that all our perceptions have a physiological basis, then all perceptions tell us something about the workings of metabolism in general and our own metabolism in particular and thus have a diagnostic value but the question is whether they tell us anything else that could not be deduced from a knowledge of physiology alone. In mundane cases it is clear that some do and some don't. If, say, I see "stars" floating before my eyes and by all the tests I can apply, alone and in conjunction with others, I am forced to the conclusion that they are giving me no true information about the world, then there seems little else but to accept that this is a characteristic effect or by-product of blood pressure on sight, a knowledge of which alone would enable me to predict the occurrence of the phenomenon. In fact we do not even need a detailed naturalistic explanation to accept a reduction for, as in the case of tinnitus, though we do not know for sure what causes it, for all practical purposes it suffices to say "its his ears playing up again". However, it would be obtuse, except in the context of an optical test perhaps, to say of most perceptions which we have reason to treat as informative, that they only show that our optics are working normally for we accept that these are also telling us something about our sensory environment. We already know what type of perception I should have under certain physical conditions but the particular view I have from my window cannot be deduced from any knowledge of physiology or abstract account of the way in which it is stimulated. Even in mundane cases we do sometimes have difficulty in deciding whether a perception is informative or not. We might be taken in by the noises of tinnitus on our first experience of it and it is not always easy to determine whether we are hot because we are running a fever or because it is a hot day - it is even possible in the extremity of hypothermia that we may feel warm

when air and body both are cold. Nevertheless we assume that, should we take the trouble, there are scientific ways of determining the status of our perceptions. However, it is not at all clear that the information value a perception has can always be determined unequivocally.

Should a perception be patently maladaptive, I walk into doors perhaps, I will have no difficulty in deciding that my senses are conveying false information and will readily accept that misjudgement in this case arises from brain lesions. It is perhaps worth pointing out in passing that, whilst in all cases where we have knowledge of the physiological background of maladaptive perception, we find morbidity, which, if we had any doubts, confirms maladaptivity, the discovery of morbidity does not necessitate that the subject's perceptions will be maladaptive. One might imagine the case where a tumour on my optic nerves causes me to see blue where everyone else sees red and vice versa. Though it may be unaesthetic and out of step where the conventional use society makes of colour is concerned, the major function of colour vision, i.e. the differentiation of objects around us, is being performed by my abnormal perception and it is not therefore maladaptive. A separate point, neither is it in any way false for sensory adaptivity is not at all the same thing as a scientific description. Since colour is not even a property of objects but only a consequence of the inter-action between environment and physiology, it is not false to see blue at one wavelength rather than another, merely abnormal. Though maladaptivity is the usual way in which we learn whether or not our perceptions are false, it can happen that our perceptions are false even when they are not patently maladaptive. For example, the ponzo effect makes it seem to us that rail-lines meet in the distance. Since we never reach the spot

where they seem to meet, we cannot apply the test of maladaptivity as I do if I walk into doors but must learn of the mistake in other ways. However, in the case of mystical perception, not only do we have no evidence of maladaptivity but, almost uniformly, we have no way of showing that these perceptions are false.

Whatever it is like, mystical perception is not like walking into a door or, as some L.S.D. experiencers do, believing that you can fly. Though it may be that mystics have a reduced efficiency, at least when inter-acting with a complex and artificial environment, there is no evidence that mystical perception leads to injury, shortens life or is associated with any other disadvantage common to maladaptive perceptions. It is not that these perceptions, like retinal dots, have no consequences, they do but none of the consequences gives the subject reason to think his perceptions are false. Nor is there any way to establish on other grounds that the claims about these perceptions are false. As discussed in chapter 1, many mystical claims are inherently unfalsifiable and, whilst therefore we may suspect their meaningfulness, we could never prove that these claims did not relate to some state of affairs in this world or another. Unlike claims about pink elephants, claims about love, design, divinity, inter-relationship etc. are within the realm of logical possibility for these could cogitably be true of some world whether or not, in fact, they are and therefore we are not even in the position to treat them as false until proved otherwise. Taken together with the fact that we have no evidence of morbidity - which would suggest if not necessitate reduction - there is no compulsion to reduce which is no doubt why mystical perception, unlike proven hallucinations and illusions, is a topic of so much interest.

The fact that mystical perceptions are not patently maladaptive or false does not mean that they are informative. We, after all, have no empirical verification and they may be false but of such a nature that this could not be demonstrated in any way. Many who accept a scientific cosmology may think such a position reasonable and point to other examples where private experiences are beyond testing and from which good consequences sometimes, fortuitously, flow. However, it is equally possible to explain the lack of verification in ways which do not over-stretch credulity. Mystics generally claim that the objects of their perception are non-material and we should not therefore expect to verify these claims using methods developed for physical claims. There are also subtler arguments. For example, mystical claims may be informative but of such a nature that the information is not understood in the form it is presented or that they are informative without being of the least consequence and in neither case would we then expect the improved adaptivity and predictive advantage knowledge usually brings. As to the first possibility, since we are dealing with sensory claims and not with claims couched in scientific form, there is no reason to expect to find the god of mystical experience 'out there' in the form mystics describe. The fact that spaceships have failed to find God or microscopes a universal fluid of love does not mean that such claims yield no true information. Just as you will not find colour in a scientific description of reality, yet we know the perception of it gives valuable information about the world albeit in an encrypted form, so mystical experience may just be the way the complex and sensitive instrument our body is, conveys and represents certain information to us. Since scientific apparatus tells us that there are many forces in the world of which we have no immediate knowledge, it is not impossible that, under certain conditions, mystics do become aware of one or other of these in

encrypted form. I see no reason to suppose that the capacities of the body to detect aspects of the world are finite and restricted to the parameters we are accustomed to in everyday consciousness. On the contrary, we are of such complexity that there may well be other sophisticated modes of functioning yielding information which we do not recognize as such or know how to make use of. It is thought birds migrate using magnetic patterns, if we had such information available to us, would we recognize it for what it was or know how to use it? The argument here is not that mystics do have some such information but that it is possible they do and therefore we cannot make too much of the fact that mystical perception does not inform us about things which we can straightforwardly verify. Equally, regarding the second point, it is possible that mystics have stumbled upon facts which are of no possible value or use to anyone at all. Though we are used to informative perceptions giving advantages - the sighted are better placed than the blind - there is no logical connection between knowledge and advantage and science itself has discovered many arcane items of information which it can do nothing at all with. Even in everyday cases much that we see and hear is of no conceivable use to us yet we do not doubt the veridicality of our perceptions on this ground. Though, in this case, there is no reason why mystical claims should not be verified, it would nonetheless explain why mystical 'knowledge' could be so unlike the twentieth century paradigm of knowledge which gives us power over the environment etc. The point is that, if a perception is neither clearly adaptive or unadaptive, the truth or falsity of the claims arising from it may be very difficult to determine.

Though there is no empirical evidence, it might even be argued that the

balance of probability favours the possibility that mystical perception conveys some sort of information about the world. I am not here thinking of pragmatic arguments, the value of believing x to be true as judged by the consequences of so believing is no criterion of its truth value. Mystics may well have better integrated personalities as a result of their experiences for perfectly understandable psychological reasons but, in general, it is rather hard to define what we mean by good consequences and life-enhancement and in any event the value we attach to beliefs about x forms no part of an empirical description of the world. The sort of thing I am thinking of is, say, the generic identity of all living matter. It is an elementary observation that all living things do have a great deal in common at the biological level and going further back still, all material objects have a family resemblance at the level of chemistry or physics. That scientists prefer to concentrate on what distinguishes does not mean to say that a vision that dismisses the atomistic and concentrates on what unites us all in a family is false. That mystics who frequently hark on the common nature of all things, do not describe their vision in terms acceptable to scientists can no doubt be partly explained by the fact that few mystics are scientists and perhaps, more importantly, by the fact that they are reporting their sensory or quasi-sensory perceptions which in no case ever amount to objective descriptions anyway. Perhaps the divine and the teleological explanations frequently encountered also may take on more meaning if we started to look at the biosphere entire. Mystics could be thought of as perhaps offering a complementary picture to the one science usually presents, reporting on facts about the world taken as a whole that are disregarded by science. I do not know how strong such arguments are - I recognize they invite more questions than they answer - since neither I nor anyone

else knows how definitive the scientific account of reality currently on offer is. All I would suggest is that since mystical claims are not demonstrably false, we have a long way to go before ascertaining, even provisionally, whether or not they have any truth value.

If we cannot be sure whether a perception has information value, there are other considerations we might wish to introduce though it is hard to see how any of these could be decisive. It might be argued that the momentary and occasional nature of mystical experience in the context of trauma suggests reduction. We have no precedent for believing that veridical perceptions are tied to unusual metabolic conditions morbid or otherwise. It would be odd to argue that x can only be seen in some uncommon physiological circumstance, angina perhaps, or euphoria as if this were tantamount to the privileged position of an observer with a special set of instruments. However, if we did have rarely used powers of perception it would follow that they might only be revealed in an uncommon circumstance. It could also be argued that being traumatized, the witness of mystics, like that of drunks, is inherently unreliable. It seems worth making two points about this. Firstly, traumatization is not necessarily a state of extreme psycho-physiological disorder such that we must discount the witnesses testimony unless it is verified by supporting evidence for shock comes in varying degrees. Secondly, the mystics claims have to do with a perception that is universally declared to be clear and unmistakable and not simply, if at all, to do with their mundane impressions which may well be hazy and unreliable. I do not think their case then is comparable with the claim that a drunk might make that he definitely remembers seeing x though he cannot remember where or when, if only because of the unanimity of mystics as to what it is that is clear and unmistakable. The perception is not randomly

remembered nor does it, as it were, appear to accidentally impress itself on the subject as might be the case with the drunk's perceptions.

Certainly we have no general reason to dismiss the mystics' claims as we might the alcoholic's for there is no evidence that, taken as a group, they have lost touch with reality and their life-long insistence that their experiences are informative should count for something. One final thought is that we have no precedent for believing that claims arising from a varied group of sense perceptions are invariably false. Mirages and tinnitus give rise to characterizable perceptions but mystical perceptions are not so easily typified and thus, like our perceptions in general, there is no reason to suppose a priori that they are not informative. None of these thoughts in itself carries much weight but certainly they do not all point in any clear direction. The problem remains whether, in some way, mystical perceptions are informative or not for they cannot be shown to be false and the lack of verification is by no means conclusive.

Unlike most everyday perceptions, we then have no clear way in the case of mystical perception of determining truth value and thus no obvious reason to deny that it yields - in sensory form at least - some information about the environment. In theory we could hold to this position regardless of the kind of naturalistic description which might be offered, since there is no necessity for morbid perception to be uninformative, though perhaps in the face of clear evidence of disease, one might accept reduction to naturalistic terms. We have no such evidence however for unlike other, more certain, victims of misperception, mystics are not, as a group, to be found in the doctor's surgery nor come to harm as a consequence of their experiences. The situation is without precedent but as there is neither clear reason nor even good reason to speculate

that knowledge of the metabolic processes involved will enable us to explain all that needs explaining about mystical perception, the main criterion for reduction to naturalistic terms has clearly not been met.

2. PERCEPTION AND PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION.

The second area of difficulty concerns the order of explanation required to account for a phenomenon. Whether or not perception is an epiphenomenon of metabolic processes, it is not at all clear that a naturalistic description would fully describe it and, for this, perhaps a higher order of description is required which may not be reducible or transcribed to physiological terms. In terms of this argument it makes no difference whether the perception is informative or not for mirages have a character over and above any simple physical description quite as much as some more veridical perception.

A common example given to show the sufficiency of naturalistic descriptions in some cases is the way in which heat and light can be explained wholly as by-products of electrical activity. However, even in this case, there is room to doubt whether in fact an account of electrical activity amounts to a full description of its epiphenomena. In the first place, heat and light are separable from their cause. Light, we are told, travels endlessly through the universe long after the star's activity which gave rise to it may have ceased and, certainly, my bed remains warm long after the electric blanket has been switched off. We may therefore talk about these properties of electrical activity quite outside of the context of electrical activity. Secondly, regardless of whether these properties are physically separable or not we can talk of them in quite different terms from those in which we would describe the process which gave rise to them for they have an identity and function over and above that which

they have in relation to electrical activity. If I blame the excessive heat for the wilting of my plants or the burning of my supper, I am referring specifically to the role heat plays in my world and not to that played by electrical activity. One might say "you burnt the supper because the stove was turned too high" but in view of the separability of cause and effect - my supper may have been cooked on pre-heated stoves and left there too long - the cause of the heat may play no part in the description of the events. Therefore, even in the case of the entirely explicable epiphenomena of physical activity, it might be that an account of the processes involved would be too simplistic to describe the by-products or the separate roles and functions these might have.

These two difficulties might arise in the case of sense perception also, even if this is treated simply as an epiphenomenon of various physical processes. One simply does not know whether perception is separable from its causes in the way that heat and light are. Various experiences of an out-of-the-body type suggest that it may be but, in any event, we can talk of perception as if it had an entirely distinctive identity and even show that perception qua perception plays an independent role such that it can have a feed-back on the very processes on which it is said to be parasitic. We can talk about a beautiful sight or mystical vision, the happiness the sight of x gave us, the consequences of seeing x or believing we see x none of which is deducible from an account of optics or the way these are stimulated. It is also noteworthy that there is a feed-back from perception to sensory process such that any on-going account of sensation must treat the nature of the perception one has - which cannot be deduced from knowledge of physical operations - as a separate causal factor in the process in its own right. Not liking what I see, I can close my eyes which, unlike the involuntary closing of my eyes in bright

light, is an action that establishes its independent role in the very sequence of which it is here supposed to be a by-product. Quite simply it does not make sense to attempt to describe the world of sensory experience solely in physical terms for, even though such an account may be given, its higher order functions could not be translated into naturalistic terms. Thus even if we had a naturalistic description of mystical experience and established that mystical perception was not informative, there would still be good reason not to accept such a simplistic description unless, on being given such an account, mystics henceforth totally disregarded their perceptions qua perceptions and talked of them as they might tinnitus only in naturalistic terms.

3. IDEALISM.

Until we have the sort of mechanism that Klüver offered for the perception of tunnels to account for perception in general and mystical perception in particular, it is not entirely self-evident that sensory awareness - as an aspect of consciousness - could be accounted for in naturalistic terms even if perception was known to be correlated with various physical processes. As discussed above, there is no logical relationship between stimulation and sensory awareness, even if the latter is parasitic on the former, and therefore no reason to assume that they are both parts of a single system. It may be that all that will be needed is a more complex naturalistic account involving two or more physiological systems but, until this is ascertained, it can be argued that mind belongs to an entirely different category from natural activity and not simply to a different physiological process. Such arguments have a long history which I cannot do justice to here but, as the need for a different order

of explanation shows, mind and physical activity are not self-evidently of the same category. There appears to be nothing else comparable to consciousness in all the workings of nature and we rarely think of our experience in such a context. Since, illness apart, we have no need to think of our perception in relation to physiology and many do not treat mind or subjectivity in these terms, idealism comes closer to describing the way experience actually appears to us to be than epiphenomenalism. In the case of mystical experience this may be especially true since this usually has little if anything to do with the world and, quite often, does not even appear to involve our everyday sensory processes at all, thus there is even less reason than usual to conceive of it in naturalistic terms. As there is, as yet, only the slightest evidence for the correlation of sensory awareness with metabolic activity and none showing that stimulation and perception form a single chain, it would not be too difficult to come up with explanations that at most place mind in some tangential relationship with physical processes. One might accept that we only see green when certain sensors fire but explain this apparent parasiticism in terms of the synchronization of two quite separate worlds each having a different ontological status. Though there are a number of oddities in the empirical world, say, the continued common identity of sub-atomic particles which have been split, which would more readily be explained if a metaphysical realm were added to nature, I reject all such arguments on the sole ground that they are unnecessarily complex. Why multiply worlds to explain oddities until we have exhausted the possibility of explaining them in terms of the material - the existence of which alone is not in doubt? Thus I reject all notions that perceptions, subjectivity etc. are part of some gossamer substance that pervades the grosser material of nature but which cannot be described in natural terms

simply because all such ideas are, cosmologically, extravagant and need the discipline of parsimony. I would not therefore take the idealist position into account when considering the sufficiency of naturalistic descriptions of experience though it is perhaps worthwhile pointing out that such a position exists.

In the light of the first two points alone there would seem to be no clear reason to reduce mystical perception to a naturalistic description however full this might be. Mystical claims are not evidently false and could yet prove to be informative in some way despite the current lack of evidence for this. Nor would we wish to stop talking about mystical perception separately from whatever aetiology it had since no explanation of the latter is likely to fully describe all aspects of the former and thus these experiences qua experiences would continue to need description in higher order terms. Since we do not have any knowledge of the metabolic processes involved nor of the mechanism which transcribes metabolic activity into such unusual perceptions, there is not in fact the slightest reason to think that, should we ever have such a description, this alone would suffice for us to comprehend mystical perception and the role it plays in the world of human experience. Therefore, though for the various reasons outlined elsewhere, I can only believe that perception and mystical perception alike have a biological context, I do not believe we would ever wish to explain away either simplistically in physical terms. If not reduction, we must either leave mystical experience on the shelf or seek to find ways to determine whether or not it does inform us about some state of affairs over and above the workings of our own physiology. Given the lack of verification for mystical claims, I will not try to make something of these head-on, rather I propose to look now at the

questions mystical experience pose for our view of ourselves and seek to argue that we can learn a lot from it and that, by pursuing the lines indicated, we might one day be in a position to evaluate the claims mystics make.

III

MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE AND HUMAN ORGANIZATION - A WAY FORWARD.

If a naturalistic explanation is unlikely to suffice as a description of all that mystical experience encompasses - not only the sociology and the possibility of its being informative but also the very concepts we apply to humanity i.e. identity, personality etc. which perhaps can only be identified with the workings of the organism as a whole - I believe it is inevitable that we must look at the problem in terms of a higher order of explanation. This is not to dispense with a simple physiological account which will be needed to underpin any model offered but to supplement it with a level of description in terms of which the problems posed by mystical experience can be understood and answered. My approach here is to take three questions mystical experiences raise which challenge our usual notions of human organization. These are, firstly, the possibility of describing experience in non-subjective terms which has implications for the concept of ego-identity. Secondly, the possibility of personality complexes which cannot be related to individual functioning. Thirdly, the possibility that we may recognize as meaningful ways of interpreting the world which are not derived from intellect. I choose these questions rather than tackle mystical claims head-on because I believe that, in answering these, we may provide a context in which we can understand why claims about Union, God etc. are made. The model of

human functioning I outline is designed to solve three particular questions but I hope offers the prospect of going on some day to examine the content of mystical claims within a context that relates them to the empirical world. As hard cases make bad law, I should here point out that the model of human organization I suggest should not be judged solely in relation to the degree it solves some of the questions which mystical experience poses. Though I no more than touch upon its wider applicability, if it does not have universal application, it is quite useless for it is my belief that, if mystical experience can be shown to have any importance for us, this cannot be done by treating it in isolation but only by relating it to the wider biological picture in which we operate. In attempting to find a way of incorporating mystical experience into the mainstream of knowledge and thus putting ourselves in a position to ascertain whatever value it might have, I recognize that I reach the border where analysis gives way to speculation. However, if nothing else, I hope to provide food for thought for future researchers who, having more data at their disposal, may be better placed to decide in which direction we are most likely to find a satisfactory framework but placing mystical experience firmly in the context of human operation does not appear to me to be a bad place to start.

1. MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE AND SELF-IDENTITY.

Ego is a concept that has been defined in various ways but in every account the self and individuality are invariably declared to be all-embracing. It is always said to be the sole form of human organization which physiology in its obscure way serves. Put crudely, man is Mr. Smith or Mrs. Jones, a particular and unique identity on two legs who, even in sleep, reveals his idiosyncrasy in dreaming. A doubtful concept at the best of times, I believe it breaks down entirely in the case of mystical experience.

Pace Searle, I believe that subjectivity is not an integral characteristic of consciousness unless the concept of subjectivity is used as a rag-bag into which every perception of identity is meaninglessly thrown. At the moment of mystical experience, the mystic finds that his sense of personal identity, individuality and autonomy has dissolved into or, at the very least, has been subsumed within the identity of another. Whatever the precise nature of the new identity he, for a moment, is no longer seeing whatever he sees as Mr. Jones, a remark which holds true for monistic cases as well for solipsism is not compatible with the definition and particularity that ego-identity implies. Equally in the spiritual phase that follows, extended identity sets limits to the subjectivity of perception. More commonly we find the same loss of the subjective if not its replacement or partial replacement by a non-individual identity. In trauma and the depersonalization typical of a variety of physical and 'mental' illnesses subjectivity is broken down as it is in more natural moments such as the hypnopompic state, moments of euphoria etc. when self-perception is greatly reduced without consciousness necessarily being lost. The point is that, at the descriptive level, it is meaningless to call non-subjective states or states in which a wholly non-personal identity is reported, ego states for ego is only a descriptive concept and not an empirical one and must break down if it cannot be characterized at all. I do not doubt the value of the concept of self if used in a restricted sense and I can accept that it is applicable to a wide range of self-perceptions and we certainly use it of our own varying perceptions of ourselves, which change with age, time of day, state of health etc. but we must also recognize that some instances fall beyond description in terms of self-identity. To describe all cases meaningfully, the concept of identity must be made more complex at the

expense of comprehensiveness such that we can talk of different types of identity rather than various sub-types of ego.

I would also point out, as it also relates to the question of the sufficiency of the concept of ego as a description and because it is relevant to the model I wish to propose to replace it, that there is no reason either to apply the concept of self to periods of unconsciousness. By any standard there simply is no subjectivity in sleep, fugue states, coma etc. - it is incoherent to offer a description of identity that encompasses states of identity and non-identity - and it is mere fancy to extend the concept of ego, as Freud did, to all our modes of functioning on the basis that there may be some personal content in some dreams. In such states ego has neither a descriptive nor an experimental basis and we have no right to infer from subjectivity in most conscious moments to subjectivity in unconsciousness. For this reason I would not accept ego as a comprehensive description of identity even if it was adequate as a description of all conscious states which, I have argued, in any event it is not.

We need a new model of identity that covers the descriptions of non-self identities reported in mystical experience and states, conscious or otherwise, in which there is no subjectivity as well as those states in which consciousness is experienced in terms of self. In providing a model that will accomplish this, I believe we will begin to understand what mystical experience is about.

2. MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE AND PERSONALITY.

As discussed in chapter 4 the spiritual orientation, which always follows

mystical perception and is usually preceded by it, is a syndromic personality state exhibiting a very typical outlook and set of values and feelings..

The point I wish to make here is that we cannot, except in terms of 'brainwashing', accommodate in the context of individuality personality complexes which crop up in a standardized form worldwide and in all ages, often briefly, regardless of prevailing culture. Since neither brainwashing nor the internalization of religious paradigms of personality alone could account for all the cases in which this complex is reported, it has to be accepted that the combination of feelings such as 'basic trust', altruism etc. owes nothing to acquisition from culture, kin and peers.

The only alternative - unless one wishes to argue that this stereotypical personality is acquired during some universal phase that all humans go through, the foetal, perhaps, or is an evolutionary artefact - is that the complex reflects a non-individual human persona, something we simply are, be it a universal characteristic of human functioning or the result of some particular and abnormal form of metabolic condition. We are familiar with cases of both. We can talk of clinical depression, a mind-state not presumed to owe anything to the individuality of the victim's acquired personality and of paranoia which seems to be an analogous case. Since there is no reason to think of spirituality in terms of morbidity, it is more reasonable to treat it as a universal product of human functioning albeit one which is rarely fully manifested in human consciousness. We can talk of childhood psychology, adolescent psychology, the psychology of old age etc. which, like the spiritual orientation, set individuality in quite characteristic non-personal contexts and it is my view that the spiritual outlook is similarly an aspect of the human, rather than the individual, condition. The point being that, if this is so, we need a model of human personality that can be described both in terms of the individual and of the universal and non-personal for any explanation in terms of

ego-identity alone would be insufficient.

If it is not an aberration, like clinical depression, it may be that the spiritual complex plays a central, rather than a marginal, role in the definition of personality. I believe it could be argued from the experience of mystics that this complex is central to the concept of human development and maturity. The spiritual orientation, in any marked form, is a temporary phase described by experients in such terms as 'becoming fully human for the first time', 'whole', 'complete' etc. In hindsight, though the phase passes, mystics trace subsequent personality changes such as an increasing confidence, altruism, fortitude etc. - which many authors have noted - to this period in an organic rather than in a contingent way. My belief is that, not only can we identify a spiritual complex, but we could relate it to personality development and emotional maturity. The possible peak-age for mystical experience in the late teens would be very significant in this context and we could suggest that whereas, in the case of mystics, the integration of individual and non-individual traits is sudden and often unstable - several shifts may be needed - the same sort of integration occurs in non-mystics gradually and thus less noticeably. It is the sudden contrast between old and new personality which needs to be recognized descriptively and which may give us an insight into the workings and nature of maturation. There are two possible objections to such an argument. Firstly, that long term changes in personality in the case of mystics, if indeed there are any, for mystics could be deceiving themselves, are entirely contingent on the way the experience is construed and on the simple accidents of life. One is likely enough to attempt to 'improve' oneself, perhaps in line with religious models, if one is certain a god, in some form or another,

exists and that his aim is human betterment and salvation and society will knock off everyone's rough edges in the course of time. I would only say to this that, if we recognize maturity in general and accept that in most cases it occurs gradually, the sudden onset - though not necessarily completion - of the same sort of maturity in the case of mystics, must be significant and would count against any argument that maturation is solely a product of contingent factors, rather it would indicate a coupling together of innate and acquired patterns. The second objection would run that human maturity is too nebulous a concept to be meaningful, at best no more than a cultural stereotype. If so there are, at most, only cultural stereotypes of maturity and we have no other way of discriminating between the mature and the immature. As Runke believed that 'basic trust' authenticated a mature and rounded personality, I believe we do recognize a wider set of personality traits in which individuality should be set as marking a fully developed personality though these are not easy to define and certainly not quantifiable and, if you do not understand what I mean, I cannot explain it to you. However, though the notion that maturity is tied, consciously or unconsciously, to the workings of a spiritual complex would give substance to the concept of maturity which would have many implications for the evaluation of ourselves - we could provide a check-list of traits to determine authentic maturity and fulfillment of the potentialities of human character - I accept that any argument based on the long-term development of a mystic's character must be tenuous. Nevertheless, central or not, we are left with the problem of syndromic personality states which certainly are of a marked nature and brief duration and which cannot be understood in terms of individuality alone.

3. MEANINGFULNESS AND MYSTICAL CLAIMS.

The third challenge mystical experience poses for a rational view of humanity could be summarized as why do mystics make certain thematic but - in an empirical sense - meaningless claims about the world apparently without using normal intellectual procedures? To outline the problem I will need first to show that mystics do not use any normal method - empirical or tautological - to arrive at their claims and secondly show that their claims are not simply illogical. Taken in conjunction with the nature of the claims, I believe these considerations show that mystical claims, neither in form nor origin, bear any resemblance to any other type of human claim, sane or irrational. Mystics simply recognize that x is a meaningful and valid description of the way things are. The problem is how then are we to explain why it is mystics find their claims meaningful and expect others - mystics at least - to find them likewise?

In everyday cases there are two ways we usually come to give a meaning to experience, either by inference or by judgment but we have no reason to believe that mystics arrive at their claims - at least primarily - through either method. Regarding the first possibility it might be suggested that mystics make inferences about their experience from whatever knowledge they may have of religious doctrine. At first sight this seems plausible for probably everyone is acquainted at least with a minimal level of religious teaching and might apply this such as it is to situations to determine whether theirs was an authentic experience of this or that. Yet, though familiar terms might be borrowed to describe what is otherwise indescribable, I doubt whether their use implies any such rational process. In monotheistic religions especially, terms such as God are rarely predicated in sufficient detail for anyone to be able to say that he had had an authentic experience of, for example, the Christian God. Unlike

a vision of the Virgin for a Roman Catholic, most mystical claims have to do with matters that have few recognized attributes and it is significant that there is never any attempt to justify the identification. Even theologians would have problems recognizing God in experience yet we never find signs of an intellectual process pointing out in what respects their experience was authentic or of any "I had better look that up" approach which would take time as we would if encountering some mundane object we were unfamiliar with but only an immediate appellation "this was God and I could not doubt the fact". That inference is not the main tool for determining the meaning of mystical perception is made clear by the fact that many mystics coin private terms to describe what they experienced - 'pure being' etc. By doing this they deny any possibility of inference. Nor do mystics appear to be analysing their perceptions in order to derive some meaning from them whether or not they have any religious knowledge. Just as, without knowing what it is our senses are presenting us with, we can just see that red is not the same as blue or square as round it might be thought that mystics are making 'judgments of perception'. One might, for example, realize that 'a presence' is a non-natural presence simply by comparison with everyday experience. In theory mystical perceptions might be quite revealing allowing experienced mystics to distinguish types, principal characteristics etc. and some mystics seem to claim that they know something about God from immediate recognition of what is or is not the case about their perception. There are two objections to this line of explanation. The first is that there is no logical necessity for us to find our perceptions meaningful in any way whatsoever. So, given the nature of mystical perception, it is something of a surprise that all experients do find them meaningful and, moreover, do not restrict themselves to basic

judgments but make sophisticated universal claims whether or not inference allows them to do so. The major difficulty however is that mystics appear to recognize that x is the case with the same immediate and unshakable conviction whether or not they have any concrete perception at all. In a case such as 'a flash of illumination ... a few seconds ... I had experienced a world mind ... I seemed to understand immediately, without effort, the meaning and truth of immortality, omniscience and omnipresence' (12) we have the usual sort of mystical insight but no cogitable basis either for judgment or inference at all. If mystical truth may be arrived at without some concrete perception of divine things, there is no logical relationship between perception and meaning in the case of mysticism.

Other arguments that mystical revelations arise from cognitive processes are equally unconvincing. Religious knowledge, unlike pure mathematics, would not appear to be tautologous knowledge. I doubt that one could deduce immortality in the same way that one could $2+2 = 4$ such that it is something we may know whether or not we have empirical illustrations of it nor do mystics ever claim that they worked out, say, that the universe must be love in any such way. Nor do mystics, unlike many ordinary religious, claim to know what they know on the basis of some authority - the bible perhaps. Mystics may use religious doctrine as a form of confirmation for their revelations but this is neither the origin of their claim nor are their claims offered to us subject to confirmation - Teresa of Avila, for instance, was dismissive of 'a certain confessor' who found himself unable to agree with what she simply 'knew' to be the case. Nor would I accept any argument about subliminal intellectual processes whether or not tied to sensory stimulation of which the experient

may be unconscious. I gave my reasons in chapter 3, the principal ones being that mystical revelation simply cannot be treated as a solution to anything and, if it is a solution, it is odd how modern atheists and medieval monks reach the same solution. Further, there is no evidence for such processes, no time for them to occur and, unlike genuine 'revelations' of this type, such as the benzene ring, provide no lasting solution nor can they even be worked out consciously, as it were, in reverse - one simply knows a mystical truth, it is not something that, once known, one can work towards demonstrating. I do not rule out the possibility that one or more of these processes plays a role in explaining how it is a mystic knows so immediately and certainly what he does but would argue that none offers a sufficient explanation of the origin of these claims.

If we cannot treat mystical claims as the product of rational thought processes, it might alternatively be argued that we could view them simply as idiosyncratic and illogical. We are after all free to imagine what we will and attribute whatever meaning we wish to our sensory experiences. There are three objections to such a line. The first is that we have no general reason to think of mystics as a group as either irrational or as obsessed by religious/supernatural matters and thus liable to apply such ideas randomly and in a wholly private way. Unlike the intellectually confused or those suffering from some mania, mystics, if anything, appear to be logical individuals, sticklers for detail and certainly do not all have such a religious background as might lead one to suspect that theirs is a neurotic nature obsessed by religious ideas. Mystics such as J. Trevor scrutinized and tried to test their illuminations in every way possible but still have not been able to concede even during the course of a lifetime that these brief episodes were delusions, wishful

thinking or whatever. Honest and sane men may easily be misled but that they believe they are making claims about that which is not personal and private but which has a universal significance and are often aware that such claims may make them look ridiculous - since whatever significance the claims have cannot be found in the public domain - is not what we would expect of the confused or the monomaniac. A second and more substantial objection is that the claims have a thematic quality or consistency which would appear to rule out simple idiosyncrasy. Though it is difficult to characterize mystical claims, they do not appear to have that diversity which we have come to expect from wholly private thoughts. It is significant in this context that many authors have sought to analyse mystical claims in various ways, treating them as if they were internally consistent, amenable to logic and to have discerned common threads running through them sufficient to relate them to models such as the 'path', the 'seven mansions' etc. It is not merely that they bear a certain compatibility with religious doctrines of one sort or another which make such activities appear reasonable but, if compared one with another both in content and form, that they do appear to constitute a recognizable family perhaps to the point where we could agree about whether a case did or did not belong to it. What criteria we would use I do not know - perhaps their unfalsifiability, their subject matter God, love, union - but this appearance of a theme and of a common form marks out the type from the simply random and idiosyncratic. The differing backgrounds of the experiencers adds weight to this argument. The third objection is that mystics not only find that temporarily, when in the right frame of mind, they understand the meaning their experience has - whether or not they can understand it later when often only the certainty that it did have a meaning may remain - but others appear in some way to recognize

this meaning also. Mystics turned guru attempt to impart their insight to others - though perhaps significantly not often in rational ways - and groups often give the appearance of being on the same wavelength. This might prove a most interesting area of study for, if it could be shown that mystics genuinely understood each other in some way it would be the strongest argument of all against the charge that mystical claims are simply private, idiosyncratic and illogical for we could not understand or even empathize with another's irrationality. The impression I have is that these claims, if not rational and thus allowing easy access by all, nonetheless do not simply have private meanings either and thus whatever significance they do have cannot be sought in the personal domain alone.

If we do not know how mystics come to know what they know yet have reasons for believing that they are making some sort of trans-personal claim, it is worth looking at these claims to see whether, as a group, they really bear any resemblance to other empirical or tautologous knowledge at all. My thinking here is that, if we find these claims meaningful, it cannot be for the same reasons that we find other claims to do with the public domain meaningful and thus we will have to explain the meaningfulness of mystical claims - at least for mystics and their associates - in other terms. As argued in chapter 1, mystical claims are rarely in a form which allows verification and never have been verified or falsified which distinguishes them as a group at the outset. It is also very curious that we can do nothing with these claims. Theology has sought to show that they make sense in terms of this or that cosmology but since these models remain unverified they are, for all intents and purposes, beyond approach in terms of the world. Neither, taking mystical claims as a

starting point, can we work back or forward from them as was done in the case of the dream of the benzene ring to show to what it is they relate and thus whether or not they have a place in the scheme of things. It is also very curious the way most mystics recognize the meaning momentarily with absolute clarity yet simply cannot say later what this was beyond the fact that it was certainly of some immense significance both for themselves and for mankind. Others try to capture it in words only to find that they are making statements of questionable meaningfulness or, as when Boehme wrote of the 'signatures' of plants, statements which are apparently nonsensical. If ever I understood 'relativity theory' I do not do so now yet I have ways of going back to the understanding I had of it and thus ways of making clear its meaning to others which mystics simply do not have - if you are to make a mystic of another, there is no rational way to do this. Not to labour the point, though, if put into theological terms, mystical claims make a certain minimal amount of sense, they are not otherwise translatable into terms graspable by the intellect. Thus it is not even a case of mystics versus non-mystics but mystical insight versus every other form of insight. Since theology offers us no reason to believe that the application of logic to these claims, which gives them an apparent meaningfulness in relation to the world, is an activity which can be justified, there is every reason to treat mystical insights and whatever significance they have for us as something entirely self-contained. Can there be ways of looking at things which have other than a private meaning yet whose meaning for us does not originate in rationality? My suggestion will be that mystical insights, and mystical perceptions likewise, belong to an arbitrary and internally coherent order of events to which, as humans, we all have access and can simply recognize but never analyse. The problem is to find a context in

which a transpersonal recognition that x is a valid description can be placed without accepting that such descriptions are the product of rationality - our own or God's - or that they tell us anything about the world at all for our ability to recognize mystical descriptions of life may only tell us something about our own nature.

Though these three questions might each be answered in various ways, taken together a common solution is indicated which, I believe, will in turn shed light on other aspects of mystical experience and perhaps better describe the nature of humanity generally. My proposal is simply to draw a distinction between subjectivity and everything else that constitutes human psycho-physiological functioning. My notion is that the functioning of the human organism can be described in two very distinctive ways which, presumably, at the physiological level represent distinct modes of operation. The human organism may well have developed to its present level of complexity without, until very recently, having developed the means to create individuality. Subjectivity I treat as an additional and specialized mode of operation which has arisen from some more sophisticated technique of information processing or simply a more sophisticated way of combining a number of long developed features such as memory. We therefore may talk of self and all that it stands for in relation to the activation of a particular pattern of neurological operation and, equally, offer a description of the human in non-personal terms for, it is important to point out - this not being an inheritance theory - that I do not believe that the development of subjectivity has subsumed our autochthonous organization into its workings. My reasons for believing that subjectivity is an operation parasitic on a non-personal structure rather than one which has incorporated all

aspects of functioning within one integrated and individualistic mode of organization are various. As discussed, even conscious awareness does not entail subjectivity and a description of unconsciousness - during which times we continue to function and respond to environment in terms of subjectivity is wholly inappropriate. Even in consciousness individual identity has little control over our bodily functions, our reactions or that whole range of impulse and behaviour we describe as instinctive and in times of crisis, such as trauma, we often find that subjectivity is pre-emptorily closed down to be replaced by a form of autonomic psycho-physiological functioning that requires a different order of description. Moreover, as in mysticism and deep dreaming, we are aware of another identity or of universal symbols which we simply cannot place in the context of self. I therefore believe we can talk of the biological machine in higher order terms as having two distinct forms of identity of which the primordial is primary and the subjective secondary - an order which does not match our usual perception. This increases the complexity of our understanding of human nature to the point where we may provide comprehensive descriptions of it yet not to the point where, as in the case of idealism or theological concepts of soul etc., it becomes ontologically extravagant. There is only one machine which, I believe, has a characteristic form of organization and a complementary higher order faculty which we wrongly assume to play a central role in its workings.

The point I am making about primordial organization is not that we can simply describe human physiology without reference to self but that this form of organization itself requires a higher order level of description than physiology alone could provide. Quite what this level, glimpsed in mystical experience, is like is something which needs to be investigated but it gives the appearance of having an identifiable character, sense of identity and a very distinctive way of representing the world to itself.

There is no reason to doubt that a complex organism such as the human being is capable of a level of self-expression which all members of the species manifest and which is the hallmark of their membership and a token of the common way in which they each, individually, function. Maybe it is quite natural for us at this level to see ourselves in terms of species, recognizing by their behaviour, perhaps, that other members likewise have a similar sense of identity, outlook and personality that is determined by context - roles and environmental demands - rather than by individuality. It should be noted that for now I am only suggesting that there may be an authentically human form of identity and I am not proposing that, like some hive creatures, perhaps, or like birds in migration, we have a transpersonal identity which coordinates the activities of individual members or which allows for communication between members in a non-material way. Mystics would in fact appear to be claiming that we do not merely have a family resemblance at this level but that we are quite literally joined together by supra-personal forces. This may be so, I would certainly wish to leave the possibility open, but I find no need to complicate matters to this degree in order to answer the questions that mystical experiences initially present us with. If we each have an identity derived from our common metabolisms we can understand to what it is mystics are referring and why it is others can recognize what they are talking about without becoming ontologically extravagant. Though we would function at this primordial or adamic level continuously, there is little reason for us to be aware of it in the normal course of events. One might imagine that when, so to speak, subjectivity is switched on it largely excludes any conscious awareness of this level though self may be compatible with some degree of consciousness of non-personal elements, especially of character, and, if my remarks above about maturation have any basis, we may conclude that there is no incompatibility between the awareness of the personal

and some impersonal contents. Of necessity I can say little else about this level of awareness. Mystics may do their best to describe what it feels like to view the world from the perspective of the merely human but since there is not even any reason to suppose that sense perception is the same at both levels - data processing may be quite different in the absence of the circuitry that, I believe, subjectivity is a part of - there is no reason to suppose that we can translate primordial ways of looking at things into terms recognizable by the self. It may be, however, should we be aware of this primordial vision, that we naturally enough recognize it and, treating it in its own terms, find it meaningful though beyond analysis in rational terms.

Depersonalization in various states and mystical claims about the dissolution of self into some greater whole become comprehensible in terms of this model. Once subjectivity has stopped, as it often seems to do in trauma, we continue to function autonomically - perhaps more efficiently in cases where the concerns of self are superfluous and a distraction from more pressing bodily needs - and, sometimes, we recognize or become submerged by an impersonal identity. One might imagine that our primordial nature is not often conscious at all but that when it is it is blissfully unaware of its own individuality and the particularity of its plight and only aware of its common identity with the species and more generally with the world of which it is part. This failure to consciously differentiate between self and others or, at least, to do so clearly may arise from poor data processing (subjectivity notwithstanding, without my glasses I feel more 'at one with the world') or it may be that this is the way we must necessarily view ourselves and our relationships in the absence of subjectivity however sophisticated

our information processing. Judging from mystical reports this adamic sense of identity is fairly distinctive and not subject to the degree of variation we find even in a restricted use of ego-identity and a perception of the world, or simply of existence, apparently seen without limitation or particularity, is invariably said to be quite different from any in which subjectivity is incorporated. It is interesting that mystics declare of this state that it is 'like coming home' and recognize that, 'at the deepest level, this is what I really was, what we all are' with a great deal of conviction and, taken together with the thematic nature of the claims, this allows me to suggest that it does have a distinctiveness and universality which identifies it as the authentic form of a non-subjective human sense of identity. The extended identity of the spiritual phase presumably represents a balance between the self and impersonal identity in consciousness, a balance which may shift. It would be pointless to attempt to evaluate extended or impersonal identities, they would only represent what the organism perceives itself, perhaps of necessity, to be but whilst clearly self has many advantages, we might regret that it is not more commonly balanced by irrational feelings of affinity given the devastation of the planet and, perhaps ultimately, of the species by those who are conscious only of the subjective dimension of identity.

Once we are able to talk of human as distinct from individual identity it also becomes easier to explain personality complexes, such as the spiritual, which appear to owe little to acquisition or to other aspects of individuality and it may be that these also give us some sort of picture of the character of the organism. We could simply talk of authentic human personality or, since natural man is unlikely to prove a paragon of virtue, childlike simplicity and trust, more probably of an authentic human personality complex, one of a number the organism manifests according to circumstance. I do not think it would be impossible

to demonstrate empirically whether or not we did respond to certain types of situation in universal rather than in idiosyncratic ways and show that this response - one might almost call it a posture involving, as I believe it does, coordinated changes in emotions, feeling, outlook etc. - could not have been acquired by all the subjects. The effects of such complexes may be tempered by subjectivity but, as we know, impulses ranging from altruism to anger are quite likely to overcome the most rational man and, what is more, equip him with a total syndromic mind set in terms of which his actions seem appropriate. The point is not that we have inherited assorted complexes from the past which we must do our best to smother but that, at one level, this is just what the organism - all human organisms - are like and this aspect of our nature cannot be entered into in any subjective or rational way. Quite what part the spiritual complex - altruistic, cooperative, trusting - plays at this level or what, if any, of the organism's postures it is representing, it is hard to say. If my remarks about maturation have any weight, we might think of the spiritual orientation as the most full developed aspect of an adamic personality coming increasingly to dominate the adult's nature but, whether this is so or not, I believe it is reasonable to suggest that, at this level, the organism is not only capable of non-individuated awareness but that it could also have evolved various psycho-physiological complexes one of which is the persona experienced in the spiritual phase. It is perhaps simpler to see these complexes as aspects of an integrated non-personal identity than to treat them, as we tend to, as isolated evolutionary artefacts which serve no purpose in the contemporary human economy beyond intruding into subjectivity and rationality often when we least want them to. Certainly any description of humanity must take into account the apparently impersonal nature of these complexes for they are characterizable,

come upon us suddenly and leave us almost as quickly. There is no other way in which we can understand why it is that the spiritual suddenly find themselves kitted out with a new, larger personality that authoritatively presents and challenges the self with a new vision of what they are, or should be, and transforms the way that they look at the world before, in Starbuck's terms, they feel a 'backsliding' and subjectivity reasserts itself. It is the cyclic nature of these intrusions and the contrast they present which demands description and explanation.

Though the only point I am making is that, by hiving off subjectivity, we can explain syndromic changes in personality in terms of the organism's rather than the individual's personality and thus give both aspects the full and independent roles they appear to us to have, I am not unaware that my model could be thought to carry implications which I do not intend it to convey. We can, I believe, describe a number of personality states as authentic examples of the "simply human" yet, whilst these states invariably make a great impact upon us - since our consciousness of them seems proportionate to the simultaneous reduction of subjective awareness - I do not see that we should look on them as moral imperatives whether or not, in practice, experients treat them as if they are. Many religions set great store by the transformation from 'sinful' self to a state in which ego is subordinated to, what I would call, the spiritual orientation, yet in my model there is no basis for evaluation between the two as both have the same ontological status and, in fact, the spiritual represents a less sophisticated form of functioning than the subjective. These non-personal forms of psycho-physiological functioning may form a benchmark for the evaluation of individual members by providing the only common basis for group identity we have, they may enhance our feelings of well-being and

maybe, if everyone regularly attended revival meetings, the world would be a happier and pleasanter place but they do not provide authoritative blue-prints for individual personality. I doubt that the self could do better than integrate its acquired elements with those provided by its identity as a member of the species but unless one believes that the latter identity is also sentient at some trans-personal level, concerned with the wider welfare of the species, omniscient etc. there is no compulsion to do so and many individuals, perhaps rightly, feel that trans-personal values are a straightjacket inhibiting individual development and efficiency. (I earlier argued that in proportion to the degree of felt spirituality, individuals appear less able to deal effectively and flexibly with the sophisticated non-natural environment which subjectivity has made possible). As, if there is a non-human identity at all it lives in a different world from subjectivity, these remarks are only intended to show that my model carries no moral or ethical implications, unless, as mystics and other religious claim, there is a great deal more to trans-personal identity than we, at first sight, have need to suppose.

The third area of difficulty can also be understood in terms of a separate, impersonal level of awareness. What mystics try to describe and, perhaps wrongly, attempt to formulate in religious or quasi-religious terms - but in no case offering us anything that is transcribable into rational terms - is maybe no more than a picture of the way the organism perceives the world to be. Though much that is perceived by the organism, the low level of differentiation say, may arise from inferior data processing, we have no reason to assume that, in empirical terms, any understanding based on such perception is meaningless nor, though they may be unapproachable, that if formulated the claims arising would be

nonsensical. As even our own refined sensory processes reflect the world in ways which are useful to us rather than in a form which any logical being could understand - colour perception, for example, symbolizes information about the world in a form common to and recognized by all members of the species yet which is only alogically related to the fact being represented - so it might be with much of the picture mystics report. Without operating at the non-subjective level and knowing what use the organism puts its picture of the world to, one simply does not know whether the picture the organism has of trans-personal forces etc. is meaningful or not. Equally though the picture the organism has of the world may be entirely alogical, informational or not, there is no reason to assume that it is nonsensical simply because it cannot be formulated in logical or proto-logical terms. Though I cannot recognize what cubist paintings, say, are conveying, others can and thus these images have more than a private significance. Perhaps mystical claims, however impenetrable, likewise convey something of significance to the initiated though this meaning could never clearly be put into words. Mystics do, without difficulty, find awareness from this perspective very meaningful indeed. All mystics, in all places and ages, not only find it meaningful but, as far as one can tell from the thematic nature of the claims, find it meaningful in much the same way. Certainly they expect others to understand the images they provide us with and some apparently do. Treating mystical claims as arising from the stereotyped comprehension of a non-rational creature, which in part I believe we all are, does explain the two most difficult points about mystical claims which are the certainty mystics have that their insights are meaningful and the problem they have in formulating, in words at least, what this

significance is. If one needs to be locked-in to the organism's whole integrated mode of operating before we can find comprehensible what it finds comprehensible, it would also explain why many mystics cannot remember the significance of so much 'other-worldly' knowledge when self supervenes moments after even though the experience remains stamped on their memory. We could make little of it, if it proved the case that the organism had developed a uniform way of comprehending its existence and the world for this need not show language or any other form of communication. It may be no more than a logo which identifies authentic human comprehension which is quite possible since, without subjectivity, there would be nothing to prevent our processing information in identical ways given a common psycho-physiological functioning. As humans operating at that level we recognize that this is our way of viewing the world.

Having taken what *are*, to my mind, the three most accessible questions raised by mystical experience and offered a model of the human being in terms of which we can answer them, I leave it to others to determine whether there is any merit in continuing further with this line of enquiry. I do not pretend to know whether the adamic entity of my hypothesis is some purblind, barely conscious, creature or whether it is much more complex than that - and there are questions about mass behaviour, mass learning and our interaction with the environment that do suggest something truly mysterious at the heart of each of us - my sole aim has been to suggest a way forward that ties mystical experience in with the world and the undoubted need for a dual description of human identity seems to provide one such - the only such? - opening. It is not therefore a solution in terms of which all aspects of mystical experience can be understood but a starting point that may enable us to investigate the subject rationally and perhaps, one day, even empirically.

SUMMARY.

I began this chapter by considering whether or not we could offer a naturalistic description of mystical experience since various reasonings suggested that the key to explanation lay in our own metabolism. I argued that, not only could we not do so at present but, beyond saying that there were few signs of morbidity, we could say nothing else as the account would need to be of such complexity that we must wait for a full understanding of how the various functions of our biological machine interact to produce awareness. The lack of a physical description however is no great disadvantage when considering what we might do with it if we had one. The simplest possibility would be to reduce all mystical reports to physiological terms but I argued that such a course is not indicated. Leaving aside idealism, I could find no reason to accept a priori that mystical reports are uninformative nor could I foresee the likelihood of our wishing to exchange accounts of mystical comprehension for naturalistic ones even if it could be shown that mystical experiences were uninformative since, at the level of human awareness, there is a great deal more to these experiences than an account of how we came to have them. In the third section, whilst accepting the possibility of a naturalistic description, I looked for a way to understand mystical experience in terms of our functioning that was not wholly reductionist. Taking the questions mystical experience poses for identity, personality and meaning as the most promising lines of enquiry, I have suggested that mystical experience could lead us to a quite new understanding of the nature of the human being. Two quite different orders of description of human functioning are indicated, the self and the non-self, the former presumably representing and being tied to the more sophisticated biological

equipment we have evolved or simply to the more sophisticated use of such equipment. The model, whatever its failings, does solve the descriptive problems posed by mystical and some other aspects of human experience without ontological extravagance - there is only one machine requiring two higher order descriptions of its functioning. If I am on the right lines, mystical experience, at the very least, is a diagnostic tool giving us an insight into human organization which we may not otherwise have been able to approach. As far as we can tell there would be no more reason to reduce our transhuman persona to physical terms than there would be our everyday one since both would require a higher order of description than could be contained in naturalistic terms alone. There is also the possibility that mystical experience could open up whole new vistas of knowledge if the organism devoid of subjectivity proves not to be an automaton, for it may be conveying usable information perhaps in an encrypted form about the world of trans-personality. The settling of this question is a very long way off even if we were to establish non-personal identity as a fact rather than as a description but it is this possibility, about which mystics have no doubts and other religious also accept, that alone should be sufficient to force us to dedicate a great deal of effort in trying to solve all of the questions which mystical experience poses. To answer the question I asked, however, a naturalistic explanation is unlikely to suffice though it is probable that one could be given eventually. We need to understand how mystical experience fits into the wider world of human organization and functioning and physical descriptions alone are unlikely to enable us to do this for, at best, these can confirm and keep our speculations on the rails.

POSTSCRIPT

Mystical experience, I believe, is something more than a non-natural perception or a group of claims loosely related by a supernatural theme for it is a very distinctive psycho-physiological event that takes place in recognizable circumstances. Any explanation of the picture which emerges needs to address all aspects of a many-faceted phenomenon. We need naturalistic descriptions and higher order accounts of personality as well as examinations of the significance these claims about the nature of reality have. Such different approaches are not incompatible and need to be developed together for any one approach is unlikely to prove compelling and understanding may come only when we have a full picture of the way human beings function at different levels and the way in which these different levels interact. Some readers may have been disappointed that, in view of the arguments in chapters 1 and 2, I have felt unable to pursue the content of mystical claims and discuss such questions as divinity, underlying unity etc. which are of course what has given mystical experience such prominence over the centuries. I take no view about such claims in isolation from the experience - its background etc. - as a whole but believe this is challenging enough, provoking as it does questions of real import for philosophy of mind and psychology, and that coming to a view about these questions we may be better placed to assess what, if anything, the claims stand for. I leave others to judge whether, as I set out to do, I have succeeded in presenting a rounded and recognizable picture of the experience and followed through some of the major implications, e.g. the difficulties of accounting for it in mentalistic terms, this picture has. I shall, however, be well-satisfied if others, partly as a result of this work, see mystical

experiences as I do in terms of a thought-provoking conundrum that challenges - one might say jars - the undemanding rational picture of ourselves and the world that a scientific age has given us. Mystical experience stands out. It is not to be dealt with as a footnote to psychology or physiology but needs to be given a more central place in our self-understanding even if this requires that many of the assumptions on which our scientific world view is based need to be reshaped to accommodate it. Perhaps Nietzsche's madman who 'entered divers churches and there sang a requiem aeternam deo' (1) was truly mad, certainly, on the basis of reports we have and my analysis of these, his actions were premature.

APPENDIX ANON-NATURAL/DISCONTINUOUS (See page 91)

In view of the argument in chapter 1 that religious claims are of doubtful meaningfulness and therefore of questionable intelligibility and the argument in chapter 2 that any way, regardless of the wider picture, mystical claims are impenetrable throughout I treat as futile any attempt to characterize or analyse the content of these claims. I make use only of the more intelligible aspects of the reports of the experience, its background and consequences etc. from which, I believe, a great deal more may be gained than from a study of concepts whose meaningfulness is more apparent than real. I do not deny that these concepts may have reference and certainly they are thematic, suggesting a transpersonal rather than a wholly private significance - for a possible explanation see chapter 6.III - but in no case do I believe that it is possible to transcribe religious language into a logical or otherwise analysable form. For this reason, throughout I ignore the content of mystical claims about the nature of the world for, though it is uppermost in my mind that mystics have experiences which they report in terms of divinity, union etc., I believe, in our present state of knowledge, such claims are unapproachable. I therefore seek a non-valuative definition such that we can talk of mystical claims as a type, despite their great variety, and which distinguishes them from claims which are amenable to verification. Ideally the definition would also distinguish the thematic nature of the mystical type but there are two objections to this. The first is that any further characterization of the non-natural would be unwarrantably selective. Christians, say, might wish to treat as mystical only those claims couched in terms of theism and love but this would simply be an extraction from the bulk of the material and would have no

corrigible basis unless it could also be shown that these, and only these, non-natural experiences appeared real and so forth, and thus, on such grounds alone, qualified as mystical. The second is that whilst, "by nose", we might tell whether a claim was authentically mystical or not, apart from the recognizable circumstances in which these claims arise - discussed in chapters 3,4 and 5, there may be no other way of distinguishing some mystical claims from claims which are wholly private. There are apparently mystical claims couched in wholly private or incomprehensible language and either one must exclude claims in which selected terms such as divinity did not appear or accept, as I do, that any non-natural claim arising in a given set of circumstances is mystical whether it is clearly to do with divinity, union etc. or not. I therefore choose non-natural/discontinuous to identify the primary characteristic of the claims made by mystics, and the religious more widely, which is that they are not seemingly empirical claims and cannot be translated into empirical terms. By this I do not exclude the possibility that they have a thematic nature but doubt whether we can ever precisely identify what it is, beyond their discontinuity with worldly claims, that they have in common.

The borderline between natural and non-natural claims may not be clear in all cases and for this reason I would only use the definition or make mention of mystical claims at all in conjunction with the wider set of criteria, I argue, can be used to identify mystical experience. Whilst it is manifest that Boehme's celebrated perception of the 'signatures' of plants was non-natural since the claim is beyond verification and quite untranslatable into empirical terms, other claims are less easy to categorize. In 'I perceived myself standing some four or five feet in the air and saw my body lying on the bed ... I beheld a person who

said "I am your guardian angel"'. (Lundahl - Near-Death Experience of Mormons) the natural and non-natural are mixed. A perception of one's body, veridical or not, relates to an empirical state of affairs whereas the 'guardian angel' appears distinctly non-natural. In other cases, especially in 'nature' mysticism, familiar objects may stand in some unfamiliar relationship with other objects whilst remaining recognizable in everyday terms. Such cases present difficulties in determining whether or not all perceptions in broad terms we might wish to call mystical are clearly discontinuous with everyday experience. However, it is only in so far as a perception is non-natural that I would consider it to be mystical for, if this is not the criterion we apply, the concept of the mystical claim collapses at the outset. As an empirical matter however, I believe we will find that all experiences which, on other grounds, we can identify as mystical do give rise to claims which are wholly or, at least, largely discontinuous with everyday experience and this, in the wider context, non-natural/discontinuous plays a part in the characterization of the experience.

APPENDIX B.'SPIRITUALITY AND RELIGION' (See page 232)

I characterize spiritual orientation in terms of its typical perception of self-identity as something extended beyond the borders of body image or otherwise inter-related with some greater non-material whole and also in terms of its associated feelings and attitudes - moral transformation, metaphysical outlook, 'basic trust' and altruism. Few would have difficulty recognizing an individual with such an outlook as an inherently religious figure but I avoid using this term as spirituality and religion are not synonymous. I do not wish to define religion here but simply argue that not all religious individuals have a spiritual orientation - in the sense that I am using this term - and that one might have such an outlook and yet not be considered religious. In identifying spirituality and the cycle in which it occurs, I am not attempting to portray a religious state of mind but rather characterize a particular perception of the world and self which may or may not, in all its variety of expression, be construed as religious. Naturally, spirituality covers many aspects of religious experience. Many conversion cases, for example, exhibit a shift to spiritual identity but I do not wish to define religion in terms of the phenomenon of spiritual identity alone for, as it is normally understood, religion is a much more complex concept than this, needing to be defined in terms of sociology, theology and psychology, and does not focus on this particular attitude with which I am concerned.

1) One might be considered religious even though one's perception of self and the world and one's attitudes bear no resemblance to those I have characterized as spiritual. Leaving aside the stock psychological type, the 'extrinsic religious personality' - a business man perhaps who adopts religious beliefs and practices only for status or monetary gain - it appears quite possible to sincerely hold religious beliefs and participate in religious practices without perceiving self and the world in the way

I contend that spiritual individuals do. In some societies, as in some sub-cultures also, religious beliefs and practices represent received wisdom backed by the authority of those such cultures deem wise. In such cases a subscription to extrinsic forms of religion is both rational and, by any definition, religious in terms of both belief and behaviour though any given individual in these circumstances need have no perception of himself as anything other than a being delimited by body image. A conceptual awareness of super-human forces or of a religious cosmology need no more affect the individual's perception of himself and the world around him than a scientific cosmology does i.e. they are matters of intellectual awareness rather than personal experience.

It might be argued that one's beliefs shape the experience of self and the world one has and thus religious behaviour will, if one accepts my criteria, be spiritual also but I think it can be shown that this is demonstrably not the case. I have argued against the contextual hypothesis that religious experience is shaped by belief elsewhere but what could the contextualist make of a complaint such as this? 'You may ask why she does not conform herself to the will of God since she has so completely surrendered herself to it. Hitherto she has been able to do so and she consecrated her life to it; but now she cannot ... why should she seek to live apart from her only Good? (Interior Castle 6.11.5)'. Teresa of Avila's trouble was that she could not at times perceive herself to be in relationship with God but rather felt alone, isolated and alienated from Him and His creation despite a continuing religious belief and living in a religious milieu. Many cases similarly support a distinction between the beliefs one has and the way self and the world are perceived to be. It appears to me that the mentalistic account of religious experience is derived from two sources

both of which have been misinterpreted. A) Studies of religious sub-cultures in the west show a high correlation between beliefs and perception i.e. members tend to see the world and themselves in terms of stereotypes laid down by doctrine. Yet in an age of plurality of cosmological systems this link is suspect. It is more likely members are drawn into the orbit of religious thinking because this better reflects their experience or perceptions of the world than that adopting a minority viewpoint shapes their experience. In fact, in western religious sub-cultures, there is no necessary connection between beliefs and experience and this was brought out by James using a Starbuck survey. 94% of evangelicals, it was shown, experienced a life-long intellectual conversion, but almost the same percentage (see James chapter x) found that their perception of themselves and life did not for long equate with their beliefs. More than threequarters found that they could not fully support their beliefs with the conviction of personal experience, a few even had to abandon their religious beliefs on this ground, which is not what one expects if beliefs and experience are inseparable. B) Primitives especially have been credited with perceiving as well as conceiving the world in terms dictated by their religious traditions. The simplest explanation of this is that western researchers have been unable to distinguish between religious beliefs, myths etc, on the one hand and the fact that relatively few primitives experience ego-identity, in the sense I use it. Kin and Clan identity, identification with place (from all of which they can be cut off for a variety of reasons) perhaps a more reverential and/or superstitious attitude all conspire to give the impression that religious beliefs determine their self image and the way they see the world. This is not however evidence that they are more likely to have an intrinsic orientation than other groups for though they rarely experience isolation

and may devote much time to rituals etc. their perceptions and attitudes can be accounted for in other terms. This is perhaps not the place for a full discussion of this issue and it may be sufficient to observe that there is a distinction between what one believes to be the case and the way in which one actually perceives it to be (of course the two may coincide but need not do so). Given this distinction it is perfectly reasonable to argue that a sincere extrinsic religious orientation is possible without a spiritual identity or indeed any other intrinsic commitment to what is solely an intellectual outlook.

2) The second reason for distinguishing a spiritual attitude from religion is that, whilst in some cases spiritual identity might be regarded as religious* - in others it is difficult to judge it so. It is not that the teachings of most faiths do not encourage an attitude in their followers not dissimilar to the one I term spiritual but that in some instances the spiritual identity is not expressed in the form of systematic or even coherent beliefs and in others these beliefs lack the qualities we associate with religion. We may accept Zen Buddhism as a religion, gnosticism, perhaps but alchemy even though it has a doctrine and a long tradition or psycho-analysis? A borderline case illustrating this difficulty might be, 'I gradually became more and more agnostic, yet I cannot say that I ever lost that indefinite consciousness of an absolute reality behind phenomena ... although I had ceased my childish prayers to God and never prayed to It in a formal manner ... in trouble or when I was depressed ... I used to fall back for support upon this curious

* Any attempt to define 'religion' is fraught with difficulty. Is a coherent and systematic doctrine required? Are there distinguishing beliefs or practices? Is the appellation merited in individual cases by profession of appropriate shibboleths, practices or the attitude presumed to lie behind these? What about doctrines to which adherence is defined by race (Judaism, Shinto, Methodism in Fiji etc.) or doctrines with no supernatural content? There is an almost endless list of such questions.

relation I felt myself to be in to this fundamental cosmical It ...

It always strengthened me and seemed to give me endless vitality. (James: Reality of the Unseen)'. Certainly it is not axiomatic that those who have a spiritual orientation see themselves as religious or that religious traditions would recognize all such individuals as religious. As I have defined it, spiritual identity does not in itself contain all the attitudes thought to be appropriate to a member of any given religious tradition. Christianity, for example, requires its followers to have love, faith, hope and humility none of which is characteristic of the spiritual cast of mind I outline. Though these virtues are not incompatible with spirituality and indeed are often associated with it, they do not occur commonly enough in the orientation I discern, for this to be equated with any particular religious tradition or even for it to be thought of as unequivocally religious. Wishing only to concentrate on a particular perception of self-identity, it appears wisest to avoid calling it a religious perception for, though many who have such a perception could be defined as religious on other grounds, not all could be though this difficulty may simply be a semantic one.

It is also worth pointing out that though spiritual identity, as I characterize it, would be recognized as an appropriate inner orientation by many faiths, it is not the only way in which one might be thought to have an intrinsically religious attitude. I dislike terms such as 'intrinsic orientation' for they appear to conceal a wide variation in the ideal each religion has for the inner attitudes of its followers and also the different types of attitude and perception each individual in fact brings to his religion. It is perhaps sufficient to say here that one could not treat spiritual identity as typical of all the different

perceptions, feelings and attitudes brought to religion or even as some highest common factor of these for I understand spiritual identity to be a specific and identifiable state and not simply an illustration of an 'intrinsic religious orientation'.

There are then a variety of considerations which make it preferable to dissociate the characterizable mind state I term spiritual identity from the use of the term religious and all the extraneous connotations this has. To be deemed religious you do not need such a mind state, having such a mind state is not in all circumstances sufficient for an individual to be deemed religious and whereas this mind state is a common one amongst intrinsically orientated individuals, it is not the only possible form of 'intrinsic religious orientation'. Therefore these terms are not synonymous and, whilst I accept that this perception of self and the world may often be thought of as religious and can be identified in many religious writings, it is less complicated, when trying to define one particular orientation of mind, to select this less controversial term.

Whilst on the subject of religion and a characterizable, often cyclic, spiritual identity and cast of mind, it would be of interest to explore the wider area of the relationship between spiritual experience and religious tradition. I doubt that much would be achieved by such speculation however, for there are too many personal variables. It is perhaps noteworthy though that whilst most do choose to adopt religious expressions - even though other options are open, such as the language of psycho-analysis - perhaps because such expressions are well suited to describing spiritual identity and the association confers a kind of legitimacy on their feelings and attitudes there nonetheless appears to be a tension in many cases

between the personal experience of the spiritual and whatever orthodox beliefs they hold. It may be that the often cyclic manifestation of their feelings and perception and the difference between this perception and orthodox accounts of the relationship between man and God, especially where mystical perception has occurred, causes an uneasy relationship with orthodox religious beliefs and, certainly in many notable cases, belief would not seem to be as straightforward as it is for other types of religious believer. Some have moved towards heresy or otherwise interpreted traditional doctrines in some specifically esoteric fashion whilst others have drawn away from a fixed pattern of belief and worship though many also seem to manage to adhere to orthodox forms of belief and practice. Whatever the true picture is, and it is only an impression that those who experience marked shifts in their perception of self-identity etc. have difficulties with orthodox beliefs, if they have such beliefs at all, it does seem reasonable to note that the relationship between spiritual identity and orthodox religion is neither a necessary nor an easy one. Throughout I therefore avoid suggesting that those who experience the spiritual orientation need necessarily have any recognizably religious beliefs even though in most cases they probably do.

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