

MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE AND ITS DEFENSE
ON THE MYSTICAL'S PROPER
UNDERSTANDING
AND USAGE

by

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ABSTRACT

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This document will closely examine the issue of mystical experience by reviewing its origins in sacred concepts and leading arguments in the field of the philosophy of mysticism. Ultimately, this document will attempt to prove the manner by which it might most properly be understood, as well as the practical use of such experience for those who have lived and experienced it within his/her day-to-day life.

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CHAPTER 1
EXPERIENCE AS A DUALITY

The use of experience as an arbiter of information and knowledge has a long-standing and well-documented tradition, along with its equally important cognitive partner intuition (more commonly prefaced with *a posteriori* or *a priori* in academic settings). This is applicable to all individuals in every manner of discipline, occupation, field of study, or methodology. Though we may be able to conceive some things in the world or in our lives cognitively (such as the ability to count integers in an ascending or descending fashion), experience grants us the possibility of knowing a great number of things within the world the likes of which we could never have the ability to deduce or know without it; take for example, the chemical equation of water: H₂O. When water is observed in nature, it is usually observed to have a liquid state, and is capable of being consumed as such; however, the composition of water is made up of hydrogen and oxygen gasses, a fact that all at once appears terribly unlikely for an individual to conceive without any prior knowledge of the periodic table or basic study in the field of chemistry.

Experience is often considered a tool of learning utilized by our cognitive faculties. This notion is supplemented by experience's usage and necessity of the cognitive faculty of memory, as being unable to recall something that was previously learned produces almost the same result as never having lived through the experience, entirely. Through our intuition, we imagine and conceive; through experience, we observe and test; and through our memory, we learn and improve upon what we already know.

Although experience is often classified in this fashion, it would be a mistake to believe this is the sole method by which the presence of experience exists within our lives. The use of experience is often experienced as one would use and refer to an emotion, a "feeling". Often

when confronted with a situation that appears similar in nature to one previously encountered, the voice of experience stirs within the individual, beckoning to the very fibers of his/her being. It is compulsive in its method, ringing within our minds as both guide and harbinger. It is a phenomenon whose power and influence is rivaled only by its commonality, as it is almost impossible to imagine a human being to have ever lived without feeling the pull, the draw of his/her experience – nay, his/her very being warning him/her of incoming danger. It is because of this experience often appeals to us in the very same manner as another cognitive source with emotional appeal: instincts.

Instincts are categorized within the mind of the conscious being – whether it is of a beast, an insect, or a human – and function as the baser imperatives of a conscious being for the purpose of survival. Though instincts are residents of the human mind, they do not pull at the individual with the same air as a logical, well-founded action, like that of a reasoned thought.

Just like instincts, experiences are felt as though they appeal and exist in two very separate ways even though we understand them to be a cognitive function; it is in this regard experience stands apart from its intuitive counterpart, another facet in which experience creates a world of difference: what we “know” to be the case and what we “feel” to be the case are two very different operations with very different requirements.

What we “know” is a far calmer, more abstract process. It is a function we facilitate best with carefully worded arguments, patient reviews of our previously held concepts against new information coming in, and cautious examinations of our own personal thoughts under the unforgiving light of logical and epistemic justification. Easily the more time consuming of the two, the pursuit of knowing is one largely purported by our higher-level cognitive processes so that each new position or refinement of an already held belief is not made in impatience and frivolity. To accept something as an object of knowing is to surrender personal skepticism, and to leave oneself open to a complete logical and epistemic critique of what exactly it is one “knows”.

What we “feel,” however, is not so patient. When the rush of an emotion or an instinct hits the human creature, it is struck with an imperative: to act in response to the immediate stimulus which caused such a feeling to erupt, or vacate the area in which the stimulus occurred; to put it simply, “fight or flight”. Feeling, here, appears unwilling to simply sit idle while one takes all of the careful considerations in order to process what he/she “knows” about the situation (though luckily the individual’s more temperate side can overrule the raging emotions [in many cases]).

What has been said of experience here also applies to what we might learn via experience: not necessarily the most patient with regard to its usage and evaluation, but maintaining a great level of weight and value to the individual. The recent learning of a friend’s lack of honesty might cause an individual to distance his/herself from such a person reflexively, even if the individual might later consider the friend was justified in creating such a lie. In such a case, it is clear the feeling created by the pull of experience may still cause certain compulsions to arise, even with the temperance of reason. It is this very trait which allows the possibility to deem experience to be a part of both the *logos*, or the logical aspect, and the *pathos*, or the emotional aspect, of a human being. This is especially true when examining particular forms of experience, such as mystical (or religious) experience.

Complete epistemic justification of a belief that is partially based upon inflexible emotions often gives rise to concerns regarding the reliability of the belief itself, and with good reason: an individual acting upon intransigent emotions may very well be acting in a manner which follows a potentially false belief, which could unintentionally lead the person onto other false beliefs. This could very reasonably lead one to creating an epistemically-coherent web of falsity, unbeknownst to the very same individual.

With such a concern in mind, it is my aim in the following paper to argue for the utility of belief and usage of experience, mystical (or religious) experience in particular, even if the belief

does not properly attain the ideal levels of epistemic justification due to its partial root in a human being's *pathos*.

The term "mystical" is undoubtedly a loaded term, carrying with it all manner of religious and social baggage. It would seem most prudent then, to first examine the use of such a term in the proper respect of its historical context, as well as its modern instantiations. Let us examine the history of its context first in the manner an academic sociologist would refer to it: within a socially observable setting where the common worship approaches the single individual, within the context of the Sacred and the Profane.

CHAPTER 2

THE SACRED, THE PROFANE, AND THE MYSTICAL

2.1: The Origin of the Sacred

In a time immemorial, man is created – whether by the flourishing wonder that is nature, or the unparalleled teleology that stems from the will of a great, powerful being – for all intents and purposes of this examination, it matters not how. Very ancient man wanders about the world, traveling with those of its¹ likeness, roaming a world it cannot yet (and quite possibly never will) fully comprehend, searching for the basic means of subsistence: food, water, shelter. It learns by watching the movements of the earth, the location of its prey, and the habits of its hunters, but many things are still unknown to it, such as the streaks of bright light across the sky that cause its reverence, the rumbling of the wind across the plains that cause its fear, and the water which bathes both man and the land that causes its joy. Man can do so very little in this state, save for a few methods of learning still in development and observation of other creatures, but whatever controls the sky and its awe-inspiring force – *that* is something most certainly grand and terrible.

One fateful day, man is cornered by a terrible beast: one its species has never before conquered or slain. There is a large, powerful storm overhead, with great lightning streaks dancing across the sky, and the terrible roar of the thunder booming across the hills. Man cannot escape, the beast is too quick to simply outrun, too powerful to simply fight. All hope is lost as man accepts its fate to become part of the eternal chain of prey and hunger, but then a large bolt of lightning strikes a tree nearby – causing a medium-sized tree limb to fall next to man, emblazoned with the unmistakable energy of fire, a power the likes of which man has

never before seen. Man looks at the limb, and picks it up, marveling in its final moments at the fire's wonder. Man feels in its heart this was no coincidence; this moment was meant to be. Man swings the magical – the holy – instrument given to it, attempting to wound the great beast, fighting with a fervor and dedication the man has never before known.

The great beast flees in fear of the weapon's smite, and man rejoices. Man runs to those of its likeness and reports to all the events of the miracle that had just taken place – man lifts the rod of fire, and its brethren kneel: such a thing is to be respected as well as feared, for the miracle can just as easily subdue each and every one of them as swiftly as it ousted the threat of the great beast.

This is the reason why man so naturally finds kinship and reverence for the stupendous, the fantastical, the sacred – survival. A great tragedy would have most assuredly transpired without the aid of the rod of fire – without divine intervention, in ancient man's mind – but an equally great tragedy could befall man if it does not pay proper respect to the larger forces at work, the forces responsible for man's very continued existence. If man wishes to continue its survival then man must teach its children the value of the great forces at work in the world, as well as protect the great forces from any outside pain or destruction; for when the survival of the great forces, the sacred forces, are compromised, so too is man.

2.2: The Function and Method of the Religious

There exists no man, woman, or child alive whose life has not been impacted, whether in the affirmative or otherwise, by the presence of religion: pervasive in its nature, fanciful and severe in its method, and daunting in its size and scope within human social affairs. Religion truly is a marvel of both personal connection and human social engineering. Beyond the use of gods or heroes, religion serves as a method of order within social groups, regardless of the age in which the religion is being observed (although it would be faulty to say religion carries the same weight within modern society as it did within the ancient eras). Regions, cultures, nations,

even whole civilizations create little difference in the way human beings respect the power and scope in the presence of what is believed to be divine.

Even more intimidating than the authority it uses to command the social sphere of human beings is the length of time religion has done so. In every country, in every city, in every town, in every hamlet: the social structure of religious belief has left an unmistakable and irreparable mark upon each land and individual it touches. No person is outside of its reach; and almost no matter is completely outside of its bounds. To gain a decent, working grasp of such a social structure, observing the ancient religious society and its use of the sacred and profane realms of space.

Sociologists use the terms “sacred” and “profane” as a method of properly understanding the order kept by religion. Although the use of a bi-valent system appears simple at first, the complexity and power of its mandates far surpasses the misleading initial digestibility of the organization received at first glance. The sacred and the profane are to be treated as opposites, but also as a means for one to better qualify the other. Where the “sphere of the profane” might be best explained as “that of *common usage*, that of acts which do not require precautions and which stay in the oft narrow space left to man in which he may act without constraint,” (Caillois 25) the sacred could be explained as just the opposite: the source of all things fantastical, a realm in which “the believer expects all succor and success.” (Caillois 22) However, the distinctions between sacred and profane appear to run far deeper than opposites or qualifications. The sacred and the profane necessitate one another:

“On the one hand, the contagiousness of the sacred causes it to spread instantaneously to the profane, and thus to risk destroying and dissipating itself uselessly. On the other hand, the profane always needs the sacred, is always pressed to possess it avidly, and thus to risk degrading the sacred or being annihilated by it.” (Caillois 23)

It appears as though the sacred and the profane both have an unexplained compulsion to intermingle with one another, leaving one to wonder why such a mutual destruction shouldn't just take place, but as Caillois points out: "we couldn't stress more forcefully the points at which the experience of the sacred animates all the various manifestations of the religious way of life...the sum total of man's relationships with the sacred." (Caillois 20)

From this, it seems as though the preservation of the sacred is not only a matter of personal survival for the sake of religious man, but also a kind of divine charge; the responsibility of the protection and defense of the sacred appears almost as a direct order from the divine. More than this, it seems as though man has been given a very powerful quality: the ability to interact and distance between both the sacred and profane in such a way no other living species on the planet has ever exhibited. This is not to say religious man may freely approach and interact with the sacred as it would with objects and matters in the sphere of the profane. Their "reciprocal relationship," Caillois argues, must "be strictly regulated." (Caillois 23) Caillois goes on to argue that this is the function of the ritual.

"First, the positive function of ritual is to transform the nature of the profane or the sacred according to the needs of the society. Second, the negative function of ritual is, on the contrary, to keep the profane and the sacred as they are, lest they destroy each other by coming into improper contact. The former comprises *consecration* rites, which initiate people and things into the world of the sacred, and *deconsecration* or expiation rites, which, conversely make persons or things pure or impure in the profane world" (Caillois 23-4)

Ritual then is best described as the vehicle by which man may freely interact with and (for lack of a better word) manipulate the forces of the sacred according to the whims of the people. This fact also reveals something terribly interesting and equally unexpected: the sacred in this particular situation can be best regarded as a force rather than an entity. It seems to behave in a very fixed, static manner: almost completely unchanging, keeping to its designated location,

but still unrelenting in its exertion of power (the sacred is always “what one cannot approach without dying,” after all (Caillois 21)). Even the sacred, by this account, must adhere to laws: laws that mandate its method and nature, laws which man may come to understand, laws which allow man to make the reality of ritual possible.

Only man, more specifically religious man, appears to be the conscious force in this exchange; the profane also appears to behave in accordance with laws much like that of the sacred: completely static, nearly all consuming, constantly seeking the sacred. The notion of this type of situation is not remarkable solely because of man’s arbitration in his own involvement with the sacred, but also because the distinct potential presence of a god(s) does not maintain any real ability to interfere with the ritual. The god(s) then could easily be understood as a mere product of the sacred rather than a representation of the sacred, itself. It is not the divine which religious man must fear then, but what constitutes in its mind the makings of the divine: the sacred force.

The ritual isn’t the only method by which the sacred and the profane are kept separate of course; there is also the use of the social *taboo*.

“Prohibitions, on the contrary, raise an equally indispensable barrier between the sacred and the profane, which separates them from catastrophe. These prohibitions are ordinarily designated by the Polynesian term *taboo*...the taboo is like a categorical imperative. It always involves forbidding, never sanctioning. It is not justified by any moral consideration...it is destined to maintain the integration of organized society and, at the same time, the health and morale of the individual who complies.” (Caillois 24)

Social order, then, relies heavily upon the societal use of the sacred and profane, but what does this mean? The whole of the civilization (the ancient civilization in this case) whose structure has already become so intricate, is held together as a people by the use of the sacred and profane? This would mean the draw of the cohesive tribal unit which has been the subject the whole time is largely together out of a desire to survive and to prevent the calamity of the sacred

smiting them, both collectively and individually. The societal body requires law, which has already settled its four central tenets: what end is to be worked toward, what end is to be avoided, in what way something may be worked toward, and the avoidance of the methods which will (presumably) lead unto what end is to be avoided.

Indeed, much of the foundation of what is considered “sacred” and “profane” has already been reviewed: definitions of the terms, as well the rituals and taboos which are associated with their proper maintenance in the social body, but much of what has been covered only appears to be the underlying personal connections and not necessarily the ancient practices.

2.3: The Order of the World

One of the single most important parts in determining the placement of a civilization rests heavily upon the space the civilization will come to occupy. Space, quite possibly one of the most abstract of all the religious influences, is undoubtedly required for man to live, work, and progress. It is from the absolute necessity of space that the sacred treatise regarding space is born. As Eliade writes,

“For religious man, space is not homogenous; he experiences interruptions, breaks in it; some parts of space are qualitatively different from others...for religious man, this spatial nonhomogeneity finds expression in the experience of an opposition between space that is sacred – the only *real* and *real-ly* existing space – and all other space, the formless expanse surrounding it.” (Eliade 20)

The sacred, in this excerpt, takes on a very different and significant property from what was observed in Caillois’ argument. The sacred is now the only hospitable place in which man can reside – it can no longer tolerate the formlessness that is to be called homogenous, profane space. More importantly, the transition between the earlier form of religious man found in Caillois and the religious man found in Eliade marks less of a relationship of fascination, fear, and the desire to maintain the favor of the sacred (although these things most certainly exist in

Eliade), to a relationship of complete, dire necessity. Religious man no longer lives within the profane world with the ability to commune with the sacred – religious man must reside within the sacred, or at the very least its nearest approximation in the world.

“According to the traditions of an Arunta tribe, the Achilpa, in mythical times the divine being Numbakula cosmicized their future territory, created their Ancestor, and established their institutions. From the trunk of a gum tree Numbakula fashioned the sacred pole and, after anointing it with blood, climbed it and disappeared into the sky. This pole represents a cosmic axis, for it is around the sacred pole that territory becomes inhabitable, hence is transformed into a world...for the pole to be broken denotes catastrophe; it is like “the end of the world,” reversion to chaos...when the pole was broken, the entire clan were in consternation; they wandered about aimlessly for a time, and finally lay down on the ground together and waited for death to overtake them.” (Eliade 32-3)

What is most telling with regards to this tale is not the fact the Achilpa decided to lie down and die, but that they wandered first. They wandered, they searched, indeed – they attempted to lead a life without their sacred bond, but inevitably saw no reason to continue doing so. The loss of grace was far too great to carry on, and succumbing to hopelessness was deemed preferable to living in the memory of sacred sentiment.

What can at once be seen with one eye in the Achilpa as nothing short of incomprehensible madness, unsurpassable admiration can most assuredly be given in the other. It is obvious such a fate was terribly impractical or logically self-destructive, but in every way such an observation is true, so too can the actions of the tribe be praised as the epitome of self-discipline and devotion. I do not deny this may be a point of controversy, but one cannot deny the almost unfathomable dedication to remain in the very same spot, enduring all the scratching impulses of a throat desperate for water and the pangs of hunger from a stomach which has lain empty too long – all for the sake of the broken staff. (This is not to say I would

ever recommend or endorse such activity for another individual, it is merely a word of awe from a writer who cannot possibly comprehend engaging in such an action himself.)

The sacred space, or “center of the world” as Eliade would call it, maintains four distinct qualities: “(a) a sacred place constitutes a break in the homogeneity of space; (b) this break is symbolized by an opening by which passage from one cosmic region to another is made possible (from heaven to earth and vice versa; from earth to the underworld); (c) communication with heaven is expressed by one or another of certain images which refer to the *axis mundi* a universal pillar which connects and supports heaven and earth and whose fixed base is below (Eliade 36)]; and (d) around this cosmic axis lies the world.” (Eliade 37) So long as all of these qualities are fulfilled, the manner in which the sacred space is occupied appears to be without note – thus emphasizing the structure of the social layout rather than the materials or methods used.

This method of structure is also applied to the concept of time, as Eliade states:

“For religious man time too, like space, neither homogenous nor continuous. On the one hand there are the intervals of a sacred time, the time of festivals...; on the other there is profane time, ordinary temporal duration, in which acts without religious meaning have their setting.” (Eliade 68)

An odd dichotomy arises: religious man is allowed to dwell in times non-sacred, but is never allowed to exist in a place without an *axis mundi*, a place known only as homogenous, profane space, lest it lose all favor and in many ways be destroyed. Is it truly the case that sacred time is granted preferential treatment over sacred space in the life of religious man?

It appears as though there is something more fundamental about sacred space (or at the very least, something less perpetual). According to Eliade, “every religious festival, any liturgical time, represents the reactualization of a sacred event that took place in a mythical past, “in the beginning”...hence sacred time is indefinitely recoverable, indefinitely repeatable.” (Eliade 68-9) Sacred space, however, does not appear to have a means to re-establish itself at

the same place in the same perpetual manner as sacred time does if all sacred space were to disappear. It could also be the reason sacred festivals are perpetuated is solely because of the festivals enacted in the appropriate occasion or seasons re-instantiate them and thus, have a place to return to as well. Without sacred space, however, there is no location in which sacred time can be re-instantiated. The disappearance of sacred space necessitates the return of the heroes or gods who created the first sacred space. An entirely new myth must occur, just as an entirely different sacred time must follow it. The world as we know it, then, would simply cease to exist – altogether replaced by a new place, a new time, an entirely new world.

Indeed, the notion of sacred time appears quite paradoxical: it is the annual celebration of a timeless event: heroes and gods, whose actions occurred in *illo tempore* (quite literally “in that time”) who are without age (and quite possibly even without time altogether) crafting the rightful place of all who should follow from their will and their genealogy. The celebration is held to again instantiate the New Year, but it seems as though this particular action wouldn’t garner much favor as it seems to celebrate the event more than the actual being who was responsible.

“The Christian liturgy unfolds in a *historical time sanctified by the incarnation of the Son of God*. The sacred time periodically reactualized in pre-Christian religions...is a *mythical time*, that is, a primordial time, not to be found in the historical past, an *original time*, in the sense that it came into existence all at once, that it was not preceded by another time, because no time could exist *before the appearance of the reality narrated in the myth*.” (Eliade 72)

In this sense; the Christian liturgy would have accomplished something extremely remarkable: the reconciliation between sacred and profane time. Historical time is, in one sense, a very profane thing – documenting a vast number of events in chronological order, many of which would not and cannot be considered sacred; there is no great sacred rite to be found in pumping gasoline twenty years ago, nor is there any grand blasphemy to be had in a maid retrieving the shoes of her king. In another sense, however, historical time is quite sacred:

the remembrance of the ancient myths that constitute the founding of the city, the date in which Moses led the slaves out of Egypt and into the desert, the date in which millions celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ; all of these events hold special significance within the sacred arena.

History, or at the very least historical time, we may say then allows the sacred and the profane to exist parallel to one another – never having to touch, and ultimately never destroying one another, but this excludes a very important part of the same quotation:

“the sacred time periodically reactualized in pre-Christian religions...is a *mythical time*, that is, a primordial time, not to be found in the historical past, an *original time*, in the sense that it came into existence all at once, that it was not preceded by another time, because no time could exist *before the appearance of the reality narrated in the myth*.”

This would mean nothing existed prior to the Christian mythical time of Eden. Although this is very problematic for objective history, it further anchors the point Eliade is making about the nature of sacred time: without a myth, it cannot exist. By its very structure, the myth is the initial action – the myth is the means by which all future sacred festivals shall pay homage. With no event, there is no myth; with no myth, there is no sacred space; without sacred space, it is ultimately impossible for man (particularly the religious man) to exist in the world.

2.4: The Cause and Use of Religious Power

Religion, as has been described, fulfills many roles within a societal structure, particularly when it is acting as “the administration of the sacred.” (Caillois 20) It maintains the power to help shape and organize the world both around and outside the social sphere in which it is based by way of organizing time and space into a sacred and profane analog, it may answer questions regarding the nature of origins, and even determines which actions taking place are the most morally optimal or best left alone.

“Myths and dogmas characteristically comprise its content, ritual reflects its qualities, religious ethics drives from it, priesthoods embody it, sanctuaries, holy places and religious monuments enshrine and enshroud it.” (Caillois 20)

Although religion is powerful in its methods, the religion's power is directly hinged to the number of believers/practitioners of the faith residing within the populace it is attempting to influence. Part of the reason religion was so effective in the time of ancient civilizations was because there were very few alternatives to a theory of the order in the universe (I'm sure a few outliers existed in ancient civilizations with a separate account of the order of the universe throughout history, but these are largely not the individuals written on at the time.) Sincere belief was the mode by which many implements and social practices were set in motion under the religious jurisdiction; the religious jurisdiction, it seems, grew well beyond that of rites and rituals, of sacred and profane – the expertise of the religious body was no longer in just the sacred and the stupendous, it ceased to simply be a means by which the supernatural and the forces beyond man's direct control could be kept in balance. The religious body became the overseer of society, the protective guardian and social arbiter of what it meant to lead a life no longer distinguished by piety and impiety, but of "good," of lasting value, of what it means to lead a desirable life.

This, altogether, appears a very natural progression – and why not? It is only through sincere belief and purest conviction that religious man would so empower its sacred institution to take whatever measures are necessary to preserve the well-being of both itself and its people. Religious man would wish to have its religion, its sacred administration, take the reins of the many facets of life it and its people so frequently take part in – religious man, after all, can only exist in sacred space: a place graced and blessed by the power of his beloved bureaucracy.

In surrendering more and more pieces of the social whole, religious man serves to better feed itself the sacred bread by which its spirit is nourished, but this is indeed a road to be feared; though religious man may believe it is doing itself and its people a great service, a great darkness begins to make its way into the organized body it loves so dearly. Fate, it seems, is

quite cruel in its methods; though it may appear religious man is helping to sanctify more and more of the social life it is a part of, quite the opposite is occurring.

This problem is not an issue of sanctity, but of defilement: the religious institution's natural sphere we have spent so long observing is with matters dealing with the sacred – the use of it, the complete and utter separation of it from the profane, the rituals in which it might be accessed, the taboos which protect against an accidental intermingling with the profane – this is its true function. Though at first glance, it would appear spreading sanctity would indeed yield desirable results for the religious man, but it is not so. In granting the religion more and more power over the social world, it is invited (irresistibly I might add) to maintain more and more power over the everyday world – the profane world.

One may already observe why calamity is almost guaranteed to ensue: the sacred and the profane must never touch, for they will ultimately create each other's annihilation, as Callois has argued. Surely, however, the mortal men (who live and co-exist with profane matters) who work within the religion and have knowledge of keeping the sacred and the profane separate will be able to properly maintain themselves and divide well their new found responsibilities?

No. They won't. They can't. In fact, how could they? It is true the religious institution has always maintained a certain level of power, of *sway*, in the social setting; man rarely ever did anything of import in the ancient days without first seeking proper divination or, at the very least, approval. But this is not an action to be looked upon as a manner of superstition with disdain or frivolity, carried forward by the condescending, impersonal vision of the modern eye: the world was still explained solely in terms of pure and impure, in sacred and profane. Religious man's actions, although remarkably superstitious by the standards of today, were an extension of instinct – the raw desire to survive. The raw instinctual influence strikes at us in a similar fashion as strong emotions: an overwhelming sensation that encompasses the entire being, nearly impossible to ignore. It is for this very reason the religious institution is so very powerful, the very same reason why ancient religious man should never be viewed as illogical or irrational –

the influence, the driving motivator with such an influence is not a reason. The will to survive, the desire to avoid calamity is an imperative of nearly unparalleled force; for all intents and purposes, though it may appear to be a cognitive function when we examine it or consider it outside or after the fact, in the moment it appeals to us as a very strong emotion. This is not something we may epistemically justify, this is not something which will necessarily seem well-founded, but simultaneously maintains the highest order of process and the most basic form of animal instinct: survival is paramount.

Calamity is the very reason religion and sacred thought are so terribly powerful. The world may end; the sacred space may recede at any moment due to great peril or the loss of a God's favor. It is a daunting concept: to know in a moment's notice, by the mood of a frivolous whim, all that you hold dear may be removed from you by the very forces of nature or the actions of the divine. But fear not! If you court divine favor, if you maintain yourself in a manner most pleasing to your deity(ies), you have nothing to fear! The gods will only smite the unjust, the wicked, those yet to be saved; if you are pious and create good works – calamity will never fall upon your home, catastrophe shall never besiege your life.

It is from this power, this very special and exclusive power, religion's original and intended functionality might readily become apparent. It is a medium by which all manners of catastrophes can be avoided (or at the very least appears more likely to avoid catastrophe to the ancient religious individual) and survival could be maintained. The organization of space, the usage of sacred time, the institution of ritual and taboo – these, all previously considered and argued, help maintain the foundation of the sacred in society. It is through these measures the religious bureaucracy may determine the action a people should take in order to maintain the balance of power between sacred and profane. But now, we've arrived back at the original problem: when religious man desires the religion to have more decision making power in the day to day life of the social – how could the institution properly refuse? To become more centrally grounded and more influential is a core directive of any social body; to be outside of

the social structure is to be deemed unworthy, to be kept outside of it is to be made not only into a pariah, but also an oppositional force – an enemy; an enemy which has been inflicted with the greatest injury any enemy could ever be forced to suffer or endure: to be ignored.

So now, to avoid such a dismal fate, the religion has opted to use more of its influence upon the general populace, with more profane affairs under the jurisdiction under the sacred religious bureaucracy, which in turn will ultimately lead, as Caillois argues, to mutual destruction.

Although it is true ancient religious man was very concerned with the ordering of the sacred and profane, this is not all ancient religious man was concerned about. Man, in its usual habits, still roamed the Earth, still observed the world about it, still attempted to understand the way everything works as it was. Man is not only capable of being pious but also an inventor, a scientist, a mathematician, a writer, a philosopher, an artist, and so on in the innumerable list. The profane pursuits, as one could call it, also beckon to the individual, in much the way the sacred had been doing for ages.

Eventually, ancient religious man makes progress, and continues at its works – discovering new things all the time. This, of course, can create a problem. Not all discoveries will be things that co-exist peacefully with the powerful, centralized religious bureaucracy. This is not to say ancient religious man was aiming to encroach upon the sacred order – after all, it is religious man's desire to continue to exist with a sacred space – it just so happens scientific results simply don't always agree with spiritual doctrine.

Thus, the rise of scientific explanation is at hand – an alternate account of the world, a profane account of the world. This could also be understood as man attempting to take back his profane matters from the sacred institution. Of course, that is not to assume the religious institution will simply give jurisdiction back over to man; on the contrary – the religious leaders in the institution have grown fond of having such influence, and why wouldn't they? Power can be

irrevocably intoxicating, transforming the pious, righteous men of old into the pristine picture of profanity. However, even this measure has a sacred backing:

“...power seems like the gratification of a desire. It manifests the omnipotence of speech, whether commandment or incantation. It causes orders to be executed. It is presented as an invisible, weighty, and irresistible quality that is manifested in the chief as the source and principle back of his authority. This quality, which compels obedience to his injunctions, is the same as that which gives wind the ability to blow, fire the ability to burn, or a weapon the ability to kill...Power, like the sacred, seems to be an external sign of grace, of which the individual is the temporary abode. It is obtained through investiture, initiation, or consecration. It is lost through degradation, indignity, or abuse.”
(Caillois 90)

What can be inferred from this is the loss of humility often found within the awesome presence of the infinite force that is the sacred and the rise of pride in an individual's own place within the social order. The sacred, at least before, could be given unto certain people, but it was never an active choice – it was always delegated to whoever was required to properly consecrate or deconsecrate objects or people, such as a shaman, or a chief. This was not a personal luxury to tout over the other members of the social unit, it was a responsibility to the unit – it was an understanding of how fragile the sacred station was, and vigilance to help ensure the fragile position was maintained properly for the current and future generations.

This, however, this flagrant use of taking in “grace” for the sake of having it is merely to maintain it for the individual's personal status is little more than vanity in a high position. It is from this errant position one may easily observe the coming storm, the mass exodus of man towards the scientific explanation – away from myths and legends of old, perpetuated by the corrupt and the wicked.

2.5: The Rise of the Profane Science

The luxury of the profane is in its human element: the invaluable asset of fallibility. No overly grand position may be taken, as human certainty is often proven incorrect; science dictates allowing evidence and data do all the talking – the human in this format is merely the intermediary between the experiment and the results. There are no grand claims to make of him/her, nothing fantastical to witness, observe, or fear; there is no grand calamity to be constantly combated and warded off. The profanity of science, indeed, provides an unmistakable peace – a peace the ancient religious man could have never known – the peace that arrives with the concept of freedom.

For reasons already discussed, the ancient religious man could have never acted on pure free will. The hunger and longing of the sacred and profane for one another was always raging; a world where “the least misstep, the least movement can doom him irrevocably.” (Caillois 19) It is likely ancient religious man was able to find some semblance of peace within the world, but the peace granted from complete freedom is more than likely one grander than it could have imagined.

Thus, with the creation of a second, somewhat reputable at the very least, method of accounting for the world, there arises a new possibility: the temperance of believing in both the scientific and sacred – the rise of faith.

It should go without saying the ancient religious man is one who maintains a great deal of personal faith in its religion – the distinction I draw here is not based upon this. Faith, in the aforementioned usage, refers to the ability to believe capably without the need for the organized body, or at the very least the large religious edifice. Faith, in this sense, is merely referring to a more personal spirituality, rather than a full-blown organized religion.

This concept of faith is very different from the positions on the sacred which have been described previously. The sacred, in the ways described by Eliade and Caillois, is a very social phenomenon – the ancient religious individual takes part in the recitation of the myths, the

sacred festivals, the creation of the cosmic axis; the sacred, in this sense, is a very external force. The sacred could in fact be called a force, as it remains in its fixed position within the world at all times. Faith, however, is not like this at all. The faith we have described is a very internal force, very much set upon internalizing the sacred – making the deity or the benevolent force your own. Though it is obvious the faith expressed here could easily be called a product of the social object known as the sacred, the social function in this aspect is no longer one of maintaining a necessarily social space and hierarchy – it is a function in which the individual takes the sacred as an object for oneself.

2.6: The Function of Faith and Science in the Modern: the Mystical

One of the original functions of religion is to explain the order within the universe, as well as the origin of the individuals who are who are engaging in the religious practice. Each recreational festival, each recitation of the myth of origin to the populous gives us a public account of how the world came to be; it is not just a sacred occasion, but also an educational one. It is for this reason (one among many), such displays are public – the use of myth as an educational tool makes it a public affair.

In the modern realm, however, science has largely taken over such a function, leaving little reason to make the sacred recitations public, other than the desire for personal gatherings such as the parishioner's group experience of course. This leaves the individual free to internalize and make the sacred not only a one-to-one connection, but also to believe freely in the manner the individual believes the nature of the sacred to be.

Not all individuals feel the need to internalize a divine presence; many in fact are perfectly content without the use of religion or faith, and rely more intently upon the sciences as an arbiter of truth in the world. The presence of atheism, while perfectly understandable and acceptable if an individual were to deem it so, can inadvertently create a large air of skepticism regarding certain types phenomena that some would claim is inexorably linked to a sacred or

religious presence such as mystical experience, which very easily could have been met with far less suspicion given the sacred-oriented societal view.

The mystical has been afforded a myriad of definitions over the course of history, ranging from a very specific type of classification to the word being used as an umbrella term applied to anything that fits within the classifications of faith or belief. For the purpose of this examination into the nature of mystical experience, let us assume whenever the term *mystic* is being used, it is in reference to an individual who has lived or experienced a mystical experience. Let us also assume whenever the term *mystical experience* is used, the meaning is to be taken *as a lived experience in which events took place that cannot be wholly explained by scientific laws, such as physics*. The reason the term is kept to the vague level at which it is currently situated is to include individuals who attest to having paranormal experiences that many philosophers, such as Walter Stace, would not include simply because the individual engaged in sensory perception during the experience (which to me sounds more than bit intellectually arrogant to completely disqualify another individual's experience simply because their experience wasn't what was being sought after).

¹ The reference to man as a neutral body was intentional and done for two reasons – (a) to better illustrate man as an object within the Religious arena, but more importantly (b) to refer to man as a collective noun of the human species and not as a gendered entity.

CHAPTER 3

ARGUMENTS ON MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE

In this section, we will look at the work of three different arguments on the topic of mystical experience by Walter Stace, R.C. Zaehner, and William Wainwright, respectively. I shall conclude this section with a brief discussion on mystical experience and the issue of epistemic justification.

3.1: Argument 1

In his article “The Nature of Mysticism,” Walter Stace argues in favor of the mystical experience, where he calls mystical experience “a nonintellectual mode of consciousness.” (Rowe and Wainwright 363) [for the rest of the paper, I shall cite “(Rowe and Wainwright #)” as “(RandW#)” for the sake of convenience] Stace argues “the mystical consciousness is destitute of any sensations at all. Nor does it contain any concepts or thoughts. It is not a sensory-intellectual consciousness at all.” (RandW 365)

The crux of Stace’s argument centers on what he titles the “core of mysticism.” (RandW 366) In it he states his hypothesis as the following:

“I shall...treat it as [a] hypothesis that although mystical experiences may in certain respects have different characteristics in different parts of the world, in different ages, and in different cultures, there are nevertheless a number of fundamental common characteristics.” (RandW 366)

What Stace regards as the “central characteristic in which all *fully developed* mystical experiences agree...is that they involve the apprehension of *an ultimate non-sensuous unity in all things*, a oneness or a One to which neither the senses nor the reason can penetrate. (RandW 366) “Only fully developed mystical experiences are necessarily apprehensive of the

One,” argues Stace, continuing on to say the unity experienced is so complete, “we should rather say that the experience *is* the One.” (RandW366-7)

The largest problem for Stace’s claims, at least at this early juncture, is their willingness to preclude the experience the many individuals who could have experienced a “fully developed mystical experience.” To speak of what a mystical experience must necessarily contain is to take on a claim of being in a position to know such a thing, which would require Stace to be in a position similar to a creator of mystical experience or, at the very least, one who oversees the trafficking of such a resource with (at least) a moderate degree of regularity – a requirement which Stace obviously can’t fulfill, leaving his position of authority on such a matter wanting. Although his hypothesis is based upon “an elaborate empirical survey of the descriptions of their experiences given by mystics and collected from all over the world,” it goes without saying his list is not exhaustive. (RandW 366) This is not to say data need be compiled in an exhaustive fashion for there to be a proper treatment of the issue at hand, but his argument of which “all fully developed mystical experiences agree” opened the door of an exhaustive survey requirement. Furthermore, the deciding factor of whether a mystical experience is a “fully developed” one is the experience an “ultimate non-sensuous unity.” I do not doubt the experiences in which Stace refers are indeed “fully developed mystical experiences,” the issue I would have with such requirement is making Stace’s definition so exclusive in nature that it may well prevent an excellent first-hand account of a mystical experience, simply because it did not lead the individual to the experience Stace requires.

Upon the basis of “fully developed mystical experiences,” Stace categorizes mystical experiences into two separate categories: extrovertive and introvertive mysticism. Stace explains the difference as the following:

“Both are apprehensions of the One, but they reach it in different ways. The extrovertive way looks outward and through the physical senses into the external world and finds the One there. The introvertive way turns inward, introspectively, and finds the One at

the bottom of the self, at the bottom of the human personality. The latter far outweighs the former in importance both in the history of mysticism and in the history of human thought generally.” (RandW 377)

Again, it appears as though Stace is making a value judgment upon another individual's experience to fit the needs of his thesis. “The extrovertive mystic with his physical senses continues to perceive the same world of trees and hills and tables and chairs as the rest of us. But he sees these objects transfigured in such manner that the Unity shines through them” is still a very impressive account. (RandW 368) Although it may not be the same as the “total suppression of the whole empirical content of consciousness” as the introvertive mystic would experience, this isn't to say a value judgment need be assigned; this is a place where the experiences are A and B, not 1st and 2nd.

However problematic the method may be in examining mystical experiences, I agree with Stace in the purpose of his paper: to illustrate even if a mystical experience is “wholly subjective, it still reveals something which is supremely great in human life.” (RandW 376) Mystical experience, by this token, should not be looked at with a glance of oddity or distrust (a judgment quite common in the modern world), but with gladness.

There are those who would argue against mystical experience on the basis of such events not being feasible, which I believe Stace argues against such claims best:

“If anyone thinks that a kind of consciousness without either sensations, images, or thoughts, because it is totally unimaginable and inconceivable to most of us, cannot exist, he is surely being very stupid. He supposes that the possibilities of this vast universe are confined to what can be imagined and understood by the brains of average human insects who crawl on a minute speck of dust floating in illimitable space.” (RandW 366)

3.2: Argument 2

In “Nature Mysticism, Soul Mysticism, and Theistic Mysticism,” R. C. Zaehner argues what he believes to be very clear distinctions between three different forms of mysticism; nature mysticism which is usually aided by hallucinations, soul mysticism which can be obtained “by ceasing to do good to one’s friends or evil to one’s enemies,” and theistic mysticism which one attains by achieving a union with God. (RandW 376)

Zaehner’s main method in his argument is to depict three different possibilities, and thus, three different distinctions within the realm of mystical experience. Nature mystics, for example, use hallucinogens to achieve their mystic state. This is, of course, quite different from the methods used in the other two options, which both require you to surrender your entire repertoire of sensory perceptions, only the theistic method usually requires the individual surrender it to a God.

“...in monism that can be no love – there is ecstasy and trance and deep peace, what Ruysbroeck calls ‘rest’, but there cannot be the ecstasy of union nor the loss of self in God which is the goal of Christian, Muslim, and all theistic mysticism.” (RandW 378)

Zaehner’s method appears to fall short. Much of his article is spent criticizing the differences between different religions, which Zaehner takes as potentially leading into different mystical experiences of practitioners of different faiths. Stace argues against this in his article “the Nature of Mysticism” by stating:

“The experience is genuine, but the interpretations may be either true or false. If we are to understand anything at all about mysticism, it is essential that we should make a similar distinction between a mystical experience and the interpretations which may be put upon it either by mystics themselves or by non-mystics. For instance, the same mystical experience may be interpreted by a Christian in terms of Christian beliefs and by a Buddhist in terms of Buddhistic beliefs.” (RandW 363)

I agree with Stace in this regard. The mystical experience is not necessarily an extension of a religious prerogative, it is a lived experience apprehended by an individual in a mystic state. If it is indeed attributed to a religion by the mystic, it is only done so in retrospect, when he/she has left the state entirely and is free to tint the experience with the color of his/her beliefs.

3.3: Argument 3

In “The Cognitive Status of Mystical Experience,” William Wainwright argues a position in which mystical experiences and sense experiences are alike in two “important respects:” both types of experiences are “noetic” (pertaining to the intellect), and “the basis of both types of experience claims are made about something other than the experience itself” (RandW 393)

Wainwright claims the mystical experience is noetic, much like sense experiences, based upon two different qualities of sense experiences: “the experiences have an object,” and “sense experience typically involves the conviction that the object on which the experience is focused is ‘really there’” in much the same way mystical experiences claims certain aspects about the world are “really there”. (RandW 393)

The so-called “object” within the mystical experience can either be one of two possibilities: either the individual experiencing them, or the experience itself. These are the only two possibilities for two reasons: (a) the only thing actively occurring with the experience is the apprehension of the experience by whichever medium is being used (introversional unity, perception of unity within objects, the use of hallucinogens, etc.) and (b) there is no other entity or object which may be attributed to or identified within the mystical experience; even in the case of seeing God, it is only a distinction made in retrospect, not during the actual experience.

If it is the case we were to assume the individual was the object, this would not allow the mystical experience to be deemed noetic; in order to be considered noetic, one must “experimentally” apprehend oneself, but this is logically impossible – you cannot apprehend what you already have; you may examine and further introspect to understand something you may not have known previously, but this is not the same as self-apprehension.

The other possibility seems terribly unlikely also, as it appears oddly circular to imagine an experience having itself as an object, much less imagining the experience experimentally apprehending the experience.

As far as the second “important respect” is concerned, it is not apt to say “mystics make claims about something other than their own experiences” insofar as the mystical experience allowed them to apprehend something to which they now believe about the world. It is more accurate to say in order to properly express the experience to which they have difficulty expressing, they explain have learned something while in the mystical experience, rather than simply stating they apprehended something from the mystical experience. The former, I believe, seems a more accurate representation, as the latter implies the volition of the experience and a willingness to educate the individual in question.

3.4: The Mystical and the Epistemic

As stated earlier, experience (although a tool used by our cognitive faculty) does not behave in just such a manner within our day-to-day lives. Experience appeals to us in a fashion very similar to emotion; mystical experience is no exception.

“These two worlds, the sacred and the profane, are rigorously defined only in relation to each other. They are mutually exclusive and contradictory. It is useless to try eliminating this contradiction. This opposition appears to be a genuinely intuitive concept. We can describe it, analyze it into its elements, and theorize about it. But it is no more within the power of abstract language to define its unique quality than to define a sensation. Thus, the sacred seems like a category of feeling. In truth, that is the level on which religious attitudes exist and which gives them their special character. A feeling of special reverence imbues the believer, which fortifies his faith against critical inquiry, makes it immune to discussion, and places it outside and beyond reason.” (Caillois 19-20)

Mystical experience, then, could be understood as a type of sacred experience, but not one under the large header of the grand religion that imposes social sanctions and laws – a sacred experience in the way faith has already been explained. Indeed, mystical experience is the most personal form of the sacred: concepts and beliefs may be exchanged equally between willing conversation partners and an understanding could effectively be erected, but mystical experience is not something that can be conveyed in the same manner. Mystical experience is the observance and the partaking in an event that is truly spectacular and wholly incapable of being expressed exactly as one felt while apprehending such an experience.

It is because of this same problem, however, that proper epistemic justification appears to be clearly out of reach. Unfortunately, the most a mystic can do is merely “appeal to their experiences to justify their claims.” (RandW 394) This does not mean, however, one should simply dismiss them as untenable because it could never be fully convincing to an outside party.

The problem with epistemic justification, in this regard, is its purely theoretical form: inflexible, unmoving, and overall stuck in its particular place. Very rarely does life meet the idealistic expectations of the scholar or of the hopeful; often it falls somewhere between complete failure and the ideal outcome. However, this is not to say one should not strive for achieving full epistemic justification, it is merely a point I grant that many of the ideas individuals take as factual or true (which have helped their lives in affirmative ways) are not always epistemically justifiable.

Therefore, it is my aim in this last section to demonstrate that although many cases of mystical experience may not be altogether epistemically justifiable, it is still very useful in the course of an individual’s life. I will present three separate cases of mystical experience (which is again, a lived experience in which events took place that cannot be wholly explained by scientific laws, such as physics) and attempt to achieve epistemic justification with them all. Lastly, I will demonstrate the pragmatic use of mystical experience.

CHAPTER 4

THE USAGE OF MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE

Before beginning the cases of mystical experience, it is important we specify the method for which justification will be attempted at achieving. For this, we shall reference the classic Alvin Goldman modification to the Justified, True Belief model: a model which requires the individual experiencing not only to believe he/she is correct, be logically justified in believing he/she is correct, and have said belief held by him/her to be proven true; but also requires a causal connection between what makes his/her belief true and his/her believing their belief is true. (Goldman 358)

4.1: Epistemic Example 1

Jennifer is a healthy, athletic young woman in her late twenties; she has 20/20 vision and has had no medical issues to speak of whatsoever. She stays very well hydrated each day, as her beloved hobby of jogging requires, and also maintains a very strict, healthy diet. Jennifer is agnostic in her religious beliefs, feeling as though she is unable to effectively decide whether she does or does not believe in a God or religious force, despite her upbringing with pious (but not overzealous) parents.

One day while walking down the street, she happens to look down at the shadow of a man walking in front of her, which is extending directly to her across the sidewalk – symptomatic of the 5 o'clock sun looming overhead. Just as she is going to divert her attention from the ground to straight in front of her, she notices the shadow moves sharply to the left of the man walking in front of her, without a change of light or the man changing either his walking pace or his direction. Although she considers it odd, she places the event out of her mind as being little more than a trivial event. Within a few seconds of the sharply moving shadow of the man walking in front of her changing from directly behind him to the left of him, the man falls over into

the person in front of him. Jennifer immediately rushes over to help him, and is relieved to find both the man and the person in front of him without injury. After helping him up, she examines the sidewalk he appeared to have tripped over, but finds no cracks, indentations, unusual rises, or anything that would suggest he did trip over anything. Jennifer also notices the man's shoes are tied and well above the soles of his feet, so tripping over them seems equally unlikely. She noticed no one behaving in a suspicious manner prior to the fall that would lead her to believe someone else was at fault at the time of the fall, nor did she notice anything that could have landed just in front of him that he could have tripped over. Without a way to properly explain the phenomenon, Jennifer goes about her day as usual.

It is a few days later, and Jennifer is having a small get together with her friends in her apartment in the early afternoon. She makes a large meal for all of her friends to enjoy while they watch a movie together. Her friends are much like her in their age, activity level, and overall physical health. Jennifer and her friends eat the meal and watch a movie together as planned without incident and many of them leave to go home for the evening. Jennifer's best friend decides to stay longer to help her clean up the dishes, as well as talk for a bit. Jennifer's best friend enters the kitchen to begin cleaning the dishes, while Jennifer is cleaning the living room. Jennifer finishes cleaning the living room and decides to enter the kitchen to help her best friend. As soon as she enters the room, she notices her friend's shadow on the ground, standing only a very short distance from where her friend stands at the sink, as the light in the kitchen is directly overhead. Thinking nothing of it, she walks further into kitchen, when her friend's shadow suddenly moves from just behind her, to very sharply to her right. Remembering the incident a few days prior, Jennifer begins to worry for her friend and wants to warn her friend to be careful. Unfortunately, before she can utter the words, her friend take a step away from the sink and slips, falling down backward.

Obviously concerned, Jennifer helps her friend to her feet and asks basic preliminary questions, such as "are you hurt?", "what happened?" and "did you slip on something?" The

best friend reports she is not injured, didn't feel as though she stepped on anything, and was very unsure about how this fall occurred. Jennifer examined the floor and it was completely dry, no wetness on the floor where her friend slipped, and her friend's shoes still maintain good traction. Her shoelaces were still tied. Jennifer knows it had nothing to do with a foreign substance, as her best friend was very determined to never to take any substances that could impair her judgment at any time. Jennifer served her food with her guests in mind, taking the time to prepare food that would be agreeable to all of them, especially the few with food allergies who had already left. No alcohol was ever dispensed, and her friend was not taking any medication to the best of her knowledge; she had actually just been commenting on how good she had been feeling and how well her latest checkup went during the meal.

Jennifer could think of no logical reason why such a fall would have taken place. Her best friend was very cheerful, remarking it was "just her luck" she would fall after bragging about how well she was feeling, but Jennifer was still very concerned. She began thinking more and more intently about the incident a few days prior with the man in front of her falling over with no apparent cause, and now her best friend suffering the same unexplainable problem. After being convinced by her best friend that it was merely bad luck and poor balance, Jennifer attempted to put it out of her mind.

Over the next few months, the incidents kept happening at different times of day and to different people over and over: a person's shadow moving in very unreasonable manners with poor consequences that follow within just a few seconds. Each time she sees the shadow of another person move in a very sharp, jerked movement, she sees the person of whom the shadow belongs lose their balance and fall without fail. Jennifer began to worry she may be suffering mental problems, and began to seek counseling. After a thorough examination, she was given a clean bill of health. Jennifer's doctor explained to her there was nothing physically wrong with her, and her mental states are well within normal ranges for a woman at her age and stress level. Her doctor also told her to merely think of the recurring events as coincidence.

Let us examine Jennifer's situation in greater epistemological detail. Taking away the detail that the odd phenomenon has never occurred prior to the fateful day walking down the street, each time Jennifer sees the shadow move in such a manner, the familiar, proceeding mishap occurs without fail. Leaving aside the metaphysical ramifications of such a phenomenon for just a moment, would Jennifer be epistemically justified from then on in her life to believe each time she witnesses the shadow of a person move in such a manner, the individual to whom the shadow belongs will inevitably fall in an unexplainable way? It would most certainly be unreasonable to say she is justified in believing it the first time it happened, as it has never occurred before – she would have no knowledge whatsoever of what would ensue. But at what point do we lend her the ability to assert her claim as plausible? The second time will most certainly be under scrutiny for justification, as the natural reflex using the first and only occurrence of the event could easily be called a "fluke," but what about after that? Could we still be equally skeptical at the third occurrence? The fourth? Even the fifth?

According to the Goldman modification of the Justified True Belief model, it is difficult to say when Jennifer has hit the point of epistemic justification. At the first instance, she certainly doesn't have it: she does not believe the shadow's movement to be anything other than an odd event with no tie towards anything in her past (and conceivably) her future, she has no idea something will happen to the man in front of her to even regard as true or false, and without knowing any event will transpire, there isn't anything to justify. The second event still falls reasonably under the possibility of being a "fluke," as there is no real connection between the friend falling and the shadow moving yet. Each time after that, however, it becomes increasingly more difficult to say Jennifer does not "know" someone is going to fall over, each time a fall is preceded by a sharply moving shadow.

But this raises a very problematic question: is such a connection causal? Did she see the shadow, so it caused her to believe the individual would fall, or is it more of a corollary connection that she so frequently observes? It is obvious that each individual person she may

witness fall does not necessarily have their shadow jolt in such a manner – take for example watching a television program, even if she could observe a sharply moving shadow cast by each character each time they were to fall, the shadow may very well not be within the camera's angle to be viewed by the audience.

One could argue either side in Jennifer's case: on the one hand, seeing the sharply moving shadow leads her to believe that an unfortunate mishap will happen to the individual to whom the shadow belongs; on the other hand, Jennifer could easily perceive it as a simple pattern that has proven true time and again, so the persistence of the pattern is what actually causes the belief in her justification, not the shadow itself.

Jennifer's belief system also plays a role in the justification in her perception of the supernatural phenomenon. She has no personal belief system that would either affirm or deny a stance on the sharply moving shadow, further illustrating such a phenomenon happening freely and independently of her conscious and subconscious mind. Without such a particular leaning, it would be unfair to Jennifer (and also slightly condescending) to suggest the phenomenon at hand is merely an illusion pulling on any latent religious undertones she was probably raised with. Even in her period of heightened awareness and paranoia prior to seeing a mental health expert, she did not immediately jump to the conclusion of a God or Gods.

4.2: Epistemic Example 2

Antonio is a man in his mid-thirties, in moderately good health. He exercises once or twice a week, maintaining a fairly healthy diet and hydrates well. His eyesight is not in the best condition, as he suffers from near-sightedness, but his glasses and contact lenses greatly compensate for his natural vision deficit. Antonio is a man of the Catholic faith, believing very deeply in its religious doctrine and practices.

Antonio shared a very close relationship with his mother. She had always been a symbol of sound reason and rational judgment in his eyes, who unfortunately passed away due to illness. Antonio mourns her loss, but carries on throughout his life, caring for his wife and two

children. One night, a night in which Antonio has difficulty sleeping, he walks out of his bedroom without his glasses, turns on the light in the dining room of his home, enters the room, and sees the image of his deceased mother in the dress she was buried in, sitting at the table appearing healthy. He approaches her after wiping his eyes and speechless – she remains, not fading away as he thought a hallucination might – as she continues to sit poised in her chair looking at him. As he approaches her, she speaks – giving him an omen of his eldest child becoming terribly ill very soon. As he begins to inquire further, her image fades away and Antonio is left speechless. He decides it is merely a hallucination created by a composite of conditions (such as his weariness, grief, and being without his glasses), and puts the entire ordeal out of his mind. A few days pass without incident and Antonio is going about his usual work day. At his lunch break, he receives a call from his wife who informs him their eldest child has been taken from school to the hospital because the child was running an extremely high fever. Antonio immediately begins to think back to the word of caution from what appeared to be his deceased mother relayed to him. Fortunately, the child eventually recovered from his illness, and nearly everything had returned to normal (with the obvious exception of Antonio's concern regarding his deceased mother).

Several years pass, and Antonio is now at work in his own office. It is nearly six pm, the usual time he leaves work, and he begins packing up his things for the drive home. Just as he's done packing up, he looks up at the door and notices his deceased mother's image again, the first time Antonio has seen her since the incident with his child's illness. Again, he goes about the usual order of operations: rubbing his eyes as well as checking and cleaning his glasses, but the image of his mother still remains. As he approaches her to speak, his mother informs him not to drive his car home, as it will very surely break down on the way. Just as he is about to ask a question, she fades away, again leaving him speechless. Antonio ponders what she has said, but finds it very difficult to believe, as the car he is driving home was purchased only two months ago from the car dealership without any prior owners of the vehicle and has always

performed in excellent condition. It appears very unlikely to him that such a vehicle would break down so quickly, so he ignores the warning and drives home. On the way home, Antonio's car overheats and breaks down on the side of the road, as previously predicted by his deceased mother. Eventually, Antonio finds his way home and learns, by way of the evening news, of a factory recall of his car; there is a factory defect in the radiator which has been known to lead to small leaks within several of the coils, causing the overheating problem. Antonio had no prior knowledge of such a problem at the time he purchased the vehicle up to the day he overheated and broke down on the side of the road (or else he obviously would not have ever purchased that vehicle to begin with).

Concerned for his well-being, Antonio decides to visit a psychiatrist to evaluate his mental health. After a thorough round of tests and a few therapy sessions, his doctor finds Antonio to be completely healthy, and believes his run-ins with his mother's image are merely caused by stress, and a mild inability to cope with her loss due to the very close relationship they built years prior. The psychiatrist instructs Antonio to disregard the images of his mother, calling the warnings she imparts nothing but mere coincidence. He recommends more therapy to help build effective methods of handling stress, but does not believe medication to be necessary in Antonio's case.

Ten years pass since Antonio began seeing his psychiatrist and Antonio is having a birthday celebration for his wife. There are a few close friends together, enjoying drinks, food, and games at the small social gathering. Antonio has consumed only one glass of red wine this evening, under the recommendation of his physician, and has consumed no other alcohol. He has eaten quite a bit, as there was a large amount of food prepared for the occasion, and remains sober throughout the night. Antonio is in great health: both he and his psychiatrist believe he has adequately dealt with the loss of his mother and manages his stress well through therapy, and has been taking excellent care of his physical well-being. The night begins to wind down and many of his guests are leaving. Antonio leaves to his room to retrieve the coat of one

of his guests, and as he enters his bedroom – his deceased mother appears to him again, in the same clothing and fashion as she had twice before. He immediately asks why does she keep appearing before him, but receives no answer. As he approaches her, she tells Antonio he will lose his best friend that evening. Completely shocked, he attempts to formulate a coherent sentence in response, but is too late – she has already left again. Antonio immediately rushes out of his room to warn his best friend. His mind was put at ease to know his friend's son would be picking him up, so he wouldn't run the risk of driving home drunk. The evening continues as expected, with all the guests finally leaving in the late hours, and Antonio and his wife retiring to bed soon after that. The next morning, he awakes to the horror of seeing a news report of his best friend being found dead as a victim in a drunk-driving accident. His friend's son luckily survived but was critically injured.

Antonio's case, epistemically speaking, is much more difficult to justify than Jennifer's case by two large differences: (a) Jennifer's case had the luxury of happening with a large sense of frequency, which enables much more personal field data regarding the shadows, whereas Antonio's case only occurs three times in his life; and (b) Jennifer's case at any time of day, at any point in time, where Antonio's largely seem to appear usually after a long day, where it is more likely weariness has set in.

However, do these differences diminish Antonio's situation in relation to Jennifer's? In all of Antonio's cases (whether it's the illness, the vehicle, or the best friend), they were proven true after the prediction, but only in the last case did Antonio believe it – does this mean that only in the last case Antonio knew the event was going to transpire, or does this say something more to the root of human skepticism? In all cases, Antonio was warned and he acted due to the warning – whether it was to embrace and use the warning, or to ignore it as he did in the first two cases. Was it that the last case was more severe than the others? Although the death of a loved one may be difficult to imagine, severe illness being brought upon one's child strikes as almost equally so. If it were an issue of severity, one could imagine Antonio taking a much

more proactive measure to ensure his eldest child's well-being, so it is difficult to say severity was the key note of difference.

Was it an issue of imminence? The vehicle issue, by the imperative nature of the warning, was predicted to occur in a manner much more immediately than the omen regarding the best friend. Indeed, Antonio was only warned about his car just as he was leaving his office to go home, leaving very little time to find an alternate mode of transport, where the omen regarding the best friend was only said to occur "that night." No, the issue of imminence also seems to miss the reason why Antonio so quickly acted upon the third warning and not the first two.

Would it be that Antonio is more logically and epistemically justified in taking the warning at face value on the third warning than the other two? Clearly, Antonio is a reasonable man, willing to consider the possibility that his vision may be compromised at the moment of the experience, or believes he is seeing things which are not there when he first comes into contact with what looks to be his deceased mother. Admittedly, it is difficult to imagine Antonio taking his first encounter with what appears to be his deceased mother at pure face value, so his inaction in the way of attempting to ensure his child's safety is not unexpected.

It could also very well be the case, much like in Jennifer's, Antonio took the first encounter with his deceased mother to be an issue of perceptual error. After all, Antonio hadn't seen his deceased mother in several years, it is perfectly reasonable to assume such a vision was concocted by a weary and grief-ridden mind with poor eyesight and not real. Antonio's second warning occurs with the logical backdrop of the first encounter quite possibly being an odd fluke, as well as the second encounter being about something far more trivial: his car. Antonio again takes a reasonable approach in weighing the possibilities about his car: it is almost brand new, only a few months old with very limited wear being placed upon the vehicle. All parts are equally aged and only a few months old themselves, so it would seem terribly unlikely the car would simply "break-down" as was foretold.

The third omen, however, was different – this one was followed; this is the one warning Antonio heeded. We have already dismissed the possibilities of both severity and imminence, so what else is left? Is it different because a medical professional had deemed his mental faculties acceptable and adequate? Is it because age had allowed experience to temper his logical mind to be wary of warnings that had proven true in the past? What is it that makes this case so different?

Correlation, it seems, occurs in the last warning, and rightfully so – it had been proven right in the past, but is this justification? Can correlation in past events be cause for justification in the present? If so, it would mean both Jennifer and Antonio are justified in believing any sharply moving shadows or omens (respectively) that may come in the future, but this does little with justifying the ones which have already come to pass. It is difficult to follow such a sign in the initial sighting and justify it based purely on sight and experience alone, as the decision would easily be deemed to be made more out of superstition than logical deduction or inquiry. However, to completely ignore pieces of information placed in front of you during your day-to-day life is little more than willful blindness; can such concerns be pacified equally to allow the best means of obtaining information that is presented in the world, and going about our lives in an epistemically justifiable way? Let us examine one final example that may allow us to do so:

4.3: Epistemic Example 3

Michael is a young man in his mid-twenties who has suffered from blindness for his entire life. He is very healthy, capable individual whose only medical issue is his obvious eyesight deficiency; his other senses, however, are extremely sharp and precise. He attempts to maintain a healthy lifestyle, eating and hydrating well and exercising as best he can. Michael is an Atheist, never begrudging religion in any way but is unable to feel a need or desire to lead a life in faith or in service to a God.

About two years ago, Michael lost his life partner of seven years in a tragic accident. Because of this, Michael now takes the subway to work every day, instead of being dropped off

by his partner. On a normal day, Michael is going about his usual routine: leaving his home to go to the local coffee shop for a cup of coffee, and proceed to the subway to get to work. After purchasing his coffee in the middle of the small bustling business (as he would any other day), he hears the whisper of his deceased partner: "Michael, don't get on the train." He immediately calls out for his partner, but hears no response, only the continued ruckus of the busy establishment. He attempts to shrug it off with another drink of coffee and continues to proceed to the subway station.

Try as he might, Michael cannot shake off the whisper he heard in his ear – it was unmistakable; he would know that voice anywhere, and could never forget it. The pitch, the tone, everything matched his deceased lover. Michael couldn't pretend to ignore it any longer, eventually abandoning his way to the subway station, and proceeded to go back home.

A few days passed, and news came quickly of the subway train line that suffered a severe malfunction and derailed, causing the death of several, and the injuries of dozens – the very train Michael would have taken to work.

Was Michael justified in believing the whisper he heard in his ear? This case is by far most difficult to judge of the three: there was only one circumstance, one instance of the mystical experience occurring. Being that there was only one experience, was there adequate cause? In most cases, as stated earlier, one simple "fluke" chance could be dismissed away, and any action toward the affirmative of the whisper could be written off as mere superstition. However, it stands to reason to consider all possible angles of the situation: the whisper Michael heard was indeed apt (it would be difficult to say accurate, as there was no claim of anything occurring specifically) insofar as warnings are concerned. It is obvious Michael believed the warning he heard in the coffee shop, and the belief was caused by a perception he had never before mistook to be someone else and could always reliably identify his partner's voice in any given setting – fulfilling the causal requirement of the Goldman model. However, does believing

something with cause that turns out to be true enough to satisfy the requirements of knowledge with justification resting upon the hands of mere superstition?

4.4: The Pragmatic Use of Mystical Experience

As Richard Rorty argues: (by re-affirming the words of William James) “let me illustrate this by James’ definition of ‘the true’ as ‘what is good in the way of belief.’” (Rorty 1980, 721) The point of the statement, Rorty argues, is “truth is not the sort of thing which has an essence.” (Rorty 1980, 721)

What is meant by this is not as subjective as it might sound. Rorty argues for a very different, much more practical method of handling such a situation as Jennifer’s, Antonio’s, or Michael’s. The model of the Justified, True Belief with causal connections is – by definition – theoretical. Although creating theory is undoubtedly useful and terribly important, it is also – by definition – not wholly translatable to individuals who live in a day-to-day world. In all three cases, one could argue all ended up perfectly well without having the justification requirement of the model slavishly met by esoteric standards which are difficult to process and meet in a world where not all facts are set before the three individuals in question, and one could make a strong case for such.

The point of Pragmatism was never to make issues or beliefs fully subjective, or to process in a manner that would leave individuals with a whimsical sense of what matters; the point of Pragmatism, in this regard at the very least, was to make the theoretical applicable to those living in a world with very little (if anything) set in stone. It is in this light that mystical experience should be viewed. Of course, there will always be individuals who will exploit the human interest in the supernatural for the sake of attention or financial gain, but exploitation is not exclusive to the realm of paranormal and mystical understanding. It is private, personal mystical experience which is being defended here – the right to believe personally, as one is entitled to do so.

The crux of the matter regarding the use of the experiences is the ability of the experiences to be useful to the individual who lives them. In all cases, the predictions cast by the mystical experiences were accurate, only furthering the claim to the utility of the experiences in question. This is not to say all mystical experiences will necessarily be correct by their nature – in fact, it should always be kept in mind mystical experiences are still being held by human beings, which are perfectly capable of both the correct and the incorrect, but most importantly – the fallible.

This also does not mean the only useful mystical experience is one in which the truth of the experience may be observably measured and tested. Even in the event of an incorrect prediction, it still serves the larger point Pragmatism makes quite well – all methods of justification and understanding should not be taken as an impenetrable method of perfect aptitude and service, but as another mode of obtaining information to help ensure one can make the best possible decision regarding his/her life and the events within it – as the old saying goes, that all things should be “taken with a grain of salt.”

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In conclusion, I have provided what I believe to be a fair, balanced account of how to deal with the issue of mystical experience. Again, mystical experience as we have defined is a lived experience in which events took place that cannot be wholly explained by scientific laws, such as physics.

5.1: The Mystical: Then and Now

The presence of mystical experience has existed since the times of the ancient religious man, but I should note a key difference here: the ancient religious man engaged with its fellow citizens to observe and revere the sacred laws which were set by the initiators of his world, its heroes or Gods usually, so that prosperity and wellness would come to its home and people, instead of the awful calamity which impiety promised.

In these particular ages, mystical experience was not looked upon with disdain or skepticism, but awe and reverence – the gift of the sacred before the eyes of the believers and intermediaries of worship. Such experience then, was a remarkable indicator of the presence of favor – a practical guarantee of glory.

In the modern age, however, the use of the sacred has become far more vastly limited in practice, and much of the world views such things as a means of attempting to gain attention at worst, and foolish superstition at best. The mystic in this age must not only be prepared in his attempt to attain such a state of unity or observation, but must also be prepared for the skeptical rampage that is sure to follow it as soon as it declares the passing of its unique experience. Although the advent of using science to explain the universe has brought upon us much good and great, wondrous innovation, it has not helped the modern individual's appetite for constant skepticism.

5.2: The Non-Religious

However, many regard the nonreligious life as a superior one to the one of old: the ways of the ancient pious forefathers. Eliade would disagree with this fact, claiming nonreligious man does not exist purely:

“Modern nonreligious man assumes a new existential situation; he regards himself solely as the subject and agent of history, and he refuses all appeal to transcendence. In other words, he accepts no model for humanity outside the human condition as it can be seen in the various historical situation. Man *makes himself*, and he only makes himself completely in proportion as he desacralizes himself and the world...he will not be truly free until he has killed the last god.” (Eliade 203)

What then are we to say in reference to the modern, nonreligious man? Eliade argues later

“nonreligious man *in the pure state* is a comparatively rare phenomenon, even in the most desacralized of modern societies. The majority of the ‘irreligious’ still behave religiously, even though they are not aware of the fact...the festivities that go with the New Year or with taking up residence in a new house, although laicized, still exhibit the structure of a ritual of renewal. The same phenomenon is observable in the merrymaking that accompanies a marriage or the birth of a child or obtaining a new position or a social advancement, and so on.” (Eliade 204-5)

It would seem then that the modern, nonreligious man must still behave in accordance with his own personal sacred and profane, but this goes against what was argued earlier. Faith is the personal engine of belief; the sacred is the social phenomenon by which the religion administers its judgments, and confers its blessing; the profane is the world in which the social phenomenon of religion others its potential blasphemes, creating the image of the lost, the hopeless, the ultimately downtrodden.

5.3: The Pragmatic End

In whichever way man may lead its life in its own personal ideal world is unmistakably the object, nay the possession, of man and man alone – effectively making any other irrelevant and vice versa. What matters in this occasion is the practice by which it carries its life, the practical – the pragmatic.

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BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

The author and original creator of this academic work is Mr. Adrian Contreras, a Humanities graduate student at the University of Texas at Arlington, the campus in which he was also conferred the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy. He has attended the university a total of five non-consecutive years; Mr. Contreras also attended Eastfield College in the Dallas County Community College District in his non-resident year, where he was conferred the degree of Associate in Arts, completing sixty-six hours of study within a single calendar year with a grade point average of 3.4.

In the Fall Semester of 2013, Mr. Contreras is hoping to attend the University of Texas as a doctoral student of Philosophy, with an interest in studying in the University's Philosophy and the History of Science program. His other research interests include foreign languages (such as Latin, French, Spanish, Japanese, and Hindi), History, Mathematics, Chemistry, Physics, Religion (both the use of and the social movements of Religion in History), Literature (including, but not limited to Poetry, Prose, and Theatrical Works), and Sociology.

Mr. Contreras's long term career goal is to become a university professor and educator, as well as a member of any volunteer program that would allow him to connect with teenagers living in at-risk environments and neighborhoods, so he may better assist young individuals in finding an avenue towards obtaining a college degree. Mr. Contreras feels having lived in a very similar experience throughout his childhood and adolescence, he may be able to communicate in an understanding manner to his targeted demographic in hopes of helping more young people find a way to upward economic mobility, so that the next generation will not have as difficult time with finding a road to success as their parents did.