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DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

Mysticism beyond time:
A comparative study of traditional vs. modern mysticism

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Declaration

Candidate's Declaration

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own original work undertaken under the guidance of my supervisor; and with the exception of references to other people's work which have been duly acknowledged, this dissertation has neither in part nor in whole been submitted for another degree in this university or elsewhere.

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                                                                         Zsuzsanna Szugyiczki

Supervisor's Declaration

I hereby declare that the preparation and the presentation this thesis was supervised in accordance with the supervisor of thesis laid down by the University of Szeged.

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                                                                         Prof. Dr. Dr. András Máté-Tóth

Köszönetnyilvánítás

Mindenekelőtt neked köszönöm meg, Tanár úr, hogy atyai szeretettel és támogatással vezettél. A belém vetett hited, legyen szó tanításról vagy kutatásról, lámpásként világította meg az utamat.

Köszönöm Dr. Fenyvesi Annának a kézirat iránti lelkesedését és a rendkívül alapos lektorálást!

A kutatásra koncentrálni legalább akkora kihívás volt, mint maga a kutatás. Milyen jó, hogy nem elefántcsonttoronyba zárkózva kellett mindezt tennem! Gabi, Peti, Sanyik, élmény volt megosztani veletek a *sötét éjszakák* nehézségeit, és az út örömeit is!

Canım, bu yolculuğun sonunda bana hediye gibi geldin.

S, ahogyan a látható a láthatatlanban gyökerezik, úgy támogat engem feltétlen szeretettel Anya, Vera, Mama és a keresztszüleim.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Attempting to hold water in your open palms… Describing what love is to someone who has never been in love… The moments after waking up from deep sleep, still dwelling at the edge of dreaming – the point of being not quite there and not quite here either… The more you try to unravel a dream's content and message, the more it fades away. It shatters into simplified pieces until only unessential details and the feeling of significance is all that remains.

Mysticism is a phenomenon that welcomes complete silence (an apophatic silence that goes beyond conceptual and linguistic expression) or a cathartic overflow of words. Both attempt to speak about an experience that is essentially ineffable, similarly to the everyday examples mentioned above. The more one tries to grasp, hold on to, and rationalize it, the more it seems to flow past. Reading descriptions, statements, and poems about mystical experiences gets readers only as close to mystical experiences as finding a blaze marking the right path towards the top of the mountain. If you have been there before or hiked somewhere else, you might know or at least have some idea how to proceed and what you will find at the end of the path. However, finding yourself at the crossroads looking at the sign instead of the desired mountaintop view might leave inexperienced hikers frustrated to the extent that they might give up on the whole journey. This is not because mystics are cruel or lazy excursion leaders with a wicked sense of humor; this is, instead, a path for people to discover for themselves.

So why not leave mysticism for the mystics only? Wouldn't it be more sensible to leave it to the people who were often labeled saints, fools, heretics, prophets, or activists? They had their own explanations and descriptions for their mystical experiences. Isn't it just a private matter, primarily about what is being experienced by the individual? Why should anyone try to grasp such a phenomenon scientifically? And, if the experience is so private, could it be grasped scientifically at all?

I consider mysticism to be worthy of scientific research primarily because of its effects and significance at three levels; secondly, because of its frequency in society; and thirdly, for its epistemological relevance. Let me now briefly explain these reasons. First, mystical experiences usually have a long-lasting and significant effect at three levels: the individual's life, the community of the mystic, and society. Mystical experiences often turn the individual's life around, seriously change their focus, and alter their personal narrative around the experience. Some turn toward or convert to a particular religion or a much more intensive practice and dedication to what they already believe in. For instance, Meera Bai, the 16th century Indian poet and mystic, beautifully described her mystical union with and longing for Krishna in her poems. Mystical experiences fueled her passion and love for God. She dedicated the second half of her life to practices focused on a loving devotion to Krishna. She regularly referred to him as her love and husband.[1]

The results of mystical experiences often affect not only the individual's life and actions but also concern their immediate surroundings and communities. Based on what was revealed to them, mystics often decide to change structures around them, rebel against them, or establish

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[1] For example, referring to Krishna as her husband in: It's True I Went to the Market (p. 17), The Door (p. 49.); as her lover: How This Will Go (p. 36.), Mira the Slave (p.56.); as her beloved: Only the Beloved Can Open the Blossoming Spring (p. 46.), Mira Is Mad with Love (p. 47.) (Bly & Hirshfield, 2004).

a new system. For example, 16th century Spanish mystics Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross reformed the Carmelite order and established the Discalced Carmelite order to focus on a contemplative lifestyle and, much like many reform movements, urged for a return to the original values of the order. On the other hand, the well-known 13th century Sufi mystic Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī established the Mevlevi order.

Some mystics are inspired to take further action on a social or global level by advocating for causes based on the values and knowledge gained during the experience. For example, Sojourner Truth was born into slavery in 1797 in the USA. She later became a women's rights activist and abolitionist, known for her speeches such as "Ain't I a Woman?". Her mystical experiences heavily influenced her activism. Similarly, Thomas Merton was inspired by his mystical experience in Louisville, in which he realized that "There are no strangers!",[2] stepped up and advocated for anti-war campaigns and got involved in interreligious dialogue during the Cold War era. There are examples where no visible or obvious changes happen. Mystics sometimes choose to stay silent and follow a rather secluded path, continuing their normal lives. This does not necessarily mean that the experience is not meaningful for them, just the fact that the experience is ultimately ineffable, and they may not want to communicate it.

Second, the question arises whether mystical experiences are, in fact, rare in society and only experienced by a few "chosen" and well-known people, such as the examples highlighted above. At this point, it might seem that mystical experiences are rare, and only a few people have them, but research shows that they do not only happen to saints, activists, or a few well-known people. Based on the works of Sir Alister Hardy, researchers have pointed out the frequency of mystical experiences in society and in an individual's life, and the frequency of different types of mystical experiences throughout one's lifetime.[3]

Third, in addition to the significance and frequency of mystical experience, its epistemological importance also plays an essential role in its scientific relevance. It originates from the directness of such experiences. Mystical experiences are surrounded by contradictions when we observe them from the outside, in so far as they purportedly cross the line between the immanent and the transcendent. In other words, they provide evident insights into otherwise inaccessible realms and a strong sense of authority. Similarly, mystics seem to cross many borders with their actions and interpretations. They make scientists question what they know about human perception and, ultimately, the borders of our knowledge in fields such as religious studies, philosophy, psychology, neuroscience, and others.

Moreover, the knowledge gained through mystical experience cannot be fully transmitted to those who have not crossed this line. The ineffability of these experiences does not help to clarify contradictions. Mystics struggle to use ordinary words (which are grounded in earthly phenomena) for their out-of-ordinary experiences. Scholars struggle to understand something they have not experienced and what is described inadequately in beautiful poems, songs, metaphors, movements, or by complete silence.

So, how should we speak scientifically about mystical experiences? Silence would be the only perfect explanation, yet ineffability did not stop scholars' endeavors to understand, define and categorize mystical experiences. As I point out in the second chapter, there are

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[2] (Merton, Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander, 1989, p. 158)
[3] (Hay, 'The Biology of God': What is the Current Status of Hardy's Hypothesis?, 1994)

numerous approaches to the scientific study of mysticism. A neuroscientist will, for example, focus on the specific parts of the brain activated during a meditative experience and most likely explain it away with biological functions. A theologian will focus on the knowledge gained during the experience and its relevance to specific teachings of the religion.

In the present work, I adopt the methodological standpoint of religious studies proposed by Ninian Smart, often called dialectical phenomenology.[4] This approach aims to position itself in between reductionism and theories with theological base. Gary Kessler aptly calls Smart's approach as methodological agnosticism summarizing Smart's standpoint as "… he held that religion was an autonomous force that could not be entirely reduced to psychological, social, political, or economic factors. He argued that the phenomenological method, with its bracketing of belief in the existence of supernatural powers (a kind of methodological agnosticism) and its insistence on the use of empathy to enter into the 'experiences and intentions of religious participants,' was the best way to avoid both reductionism and advocacy."[5]

This is an approach in between the previously mentioned ones. This method ensures the focus on the personal explanation for mystical experiences and the personal and societal significance when explaining the phenomena in the research. However, this method avoids the role of advocating for whether what was experienced is true. The question of the truth of the content of the experience is secondary here – it is of essential value for mystics and perhaps from the point of theology, but not from the perspective of religious studies. With methodological agnosticism, I aim to stay in the middle: avoiding a reductionist approach that would explain away mysticism with biological functions, and keeping away from a theological focus on the truth of what is experienced.

Even though I am dedicating an entire chapter to the scientific approaches, methods, definitions, and categories of mysticism in this dissertation, I consider it crucial to establish a preliminary understanding of what the concept of mysticism is here. For that purpose, I am quoting a definition from the comparative religious studies perspective. Richard King defines mysticism in the following way:

> "In a comparative context mysticism has come to denote those aspects of the various religious traditions which emphasize unmediated experience of oneness with the ultimate reality, however differently conceived."[6]

It is also essential to briefly clarify the difference between mysticism (noun), a phenomenon centered around a specific religious experience, called mystical experience; a mystical experience (noun), which, based on King, would be defined as an "unmediated experience of oneness with the ultimate reality"; a mystic (noun), a person who has had a mystical experience; and mystical, an adjective referring to objects, people, texts, etc. related to mysticism.

In the case of abstract notions such as 'mysticism' and 'religion', the question of comparability ultimately arises. Like 'religion', 'mysticism' is not a native term either, as

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[4] Its main aims are summarized well here: (Smart, The Science of Religion & the Sociology of Knowledge: Some Methodological Questions, 1973, pp. 158-159). The application of the methodology is best highlighted in another book of Smart's with plenty of examples. (Smart, Dimensions of the Sacred: An Anatomy of the World's Beliefs, 1996)

[5] (Kessler, 2012, pp. 180-181)

[6] (King, 2005, 306.).

Jonathan Z. Smith argues: "[…] it is a term created by scholars for their intellectual purposes and therefore is theirs to define" to create the foundational disciplinary horizon.[7] While this substantial purpose of definitions is undoubted, further possible implications must be kept in mind for the concepts of religion and mysticism. Scientific discourses might influence religious, political, and everyday narratives of these concepts. In the case of mystical experiences, some of these vital influences on narratives can include descriptions that can either provide explanations about the experience people had and cannot pinpoint or help them to process it.

In its relatively brief history of the field, scholars of religious studies have attempted to define 'religion' over and over. These attempts are usually categorized as essential or functional definitions.[8] Both of these types have their strengths and weaknesses. Essential definitions often refer to the transcendent dimensions of religion, which functional definitions cannot grasp with such accuracy. Functional definitions often accurately grasp the variety of social functions of religions, which essential ones fail to do. While the immense variety of definitions is notable in itself,[9] here I would like to highlight another aspect of this endeavor. Despite all the challenges of defining what "religion is",[10] it should be a continuous effort in the meaningful discussion of religious phenomena. Similarly, reshaping the definition of mysticism, based on the recent developments of the phenomena and scientific discoveries, is a significant element in its study. As Thomas Tweed describes throughout his work, these definitions provide the maps[11] to find one's way in today's increasingly diverse phenomena. In the present work, I argue that, especially because of religious pluralism today, it is vital to keep these maps up to date. While the overwhelming variety and range of differences perhaps encourage the study of singular cases, trying to grasp the common features of the diverse religious and mystical phenomena is not meaningless. As for the concept of mysticism, this common feature seems to be mystical experiences. Besides apparent differences attributed to cultural contexts, mystical experiences seem to transcend the limitations of time and space.

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[7]"'Religion' is not a native term; it is a term created by scholars for their intellectual purposes and therefore is theirs to define. It is a second-order, generic concept that plays the same role in establishing a disciplinary horizon that a concept such as 'language' plays in linguistics or 'culture' plays in anthropology. There can be no disciplined study of religion without such a horizon." (Smith, 1998, pp. 281-282)

[8] The essential definitions of religion focus on the *conditio sine qua non*, the essential element in religions, without which religions would not be the same. For Rudolf Otto and William James, this essence is religious experience. For others like Sigmund Freud, religion is essentially an illusion: people create religion as a response to realizing their most vital and most pressing fears and desires (Freud, The Future of an Illusion, 1975) (Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents, 1984). The other type of definition of religion is the functional one, which refers to the psychological, social etc. functions of religion in society. However, these definitions are often too broad and unable to reflect on the aspects of religion related to the transcendent. One of the most famous and widely-used functional definitions is Ninian Smart's seven dimensions of religion, entailing seven different personal and social functions: ritual, experiential, narrative, doctrinal, ethical, social, and material (Smart, Dimensions of the Sacred: An Anatomy of the World's Beliefs, 1996). More about the essential definitions: (Capps, 1995, pp. 1-52) and functional definitions (Capps, 1995, pp. 157-208)

[9] Collections of these definitions can be found in James Leuba's and Hughes and McCutcheon's works (Leuba, A Psychological Study of Religion: Its Origin, Function, and Future, 1912), (Hughes & McCutcheon, 2021).

[10] Hughes and McCutcheon neatly summarize many of these challenges in their books (Hughes & McCutcheon, 2021).

[11] (Tweed, 2006)

"One of my bullies
held a forbidden object a mirror
in front of me today
I've always wanted a face
without features
blurred as if
leaning beyond time."[12]

      János Lackfi's metaphor is imagining Saint Margaret of Hungary at the end of her life. In this poetic vision her face is not the same anymore without her facial features. She seems to have left behind her distinctive characteristics. As this face looks in a mirror, for the first time in a long while, it seems to be leaning above time. As if what kept her in the flow of time was what made her different or distinct. Throughout her life of suffering, religious practices and experiences, she lost these features and became "featureless". She reached a clear, empty, universal state, which – in the poet's imaginary description – is visible in Saint Margaret's facial features, too. While the bodily manifestation of the effects of mystical experiences is not the subject of this study, the idea of mysticism transcending limitations of space, and especially time, is. Therefore the following questions arise. Is there a phenomenon and an essentially similar mystical experience that can be found in different religions and eras? If so, how can this concept be adequately described? If not, then how can we explain the changes? Do we need more than one definition when discussing the mysticism of different eras and cultures? What are the criteria that distinguish a mystical experience from other kinds of religious (or non-religious) experience?

      The questions of comparability between different religious traditions often arise, as I will point out in the discussion about contextualism and perennialism in Chapter 2: Epistemological and Methodological Issues. However, temporal changes are less frequently discussed. Nevertheless, I consider them to be of an essential importance when it comes to the scientific understanding of mysticism, especially with regard to contemporary phenomena. Let me briefly mention how I came to presume this importance and, at the same time, highlight some negative assets of contemporary research.

      When I started studying mysticism, I read "classic" Christian mystics such as Augustine, Meister Eckhart, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, etc. Their interpretation of mystical experiences was full of passion, love, and a sense of unity. They were vivid illustrations employing complex metaphors about depth, dedication, and the experience of powerful divine presence. After a while, I started wondering what the situation with mysticism was today. What has happened to mystics? I presumed there were fewer of them nowadays since there are much fewer monasteries, isolation, and such dedication to preparatory techniques. This was the time

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[12] (Lackfi, 2000, p. 94) Translation by Zsuzsanna Szugyiczki
„Bosszantóim egyike tiltott
tárgyat tükröt tartott
elém ma
Mindig szerettem volna
ilyen vonások nélküli arcot
mintha elmosódva
az idő fölé hajolna"

when the works of Thomas Merton were introduced to me as a contemporary example of mysticism. He lived in a monastery and showed similar traits to medieval mystics I was familiar with: a strong sense of authority and a sense of unity present in the mystical texts, and the transformative aspects of the experience. However, I also discovered that he did not live in a similar isolation, had no visions, and had one of his most well-known mystical experiences in a crowded street. Compared to the elaborate poetry of John of the Cross and the various metaphors with which Teresa of Avila described her mystical visions, Merton's texts seemed shallow and simple. The effects of the experiences seemed to be transitory and superficial at first sight, considering the changes mystical experiences inspired in other ages. In this comparison, Merton's mysticism did not seem like mysticism at all back then. The absence of modern examples remained with me for years until I returned to researching medieval mysticism.

My initial reaction and studies show many similarities to the depths and attitude of research of modern mysticism. Unfortunately, much of the current research is based on simplistic comparisons of modern examples with already established (often medieval) classic examples of mysticism, and rarely move beyond the initial discovery of dissimilarities. I have found that, at best, academic research is stuck with pointing out some differences between today's phenomena and past examples.[13] The differences are often highlighted, and the idea of change is lurking in the background, but the attempts to thoroughly understand these changes and describe today's phenomena are lacking.

My dissertation focuses on understanding mysticism beyond temporal differences, through characterizing the changes, that today's scientific literature very vaguely suggests and, pointing to the similarities, almost completely ignores. Therefore, in this dissertation, I present the following arguments:

1. In the present dissertation, first, I argue that we can characterize mysticism as traditional and modern mysticism based on contemporary theoretical works.
2. Second, this differentiation applies only to the contextual elements of mysticism: what precedes and follows the mystical experiences.
3. Third, as this differentiation does not apply to mystical experiences, modern mysticism is essentially the same as traditional mysticism.
4. Fourth, modern mysticism lacks sufficient theoretical explanations.
5. Last, due to contextual changes, modern mysticism requires an updated theoretical account in terms of its definition and categories.

In this dissertation, I argue that we can and should differentiate between traditional and modern mysticism. Most of the definitions of mysticism are based on traditional mystical experiences. Some of these definitions use traditional mysticism as a base; others use it as a blueprint for deciding what qualifies as mysticism. I also argue that the definitions and theoretical basis for understanding mysticism need to be revised in light of modern mysticism. Before I delve into the preview of the argumentation, I believe it will be helpful to comment on

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[13] I elaborate on some of these approaches in Chapter 3 and their theoretical underpinnings in Chapter 5.

the phrases "traditional" and "modern", as well as "past" and "present". I provide only a primary differentiation here and elaborate on the subject in Chapter 3.

How can mysticism be labeled as 'traditional' or 'modern'? In the core of mysticism lies the mystical experience, which is not only challenging to articulate but cannot be induced and therefore predicted and repeated. Preparatory activities, techniques, and texts explaining the path toward the mystical experience might construct a mystical tradition or fit into an existing one. Not only the preparation but the interpretation and what follows the mystical experience can constitute a religious or mystical tradition. The question of whether mystical experiences are partially or fully constructed by a tradition or previous experiences and presuppositions leads back to the fundamental difference in the argumentation of contextualism and perennialism. I discuss this opposition and the current questions in Chapter 2 of my dissertation. Thus, activities, texts, and knowledge related to preparation and interpretation (and possibly to mystical experiences) might construct a mystical tradition. What is traditional mysticism, then? I argue that we can talk about traditional mysticism in cases when the contextual elements of mysticism are exclusively determined by the tradition in which the mystic was born and/or raised in. In contrast, modern mysticism presupposes a plurality in schemas of explanation, not necessarily connected to any traditional religious framework.

Related to the differentiation between traditional and modern mysticism, it is important to briefly highlight these concepts' relation to the historical forms of mysticism. Here, both traditional and modern mysticism is understood as what we could call categories or types of mysticism. Many other categories and their use in understanding mysticism will be elaborated on in Chapter 3. Furthermore, in Chapter 3, I will explain why traditional mysticism is mainly (but not exclusively) connected to medieval mysticism and modern mysticism is connected chiefly to mystical experiences in modernity. This aspect implies a historical succession and connection between the two. It would undoubtedly be a worthwhile endeavor to understand the historical processes and influences that led to changes in mysticism: for example, the theological, philosophical, and historical changes in one or more specific mystical traditions. However, the present work aims to compare two types of mysticism, traditional and modern, and to highlight the similarities and differences between them. Through the comparison of traditional and modern phenomena, it aims to understand the characteristics of both types as well as to refine the definition of mysticism. While understanding mysticism as a historical tradition also helps us to understand the concepts of mysticism and mystical experiences, this dissertation seeks to show that mystical experiences exhibit an essential similarity that transcends temporal and contextual frameworks.

In Chapter 2 of my dissertation, I outline the theoretical framework which will serve as a basis for comparing traditional and modern mysticism. The chapter starts by presenting the unique features of mystical language. Based on these linguistic characteristics, it continues with the epistemological and methodological issues it raises. Then, an exemplary and foundational approach to mysticism is presented through the works of William James. To present a broader set of approaches and mark the path this work takes, the following section approaches from different fields of study are explored, namely, psychology, religious studies, theology, and philosophy. Finally, I introduce a threefold understanding of mysticism used in the remaining parts of this work.

Chapter 3 focuses on traditional and modern mysticism by introducing contemporary theoretical approaches to mysticism, first, through the work of three authors, Richard H. Jones, Sophia Rose Arjana, and Don Cupitt. Second, important categorizations of mysticism are made, as religious vs. non-religious, Eastern vs. Western, Male vs. Female, Kataphatic vs. Apophatic vs. Translinguistic, Extrovertive vs. Introvertive, and Ergotropic vs. Trophotropic. Third, I establish the criteria for comparing traditional and modern mysticism. I start with Ernst Troeltsch's *Protestantism and Progress*[14] to define the meaning of traditional and modern further. Culture and subject are the two key points chosen for comparison in this dissertation. I argue that traditional mysticism mostly belongs to the Middle Ages, and this era can be described as church civilization, according to Troeltsch. The subject of traditional mysticism is private, and the act is individual. On the other hand, modern mysticism mainly belongs to modernity, which is described with the term of plurality, based on Peter L. Berger's work[15]. The subject of modern mysticism is public, and the act is performative. At the end of this chapter, I again refer to the definition of mysticism and the common characteristics of these two categories.

In Chapter 4, traditional and modern mysticism are compared based on the works of John of the Cross and Thomas Merton. John of the Cross's mysticism is introduced as a paradigmatic example for traditional mysticism, complying with the criteria of both culture and subject. His works are presented as part of the mystical literature from the Golden Era of Spanish Mysticism. Thomas Merton's works are not highlighted here because of their popularity in Christian spirituality or Merton's unquestionable role in the development of interreligious dialogue. I consider Merton's mysticism as an excellent example for the shift from traditional to modern mysticism. Furthermore, I analyze and compare the interpretation of Merton's and John of the Cross's mysticism based on the criteria introduced in Chapter 3. All this is in order to probe the supposed theoretical difference between traditional and modern mysticism, presented in the previous chapter, and to highlight whether and where the differences can be found.

Chapter 5 of my dissertation focuses on understanding modern mysticism. First, I reflect on contemporary approaches and summarize the essential ideas and assumptions about modern mysticism. Second, dichotomies which implicitly shape these assumptions are presented, together with alternative theoretical approaches that better fit modern mysticism. This chapter also introduces Thomas Tweed's concept of functional fluidity of religions and Peter L. Berger's theory of pluralism. Finally, at the end of my dissertation, in Chapter 6, I draw the conclusions of the argumentation and the results of the comparison of traditional and modern mysticism, also highlighting the changes needed regarding the definition of mysticism.

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[14] (Troeltsch & Montgomery, Protestantism and Progress: a Historical Study of the Relation of Protestantism to the Modern World, 1912)
[15] (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014)

Chapter 2. Speaking of the ineffable: *The scientific study of mysticism*

Introduction

The word *mysticism* comes from Greek, *μύω* (muo) "to shut, to close".[16] It may refer to closing one's eyes or mouth, or to a vow of silence, or even to the (years-long) preparation for initiation in Pythagoreanism, when the initiates had to remain silent. Related to that, both etymologically and in meaning is *μύστης* (*éémystés*) referring to initiates, often connected to mystery cults (mysterion). This meaning refers to practices and experiences which are opened only for the initiated.[17]

While sharing some characteristics, understandably, the everyday use of the word is far from the academic understanding of it. The everyday use of the word also grasps the hidden, closed off, and concealed nature of the phenomenon, but often with a pejorative overtone. In this sense, it often refers to anything beyond rational understanding without hands-on proof. Moreover, it is also connected to spiritual, religious, and occult practices related to what is beyond our everyday perception, understanding, and capabilities; something beyond, but not in the sense that we should forget about it because we cannot reach it, more likely something that lures us to explore it, to get close to it, where we become like the initiated, the knowers of the secrets.

The 'beyond-nature' side of mysticism affects seekers differently. Mystics who have already experienced what is beyond long to be there again. Scholars, often without similar experiences, react in various ways, as, for them, there is no direct access to the object of the study – the actual experiences and their content. Only accounts of mystical experiences are available to them through the layers of interpretation. What complicates matters further is the unrepeatability of mystical experiences. While the notion of unrepeatability is somewhat applicable to any experience, the accidentality of mystical experiences is beyond everyday occurrences. It is enhanced by the idea that they cannot be induced, or they are dependent on divine actions which cannot be influenced. In short, they are perceived as almost accidental[18]: they happen when they happen, if they happen. Inducing or repeating the experiences would be problematic. The indirect access to the content of the experiences and their unrepeatability makes the scientific study of the subject problematic.

Adding to these 'complications', mystics do not refer to everyday notions but report the acquisition of knowledge of the transcendent. For the aforementioned reasons these claims are essentially unverifiable. Scientific inquiries have two general responses to these knowledge claims. On the one hand, some scholars accept mystical experiences as a valid way of perception and gaining knowledge, even though they cannot scientifically be tested or observed. This approach can be described as an essentialist one. It usually focuses on the experience and its effect, rather than questioning whether what was experienced is true, or whether the experience

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[16] Richard H. Jones gives a brief history of the word "mystical", mentioning its adaptation by Christianity and its psychologization. (Jones R. H., An Introduction to the Study of Mysticism, 2021, pp. 1-2)
[17] More on this in the first chapter of Silvia Montiglio's work. (Montiglio, 2000, pp. 9-45)
[18] This notion is questionable. Related to William James's idea of passivity of mystical experiences, I will be presenting some counter examples.

itself actually leads people beyond the veil of knowing. On the other hand, mystical experiences can be considered 'ordinary' religious experiences or usual human experiences with an added sense of significance for the individual. This reductionist approach ultimately questions the validity of the core feature of mystical experiences, i.e. the direct connection of the individual and the ultimate reality. Therefore, the element of a direct connection between the individual and the ultimate reality is being reduced to a narrative that serves as a validating factor for the individual. In this sense, the direct connection is perceived as a tool to accentuate the supposed uniqueness of the experience and highlight its validity and depth by referring to the ultimate reality.

This chapter focuses on introducing scientifically plausible examples from both reductionist and essentialist perspectives to clarify the standpoint taken in this dissertation. First, the characteristics of mystical language, then second, the related epistemological and methodological problems are introduced. Third, William James's work and contemporary critical approaches will serve as one of the first attempts at the scientific study of mysticism. Fourth, disciplinary approaches to mysticism in psychology, religious studies, theology, and philosophy will be discussed. Lastly, the concept of mysticism used in this work will be outlined. With these topics and examples, I attempt to show some milestones in the scientific discussion of mysticism in the past 120 years. The aim is not to provide a detailed historical overview but to point out relevant approaches of previous scientific works and discussions for the topic of this dissertation.

The language of mysticism

The ineffable nature of mystical experiences seems undoubted throughout disciplines, notwithstanding that there are not many aspects of them that scholars agree on. Ineffability[19] can be interpreted as referring to a twofold difficulty. First, it is challenging for mystics to put an essentially personal and extraordinary experience into words, as it seems inexplicable in everyday terms. Second, it is difficult to understand the mystical experience based solely on oral or written descriptions, especially if one has not had such an experience before. I will concentrate on the first element of this characteristic now and return to the second one later in this dissertation.[20]

The first difficulty is essentially connected to the delimiting nature of words. The words that efficiently refer to everyday objects, feelings, and phenomena seem inadequate for describing extraordinary experiences. The inadequacy often results in complete silence or a refusal to speak about the core of the experience or the knowledge gained. In the case of Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī,[21] we can see an example of the latter case.

> *"Now it is time for silence.*
> *If I told you about His true essence*
> *You would fly from your self and be gone,*

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[19] I use the term primarily based on James's *Varieties*. I will elaborate on it in a subsection below.
[20] The subsection titled: *Understanding mysticism: Methodological and theoretical issues*
[21] The most well-known Sufi mystic from the 13th century.

> *and neither door nor roof could hold you back!"*[22]

When words fail, sometimes all there is left is stammering, just like how John of the Cross[23] describes it:

> *"That perfect knowledge*
> *was of peace and holiness*
> *held at no remove*
> *in profound solitude;*
> *it was something so secret*
> *that I was left stammering,*
> *transcending all knowledge."*[24]

Otherwise, if mystics choose to speak about their experiences, they often stress that words only allow them, at most, to point to a small portion of the experiences or an everyday experience somewhat resembling theirs. The inadequacy is the most bothersome in these cases, as mystics struggle both with the need to talk about what they experienced and that their expressions make the events seem ordinary, simply tangible, and cannot give back their essential nature.

> "I have the immense joy of being man, a member of a race in which God Himself became incarnate. As if the sorrows and stupidities of the human condition could overwhelm me, now I realize what we all are. And if only everybody could realize this! But it cannot be explained. There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun."[25]

In most cases, the need to express the mystical experiences is more substantial than the struggle felt over the inadequacy of the words. In these instances, not complete silence but an overflow of words or use of several, intricate metaphors compensate for the limiting nature of everyday expressions. Mystics find their way around everyday modes of speaking and writing. They use the empty yet fertile spaces of imagination by evoking similar past experiences and familiar sensations. They drive their readers as close as they can, point in the right direction, and leave the rest up to them. Many exquisite metaphors and comparisons work this way for mystics. Teresa of Avila was exceptional in this regard. Through the constant extenuation of herself as uneducated and unworthy, she left behind some of the most diverse and clearly expressed metaphors in mysticism. Metaphors played a primary role in her attempt to inform and educate her sisters in the Discalced Carmelite order. She used a fascinating set of them to describe the spiritual betrothal. The union of God and soul is explained as two distinct beings/objects becoming one, to the extent that they cannot be separated any more, just like two candles can

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[22] *Who is at my door?* in: (Star, 1997, p. 99)

[23] Some Catholic saints, most often St. John of the Cross, will be mentioned in this work. In English, generally, their names are mentioned without 'saint', such as John of the Cross, Hildegard of Bingen, and Teresa of Avila. I am following this general use of their names in this work.

[24] *Stanzas concerning an ecstasy experienced in high contemplation* in: (John, Kavanaugh, & Rodriguez, The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross. Revised edition, 1991, p. 53)

[25] (Merton, Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander, 1989, p. 157.)

share their flame, so we cannot differentiate their origins. In addition to flames, light and water are also used as metaphors for the same mystical phenomenon:

> "In the spiritual marriage the union is like what we have when rain falls from the sky into a river or fount; all is water, for the rain that fell from heaven cannot be divided or separated from the water of the river."[26]

Perhaps, the ultimate forms of indirect mystical expressions are koans. For outsiders, they are often explained as resembling riddles. Though these "riddles" do not have a solution, as they are not meant to be intellectually understood or solved. This nature is also a reminder that Zen is not a philosophy or an intellectual quest but essentially a practice and enlightenment experience. Koans convey the impermanent nature of the world and human existence. They are traditionally used in Zen Buddhism to prepare and test students on their way toward enlightenment. Therefore, koans are not only a form of mystical expression but a form of preparation, too. One of the most famous koans is a question: "What is the sound of one hand clapping?". Dōgen Zen is known for being the establisher of Japanese Zen, passing on teachings,[27] and koans, and "…his use of the Five Ranks of Master Dongshan to illuminate different perspectives available within a kōan."[28] Here is an example from one of his 300 collected koans:

> *"The enlightened and the deluded all live in its presence.*
> *Move toward it, and the sickness is increased.*
> *Describe it,*
> *and you miss its reality."[29]*

Well-known pieces of poetry and prose also reflect mystical influences like Dante's *Divine Comedy* or some of Goethe's poetry. Beyond textual and verbal expressions, mystical experiences serve as inspirations for other types of art. Hildegard von Bingen's (1098-1179) music is an outstanding example of this. She was a German Benedictine Abbess, mystic and writer. In addition to the religious context, she is noted for her groundbreaking medical and scientific texts. She had visions from early childhood and referred to these as inspirations regarding her varied works. She was also an outstanding composer, inspired by her mystical experiences in her work. She never learned to play music formally, but she self-taught herself throughout her life. Hildegard claimed that music came to her in her mystical experiences – through clairvoyance and clairaudience. Today she is a cherished figure in medieval monophonic music. *Ordo Virtutum* is one of her most well-known sacred pieces, an allegorical morality play that showcases the human soul's journey and struggles between choosing good (a virtuous life) and evil (the Devil).

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[26] (Teresa, Kavanaugh, & Rodriguez, The Interior Castle, 1979, p. 179.)
[27] (Dógen, Sóbógenzó-Zuimonki, 2020)
[28] (Dógen, Loori, & Tanahashi, The True Dharma Eye: Zen Master Dōgen's Three Hundred Kōans, 2011, p. 32.)
[29] (Dógen, Loori, & Tanahashi, The True Dharma Eye: Zen Master Dōgen's Three Hundred Kōans, 2011, p. 125)

Nonetheless, the study of mysticism and mystical experiences are primarily based on textual and verbal resources, written personal accounts of experiences, transcribed records,[30] and interviews in some cases. However, mystical texts are not merely accounts of an experience but, often, knowledge claims[31] about their objects, i.e. ultimate reality.[32] Dependence on textual and verbal resources already presents several methodological problems. How should scholars deal with references to the ultimate reality in mystical texts? These experiences have an unquestionable clarity, sense of authority, and power for mystics. From the perspective of religious studies, deciding on whether these claims are valid is not the task or competence of a scholar. Nonetheless, this issue provides an added layer of complexity to the equation. In addition to the text related problems I am mentioning here, I will touch upon the gap between experience and interpretation, contextual questions such as the sociocultural dependence of language.

At first glimpse, mystical language might seem vague, lofty, imprecise, and overall confusing. Generally, two types of responses occur in science for the uncertainty of mystical language. In most cases, researchers try to anchor the abstract concepts and metaphors in an intellectually graspable way: they try to operationalize the mystical statements. After all, this is what scientific methodology demands and what science does with all its other objects. The problems occur when such scientific explanations aim to serve as comprehensive and dominating explanations for mysticism. As Carrette points out, over the last century, psychology and neurology have moved from an alternative explanation for mystical experiences to the claim of comprehensive explanations based only on biological and physical activities of the body. At the start of the discipline, the brain's electrical activity was explored during meditative states. However, without the actual personal accounts of the experience, these data could not tell much about the experience.[33] Why were these experiments still conducted after that or conducted in the first place? Mystical language seemed to have ineffable qualities, and mystical experiences did not seem precise enough to discover more about them. Machines seemed to provide more precise pictures of the subject. Even though they did not provide much explanation or were better than personal accounts, they seemed a better way for many scholars. Carrette explains the reasons perfectly: the imprecision of mystical experiences stood against something imperfect yet possibly precise and tangible. "The imprecision of language was set against the attempts to pinpoint electrical activity in brain cells, with philosophical assumptions that linguistic displays and neurons could in some way provide statements of reality."[34]

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[30] As Komjathy points out, many of the mystical accounts from the past were transcribed. (Komjathy, 2011, p. 860)

[31] William James's concept of noetic quality refers to his. (James, The Varieties of Religious Experience A Study in Human Nature. Centenary edition, 2002, p. 295) Moreover, from a philosophical perspective Richard H. Jones dedicates a major part of both of his works on mysticism to this question. (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, pp. 71-120) (Jones R. H., An Introduction to the Study of Mysticism, 2021, pp. 32-50)

[32] Ultimate reality is the term used in this work referring to the variety of ideas about the transcendent/foundation of the world/ultimate reality. The concept can integrate monotheistic, polytheistic, atheistic, as well as transcendent, and immanent views, and many other in between these categories. It is used based on Richard King's definition of mystical experiences, mentioned in the introduction of this work. (King, Mysticism and spirituality, 2005, p. 306)

[33] (Carrette, The Return to James: Psychology, Religion and the Amnesia of Neuroscience, 2002, pp. xlvix, li, lii):

[34] (Carrette, The Return to James: Psychology, Religion and the Amnesia of Neuroscience, 2002, p. xlix)

With the focus on brain activity and biological functions, natural sciences have aimed to define what mystical experiences are, and, ultimately, what mysticism is. The substantial question of "what" mystical experiences are is replaced in the context of "politics of interpretation"[35] with "Who can tell what mystical experiences are?". Science and, particularly, natural sciences, aim to dominate the narratives about mysticism in a reductionist way. This way, the value and depth of mystical language are lost or at least suffer a significant loss. Carrette argues against such confusion of the differently functioning scientific and mystical language.[36]

Why should researchers turn back to mystical language and accounts? What would this return entail? It would bring back the inherent ineffability, uncertainty, and confusion of mystical language. Along with Carrette, I argue that this is not necessarily a problem but more of a value which demands a humble approach from researchers.[37] While the uncertainty seems contradictory from the perspective of natural science, it leads much closer to the actual phenomenon, which is at the center of the study. In this sense, the goals of scientific discovery are not rolling away but getting closer. Amid the alleged certainty of natural scientific discoveries dominating scientific approaches, it is indeed uncomfortable to familiarize oneself with the uncertainty of mystical language.

Epistemological and methodological issues in the study of mystical experiences

Scientific research into mysticism often starts with marking off the term *mysticism* and *mystical* from the everyday and often pejorative sense of the word. The word *mystical* often refers to objects related to fantasy. The word is also widely used for incomprehensible notions or vague statements referring to something beyond our understanding, often related to spiritual notions such as thought transference and belief in spirit return.[38] Beyond the vague and often negative everyday connotations of the term, none of the theoretical works have an easy task when it comes to mysticism. Given the ineffable, passive, and subjective nature of the experiences, it is not an ideal object for scientific study. As I referred to this when discussing

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[35] Carrette argues similarly. "To recognise the importance of narrative accounts of experience does, of course, take the authority of interpreting such experience away from the scientist. The scientist is at least dependent on the 'account' of the experience with all the shifting signs that make up human understanding. This places great weight on the narrative of 'religious experience' and opens up crucial issues about the hermeneutics and politics of our representation of experience. Language, culture and society play important roles in the way we organise and report our experience, for the scientific as much as the 'religious' community." (Carrette, The Return to James: Psychology, Religion and the Amnesia of Neuroscience, 2002, p. lxi)

[36] "The problem is that religious language functions differently to scientific language and to confuse the two is to enter a political power struggle for ideological supremacy on the nature of human experience, a dangerous form of fascism." (Carrette, The Return to James: Psychology, Religion and the Amnesia of Neuroscience, 2002, p. liii) The confusion is especially relevant in psychology, according to Carrette. (Carrette, The Return to James: Psychology, Religion and the Amnesia of Neuroscience, 2002, p. lix)

[37] (Carrette, The Return to James: Psychology, Religion and the Amnesia of Neuroscience, 2002, p. lii)

[38] The latter examples are mentioned by William James, who starts his inquiry on mysticism with these distinctions. (James, The Varieties of Religious Experience A Study in Human Nature. Centenary edition, 2002, p. 294) The same approach is mentioned by Komjathy (Komjathy, 2011, p. 855) and Jones as well (Jones R. H., An Introduction to the Study of Mysticism, 2021, p. 1).

the language of mysticism, mystical accounts are far from an ideal and concrete object of study. Their subjectiveness leads to several methodological and epistemological problems. In the next section, I concentrate on the epistemological problems, primarily related to the interpretation of experiences, based on the philosophical debate of constructivism versus perennialism.

The gap between experience and interpretation is a topic that has an overall significance in epistemology. Mystical experiences once again seem to provide additional challenges to this issue. Mystical experiences usually happen unexpectedly, not in controlled scientific environments, and they cannot be repeated or observed directly.[39] Therefore, the entanglement of words and the layers of interpretation present difficulty in understanding what mystical experiences are. Contextualism is a powerful reminder of context: the embeddedness of language, texts, and interpretations in both directions, both by the transcriber and the researcher or reader. Understanding the context is undoubtedly essential, but according to perennialism, there is more to understand about mystical experiences and mysticism. This section focuses on the theoretical, mainly epistemological, and methodological issues in connection with the context of the mystical experiences and their interpretations.

Experience and interpretation: Contextualism versus Perennialism

Mystical experiences present challenging epistemological problems related to experience and interpretation. Moreover, they also seem to offer an exciting and debatable exception to the contextual embeddedness of human experiences. In this section, I concentrate on the gap between experience and interpretation, furthermore, the communication of the experience with outsiders. The reason why I go into details regarding this question rather than other equally relevant questions[40] is that I believe these views can influence our approach to studying mysticism in general and studying modern mysticism in particular. I want to highlight here that beyond the philosophical value of this debate, both constructivists and perennialists implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) take a stand on what is worth studying in terms of mysticism. Along with this issue, they also implicitly determine how it should be studied and to what extent we should investigate when it comes to mystical experiences. Understanding this debate is essential in the scientific treatment of mystical experiences. This debate highlights opposing theoretical arguments about whether one can explain away mystical experiences in light of the context and, therefore, neutralize the weight of the mystical knowledge claims or leave this quality of the experiences untouched.

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[39] Neurological studies aim for the exact opposite of that. The examination of brain activities of people in meditation and other activities leading to religious experiences aims to locate and directly observe the respective experiences. I will elaborate on the scope of neurological observations in the study of mysticism later in this chapter.

[40] These include issues whether visions and drug-induced experiences can be considered mystical experiences; or whether there is a significant difference between mystical experiences and religious experiences; and also the scientific approach towards mystical knowledge claims, which I have mentioned earlier.

Contextualism

The debate between contextualists and perennialists circles around the following epistemological point: human experiences seem to be determined by their contexts (language, culture, time, etc.), but mystical experiences seem to question the unambiguity of such notions. I discuss two crucially different theoretical approaches to this question: the constructivist and the perennialist approaches related to the ongoing debate about mystical experiences.

Constructivism[41] (or contextualism) mainly argues that every human experience is constructed or determined by the person's sociocultural context. Perennialism (or essentialism, non-constructivism, decontextualism, or perennial philosophy) takes the standpoint that some experiences are exceptions to this construction. They argue that there is at least a possibility, if not the reality, of a universal experience that overarches culture. Moreover, mystical experiences have a prominent role in this argument, as some of them lead beyond the determination of context toward so-called Pure Consciousness Events (PCE).[42] This type of experience is thought to be independent of contextual determination and transcending cultural differences. The latter is undoubtedly an essentialist standpoint. In the philosophical debates, it is called chiefly "perennialism", often intended to be mocked from a scientific perspective when labeled so. In this mocking sense, it refers to a particular understanding of modern spirituality, which oversimplifies world religions by connecting them to one shared origin. In other words, the term 'perennialism' is intended to refer to a less sophisticated, simplifying, and unifying vision of religion. Regardless of the mocking sense, there are three reasons I stick with this term. First, most scientific literature refers to this approach as Perennialism.[43] Second, one of the prominent authors I quote here, Robert Forman, calls this "perennial philosophy".[44] Third, oversimplification does not apply to the perennialist works I am referring to. On the contrary, they are sophisticated, susceptible texts, referring to the latest scientific results, written from a scientific perspective.[45]

Many prestigious authors could be mentioned from both sides of the debate: constructivist philosophers Jess Byron Hollenback[46] and Wayne Proudfoot;[47] and perennialist authors William G. Barnard[48] as well as Jonathan Shear.[49] The limitations of length and subject

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[41] The term constructivism derives from the Latin word *constructo*, meaning "construct, assemble, accumulate". Constructivism appears in pedagogy, art, mathematics, and moral philosophy, and we can also talk about social constructivism. Here I focus on its epistemological relevance.

[42] Also known as Pure Experience and Pure Consciousness Experience. Here it is referred to as Pure consciousness event (PCE) following Robert K. C. Forman's terminology. It is a form of perception that is not defined or influenced by any cultural or contextual impact. I will return to this with more details when writing about perennialism. (Forman R. K., 1990)

[43] (Jones & Gellman, 2022, p. Perennialism)

[44] (Forman R. K., 1990, pp. 3-48)

[45] Komjathy shares a similar view on the shift in the accuracy and scientific level of perennialist research. "While earlier Perennialist accounts most often used inaccurate translations, selective citation, and decontextualized interpretation, the contemporary study of mysticism is characterized by a generally high-level linguistic competence, complete translations of primary sources from their original languages, and historically informed interpretations." (Komjathy, 2011, p. 859)

[46] (Hollenback, 1996)

[47] (Proudfoot, 1985)

[48] (Barnard, 1997)

[49] (Shear, 1990)

do not allow me to go into details about these authors, nor about the nuances of the debate.[50] Both constructivism and perennialism are showcased here through the work of the most influential authors who play an essential role in the debate: Steven T. Katz for the former and Robert K. C. Forman for the latter.

The work by Steven T. Katz[51] I quote here is one of his first and most influential essays entitled "Language, epistemology and mysticism".[52] In this essay, he reflects on the most influential authors and handbooks on mysticism from a constructivist perspective, distinguishing its arguments from perennialist ones, and finally, proposing original arguments.

From a constructivist perspective, Katz assesses the study of mysticism as a process developing through time which has become more complex and sophisticated. He distinguishes three eras, those of ecumenism, essentialist reductionism, and cross-cultural phenomenological categorization. According to Katz, at the beginning of the study of mysticism, researchers were motivated by ecumenism and missionary goals. This drive resulted in the unsophisticated simplifying vision of religion. Mysticism was thought of as the common yet undiscovered basis of every religion. Stripped-down accounts of mystical experiences were supposed to point to an experience of such base. Katz explicitly deems this period as the least scientifically prestigious and implicitly as the closest to radical perennialism.[53]

Following both in time and complexity, essentialist reductionism sticks to the idea of the fundamental similarity of mystical experiences. However, accounts of mystical experiences are examined in a more nuanced way: the textual differences are recognized. The accounts are seen not only as different but as culturally defined. Katz's term "essentialist reductionism" is expressive as it clearly states the viewpoint of constructivism: the diversity of phenomena being the reality, and every attempt to connect them cross-culturally involves a simplification or reduction.

The introduction of the third era leads to Katz's contemporaries: Robert C. Zaehner, Walter T. Stace and Ninian Smart. The term *cross-cultural phenomenological categorization*[54] refers to an attempt that distinguishes mysticism into smaller, cross-cultural types or categories. Mystical experiences remain fundamentally intact, and the traditions and interpretations are recognized as culturally determined. The slight difference between the second and the third stage lies only in the sophistication of the argument. The cultural and religious differences between the interpretations of mystical experiences originate in linguistic differences, as the language and symbols used by the mystics are culturally bound. Even though this stands closest to the constructivist argument, Katz deems it too reductionist and argues for recognizing differences.[55]

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[50] Jones and Gellman present some of the nuances of the debate: soft constructivism, arguments against soft constructivism and hard constructivism. (Jones & Gellman, 2022, p. Constructivism)

[51] Steven T. Katz (1944-) is a Jewish American philosopher. His main research areas include the history of Judaism, philosophy of religion, and mysticism. His most important books related to mysticism include: (Katz, Mysticism and Religious Traditions, 1983), (Katz, Mysticism and Language, 1992), and (Katz, Mysticism and Sacred Scripture, 2000)

[52] (Katz, Language, Epistemology and Mysticism, 1978)

[53] (Katz, Language, Epistemology and Mysticism, 1978, p. 23)

[54] (Katz, Language, Epistemology and Mysticism, 1978, pp. 24-25)

[55] "[…] the phenomenological typologies of Stace and Zaehner are too reductive and inflexible, forcing multifarious and extremely variegated forms of mystical experience into improper interpretative categories which lose sight of the fundamentally important differences between the data studied. In this sense it might even be said

In order to distinguish constructivist arguments from perennialist ones, Katz focuses on the criticism of pure experience (or PCE) and the process of interpretation. Pure experience seems to be an exception when it comes to the determining factor of context. Katz objects that every experience (including mystical experiences) is mediated, and the influence of the context is inevitable in terms of the mystical experience and its interpretation too.[56] This objection makes his argument different from the one referring to the previous era he distinguished. Every experience is culturally dependent according to Katz: Hindu mystics have Hindu mystical experiences, just as Jewish mystics have Jewish experiences.[57] This notion justly seems too oversimplifying. However, Katz does not make the mistake he has just criticized: he does not simplify the matter to such an extent. He merely points out that mystical and everyday perception is not different from each other regarding contextual dependency. This dependency works in two ways: the context defines what an experience might be like and what kind of experience a particular person might have.[58]

At this point, it seems logical to ask how contextual determination can be examined. Once again, the argumentation Katz presents is more complex than it seems at first. He does not question whether mystical experiences happen or not, and he does not pry into the truth of mystical knowledge. He reflects on the limitations of philosophical inquiry: he argues that there is no way to adequately examine contextual influences on experiences and their interpretations. However, later, stepping over these limitations, he argues that mystical experiences cannot contribute to religious teachings, as they do not provide the purported knowledge claims.[59] The latter argument points to the commonality of mystical experiences: they do not provide the claimed knowledge of the ultimate reality. The context determines them, just as it determines any other human experience.

Continuing his argumentation against perennialism, Katz points out the complexity of interpretations. Starting with the first interpretation, that is, the mystics' interpretation directly after the experience, followed by more complicated layers such as their interpretations (writing it down, telling others about it) happening later after the experience; and others, from the same and different traditions, understanding it. So the circle widens, and we get further away from the experience. It might be objected, however, that beyond the layers of interpretation, there is a much more relevant argumentation about the inescapability of interpretation. Katz does not stop at the ineffability of the mystical experience and does not leave experiences as mystics claim them to be. He uses Walter Stace's example and says that the process of interpretation does not stop: it is continuous even during mystical experiences. There are no isolated – pure –

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that this entire paper is a 'plea for the recognition of differences." (Katz, Language, Epistemology and Mysticism, 1978, p. 25)

[56] (Katz, Language, Epistemology and Mysticism, 1978, p. 35)

[57] "That is to say, the entire life of the Jewish mystic is permeated from childhood up by images, concepts, symbols, ideological values, and ritual behaviour which there is no reason to believe he leaves behind in his experience. Rather, these images, beliefs, symbols, and rituals define, in advance, what the experience he wants to have, and which he then does have, will be like." (Katz, Language, Epistemology and Mysticism, 1978, p. 33)

[58] *"The significance of these considerations is that the forms of consciousness which the mystic brings to experience set structured and limiting parameters on what the experience will be, i.e. on what will be experienced, and rule out in advance what is 'inexperienceable' in the particular given, concrete, context."* (Katz, Language, Epistemology and Mysticism, 1978, pp. 26-27)

[59] (Katz, Language, Epistemology and Mysticism, 1978, p. 22)

experiences that could escape the close embeddedness of experience and interpretation.[60] The issue of the supposedly inescapable continuity of interpretation is, possibly, the main difference between constructivist and perennialist argumentations on mystical experiences.[61] The question would then be whether, during mystical experiences, the embeddedness of experience and interpretation stands or not.

Finally, Katz's argumentation clearly shows the classical view of hard constructivism, which was only implicitly applied in the previous parts of his work. Experiences – whether they are religious, mystical, or ordinary experiences – are entirely determined by the sociocultural context of the given person. The interpretation of the experience and the experience itself is embedded in the ongoing process of interpretation. Therefore, a constructivist approach to the study of mysticism would explore the person's underlying linguistic, religious, cultural, and other references. Such an approach would primarily focus on textual analysis.

Schools within constructivism have varying opinions regarding the extent of contextual determinism. Hard constructivists share a similar view to Katz's. The so-called soft constructivists uphold the idea of no pure, unmediated experience. They differ from the more radical school in the extent to which mystical experiences are predetermined. In this view, it is still impossible to get around memory, language, expectations, etc. Even though soft constructivists do not share the view of complete determination, they still think that these aspects are connected to human perception and can be found in mystical experiences. Due to limitations of space and focus, I am only pointing out this difference here. Further theoretical variants are presented in other philosophical works.[62]

Perennialism

Of several perennialist philosophers, Robert Forman's[63] ideas of Pure Consciousness Event and argumentation seem to be the most influential in the debate. Therefore, *The Innate Capacity*[64] is taken here as one of the main references. In this work, the standpoint of perennialism is discussed in a threefold way. First, Forman writes about perennialist responses to constructivist argumentations; second, he refers to unanswered and currently relevant criticism of the perennialist views with a possible solution; and third, he discusses the implications of these answers.

The difference between the opposite ideas of Forman and Katz revolves around the possibility of pure perception or a pure experience. First, Forman lists specific arguments that question the constructivist idea of conditioned experiences. He points out that the analogy of mystical experiences and ordinary sense experiences is not proven. Similarly, it is unclear what

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[60] (Katz, Language, Epistemology and Mysticism, 1978, pp. 27-28)

[61] (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, pp. 58-60)

[62] As I earlier pointed out: (Jones & Gellman, 2022, p. Constructivism) and in Richard H. Jones's handbook with a difference made between moderate and strong constructivists (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, pp. 55-56). Furthermore, Jones connects these approaches to current neuroscientific research. (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, pp. 121-170)

[63] Forman is a renowned scholar of philosophy of religion (perennialism) and a former professor of religion at the City University of New York.

[64] (Forman R. K., The Innate Capacity: Mysticism, Psychology, and Philosophy, 1998) In addition to this work, some of his most influential handbooks include: (Forman R. K., 1990) and *Enlightenment Ain't What It's Cracked Up to Be* (Forman R. K., Enlightenment: Ain't What It's Cracked Up To Be: A Journey of Discovery, Snow and Jazz in the Soul, 2011)

role language and concepts play in mystical experiences. He refers to mystical texts which prove that many experiences happen before the person has heard about such teachings. Therefore, people are often led by the experience to mystical traditions, not the other way around. This means that the interpretational process suggested by Katz is not so simple or obvious. Moreover, Forman points out that it is also not proven how the context and previously acquired knowledge could directly determine such experiences.[65]

Second, as a possible solution for currently relevant questions, Forman proposes the *forgetting model*,[66] through which he refers to mystical accounts which often tell about the ceasing of thinking and use of senses. During mystical experiences, the contextual, mental, and sensual elements which influence ordinary sense experiences are "forgotten", and this state is said to be opening them to new types of perception. Based on mystical accounts, Forman argues that contextual embeddedness might be suspended, and he suggests that context might not play such an essential role as constructivists argue.[67]

Third, Forman talks about the implication of the Pure Consciousness Event (PCE). During a PCE, the mind is allegedly empty of all differentiated content: concepts, thoughts, expectations, memories, etc. Certain soft constructivists who accept the possibility of such experiences deem it as an "event" rather than an experience. It is not an experience in the classical sense: the duality of the subject and object of perception is not there. In this sense, a PCE "happens" to the person without them noticing it. They also consider it as an unconscious episode that the person cannot remember. Soft constructivists then argue that later on the person fills this void with content based on their context. However, Forman argues that a PCE is more than just a void, by, once again, referring to mystical texts. Mystics account for an emptiness different from unconsciousness, dreaming, or sleeping. It is meaningful, but they can clearly differentiate such events from what precedes or follows them. Therefore, Forman argues that such experiences are exceptions to contextual embeddedness and should be viewed as decontextualized.[68] Thus, Forman's concept of PCE provides a different narrative from reductionist approaches, explaining mystical experiences away in light of context, and deeming them as unconscious episodes of a void, later filled in with contextual padding, merely happening to people.

Through outlining the different views of Foreman and Katz, I have aimed to highlight the opposing ideas of the two philosophical schools. They start from a critical epistemological question of human perception. Later, I will return to the implications of this debate on this work.

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[65] "When Steven Katz or Wayne Proudfoot writes as if the mere existence of prior knowledge implies that the experiences were shaped by that knowledge, they commit the fallacy of post hoc ergo propter hoc (if B comes after A, B is therefore caused by A). Other causes may be at work." (Forman R. K., The Innate Capacity: Mysticism, Psychology, and Philosophy, 1998, p. 7)

[66] "Finally, we have suggested a new model for experiences like this passage's, the so-called forgetting model. Notice how our passage says 'restrain the breath,' 'withdraw the senses,' 'put to rest objects of sense,' and 'let the breathing spirit restrain his breathing spirit.' Mystical texts nearly always use such language: one should 'forget' or 'lay aside' or 'cease thinking' or 'restrain the mind' or 'put behind a cloud of forgetting' or come to vergezzenheit (the state of having forgotten)." (Forman R. K., The Innate Capacity: Mysticism, Psychology, and Philosophy, 1998, p. 7)

[67] Example in Paul Marshall's work: (Marshall, Mystical Encounters with the Natural World: Experiences and Explanations, 2005, p. 242)

[68] "[…] if culture is not shaping these quiet mystical events, then what does explain the features of this form of mysticism? What factors are responsible for their peculiar 'shape'?" (Forman R. K., The Innate Capacity: Mysticism, Psychology, and Philosophy, 1998, p. 7)

But now I will focus on some further implications. I consider this debate to be leading us further than the original epistemological issues. They also raise methodological questions regarding the study of mysticism.

Understanding mysticism: Methodological and theoretical issues

While both of the above discussed constructivist and perennialist approaches focus on mystical experiences, there is a major difference between them. Katz's focus on mystical experiences is distant in the sense that he does not take their content into consideration. He retains mystical experiences as the objects of inquiry. Furthermore, he implicitly works as if a sufficiently thorough scientific investigation could encompass the totality of mystical experiences. In contrast, Forman's approach places mystical experiences into focus not only as a research material, but by referencing the alleged knowledge claims and descriptions of experiences that mystics share. Forman integrates these points into his concept of the PCE and the forgetting model. He contributes to understanding mystical experiences better scientifically with the use of mystical narratives. In my view, Forman's approach does not lack clarity or scientific value, because of the integration of the explanations of mystics, on the contrary, it is enhanced by it. This debate illustrates well the previously mentioned differences between reductionist and essentialist approaches.

Both constructivism and perennialism implicitly and (sometimes) explicitly determine what is worth studying about mystical experiences and how it should be done. From the constructivist point of view, mystical experiences are not as extraordinary as they seem to be. Therefore, neither from a religious nor epistemological or even from a general scientific perspective are they particularly significant, at least not more significant than any other human experience. Therefore, the perspective of the mystics and the significance of the experience are not taken seriously in constructivism. In perennialism, these are considered and shape the views significantly, as we have seen in Forman's idea of the forgetting model and PCE.

Moreover, Perennialists highlight a radically different type of perception, the Pure Consciousness Event. It is not only radically different from everyday perception or other types of religious experiences, but it is differentiated from other mystical experiences, too. In one of the most recent monographs on mysticism, the *Philosophy of Mysticism* by Richard H. Jones, the author discusses a concept similar to the PCE, calling it the "empty depth mystical experience". [69] In Jones's categories, the Empty Depth Mystical Experience is considered to be one of the subcategories of introvertive mystical experiences, and it constitutes the subcategory called "experiences with non-differentiated content".[70] This unique subtype of mystical experience has become the center of attention for many scientific inquiries. Even though I find this question epistemologically relevant, I consider both the constructivist and the perennialist views limiting when studying mysticism. The reductionist limitations of constructivism have been discussed above, so I am dedicating more attention to explaining the perennialist view.

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[69] (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, pp. 46-49)
[70] (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, pp. 1-36)

In the focus of perennialism lies the PCE, a novel and challenging concept indeed. Whether one calls it a PCE or an *Empty Depth Mystical Experience*, the two share the characteristic of emptiness. What does this mean from the perspective of mysticism? In most mystical experiences, the duality of subject and object can be detected through the interpretative expressions. Mystics often have an experience of the presence of a/the deity. In other cases, the distinctness of subject and object fades away as the mystic experiences unity with the object of experience. This phenomenon is called *unio mystica*. Teresa of Avila's earlier examples showcase this union beautifully. However, in the case of the PCE, the duality is simply not there anymore, not even in the form of merging into a union of subject and object. In this experience, the duality of subject and object is suspended. Mystics "experience" complete emptiness, yet it is not a state of unconsciousness, passing through unnoticed. The uniqueness and the characteristics of this type of experience, understandably, raise questions about its possibility. First, how can we call it an experience if there is no duality between the person experiencing and the object experienced? Second, how can mystics report anything of these experiences if there was nothing to observe?

The concept of the PCE becomes the luring possible solution for many pressing epistemological questions. In this sense, the mystical experience is the invitation or key toward a bigger picture of human perception. Most current inquiries go forward not only by researching mystical accounts but also by searching for physical proof of the experience (neuropsychology) or its epistemological possibility (perennialism). The way most researchers respond to this quest entails the study of the biological base for such experiences.[71] Other works on studying religion aim to suit and position their philosophical or social scientific approaches to these neuropsychological results and endeavors. For example, Jones's entire handbook is written to defend the relevance of the philosophical study of mysticism.[72] While neuropsychology focuses the attention on the biological base of mystical experiences, constructivism and perennialism focus on a specific type of mystical experiences: pure experiences. Therefore, they are either diminishing or narrowing down the study of mysticism to a great degree.[73]

In addition to the debates of the alluring pure experiences, an important dimension of mysticism is forgotten. Mystical experiences have a fundamentally transforming aspect and significance for the person and many times for their community. As I will point out later in this work, they come in many shapes and forms and are almost too much to comprehend. These aspects of mysticism are hardly reflected in today's scientific study, which focuses on the biological basis and the physical proof of a unique type of mystical experience. Both approaches – the neurological and the positioning ones – seem to happen correspondingly to the trends in psychology (especially the so-called neural turn), which I will discuss shortly.

Now let me turn the attention to something I mentioned in the beginning and did not pursue further yet. Earlier I touched on the primary language barriers and some of the epistemological difficulties of studying mysticism. I mentioned that ineffability holds a twofold

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[71] (Taves, Religious experience reconsidered: A building block approach to the study of religion and other special things, 2009) (d'Aquili & Newberg, 1999)

[72] (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, pp. ix-xviii)

[73] Forman's work is an exception to a certain degree, possibly due to his own experiences. (Forman R. K., 2008) Later on in this Chapter, I will highlight some similar examples of scholars' own (mystical) experiences.

problem, of which one is about expressing the content of mystical experiences. The second problem is the difficulty of understanding the mystical experience based on accounts/interpretations of them if one had not had such an experience before. This problem leads us further to other methodological problems in the study of mysticism.

Mystics are "experts by experience".[74] What role does a researcher have, then? Where do we (researchers) get the authority to say that we understand mysticism (at least as well as mystics do)? How should we approach mystical texts/mysticism as scholars? Two opposite standpoints can be detected here: first, getting to know the subject in a first-hand experience and, second, being as objective as one can be toward the subject of research and being involved. Let us start with the former through two works which foster first-hand scholarly experiences.

The idea of first-hand scholarly experiences is not new to the study of religions, particularly in studying religious experiences. Rudolph Otto argues somewhat similarly to Staal: scholars attempting the academic study of religion should have experienced their subject, the Holy or the numinous. The numinous can be understood through experience: as a *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*: as a feeling that this mystery is terrifying and fascinating.[75] Two perspectives are needed to understand Otto's views more clearly. The first is Otto's theological background: he was a Lutheran theologian, philosopher, and religious studies scholar. Opinions vary on the applicability of Otto's work in contemporary religious studies research. Although he is often classified as a theologian and frowned upon for mixing theological methods with the methods of religious studies, I consider his work applicable to studying religious experiences. It is worthy of attention not only in terms of the scholars' personal experience but the focus on the tremendous characteristics of the encounter with the numinous, as oftentimes, only the positive aspects and the fruits of the experiences are highlighted. The second perspective leads to Otto's essentialist definition of religion. Central to his concept of religion is the idea of the Holy, which is not a rational or moral category. The essence of religion for Otto is irrational, and he bases his definition of religion on religious experience, particularly the experience of the numinous.

Frits Staal has based his methodology of studying mysticism on the scholars' personal experiences. In his book *Exploring mysticism: A methodological essay[76]*, Staal advocates for having such experiences – to be more open and understanding of mysticism. Staal bases his arguments on the methodology because mystical experiences are often considered irrational in Western traditions.[77] Staal's approach has a whipsaw effect. On the one hand, he advocates for the need for rational explanations in the study of mysticism. Scholars cannot stop by saying that mysticism is irrational and cannot be scientifically studied. On the other hand, it can be easily said that he goes far beyond the scopes of science when he says that scholars interested in mysticism should experience their subject to understand it and talk rationally about it. He means this argument as a criticism of the methods of religious studies. Staal claims that the discipline

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[74] This term is used initially and is widely known to refer to individuals whose work is based on their personal experiences as carers, mental health or social services users. This term is not used here for any possible connotations of mysticism and mental health issues, but for the view on personal experience: "Being an Expert by Experience acknowledges that lived experience is as valuable as clinical/ professional expertise." (n.a., Experts by Experience -Involvement Handbook, p. 3)

[75] (Otto & Harvey, The Idea of the Holy, 1924)

[76] (Staal, 1975)

[77] (Staal, 1975, pp. 17-58)

of religious studies considers religious phenomena ultimately mysterious and irrational. This results in stopping at the core of their research subject and not investigating it. Thus, he claims that religious studies is stuck at the scientific level of alchemy[78] and, for the same reason, he does not consider religious studies scientific.

Staal's criticism imprecisely touches upon a central element in the methodology of religious studies. The primary position of the discipline is between reductionism (reducing religious phenomena to something else) or advocacy for the truth or falsity of religious beliefs (while theological texts might judge on this basis, religious studies texts should not). The discipline of religious studies remains in between with its standpoint that is briefly explained as "dialectical phenomenology" or "methodological agnosticism" by Ninan Smart.[79] Deciding if certain beliefs or teachings of different religions are true or based on verifiable phenomena is not the task of religious studies scholars, as we deem this ultimately unknowable and undecidable. "He argued that the phenomenological method, with its bracketing of belief in the existence of supernatural powers (a kind of methodological agnosticism) and its insistence on the use of empathy to enter into the 'experiences and intentions of religious participants', was the best way to avoid both reductionism and advocacy."[80] However, what is essential in the scientific attitude springing from Smart is the empathy and openness towards what people experience as religion and how they experience it, the reason and effects of their beliefs on their personal and communal lives. This empathy also brings a certain amount of neutrality towards the subject and object of the study. The result is more than a historical description and less than value judgment: it is a dialogue.

However, the methods which Staal proposes are worthy of attention beyond (the imprecision about the methodology of) the study of religions. Staal outlines a twofold research agenda for studying mystical experiences.[81] The first part is subjective, experiential, direct, and personal, and the second part is objective, analytical and indirect. He argues that a serious study of mysticism entails the scholar's own experience. Immersing oneself and becoming "insiders" by suspending skepticism enables scholars to understand what they are talking about. The experiential and the analytical parts of research are strictly kept apart. To avoid comparison, confusion, and subjectivity, one should stay detached from their own experiences when analyzing other religious experiences. What is the role of the scholar's personal mystical experience? In Staal's case, the role of personal experience could be understood to serve as a tool in becoming open and empathic towards the phenomena and to understand or know what mystics experience.

However, Staal does not raise important implications regarding his proposed methodology. What would such an experience authorize researchers for? Not much, as a contextual researcher would argue. Personal or culturally related experiences could be illuminated this way. However, experiences in different religious and cultural backgrounds or from other eras could not be understood this way. However, the implications become broader from a perennialist point of view. If we perceive mystical experiences as essentially similar

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[78] (Staal, 1975, pp. 3-16)
[79] See footnote 4.
[80] (Kessler, 2012, p. 181)
[81] (Staal, 1975, pp. 121-200)

despite cultural differences, such a personal experience could indeed be vital for understanding mystical experiences.

One could argue that the idea of and the emphasis on personal experiences could be derived from the fact that Staal heavily favors "Eastern" mystical traditions (related to Hinduism and Buddhism) over Western ones (primarily meaning Christianity and touching upon Islam and Judaism). He extensively criticizes that in Christianity, mystical experiences are perceived as relatively passive and dependent on the Grace of God.[82] He weighs the Western phenomenon against the Eastern, and favors the latter, which is less exclusive and more proactive.

However, the idea of first-person experiences is not far from "Western" thinkers either. William James has purportedly had such experiences, experimenting with nitrous oxide.[83] Robert K. C. Forman is open about his long journey of being a practitioner of Transcendental Meditation[84] and his experiences related to it as well.[85] His openness towards the subject and the insider point of view is palpable in his scientific texts: the forgetting model, mentioned above, is one example. According to the examples of Staal, James and Forman, being involved in mysticism and having first-hand experiences could benefit scholars.

On the other end of the spectrum of scholarly involvement or the subjectivity vs. objectivity continuum lie methods that are not immersive and personal. They keep their distance from the subject and remain as objective as possible – sometimes to the extent of complete reductionism. I have already mentioned the methodological problems with reductionist approaches – particularly those related to neurological studies of mystical experiences. Neurology often represents a materialist-reductionist point of view. On the other hand, contextualism has had similar reductionist attempts with a philosophical methodology. Reducing mystical and religious experiences to everyday human experiences by criticizing their directness results in similar outcomes. The attempt to be objective is not necessarily extreme, like the cases mentioned before, but in the study of mysticism, it often results in this. Therefore, contrary to the generally crucial scientific aim of staying objective, it has an extreme connotation here. Moreover, while thorough analysis, operationalization, and physical facts are fundamental to other disciplines if they want to stay scientific, it tends to work against their subject in the study of mysticism. It cancels its subject, as mystical experiences are often defined as essentially personal, subjective, and ineffable. Therefore, scientific terms and explanations of mystical experiences remain constructions, and this applies to similar phenomena, such as religion and other religious experiences. However, it is particularly true in the case of mystical experiences, which ultimately remain ineffable. Therefore, even though we can meaningfully discuss the qualities and categorizations of mystical experiences in science, we should not forget about the ultimately ineffable nature of mystical experiences.

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[82] (Staal, 1975, pp. 135-142)

[83] (James, The Varieties of Religious Experience A Study in Human Nature. Centenary edition, 2002, pp. 300-301) However, he notes that he can only talk about mystical experiences second-handedly: "Whether my treatment of mystical states will shed more light or darkness, I do not know, for my own constitution shuts me out from their enjoyment almost entirely, and I can speak of them only at second hand. But though forced to look upon the subject so externally, I will be as objective and receptive as I can; and I think I shall at least succeed in convincing you of the reality of the states in question, and of the paramount importance of their function." (James, The Varieties of Religious Experience A Study in Human Nature. Centenary edition, 2002, p. 294)

[84] A meditation technique founded/popularized by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. (n.a., Transcendental Meditation, n.d.)

[85] Inspired by his experiences, he recently focused on non-scientific activities such as Spiritual counseling, Sacred relationship counseling, etc. (Forman R. K., 2008)

Can mystical experience be studied scientifically at all, then? Should it not just be left for people to experience? Without a doubt, mystical experiences have a significant impact personally and communally through the views and actions of the mystics and knowledge claims on the ultimate reality. Moreover, possibly, many people have such experiences – more than we might think.[86] For these reasons, too, I consider the scientific study of mystical experiences important. I further argue that beyond the two extreme methods presented above lies an approach in between, which leads us back to the foundations of the study of mystical experiences.

William James was influential in this area: taking into consideration the personal and ineffable nature of mysticism while creating a theoretical basis for understanding mystical experiences. Therefore, below, I will discuss William James's works on mystical experiences for multiple reasons. First, this work serves as an introduction to establishing the differences between mystical experiences and other types of human experience, particularly from other religious experiences. Second, James's attempt to pinpoint the criteria of mystical experiences was one of the first-ever serious attempts to study mysticism scientifically. Third, James's scientific, non-reductionist approach is still subject to an ongoing discussion, and his work is praised and criticized today for the same reason.

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[86] Based on Hardy's hypothesis, Hay summarized 3 studies on the frequency of spiritual experiences and the related theories explaining them, highlighting that "the proportion of positive respondents is greater than 60%." (Hay, 'The Biology of God': What is the Current Status of Hardy's Hypothesis?, 1994, pp. 5-10). It is important to clarify that, with the methods and tools today, not only the experiences of the prominent people is noted, but a much larger audience could be reached. Therefore these results do not automatically suggest that there are more spiritual/mystical experiences today than centuries ago. However, the frequency of such experiences still cannot be explored without difficulties as "Respondents fear being thought stupid or mentally unbalanced, yet they are sharply ambivalent about their experience. Almost all of them make some sort of affirmation that the experience has positive cognitive content." (Hay, 'The Biology of God': What is the Current Status of Hardy's Hypothesis?, 1994, p. 12)

Establishing the study of mystical experiences: William James

One of the most influential classical works of religious studies is *The varieties of religious experience*[87] by William James.[88] *Varieties* was one of the first ever attempts at empirically studying religious experiences. It provided a different scientific approach toward mystical experiences from theological and historical understandings of the previous centuries. James was a multi-faceted author in his time: coming from medical studies and with a background in psychology, he excelled primarily in psychology and philosophy. Later in his life, he made an essential contribution to American philosophy, mainly by developing pragmatism and radical empiricism.[89] However, through his above mentioned work, I focus on his contribution to religious studies. In this field, his broad knowledge, background, and his scientific approach make him stand out among his contemporaries in the study of mysticism.[90] *Varieties* is not only discussed here as a crucial classical piece, laying the foundations for the debate, but more importantly, for its current relevance. It has remained an influential handbook on religion, which is still a regularly referenced and debated scientific piece regarding the categories of mystical experiences and their significance in and outside religious traditions.

The concept of mystical experience within the definition of religion

With *Varieties*, William James contributed to the general treatment of religion and religious experiences. James's work can be summarized as focusing on religion as an essential dimension of life. In this dissertation, he is quoted for a slightly different but essential reason: he turned scientific attention towards studying religious experiences, particularly mystical experiences. What makes an experience religious? According to James, religious experiences are encounters with the divine, or, in other words, with the primal or ultimate reality. Another critical factor is that this encounter is taken solemnly by the person.[91] Acknowledging that one clear concept of religious experiences cannot be established, James stresses that these factors – divinity and solemnity – mark off the religious experiences from ordinary ones. However, this boundary is not exact. An essential and currently not popular methodological statement is made here, which is worth noting: the boundaries of religious experiences are "misty". Yet the efforts to define religious experiences is not totally worthless – at least the religious nature of

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[87] Later, I refer to this work in a shorter and well-known way as *Varieties*.

[88] William James (1842-1910) was an American psychologist and philosopher. Here, he is primarily referenced as one of the classical authors of religious studies.

[89] Essays in Radical Empiricism – Posthumus edited by Ralph Barton Perry

[90] Among James's contemporaries, the following authors and works can be highlighted. From a psychological perspective: (Starbuck, 1900); (Leuba, 1925). More on Starbuck's and James's work, particularly on James's references to Starbuck's empirical studies: (White, 2008). And from the religious-theological perspective: (Underhill, Mysticism: a Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness, 1911); The Graces of Interior Prayer (1901) (Poulain & Smith, 1921). Further early contributions on the subject, such as Nathan Söderblom's work, are listed here: (Sharpe, 2005)

[91] "The divine shall mean for us only such a primal reality as the individual feels impelled to respond to solemnly and gravely, and neither by a curse nor a jest." (James, The Varieties of Religious Experience A Study in Human Nature. Centenary edition, 2002, p. 34)

experiences should clearly be determined.[92] However, to aim for sharp concepts and exact terms to describe their totality only shows that one does not know the research subject. This approach is highly questionable in today's scientific milieu, which primarily approaches religious phenomena from a scientific, naturalistic point of view, focusing on their biological and neurological aspects as well as on the measurable and exact side of such experiences. What James stands for is sometimes considered outdated and not so seriously scientific.[93] However, as I elaborate on this below, for the same reasons, I consider this approach useful in today's scientific milieu.

How are religious experiences different from others? James draws on a range of experiences bearing some features of mystical experiences and religious relevance:[94] starting with experiences that have some element of mysticism in them but do not have a particular religious meaning, such as *déjà-vu* or the "aha moment", following with more complex experiences which can be understood as primary examples of mysticism, and finishing with quasi-religious experiences like drunkenness[95] and drug-induced experiences.[96] Both of the latter examples are considered stimulating resources for the mystical mind and capable of inducing fractions of the mystical mind.

Using this scale, James aimed to look at the essential, the unmistakable, and the extreme cases where the nature of the experience is not questionable.[97] When the religious nature of an experience is questionable, for James it is not worth studying. Therefore, within religious experiences, there is a particular type that he focuses on: mystical experiences. This differentiation is established when James defines religion at the beginning of *Varieties*. Here mystical experiences are differentiated from other religious experiences by two characteristics: they are *direct and personal* experiences of the divine.

"Religion, therefore, as I now ask you arbitrarily to take it, shall mean for us the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine. Since the relation

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[92] "… and, do what we will with our defining, the truth must at last be confronted that we are dealing with a field of experience where there is not a single conception that can be sharply drawn. The pretension, under such conditions, to be rigorously 'scientific' or 'exact' in our terms would only stamp us as lacking in understanding of our task. Things are more or less divine, states of mind are more or less religious, reactions are more or less total, but the boundaries are always misty, and it is everywhere a question of amount and degree. Nevertheless, at their extreme of development, there can never be any question as to what experiences are religious. The divinity of the object and the solemnity of the reaction are too well marked for doubt." (James, The Varieties of Religious Experience A Study in Human Nature. Centenary edition, 2002, p. 35)

[93] I will return shortly to Taves's critical approach. (Taves, William James Revisited: Rereading The Varieties Of Religious Experience in transatlantic perspective, 2009)

[94] (James, The Varieties of Religious Experience A Study in Human Nature. Centenary edition, 2002, pp. 296-301)

[95] "The drunken consciousness is one bit of the mystic consciousness, and our total opinion of it must find its place in our opinion of that larger whole." (James, The Varieties of Religious Experience A Study in Human Nature. Centenary edition, 2002, p. 300)

[96] Ha talks about his experiences with nitrous oxide in the following way: "Nitrous oxide and ether, especially nitrous oxide, when sufficiently diluted with air, stimulate the mystical consciousness in an extraordinary degree. Depth beyond depth of truth seems revealed to the inhaler. This truth fades out, however, or escapes, at the moment of coming to; and if any words remain over in which it seemed to clothe itself, they prove to be the veriest nonsense." (James, The Varieties of Religious Experience A Study in Human Nature. Centenary edition, 2002, p. 300)

[97] (James, The Varieties of Religious Experience A Study in Human Nature. Centenary edition, 2002, pp. 34-35)

may be either moral, physical, or ritual, it is evident that out of religion in the sense in which we take it, theologies, philosophies, and ecclesiastical organizations may secondarily grow."[98]

Therefore, first, mystical experiences are different from other religious experiences, as they are direct encounters of the person with the divine. In contrast, regular religious experiences involve an intermediary or a tool for mediation: a text, a person, etc. Second, mystical experiences are personal: according to James, they happen in solitude. Other religious experiences might also happen in solitude, but this is primarily true of mystical experiences.

His idea of mystical experiences is that these experiences fundamentally shape religion, not only on an individual but on an institutional level. Mystical experiences are not only central in terms of the clarity of their religious nature but also in terms of the institutional and philosophical dimensions[99] of religion. There is both a temporary and a qualitative relationship between mystical experiences and these dimensions. The relationship is temporary because these dimensions might secondarily grow out of the primary – experiential – aspect of religion, and qualitative because the aforementioned religious experiences provide the foundation and content for the secondary dimensions.[100] For this reason, the central and primary aspect of religion is the mystical experience.

The religion of the 'healthy-minded' and of 'sick souls': Differences between mystical and other religious experiences

Until now, the central aspect of mystical experiences in religion has been discussed. At this point, they are considered as the individual's solitary, direct experience of the divine. It is worth dedicating some more attention to how these experiences are different from other religious experiences. Therefore, I will discuss James's differentiation of two types of religiosities: the religion of the "healthy-minded" and that of "sick souls". On the one hand, the religion of the healthy-minded is characterized by contentment, happiness, surrender, and accepting religious teachings more or less without critical questioning. On the other hand, the evanescence and the negative aspects of life cannot be avoided for the sick souls. For this reason, the religiosity of sick souls is more complex. To surpass melancholy, they need a direct religious experience of the divine, which results in an existential transformation. Based on this latter transformational aspect, the sick souls are also called "twice-born", and the healthy-minded, lacking this existential-spiritual rebirth, are called "once-born".

The mystical experience is an essential aspect of the spiritual transformation of the twice-born. Moreover, they have an important position among religious experiences and the definition mentioned above.[101] As many mystics relate, a mystical experience fundamentally restructures one's personal narratives and actions. Therefore, mystical experiences are vital

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[98] (James, The Varieties of Religious Experience A Study in Human Nature. Centenary edition, 2002, pp. 29-30)
[99] (Smart, Dimensions of the Sacred: An Anatomy of the World's Beliefs, 1996)
[100] (Weber M. , 1947)
[101] Underhill shares this notion. "Mysticism, according to its historical and psychological definitons, is the direct intuition or experience of God; and a mystic is a person who has, to a greater or lesser degree, such a direct experience-one whose religion and life are centered not merely on an accepted belief or practice, but on that which he regards as first-hand mystical knowledge (E. Underhill, The Mystics of the Church)." in: (Bowker, 2000, p. 395)

from the individual's perspective. Mystical experiences have a significant effect on the person and also a less obviously significant effect on the community. James calls these direct experiences of the divine "first-hand religious experiences". In the case of religious founders, the knowledge and insight of the divine gained through mystical experiences provide the foundation for the theological, institutional and philosophical dimensions of religion. The founders' experiences also influence the religiosity of people who have no direct experience of the divine ("second-hand religiosity").

The religion of the sick souls involving first-hand experiences of the divine might seem a rare and unique occurrence. His critics, as mentioned above, point out that James seems to be exclusive by favoring the purportedly rare first-hand experiences. Paul Croce provides a strikingly different interpretation by highlighting the universality behind James's concept. According to Croce, James is far from exclusive regarding religious experience as he focuses on a universally present spiritual potential. This potential in all humanity is the most recognizable in the founders and leaders of religions and mystics – all of whom had direct personal unitive experiences with the divine. However, contrary to popular understanding, James does not "neglect the pew for favoring the few".[102] He refocuses the attention from the transcendent to the "inscendent"[103] – the spiritual potential in every person. The inscendent, as Croce calls it, could be described as the meeting point of transcendence and immanence in every person.

> "In these subliminal depths, the transcendent and immanent dimensions mingle at the roots of religion. Depth consciousness is a kind of 'inscendent' realm, as mysterious as the advocates of transcendence claim and as intimate as those seeking immanence crave; these depths are not in defiance of tradition and community but serve as their well of life, not always tapped, yet always ready to refresh second-hand behaviors and beliefs."[104]

If the purported universality of this potential is true, then the question remains: why do only a few people seem to have a mystical experience? Based on James, Croce argues that this potential is often not awake in people, and habits prevent the masses from realizing it. Everyone is capable, but some "choose to outsource their spirituality to experiences of others, the founders, leaders, and mystics, who can inspire them beyond the constraints of their own normal waking state."[105] This argument coincides with the original understanding of the sick souls and the healthy-minded.

As for historical examples of mysticism, a selective list of classical authors could be mentioned. However, the supposed universality of the spiritual potential should also be explored in recent cases. Croce focuses theoretically on the spiritual potential and suggests that the type of religiosity James focused on is more and more influential in today's society. Realizing James's forecast, Croce says that the "mystical germ has sprouted" and "the religion

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[102] (Croce, 2013)

[103] The term comes from Thomas Berry, who in *The Dream of Earth* (Berry, 1990) refers to inscendence as the "pre-rational, […] instinctive resources" of humanity. However, as Croce points out, "he does not draw upon the theory of the subliminal, which provides a psychological prelude to his search for inner resources to increase humanity's environmental 'survival capacity' (207-208)." (Croce, 2013, p. 23)

[104] (Croce, 2013, p. 7)

[105] (Croce, 2013, pp. 6-7)

of the few will soon become the religion of the pew".[106] However, he does not go into detail about its realization or provide examples.

Sharing a similar view to Croce's interpretation of James, but from an evolutionary point of view, Sir Alister Hardy[107] argued that religious awareness is biologically natural in the human species. This idea is partially based on the Darwinian theory of natural selection, Dawkins' theory of memes, and partially on his own research over the years.[108] His approach is naturalistic but not reductionist. Through his research, he attempts to show that "[…] religious awareness is biologically natural to the human species and has evolved through the process of natural selection because it has survival value for the individual."[109] The starting point for both Hardy and James is not theological but pragmatic.[110] Their research is rooted in and based upon accounts of experiences. In the case of Hardy, they are collected based on the so-called "Hardy question"[111]. James used contemporary interviews, historical accounts, and data from Edwin D. Starbuck and James H. Leuba. In the case of both, the experiences are the starting points and determining the classification or the criteria of mystical experiences as well. These approaches are in line with the methodological basis of this work: dialectical phenomenology.

The four criteria of mystical experiences

So far, James's concept of the central aspect of mystical experiences in terms of religion has been discussed. In this subsection, I focus on the four criteria of mystical experiences. James addresses the topic of mystical experiences in the 16th and 17th lectures of the *Varieties*, which he calls a "vital chapter from which the other chapters get their light".[112] James considered mystical states of consciousness to be the root and center of personal religious experience and a part of human nature.[113] In these chapters, he aims to determine the scientific meaning of mysticism first, distinguishing the often pejorative everyday use of the word "mystical",[114] and, second, by defining four criteria of mystical experiences to have a common and clear foundation for scientific study. These four criteria are ineffability, noetic quality, passivity, and transiency.[115]

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[106] (Croce, 2013, pp. 15-16)

[107] Sir Alister Hardy (1896-1985) was a professor of marine biology who was also interested in the boundary between biology and religion, starting from his own experiences of the divine early in his life. Following his retirement, he gave Gifford Lectures at the University of Aberdeen. Based on the lectures, he published two books: (Hardy, The Living Stream, 1965) and (Hardy, The Divine Flame, 1966)

[108] "I am convinced of the truth of the selection theory but, as I shall explain, I do not believe that all selection is just chance. Nor do I agree with the unwarranted dogma that belief in modern evolutionary theory shows that the whole process is an entirely materialistic one leaving no room for the possibility of a spiritual side to man." (Hardy, The Spiritual Nature of Man: A Study of Contemporary Religious Experience, 1979, p. 10) See also: (Hardy, The Spiritual Nature of Man: A Study of Contemporary Religious Experience, 1979, pp. 10-14).

[109] (Hay, 'The Biology of God': What is the Current Status of Hardy's Hypothesis?, 1994, p. 2)

[110] (Morgan, 2005, p. 8)

[111] "Have you ever been aware of or influenced by a presence or power, whether you call it God or not, which is different from your everyday self?" In: (Rankin, 2008, p. 3)

[112] (James, The Varieties of Religious Experience A Study in Human Nature. Centenary edition, 2002, p. 294)

[113] (James, The Varieties of Religious Experience A Study in Human Nature. Centenary edition, 2002, p. 294) See also: (Hood, Spiritual, and Religious Experiences, 2005, p. 348)

[114] Vague, vast, sentimental; an opinion without a factual or logical base. (James, The Varieties of Religious Experience A Study in Human Nature. Centenary edition, 2002, p. 294).

[115] (James, The Varieties of Religious Experience A Study in Human Nature. Centenary edition, 2002, pp. 295-296)

According to William James and many other scholars following him, ineffability is perhaps the most important criterion of the mystical experience. On the one hand, ineffability means that words cannot express what is experienced during a mystical experience. On the other hand, it means that those who have not had a mystical experience before will not be able to fully comprehend what mystics talk about when they try to describe their mystical experiences. Mystics struggle to use ordinary words (referring to this-worldly phenomena) for their non-ordinary experiences. Scholars struggle to understand something they have not experienced and what is described inadequately in beautiful poems, songs, metaphors, movements, or with complete silence. However, these circumstances do not stop scholars' endeavors to understand, define and categorize mystical experiences.

The noetic quality refers to the fact that mystical experiences are not merely feelings, but they provide an insight into or a knowledge of, ultimate reality, directly experienced by the mystic. These illuminations and revelations are significant and leave a sense of authority behind once the experience is over.

Some mystical traditions offer techniques and texts to prepare and guide the mind and the body towards the mystical experience, at least promoting openness to mystical experiences. These techniques may help the mystics become recipients, but mystical experience ultimately cannot be induced, according to James. This is expressed by the criterion of passivity.

Based on the cases studied by James, the last criterion of mystical experience is transiency, and this aspect refers to the length of mystical experiences. Based on the accounts he considered, James states that mystical experiences do not last longer than a few minutes and rarely last as long as an hour.

Critical approaches to the criteria

The criterion of ineffability focused the attention of studies on epistemological questions such as the ones I mentioned earlier regarding the debate of constructivism and perennialism. It could be considered one of the main points of the *sui generis* understanding of mysticism as it grasps the nature of mystical experiences without explaining it away. Grace Jantzen has advanced a critique of the emphasis on ineffability as an attempt to remove mystical experiences from rational discourse, placing them instead into the realm of emotions.[116] Constructivists such as Spickard who identifies the Jamesian "overbelief" model[117] argue that the separation of interpretation from experience gives scholars the possibility to talk about inherently mystical experiences. While ineffability is debatable, many mystics describe their apprehension of the sacred as ineffable, as I have pointed out earlier, related to the language of mysticism.

Questioning the criterion of noetic quality is the hard-constructivist philosophical stance, which considers mystical experiences like any other human experience: they are not exceptions to the ongoing interpretational processes and the constant contextual influences on

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[116] (Jantzen, 1995, old.: 344)

[117] "Spickard also identifies a Jamesean 'overbelief' model (1993, p. 111) in which the distinction between experience and interpretation is maintained but the focus is upon experience and not the language in which it is expressed ('overbelief'). Thus we prefer to talk of social expression, rather than of construction, and leave it an open conceptual and empirical possibility that there are fundamental experiences that are inherently mystical, religious, or spiritual and that become only partially expressed through language." (Hood, Spiritual, and Religious Experiences, 2005, p. 356)

experiences. Another counter argument focuses on the "claim that knowledge itself is a problem".[118] One example of this is the early Daoist inner cultivation lineages.

Against the criterion of passivity, a notion in Hinduism and Buddhism can be mentioned. These examples focus on the idea that mystical experiences cannot be induced. The example concerns the touch or the presence of the master/yogi, which is said to evoke a mystical experience if the recipient is ready for it. This happened purportedly in the case of Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda when Ramakrishna touched Vivekananda.[119] Inducement of mystical experiences through religious praxis can also be found in the case of Dogen.[120] Furthermore, Staal criticizes the idea of passivity linked to mysticism in general and argues that it is derived from Western mysticism, particularly Christian mysticism, where the experience is dependent on God's grace.[121]

The notion of transiency (i.e. the relatively short nature of mystical experiences) is questioned by attaining "an enduring state of mystical experiencing or mystical being".[122] Many traditions report long-lasting mystical experiences. In Hinduism the difference between samadhi and sahaja samadhi is noted.[123] One example from Christianity is Teresa of Avila's "habitually enjoyed" experiences of the Holy Trinity.[124] In Zen, too, there is a differentiation between transient, momentary realizations or understanding (*kensho*) and similar but more profound enlightenment (*satori*). However, it is important to mention that *satori* is not permanent like samadhi is. Moreover, enlightenment is considered a long process that is never completed.

Komjathy argues that researchers after James attempted "a more informed comparative approach, have sought to categorize mystical experiences according to types."[125] Indeed, in the

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[118] However, Komjathy argues that it is not the indescribability which is the central problem, but knowledge itself. (Komjathy, 2011, p. 856)

[119] "On his third visit Naren fared no better, though he tried his utmost to be on guard. Sri Ramakrishna took him to a neighbouring garden and, in a state of trance, touched him. Completely overwhelmed, Naren lost consciousness. Sri Ramakrishna, referring later to this incident, said that after putting Naren into a state of unconsciousness […]." (Nikhilananda, 1953, p. 6). "Ramakrishna took him for a stroll to Jadunath Mallik's gardern house nearby. There Paramahamsa again went into a trance and touched Narendra, who lost outward consciousness (Leelaprasanga, V, 95-97)." (Chattopadhyaya, 1999, p. 44). Note: Naren or Narendra was Vivekananda's name before monasticism. *Paramahamsa* refers to enlightened masters and religious teachers in Hinduism.

[120] (Komjathy, 2011, p. 856)

[121] (Staal, 1975, pp. 135-142)

[122] (Komjathy, 2011, p. 856)

[123] "It can be seen most readily in a distinction made by Ramana Maharshi, the twentieth-century Hindu guru, between *samadhi* and *sahaja samadhi*. Samadhi is a contemplative mystical state and is 'introvertive' as Stace employs the term. Sahaja samadhi is a state in which a silent level within the subject is maintained along with (simultaneously with) the full use of the human faculties. It is, hence, continuous through part or all of the twenty-four-hour cycle of (meditative and nonmeditative) activity and sleep. This distinction seems to be key: introvertive mysticism denotes a transient state (after all, no one who eats and sleeps can remain entranced forever), whereas extrovertive mysticism denotes a more permanent state, one that lasts even while one is engaged in activity." (Forman R. K., 1990, p. 8)

[124] "O God help me! How different is hearing and believing these words from understanding their truth in this way! Each day this soul becomes more amazed, for these Persons never seem to leave it any more, but it clearly beholds, in the way that was mentioned, that they are within it." (Teresa, Kavanaugh, & Rodriguez, The Interior Castle, 1979, p. 175). As Kavanaugh's introduction to the Interior Castle describes it: "Here was shown to her, in the fullness of light through an intellectual vision, the presence of the three Persons of the Blessed Trinity. Though this presence was not afterward always felt in such light and intensity, she did enjoy habitually the company of these three Persons." (Kavanaugh, Introduction, 1979, p. 8)

[125] (Komjathy, 2011, p. 856)

20th century, categorization was a widely used method of understanding mysticism. However, these categorizations, as I will point out in Chapter 3, are often restricting and simplifying of the notion of mysticism. Even though they are comparative, they bracket mysticism in two opposing categories, such as Eastern vs. Western mysticism, or extrovertive vs. introvertive mysticism. In the light of these approaches, William James's criteria are much more "informed" and comparatively nuanced than categorizations.

Some, such as Komjathy consider these criteria to be fully outdated and inapplicable, as there are examples of mystical experiences and traditions contradicting them.[126] While the criticism against the criteria of ineffability and noetic quality is worth consideration, I consider the latter two against passivity and transiency to be essential. These critical examples definitely highlight the shortcomings of the criteria: the lack of knowledge/consideration of other mystical traditions, primarily related to Hinduism and Zen Buddhism.

While these examples call for a revision of the criteria of passivity and transiency, overall I consider the criteria and James's approach worth this revision and fitting the goals of this work. In Chapter 3, I will get back to its applicability of the criteria and James's overall approach to mystical experiences. Furthermore, based on the mystical experiences of Thomas Merton and John of the Cross, I will present alternatives to these criteria.[127] James's approach combines a critical perspective and scientific methodology as well as an accommodating approach towards the ineffable and personal aspect of mysticism, while avoiding a reductionist point of view. James's scientific, non-reductionist approach is still an ongoing discussion, and his work is both praised and criticized today. What was James's scientific approach at all? In the next subsection, I turn briefly towards it by discussing his works on pragmatism and radical empiricism.

Pragmatism and radical empiricism

James's conception of religion and religious experience should also be understood within the context of pragmatic philosophy. Indeed, James is much more often known as a pragmatist philosopher than a scholar of psychology of religion. Even though he published his first book[128] on pragmatism, in 1907, he was involved in forming the key ideas as a participant of the Metaphysical club at Harvard.[129] The influences of pragmatism are quite outstanding in *Varieties*.[130]

James considers religion and particularly mystical experiences useful. This is an excellent case to highlight James's idea of pragmatism as a "mediating philosophy"[131] aiming to resolve ages long metaphysical and philosophical problems, and, therefore, offering a critique of Cartesianism – looking at problems from a dualistic perspective. The over-beliefs and religious experiences give a pragmatic answer to questions that were metaphysically and

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[126] (Komjathy, 2011)
[127] (Komjathy, 2011)
[128] (James, Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking, 1981)
[129] The origins of pragmatism can be traced back to the so-called Metaphysical Club at Harvard, which James was a member of since 1872. He was involved in a discussion with Charles Sanders Peirce and other contemporary theorists. (Legg & Hookway, 2021)
[130] (Legg & Hookway, 2021), (Bernstein, 2010)
[131] James saw pragmatism as a mediating philosophy between how "[t]he tender-minded tend to be idealistic, optimistic and religious, believing in free will, while the tough-minded are materialist, pessimistic, irreligious, dogmatic and fatalistic." (Legg & Hookway, 2021)

philosophically debated for a long time, on the one hand, by pointing out that mystical experiences transcend the duality of the subject-object and body-mind by offering a direct insight into the ultimate reality. On the other hand, pragmatism focuses on the often neglected social and ethical effects of such experiences.

These social and ethical effects of the experiences are called "over-beliefs" since the existence of the objects of beliefs (the transcendent realm, God) has not been proven yet. The so-called over-beliefs refer to beliefs in such objects. According to James, even if their object cannot be proven empirically, they might be deemed valid on a different basis: on their positive, constructive effects, as they enrich people's lives morally and aesthetically. If something – any experience – has practical consequences, it is crucial from the pragmatist point of view. "Pragmatism is willing to take anything, to follow either logic or the senses and to count the humblest and most personal experiences. She will count mystical experiences if they have practical consequences."[132]

According to James, just like Carrette lists it, mysticism has the highest of these moral and aesthetic effects[133] insomuch as one can only speak in negative terms about such heights and positivity. According to James, mystical experiences offer a view and connection into such realms and inspire faith[134]. Moreover, they provide knowledge that steps over the boundaries of a strictly rational understanding of the world by becoming a source of moral and aesthetic inspiration and having rational consequences, which cannot be entirely accounted for on a rational or physical basis only. From a pragmatist philosophical perspective, the effectivity of the phenomena decides whether or not they are valid or justifiable.[135] Philosophical enquires should take this into consideration and not stop at the physical level.[136] Today religious studies offer a similar perspective on studying mystical experiences and other religious phenomena.

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[132] (James, Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking, 1981, p. 422)

[133] "He enumerates their superlative quality, insofar as they lead us to such heights that we are forced to describe the most positive qualities as well as outcomes in negative terms — none higher, nonpareil, and superlucent. They tend toward self-abnegation, in the sense of a loss of egotistical self-centeredness, and they tend to promote a life of selfless service toward others. They increase our appreciation for poetry, music, and the arts. They affirm the idiosyncratic life of the individual regardless of the evolutionary direction of the group. And because they inspire such faith, by their very existence they overthrow the pretensions of the rationalists who claim to have absolutely explained all of reality by some newest theory of the intellect." (Carrette, The Return to James: Psychology, Religion and the Amnesia of Neuroscience, 2002, p. xxxiii)

[134] Carrette, in the Introduction of *Varieties*, uses the word "faith". I argue that there is "more" to the effects of mystical experiences. It is not only faith that mystical experiences inspire, but knowledge and understanding of the transcendent/divine. Noetic quality refers to this aspect too. (Carrette, The Return to James: Psychology, Religion and the Amnesia of Neuroscience, 2002, p. xxxiii)

[135] "Her only test of probable truth is what works best in leading us, what fits every part of life best and combines with the collectivity of experience's demands, nothing being omitted. If theological ideas do this, if the notion of God, in particular, should prove to do it, how could pragmatism possibly deny God's existence? She could see no meaning in treating it as 'not true,' a pragmatically so successful notion. What other kind of truth could there be, for her, then all this agreement with concrete reality?" (James, Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking, 1981, p. 422). This notion of pragmatic philosophy in regards to religions seems to fail in light of Freud's concept of religion being a useful illusion to humankind. In this sense its utility does not support its validity automatically. Freud's concept has also been criticized, to name but one argument suggesting that psychoanalysis could also be interpreted as an illusion, as it is just one explanation of the world – just like Christianity and other religions. (Bloom, 1992, pp. 34-35)

[136] One of the essays about radical empiricism, titled "A World of Pure Experience" touches upon this question, when explaining the foundations and main ideas of radical empiricism. (James, A World of Pure Experience, 1912)

Whether the transcendent/divine exists or the claims about it are true is not of concern for this discipline.[137] However, their direct or indirect cultural, historical, social, etc. influences are.

James goes further than stating that the absolute/divine/ultimate reality cannot be known by rational inquiry. Knowing the absolute is not a rational task but a mystical one. The absolute is accessed through direct knowing, which is based on experiencing it. He presents the example of the mystical method of the Vedanta. "You do not reason, but after going through a certain discipline you see, and having seen, you can report the truth."[138] However, it is relevant to mention that James did not consider that such experiences were accessible to only the chosen few.[139] To some extent, we all have the ability of this mystical way of knowing – he refers to this ability as "the mystical germ in us".[140] A similar idea appears in Alister Hardy's work, but he refers to this ability from an evolutionary biological point of view, but similarly to pragmatism as something useful.[141]

The current relevance of *Varieties*

Spiritual elitism: A critical approach to the emphasis on mysticism

The emphasis on a seemingly rare experience confronted in solitude was not received without criticism. James is both blamed and praised for this shift. "Spiritual elitism", neglect of the other dimensions of religion and other religious experiences are some of the main objections raised against this stance. Moreover, with a focus on mystical experiences comes a secondary position of other dimensions of religion, particularly the philosophical and institutional ones. These dimensions are considered to be more important by many. In relation to mysticism, Jones blames James for focusing on its experiential aspect. He considers James to be the initiator of a scientific trend which focuses on experiences and forgets about other aspects of religiosity. In terms of mysticism, this focus entails the neglect of rites, communities, teachings, and practices of mystical traditions. Jones extends this view from the scientific relevance to its everyday and individual effects. He does it by saying that, in the long-term, James's focus on the experiences affected how religious phenomena have changed in modernity: people detached from the aspects of religion mentioned above and moved from one experience to the other without any long-term commitment.[142]

William James's approach to religion and religious experiences is often understood as exclusive because it favors the so-called "spiritual elite" who have first-hand experiences of the divine. The rest of the practitioners seem to be neglected, along with religion's institutional and social aspects. In his 2013 paper titled "Spilt mysticism: William James's democratization of religion", Paul Croce argues differently. He stresses that James does not defy or deny the seemingly neglected social, traditional, and institutional aspects but merely points out that they

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[137] This notion is based on the above-mentioned concept of methodological agnosticism by Ninian Smart.
[138] (James, Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking, 1981, p. 422)
[139] (Croce, 2013, pp. 6-7)
[140] "We all have some ear for this monistic music: it elevates and reassures. We all have at least the germ of mysticism in us. […] This mystical germ wakes up in us on hearing the monistic utterances, acknowledges their authority, and assigns to intellectual considerations a secondary place." (James, Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking, 1981, pp. 553-554)
[141] (Hardy, The Spiritual Nature of Man: A Study of Contemporary Religious Experience, 1979) (Hardy, The Living Stream, 1965) (Hardy, The Divine Flame, 1966)
[142] (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, pp. 333-337)

are secondary to the experiential aspect of religion both in time and in quality, and, for this reason, they are not treated in *Varieties*. Further, James is often blamed for promoting "spiritual elitism" on account of focusing on the passively experienced mystical events of the few chosen people (the twice-born) and neglecting the religion of the masses and other types of religious experiences.[143] The focus of *Varieties* on mystical experiences is explained thoroughly through their central and primary role within religion. However, because the connection between mystical experiences and religion is made and emphasized at the beginning of the work, the lack of discussion of the other religious dimensions has raised further questions.

For instance, Charles Taylor criticizes James for forgetting about people who have not had such experiences, or religious experiences in groups.[144] Taylor points out how the collective dimension of religion is neglected by James – by not being able to refer to the communal aspect of religiosity and experiences within communities. Taylor refers to shared events, rituals, and experiences when the individuals' experiences are not merely added together in the community, but there is a shared value created and an added depth to the experience.[145] Taylor takes this argumentation further and proposes a phenomenological and philosophical question, whether individual experiences are even possible. He implicitly articulates that experiences depend on language and that language almost exclusively depends on the community. Humans borrow the tools of understanding – symbols, words, and narratives – from the community.[146]

I agree with Croce's clarification and consider this question a matter of focus rather than a universal and intentional neglection on James's side. James indeed shined a light on the phenomenon of mysticism that had not been observed similarly in his age.[147] He considered this phenomenon central to religion and introduced several examples and arguments to support his idea. Therefore, I do not consider Jones's argumentation particularly meaningful regarding the lack of religious dimensions referred to in *Varieties*. However, the idea of "detached experiences" and the negative tone in which he speaks about this development is worth further consideration regarding today's mystical phenomena, which I will touch upon when discussing Jones's work in detail.

Even though Croce's emphasis takes away most of the heaviness in Taylor's critical approach, an essential aspect remains: experiences within communities and communal experiences are indeed not referred to appropriately in *Varieties*. Taylor rightly points out an essential phenomenon within religion and society which is neglected and deemed unimportant here. Following James's idea, one could argue that the focus is on mystical experiences that are primarily private. However, what does this private characteristic mean exactly? James stresses the word by adding that these experiences happen in solitude. So, the picture of a solitary experience is drawn up here. Even though Taylor's argumentation is valid and brings to attention an essential group of religious experiences, one could still argue that these are not

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[143] A concept, lately articulated by Charles Taylor. (Taylor C. , Varieties of religion today: William James revisited, 2002)

[144] (Taylor C. , Varieties of religion today: William James revisited, 2002, pp. 33-60)

[145] He also added that the "mystical body" of the Catholic church, the sacramental communion is not referred to in James's work either. (Taylor C. , Varieties of religion today: William James revisited, 2002, pp. 24-25)

[146] See: contextualism.

[147] I refer to his focus on mystical experiences in particular and also the place of mystical experiences in terms of the concept of religion. I do not intend to suggest that mysticism was not discussed in the 20th century. Footnote no. 90. highlights his contemporaries, and Chapter 3, his successors.

mystical experiences. However, I consider raising a different question, namely, whether mystical experiences happening in a community setting are possible. By this, I do not only mean an individual surrounded by others when this experience happens but an experience that is essentially communal. In Chapter 3, I argue that modern mysticism leans in this direction.

The return to James

The next aspect of James's reception and applicability is connected to the irreducibility related to the study of religious experiences. James highlights this in the first lecture of the *Varieties* on "Religion and Neurology".[148] This notion is also the core of Jeremy Carrette's critique of what he calls "the amnesia of neuroscience".[149] This critique entails two main parts. On the one hand, Carrette aims to remind scholars of some forgotten elements and the general approach of the *Varieties* as a response to the disciplinary hybris and amnesia of psychology and neuroscience. Carrette argues that its methodological and theoretical questions and the humble[150] approach toward its subject (i.e. religious experience) is missing from today's psychology and neurology. This humble approach should play an essential role in the scientific study of religious experiences. Religious experiences have their distinct language[151] and characteristics that make them immensely difficult to study scientifically, especially when one tries to treat them as any physical object of scientific study. I agree with Carrette's arguments in the sense that an approach similar to James's allows scholars to study mystical experiences meaningfully without applying a materialistic reductional framework. On the other hand, Carrette argues that the psychology of religion should return to James's *Varieties*. It is important to note that the "return to James" is originally J. M. Barbalet's idea. It is not centered around the criticism of psychology and neurology but around the reception of James's work. Barbalet advocates for a more comprehensive understanding of James through his theory of emotions.[152]

What is relevant here is that Carrette considers *Varieties* a key work in the psychological study of religion, particularly that of religious experience. It is undoubtedly a classical work contributing to the beginnings of a discipline. Carrette argues against many scholars, such as Taves, who point out the findings and problems that have been transcended since their publication in *Varieties*. However, Carrette is far from being blind or partial towards the scientific value of *Varieties*. He critically presents several advancements of research and narratives from various disciplines: philosophy, gender studies, and minority studies.[153] At the

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[148] (James, The Varieties of Religious Experience A Study in Human Nature. Centenary edition, 2002, pp. 7-25)

[149] (Carrette, The Return to James: Psychology, Religion and the Amnesia of Neuroscience, 2002, pp. xl-xliv)

[150] The limits of human knowledge and methodological humility are based on James. "Such scientific approaches underestimate the complexity of the socio-cultural-linguistic space of religion as serving a cultural function for the very limits of knowledge and the practices of living. It is, perhaps, the very living experience of recognising that our brains do not have the cognitive capacity to understand the mysteries of consciousness and the universe, however long the species is given to technologically advance its material knowledge, which brings us back to James. It is this methodological humility that William James employed in his own psychological examination of religion." (Carrette, The Return to James: Psychology, Religion and the Amnesia of Neuroscience, 2002, p. LXII)

[151] I elaborated on this subject at the Ineffability criterion in the previous pages.

[152] Carrette on Barbalet's idea. (Carrette, The Return to James: Psychology, Religion and the Amnesia of Neuroscience, 2002, p. xil). See Barbalet's original notion here: (Barbalet, 1999)

[153] See: (Carrette, The Return to James: Psychology, Religion and the Amnesia of Neuroscience, 2002, pp. xlv-xlvi). Condemning James for not focusing on many narratives related to minorities is a twofold issue. I find it relevant in the case of "the selective ordering of women's religious experience." (Carrette, The Return to James: Psychology, Religion and the Amnesia of Neuroscience, 2002, pp. xlv-xlvi), and according to Carrette: (Davis, 1995). However, it can be hardly held against James that he did not focus on differences in gender, sexual

same time, he acknowledges that *Varieties* has some fundamental methodological and theoretical problems. Yet, forgetting about or neglecting it based on neurological advancements in the last century is part of psychology's disciplinary amnesia and power struggle. I will return to further elaborating on the idea of disciplinary amnesia and its implications on the psychology of religion in the next section.

Taves also reflects on and questions the current scientific value of *Varieties* from a different perspective. She aims to reach her goal by finding explanations for its continued popularity[154] throughout the last century. She acknowledges its popularity at the time of publication but points out the mixed reviews among different scholars and other people.[155] Referring to the mixed reviews and further argumentation, she points out that *Varieties* is challenging to pin down scientifically as it does not fit into any category. She assigns some of its popularity to the "melt science and religion together" attempts. She points out several questionable elements and approaches in *Varieties*,[156] of which I only highlight the elements relevant for this dissertation.

First, she stresses the fact that the underlying question of the book is unclear. She argues that neither a theory nor a specific methodology is articulated in *Varieties* – it uses lots of examples and minimal argumentation to reach some rhetorical points rather than to prove a scientific argument. It is essential to point out that, for Taves, exploring this question is also a tool in disposing of something that bothers her, namely, that this book does not fit into disciplinary categories. Therefore, she applies a more critical understanding of the book than, for example, Charles Taylor, who made a similar attempt. Taves further points out the structural and rhetorical similarities between *Varieties* and Myers' *Human personality and its survival of bodily death*.[157] She argues that if we read *Varieties* this way, we can locate a shift of religious

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orientation, and race with the delicacy and meticulosity of contemporary discourses. Carrette attaches this notion to the elitism of academics at the beginning of the 20th century (Carrette, The Return to James: Psychology, Religion and the Amnesia of Neuroscience, 2002, p. XLVII). It is an attempt emphasized in contemporary science and popular discourse to the extent where it is a decisive factor in the value of the scientific work. Whether or not such factors are valid is not to be decided here. However, I consider such critiques anachronistic at best.

[154] "[…] one of the world's most popular attempts to meld science and religion. It was hugely popular from the start, selling more than ten thousand copies." (Taves, William James Revisited: Rereading The Varieties Of Religious Experience in transatlantic perspective, 2009, p. 416). Taves uses the word "popular" – not "influential" or "classical" – and this summarizes her feelings about the book: it taps into something that we want to hear in a way that we want to hear it, and it is not necessarily scientific.

[155] She tackles the mixed reviews from James's contemporaries: reviewers of foreign language editions, religious readers, psychologists, theologians, and philosophers. The academic reviews were mixed for a similar reason as it was popular. Scholars could not understand the book in Europe and America. The attempt of combining religion and science – some thought it was theological or even spiritual work, and some did not think it was science; many could not fit it in any scientific category. Moreover, Taves herself argues that it is quasi-scientific. She argues that. Only Leuba read it from the transatlantic network's perspective – he grasped the most important ambiguities and argued that James did not want to write a purely scientific book. (Taves, William James Revisited: Rereading The Varieties Of Religious Experience in transatlantic perspective, 2009, p. 419)

[156] First, based on Frederic Myers, she points out the main difficulty for readers: an ambiguous notion of the subconscious, which plays a vital role in the attempt to melt religion and science together. Taves argues that reading *The varieties* "in the context of the transatlantic network of experimental psychologists and psychical researchers" plays a vital role in understanding this concept, as it was the leading intellectual inspiration of the book. Second, she questions the book's central role in psychopathology and unusual experiences. (Taves, William James Revisited: Rereading The Varieties Of Religious Experience in transatlantic perspective, 2009, p. 415)

[157] They both adopted a natural, historical approach. They had examples arranged for a rhetorical effect – invoking science to evoke a religious response. Nevertheless, the difference is that Myers was concerned with how humans

preoccupation with death to this-worldly self-transformation. None of the scholarly attempts could grasp the primary perspective of the book: they tried to read it as philosophy, religious studies, and psychology. She argues that there is a more comprehensive and straightforward picture here which nonacademic readers could grasp better: a turn towards subjectivity and self-transformation. *Varieties* marks what Charles Taylor refers to as the "massive subjective turn"[158] in modern religious life characterized by what they call "spiritualities of life"[159].

Richard H. Jones implies a similar notion in the epilogue of *Philosophy of mysticism*: people are not interested in the transcendent any more, and pursuing religion and mysticism is more this-worldly as mystical experiences are primarily about self-transformation nowadays. Jones assigns this shift partially to James as well, in the sense that he overly accentuated the experiential part of mysticism rather than the preparatory activities and traditional and cultural aspects of it.[160]

Taves' critique is literary, showing similarities and differences, pointing out questionable parts of *Varieties* to prove that the work is not entirely scientific. What kind of criteria is she pushing regarding this book? This question is not entirely clear in Taves' paper. Furthermore, Taves has a narrow understanding of James: her critique does not grasp the essence and value of the book like Taylor does. She does recognize the work as it launched the psychology of religion as an area of study. It is widely acknowledged as a classic in both religious studies and psychology, and it remains something that should still be interpreted for the latter reasons, not necessarily for its scientific value. She aims to "debunk" its popularity, to remove James's spell on the readers.[161] She argues that its influence on religious studies and psychology has been limited, and it has a more long-lasting influence on the study of mysticism rather than on religious studies and psychology.

This review by Taves seems somewhat contradictory to what Kim and Snarey have articulated. Taves states that the current trend of neuropsychology deems anything not strictly scientific as unworthy of attention. Moreover, the forgetfulness of neuropsychology of religion is worth mentioning here: the discipline forgets or disregards that religion is a *sui generis* phenomenon, inherently something personal, something we cannot entirely grasp. Taylor argues that it is a loss of value that neuropsychology of religion cannot account for.

Similarly to Taves, Taylor heavily emphasizes the transatlantic understanding, however, not from the perspective of the contemporaries and of the reviews but from the perspective of applicability after James. He also points out intellectual antecedents. Moreover, by doing this,

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survive death; James was, on the other hand, trying to prove that the involvement of higher powers is significant in the transformation of the self.

[158] (Taylor C. , The Ethics of Authenticity, 1991)

[159] (Heelas, The spiritual revolution: from 'religion' to 'spirituality', 2009, p. 430)

[160] "The modern reduction of mysticism to merely a matter of personal experiences was solidified by William James in 1902 (1958). Nevertheless, mysticism is traditionally more encompassing than simply isolated mystical experiences: it is about living one's whole life aligned with reality as it truly is (as defined by a tradition's beliefs)." (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, p. 2)

[161] Taves (following Leuba) argues that James bewitched his readers in how he formed his arguments, and the underlying question is theological. The book is not about what seems to be the main argument: the human need for religious and mystical experiences – but the proof of spiritual agents. (Taves, William James Revisited: Rereading The Varieties Of Religious Experience in transatlantic perspective, 2009, p. 430) Taylor does not seem to share Taves' critique about the hidden theological agenda of *The varieties*: the critical argument, according to Taylor, is defending the right to believe in an agnostic and secular modern world. (Taylor C. , Varieties of religion today: William James revisited, 2002, pp. 33-60)

his aim is also to show what has been driving James – but it is even more important that he does not get stuck here. By finding these sources of intellectual inspiration, he uses his discoveries to understand the scope and applicability of the work better.

Taylor argues that James, possibly knowingly, grasped the essential tendencies of today's religious phenomena. One of the main characteristics of the present is that it seems to be a paradigmatically Jamesian era, where people who have religious experience make whatever sense of it, and there is not much interaction and concern for how it all fits at the level of society and how it affects the faith of different churches. Taylor argues that this is not a mere coincidence: James was seeing or foreseeing a solid tendency in society.[162]

Lastly, we arrive at the fundamental difference in the attitude towards *Varieties* in the case of Carrette, Taylor, and Taves. Carrette advocates for the relevance of the work when it comes to its methodological and theoretical sensitivity and critical approach to its subject. Taves seeks to find the "bewitching" factor of *Varieties*, a work which still holds the attention of the scholarly community, regardless of the more advanced and up-to-date literature on the subject. Even though Taves acknowledges the influence of the work, she does not regard it to be relevant today. Carrette critiques such an attitude, which implicitly or explicitly holds the idea that science has transcended and corrected the mistakes of its early trials.[163]

Other important critical reflections on *Varieties* I have not elaborated on due to space limitations include Eugene Taylor's work on the subject,[164] as well as Hardy's attempt to amplify James's work from an evolutionary biological perspective.[165] Also, Carrette aptly summarizes other meaningful contemporary critical responses such as James's Protestant bias, the focus on mystical experiences in light of Kantian philosophy, and selectivity regarding women's mystical experiences.[166]

This section, which has focused on William James's approach to mysticism, has not only provided a summary of an influential historical example in the study of mysticism but also aimed to point out an ambitious attempt to classify mystical experiences, which has curiously rarely been followed since James. The variety of mystical experiences either seemed too overwhelming for such a concise classification, or researchers did not even attempt it in the first place, in order to avoid the blame of oversimplification or due to their different overall interests

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[162] (Taylor C. , Varieties of religion today: William James revisited, 2002, pp. 111-116)

[163] (Carrette, The Return to James: Psychology, Religion and the Amnesia of Neuroscience, 2002, pp. XLIII-XLIV)

[164] Particularly *Consciousness beyond the margin* (Taylor E. , Mystical Awakening: An Epistemology of the Ultimate, 1996)

[165] Hardy refers to James as "the great pioneer in the study of religious feeling" and to *The varieties* as a "classic and profound study" at the beginning of *The spiritual nature of man*. (Hardy, The Spiritual Nature of Man: A Study of Contemporary Religious Experience, 1979, p. 4) Hardy intended to continue and extend James's work on the religious experiences reflected in *The varieties*. Peggy Morgan summarizes Hardy's references to James and their shared and extended goals: a large number of records of religious experiences from a variety of people was intended to serve as the foundation of his study; since James's and Starbuck's footsteps were followed mainly by anthropologists, Hardy intended to conduct an anthropological study with the hope of later extending it to eastern cultures; since mainly one particular Protestant community was studied in the light of James's and Starbuck's work, Hardy aimed to extend the research towards other lands and people with different religious affiliations; Hardy also aimed to continue James's interdisciplinary approach and include experiences that are not explicitly religious. (Morgan, 2005).

[166] (Carrette, The Return to James: Psychology, Religion and the Amnesia of Neuroscience, 2002, pp. XLV – XLVI)

in research (biological, neurological etc.). The approach of marking mystical experience as a *sui generis* phenomenon was undoubtedly influential in the study of mysticism.[167] Before that, theological and philosophical approaches to mysticism were common. The former regarded mystical experiences from the given religion's perspective: how the mystic fits or does not fit into the teachings[168] and boundaries of religion. Moreover, James pioneered recognizing "non-religious" experiences as mystical. The term "non-religious" usually refers to the fact that some of them are not (clearly) affiliated to one particular religious tradition. From the perspective of religious studies, "non-religious" experiences, such as the "aha moment" experience or *déja vu*, might be considered religious in nature. For example, James refers to these two experiences bearing minor similarities to mystical experiences.[169]

Though many of James's ideas have been criticized in the past 120 years, I consider James essential as his treatment of mystical experiences has been ahead of his time. The way he refers to the plurality of the phenomena could not be more relevant today. Taylor, one of his best critics, talks of James similarly: as if he has foreseen where the social and scientific processes were heading. As Carrette's view on James also suggests, I attempt to maintain a humble approach towards mystical and religious experiences without forcing a material explanation on them. This approach will be primarily important in Chapter 4, in the comparison of mystical experiences. Keeping this in mind, next, I turn toward the specific methods and theories of theology, psychology, philosophy, and religious studies. I aim to explore questions such as how these disciplines relate to mysticism and how they define mysticism today.

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[167] Although Taves argues that James did not understand religious experience as a *sui generis* experience, he wanted to point out its empirical basis or its explanation with regard to the relationship of the conscious and the subliminal self. (Taves, William James Revisited: Rereading The Varieties Of Religious Experience in transatlantic perspective, 2009, p. 418)

[168] Many mystics in western Christianity were considered to be heretics and later accepted and taken as saints. Dorothee Solle's work talks about resistance as one of the essential features of mysticism. (Soelle, 2001)

[169] (James, The Varieties of Religious Experience A Study in Human Nature. Centenary edition, 2002, p. 300)

Approaches to mysticism in various disciplines

Psychology of religion

The psychological approach towards mystical experiences offers a long list of relevant research topics, such as mysticism and psychoanalysis, mysticism and psychotherapy, drugs and hallucinogens related to mysticism, and issues such as the relation of mystical experiences to consciousness, and their resemblance to altered states of consciousness. Instead of diving deep into these specific issues, general approaches to the scientific study of mysticism will be presented here.

First, I focus on two principal attitudes towards religious experiences within the psychology of religion. One is sympathetic and integral, the other is skeptical and reductionist.[170] Among many outstanding scholars of mysticism,[171] William James's work has already been introduced. It is an example of a sympathetic and integral approach toward mystical experiences. It would lead the present dissertation off-track to dive deeper into other similar theories here; therefore, I want to mention only a few other examples related to this approach.

Maslow's concept of peak experience[172] is well-known as a reaction to the Freudian reductionist approach and pathological view of religious experiences. For Maslow, these experiences are not essentially religious, but he acknowledges that they were considered as such.[173] They are primarily perceived and described psychologically, with an emphasis on their psychological characteristics,[174] immediate and future effects.[175] "The peak-experience is felt as a self-validating, self- justifying moment which carries its own intrinsic value with it."[176] Other characteristics of the experience include an integrated perception of the universe,[177] the object of the experience (rather than the self)[178] being in focus, and the person becoming

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[170] "The skeptical and reductionistic approaches tend to interpret mystical experiences as pathological in nature and to categorize certain mystics according, to modern psychiatric or medical categories (e.g., schizophrenic, migraine sufferer). Such approaches tend to begin with the assumption that religion itself is a social pathology, when there is, in fact, much evidence that mystics actually live in more 'optimal states' and differ significantly from 'the diseased.' Sympathetic and integral psychological approaches tend to see mystics as providing glimpses into human potential and higher levels of consciousness. In this way, there is overlap with consciousness studies." (Komjathy, 2011, p. 858)

[171] "Some major voices in the psychological study of mysticism include Arthur Deikman, Robert Forman, Sigmund Freud, Stanislav Grof, William James, Abraham Maslow, and David Wulff." (Komjathy, 2011, pp. 858-859). The author lists Robert Forman here, which is justifiable on two bases – research and publications on the topic, the quality of research, and the contribution it brought about to the study of mysticism. However, I primarily consider Forman a philosopher.

[172] (Maslow, 1994)

[173] (Maslow, 1994, p. Appendix A.)

[174] Maslow describes what Forman calls forgetting and what mystics often experience as emptying the self, related to its psychological effects: "In peak-experiences, the dichotomies, polarities, and conflicts of life tend to be transcended or resolved." (Maslow, 1994, p. Appendix A/13)

[175] "Peak experiences can make life worthwhile by their occasional occurrence. They give meaning to life itself. They prove it to be worthwhile. To say this in a negative way, I would guess that peak-experiences help to prevent suicide." (Maslow, 1994, p. Appendix A/5) He also mentions immediate and later occurring effects: illuminations, conversions, insights, or therapeutic effects. (Maslow, 1994, p. Appendix A/15)

[176] (Maslow, 1994, p. Appendix A/5)

[177] (Maslow, 1994, p. Appendix A/1)

[178] (Maslow, 1994, p. Appendix A/4)

detached[179] and objective towards the subject, which is perceived "as it is", in its own reality.[180] Maslow calls these "end-experiences" as opposed to "means-experiences" and recognizes them as a sort of ultimate form of experience to look forward to or work for – something that makes life worthwhile as well as implies that "there are ends in the world".[181] He agrees with James on the foundational aspects of these experiences regarding religions.[182] His ideas were likened to James's.[183] Overall, Maslow's concept of the peak experience showcases a sympathetic and integral approach toward religious experiences from a primarily psychological and pragmatic perspective. One of the strengths of his work is pointing out the psychological effects of such experiences. However, his concept is much too broad to be adapted here. Besides peak experience, the concepts of oceanic feeling by Romain Rolland[184] and Erich Fromm's X-experience[185] are worth mentioning here.

Freud's interpretation of Rolland's oceanic feeling leads us to the second general approach to religious experiences: the reductionist and skeptical. Exploring the neuropsychological basis of religious experiences is getting more and more popular. The findings are interpreted in several disciplines, such as the cognitive science of religion and neurotheology. Among scholars, I highlight the most influential ones that write about mysticism: Andrew Newberg, Eugene D'Aquili (neurotheology), and Ann Taves (the cognitive science of religion). The approaches I discuss here are not skeptical or reductionist towards religious experiences per se but towards one or more aspects of the phenomena – generally, the cultural or personal aspects.

Neurotheology

One of the first attempts to interpret neurological data through a theological perspective and apply its language and concepts is connected to James Ashbrook and Carol Albright's book *The humanizing brain*.[186] A much more influential and empirically stable work was published shortly after this work by Eugene d'Aquili and Andrew Newberg, *The mystical mind*. This work primarily focuses on religious and mystical experiences. The authors intend to outline the fundamental questions of neurotheology, i.e. the study of theology from a neuropsychological

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[179] "non-evaluating, non-comparing, or non-judging" (Maslow, 1994, p. Appendix A/2)

[180] (Maslow, 1994, p. Appendix A/3)

[181] (Maslow, 1994, p. Appendix A/6)

[182] (Maslow, 1994, p. Chapter 3)

[183] (Burris & Tarpley, 1998)

[184] Rolland articulated the idea of Oceanic feeling in a letter written to Freud. Later Freud has also adapted the concept. In *Civilization and its discontents*, he summarizes Rolland's idea, referring to his letter: "It is a feeling which he would like to call a sensation of eternity, a feeling as of something limitless, unbounded, something oceanic. It is, he says, a purely subjective experience, not an article of belief; it implies no assurance of personal immortality, but it is the source of the religious spirit and is taken hold of by the various Churches and religious systems, directed by them into definite channels, and also, no doubt, used up in them. One may rightly call oneself religious on the ground of this oceanic feeling alone, even though one reject all beliefs and all illusions." (Freud, Strachey, & Hitchens, Civilization and its discontents, 1961, p. 7). Rolland's original lines in French can be found here: (Masson, 1980, p. 34)

[185] "More specifically, the x attitude can be described in the following terms: a letting go of one's 'ego,' one's greed, and with it, of one's fears; a giving up the wish to hold onto the 'ego' as if it were an indestructible, separate entity; a making oneself empty in order to be able to fill oneself with the world, to respond to it, to become one with it, to love it. To make oneself empty does not express passivity but openness. Indeed, if one cannot make oneself empty, how can one respond to the world? How can one see, hear, feel, love, if one is filled with one's ego, if one is driven by greed?" (Fromm, 1966, p. 59)

[186] (Ashbrook & Albright, 1997)

perspective. They are proposing the following questions: Why are religious experiences/spiritual experiences so powerful? How can we understand them from a biological point of view? What can religious and mystical experiences tell us about the mind and reality?[187] They start their exploration from the body, as they claim that the body makes such experiences possible.[188] They aim to discover a religion behind religions and a human experience of religions. Therefore, they take an approach that acknowledges the cultural diversity of such phenomena but goes beyond it to discover a biologically rooted fundamental experience and religion. These attempts are part of establishing a so-called metatheology.[189] In this attempt, authors go further than might be expected. They explore brain activation data recorded during meditative states and standard church liturgy and claim that similar brain areas are involved in both cases but to different degrees. Based on this fact, they conclude that religious experiences are essentially similar, maybe more or less intense. Many cultural factors are neglected here, along with accounts of such experiences, and the conclusions could be questioned based on these factors.

James H. Austin's work *Zen and the brain*[190] is an example that combines thorough (primarily personal) knowledge of Zen religious practices and neurological studies. Austin is not only a Zen practitioner but a neurologist who aims to explore the neurological basis of consciousness. He researched brain activities happening in meditative states. His book introduces the neurological findings and related Zen practices and teachings. This example contradicts what Taves and Carrette articulate about the general lack of knowledge about religions in the case of neuroscientists.

Thus, exploring the biological basis of religious experiences does not necessarily entail a reductionist and skeptical approach. In connection to James's work, I have briefly discussed Alister Hardy's evolutionary biological perspective on religious experiences before. Hardy aimed to explore the concept of a biologically universal experience which he called spiritual experience. Hardy's research is continued and supplemented with several quantitative[191] and qualitative[192] studies as well as theoretical works attempting to classify[193] the reported religious experiences and to show the universality of spiritual awareness. In its aim to point out a fundamental religious experience, Newberg and d'Aquili's work is close to the essentialist approaches mentioned before. However, based on their neurological similarities, they reduce and homogenize religious experiences.

The neural turn and its critique

Since the beginning of the 20th century, the focus shifted from the subliminal to the brain and biological functions of the body. Psychoanalytical, behaviorist, humanistic, cognitive,

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[187] (d'Aquili & Newberg, 1999, p. 163)
[188] (d'Aquili & Newberg, 1999, p. 16)
[189] (d'Aquili & Newberg, 1999, pp. 5-7)
[190] (Austin, 1998)
[191] David Hay, who worked in cooperation with the Religious Experience Research Unit, collected a set of relevant studies reflecting on the timely status of Hardy's hypothesis. These studies refer to the nature and frequency of reports. (Hay, 'The Biology of God': What is the Current Status of Hardy's Hypothesis?, 1994)
[192] Recent twin studies have shown that religious awareness is genetically inherited as opposed to churchgoing, which is more dependent on the person's upbringing. (Hay, Religion under Siege: A Scientific Response. A Lecture given to the Alister Hardy Society meeting at Oxford, December 1, 2007, 2008, pp. 148-149)
[193] (Hay, 'The Biology of God': What is the Current Status of Hardy's Hypothesis?, 1994, p. 5)

social, and evolutionary – several prevailing trends have shaped the scene of psychology, which is still in search of its identity.[194] According to Carrette, a discipline's search for identity is a complex process that entails positioning, authority, and amnesia.[195] Positioning the discipline among philosophy, physiology, and politics is a pursuit of becoming/remaining a voice of authority in the scientific milieu dominated by the natural sciences and their methodologies. In order to achieve these goals, amnesia enters the picture: disciplinary amnesia concerns its early history (figures, methods, and theological roots). I concentrate on the latter two of these pursuits, which entail the consequences of studying religious experiences.

This amnesia is partially the result of natural sciences gaining ground. The power struggle in the scientific world demands data, measurability, verification, and ultimately an anchor in the physical realm. Psychology and, more precisely, the psychology of religion is forgetting about its origins to appear less mumbo-jumbo and more akin to the natural sciences. The past hides underlying methodological problems, roots, and concepts based on theology and the quest to refer scientifically to human experiences without reducing them to physicality.[196]

The amnesia is closely connected to the change which is often named the neural turn or neuro turn. The so-called neural turn marks a change in the research of religion and other phenomena. The turn does not only mean the appearance of and focus on neurological and cognitive methods but, as Carrette and Bulkeley point out, the forgetting of what has happened before: putting aside previous scientific results and discoveries, and claiming to find new ones.[197] The power struggle is not only relevant within the discipline, but especially regarding its position in relation to natural sciences.

Another power struggle is presented in Carrette's text regarding the psychology of religion. Psychology treats religion as a subject similarly to the theoretical and methodological origins of religion, in an authoritative manner. It tries to explain away religion in order to showcase its power over it. Religious experiences with their uncertainty threaten the scientific worldview. Psychology, and especially neuroscience, surpasses its scope and makes a category error by applying its findings[198] to religious experiences. It does so exclusively and totally, presenting them as comprehensive explanations of religious experiences.[199] According to Carrette, this is an attempt to dominate the understanding of the human experience and to "[…] eradicate those experiences — arbitrarily held under the signifier "religion" — which threaten

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[194] (Carrette, The Return to James: Psychology, Religion and the Amnesia of Neuroscience, 2002, pp. XXXIX-XL)

[195] (Carrette, The Return to James: Psychology, Religion and the Amnesia of Neuroscience, 2002)

[196] The roots of western psychology and the concept of self rely heavily on a theological and religious basis. "By returning to the foundations of a subject we see all the provisionality and uncertainty of knowledge, which rather than being unhealthy, unscientific and untrue enable us to recognise the temporality of thought and the problems of 'closure'." (Carrette, The Return to James: Psychology, Religion and the Amnesia of Neuroscience, 2002, p. xliv). For more about the problems of closure, see (Lawson, 2001)

[197] (Kime & Snarey, 2018)

[198] "Neuroscience is a valuable and important part of the biology of human mental functions; it can locate functions and activities, and help in the understanding of mental diseases and neuronal dysfunction. However, to apply such knowledge to assessments of religious experience is to make a fundamental category error. An error James realises in his assessment of the project in 1901 and 1902. This disciplinary amnesia of contemporary neuroscientific assessments of religion is significant and requires an important and urgent return to James." (Carrette, The Return to James: Psychology, Religion and the Amnesia of Neuroscience, 2002, p. l)

[199] "It seeks closure of one discourse (religion) by assuming the rules of another discourse (neurology)." (Carrette, The Return to James: Psychology, Religion and the Amnesia of Neuroscience, 2002, p. LIV)

the certainty and domination of a scientific worldview".[200] Furthermore, "the weight of the discipline" allows scholars to make assumptions about religion without thoroughly studying it and being ridiculed.[201] Carrette rightly states that the opposite – social scientists presenting assumptions to natural scientists – would not work without significant backlash.[202] Carrette has given a discipline specific critical answer to the question with the neural turn in focus. LaFleur perceives identical changes with a different general attitude: as part of organic development in the scientific interest and research turning towards the body.[203] With this turn, the increased interest in the body's functions comes evidently.

As for the responses to these issues, two will be mentioned here: Carrette's proposition of "returning to James" and a collaborative approach. Carrette aims to guide psychology and especially neuroscience back to James's work. He goes against Taves' critique of *Varieties*, presented earlier, stating that James is not only a historically and methodologically great ancestor to remember, but his work and methods should be used today. He particularly emphasized the humble approach of *Varieties* towards its subject: religious experiences. "The return to James is a return to the foundational humility of the subject of the psychology of religion and a resistance to scientific imperialism, which performs such abusive disciplinary amnesia in order to propagate its regime of power. A return to James indicates that 'religion' and 'experience' are important categories for making sense of human life, irrespective of their confused cultural and neurological foundations."[204]

This does not necessarily mean a radical break with neuroscience. Taves and Kelley Bulkeley advocate for collaboration between religious studies and neuropsychology.[205] James's work does not call for such a break either. In the first chapter of *Varieties*, he refers to the "roots and fruits" of experiences. The roots of an experience lead research towards neurology, the brain, and other biological functions. Therefore, the psychological and neurological investigations of religious experiences can complement each other from the perspective of their connection to the roots of experiences. However, this does not mean that a reductionist approach could be implemented because the significance of the experiences cannot (entirely) be known

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[200] (Carrette, The Return to James: Psychology, Religion and the Amnesia of Neuroscience, 2002, p. LIII)

[201] Taves applies a similar critique to the earlier discussed work of Newberg and d'Aquili: "In addition, scholars and researchers, including a number of self-identified neurotheologians, most of whom lack training in theology or religious studies (e.g., D'Aquili and Newberg 1999), have enthusiastically embraced the challenges of identifying the neural correlates of religious experience without engaging the critiques of the concept that led many scholars of religion to abandon it." In: Taves, A. (2009). *Religious experience reconsidered: A building block approach to the study of religion and other special things*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Page 8. (Taves, Religious experience reconsidered: A building block approach to the study of religion and other special things, 2009, p. 8)

[202] (Carrette, The Return to James: Psychology, Religion and the Amnesia of Neuroscience, 2002, p. LVI)

[203] (LaFleur, 1998, p. 37). Fuller on LaFleur's above-mentioned ideas: "LaFleur went so far as to suggest that twenty years ago mysticism would have been widely considered a core term in religious study, and the body was given no attention whatsoever. LaFleur states that the situation now seems to be reversed. He didn't mean that mysticism is no longer a prime topic of religious investigation. His point was that we now ask new questions about mysticism and structure our investigations into mysticism around new critical terms. Among these terms are concepts drawn from the study of the body's biological functions—its genetic predispositions, its neurochemical processes, and its emotional programs." (Fuller, 2008, p. 6)

[204] (Carrette, The Return to James: Psychology, Religion and the Amnesia of Neuroscience, 2002, p. LXIII)

[205] (Kime & Snarey, 2018, pp. 311-312)

from the roots but their fruits. The fruits are the effects, results, function, and value of the experience.[206]

Religious studies

In view of Taves's and Carrette's work, the need for a thorough knowledge of religions and social theories regarding the study of religious experiences is clear. Indeed, the discipline of religious studies treats religion as a relevant cultural phenomenon and has a vital role in raising awareness about the complexity of religious phenomena. Moreover, religious studies reminds us of the necessity of a constant critical and open approach toward the definitions of religion. In addition to facts and theories, religious studies also brings a fruitful methodology to the table, which is, in some sense, closely related to James's essentially humble approach. I have elaborated on the concept of methodological agnosticism before, so I will not go into details here.

In this section I focus on definitions of mysticism and mystical experiences in religious studies. While it would be beneficial to go further into detail, many relevant and classical authors of religious studies are either not discussed here, such as Max Weber;[207] have been mentioned before, like Otto and Freud; or will be discussed later, like Gerardus van der Leeuw, Émile Durkheim, Ernst Troeltsch, and Peter L. Berger.

Besides his methodological contributions, Ninian Smart is well-known for articulating a functional concept of religion focused on the seven dimensions of the phenomenon.[208] One of the seven dimensions is the experiential one, also known as the "emotional dimension". Here Smart refers to the emotional and subjective side of religion, i.e. how an individual person experiences religion. Among others, he mentions the experiences which laid the foundations for religious traditions. He agrees with the idea proposed by James, namely, that these experiences have an essential role in establishing the workings of the tradition and providing vitality for it. Mystical experiences could also be interpreted within this dimension. Smart clarifies mysticism right at the beginning: he distinguishes mysticism from other religious phenomena[209] and proposes typical figures[210] of mystical life. I consider his definition vague as it concentrates on contemplative life and experience, but, nevertheless, the attempt and mode of clarification are needed, because they are not yet prevalent in the study of mysticism.[211]

Richard King's comparative definition is much more applicable to the present dissertation. King defines mysticism in the following way: "In a comparative context mysticism has come to denote those aspects of the various religious traditions which emphasize

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[206] "The highest flights of charity, devotion, trust, patience, bravery to which the wings of human nature have spread themselves have been flown for religious ideals." Varieties 203. (James, The Varieties of Religious Experience A Study in Human Nature. Centenary edition, 2002, p. 203)

[207] Weber's concept of charismatic authority and the routinization of charisma could be mentioned here (Weber M. , 1947). On its applications to mysticism, particularly to medieval female mysticism, see (Turai, 2022)

[208] (Smart, Dimensions of the Sacred: An Anatomy of the World's Beliefs, 1996)

[209] "Thus 'mysticism' will here be used to refer to the contemplative life and experience, as distinguished from prophetism, devotionalism and sacramentalism (though we must keep in mind the fact mentioned above-that prophetic and sacramental religion are often interwoven with that of mysticism)." (Smart, Interpretation and Mystical Experience, 1965, p. 75)

[210] St John of the Cross, Tauler, Eckhart, al-Hallaj, Shankara, the Buddha, Lao-Tzu. (Smart, Interpretation and Mystical Experience, 1965, p. 75)

[211] I consider this definition relevant only in terms of ergotropic and trophotropic states, further elaborated on in Chapter 3.

unmediated experience of oneness with the ultimate reality, however differently conceived."[212] This definition reflects the approach of the comparative study of religions and focuses on the mystical experience, particularly its directness, compared to other religious experiences. One of its most vital points is its neutral wording, which allows the inclusion[213] of a variety of religious traditions: "unmediated experience of oneness with ultimate reality". The term "ultimate reality" does not necessarily refer to a god or include theistic experiences. However, this definition limits mystical experiences to be aspects of religious traditions and forgets to account for experiences that defy these boundaries.[214] Examples beyond this definition could include experiences happening within religious traditions but not with a content of that specific tradition,[215] or mystics and mystical experiences which are not affiliated with religious traditions at all. Nature mysticism or cosmic consciousness are examples which often are not affiliated in such a way.[216]

From a religious studies point of view, what counts as a religious experience does not necessarily depend on whether it is connected to a religious tradition. Just as there are phenomena that are not obviously religious but which function similarly to religion,[217] some not-so-obvious experiences have similar functions on the individual's level. Louis Komjathy defines mysticism based on this element: mystical experiences are experiences that the person or the community considers sacred or ultimate.[218] One of the strongest points of this definition is the defining factor: the meaningfulness or sacredness of the mystical experience for the individual or the community. However, the definition remains too broad to be adapted here,

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[212] (King, Mysticism and spirituality, 2005, p. 306)

[213] "But mysticism need not be theistic. Theravada Buddhism for example, is more conducive to mystical thought, experiences, and practices, than Islam in general; yet Sufism emerged in Islam giving priority to the mystical apprehension of God. Mystical experiences bring a serenity or bliss to the mystic. Such experiences may have some relation to the spontaneous experience of the unity of the world ('panenhenic' experience) and with certain kinds of chemical- and drug-induced experiences; but the connections are much disputed." (Bowker, 2000, p. 395)

[214] Bernard McGinn argues that mysticism, particularly Christian mysticism, was solely connected to a specific historical religion. A so-called "unchurched mysticism" appeared only about 150 years ago. Therefore, McGinn argues that we need to study the phenomenon within this context (McGinn, The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism, 2006, p. xiv). Furthermore, Carrette's reminder about the psychological labeling of experiences has already been discussed. As I mentioned earlier, James also considered many experiences such as déjà vu and drunkenness mystical to some extent.

[215] "To flesh this out, straightforwardly, what is being argued is that, for example, the Hindu mystic does not have an experience of X which he then describes in the, to him, familiar language and symbols of Hinduism, but rather he has a Hindu experience, i.e., his experience is not an unmediated experience of X but is itself the, at least partially, pre-formed anticipated Hindu experience of Brahman. Again, the Christian mystic does not experience some unidentified reality, which he then conveniently labels God, but rather has the at least partially prefigured Christian experiences of God, or Jesus, or the like. Moreover, as one might have anticipated, it is my view based on what evidence there is, that the Hindu experience of Brahman and the Christian experience of God are not the same." (Katz, Language, Epistemology and Mysticism, 1978, p. 26)

[216] "The present definition also does not preclude the possibility that there are "nonreligious" mystical experiences, such as a feeling of oneness with nature or the cosmos (Zaehner's panenhenic category), or that, as noted by Louis Komjathy, some individuals may have had 'transtradition' experiences that lead to religious conversion. 'Nonreligious' experiences would still be 'mystical' because an individual or a group defines them as sacred or ultimate." (Komjathy, 2011, p. 855)

[217] Robert Bellah's concept of Civil Religion could be mentioned here, which in itself is a good example. Furthermore, it entails public and political figures, commemorative holidays, presidential inauguration speeches and even social gatherings such as football games as elements of the civil religion in America. (Bellah, 1967)

[218] "On the most basic level, mystical experience may be defined as an experience of that which a given individual or community identifies as sacred or ultimate. There is no single, essential, and 'ultimate' form of mystical experience; there are, in fact, many types of mystical experiences, which differ according to the community and tradition involved and which assume different soteriologies and theologies." (Komjathy, 2011, p. 855)

even though it includes nonreligious experiences as well. All in all, I consider King's comparative[219] definition to be applicable for the methodology and goals of this work, as it is neutral in its phrasing and grasps the common element in a variety of mystical experiences well. However, it must be supplemented by the necessary condition that mystical experiences occur outside of religious traditions as well.

Theology

Religious studies approaches mysticism and religion from an outsider's perspective, not debating the compatibility of the experiences with certain religions' teachings. On the contrary, the theological study of mysticism here primarily means the insider study of such experiences and the systematic study of mystical experiences within a given religious tradition.[220] Naturally, the "insider" perspective of understanding mysticism differs from the perspective of religious studies. Traditions try to create meaning of mystical experiences: they try to account for what is not fitting, sometimes based on different mystical experiences.

Mystics' claims about the direct connection, unity, and firsthand knowledge are highly provocative and possibly disturbing for traditional and systematic interpretations. This is especially true when the transcendent is essentially unknowable according to the teachings of a religion. Through this, mystics become an authority that bypasses traditional mediations of transcendental knowledge and power. Some choose to act upon these characteristics and risk the possibility of ostracization, like one of the greatest Christian mystics, Meister Eckhart, who voiced his views and was accused of heresy because of this. Others, like Teresa of Avila and many medieval mystics, stressed that even though their experiences might be extraordinary, they are in line with the teachings of the Church. Nonetheless, mystics are essential examples of border-crossing,[221] and, through their experiences, they unintentionally challenge religions to reflect on the limits of their narratives.

Several great works on the history of Christian mysticism have been published over the decades. Alois M. Haas's works concentrate on Rhineland mysticism.[222] Kurt Ruh has published a volume about the history of western Christian mysticism in the age of Patristics and the 12th and 13th centuries, with a particular focus on female mysticism, Franciscan mysticism, and the connection of monastic theology to mysticism.[223] One of the latest and grandest works on the subject is being written by Bernard McGinn. McGinn is writing an enormous and momentous

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[219] On the advantages of the comparative approach: "The comparative study of mysticism reveals many unquestioned assumptions on the part of both a given religious community and researchers of mysticism." (Komjathy, 2011, p. 858)

[220] Here I am primarily concentrating on (Western) Christian theology as both John of the Cross and Thomas Merton are connected to this tradition.

[221] The idea of border-crossing as part of the evolvement of explanatory processes in religions is based on the works of Clifford Geertz and Thomas Tweed. Both refer to events and experiences that stretch the already existing boundaries of explanation. While Geertz's concept entails a reaction to these challenges, Tweed's theory supposes an active and ongoing boundary-expansion effort (Tweed, 2006). According to Geertz, religions strive to integrate experiences that do not fit into their explanatory framework at first sight; therefore, they expand and transform models of reality; or to maintain the conviction that it can be reckoned with. All this is in order to avoid chaos and move towards order (Geertz, 2001). Tweed's theory will be further elaborated on in Chapter 5.

[222] (Haas, 2013)

[223] (Ruh & Görföl, A nyugati misztika története : A patrisztikus alapok és a 12. század szerzetesi teológiája, 2006), (Ruh & Görföl, A nyugati misztika története: A 12. és a 13. századi női misztika és az első ferencesek misztikája, 2006)

set of books about Christian mysticism entitled *The presence of God*, starting from the origins of Christian mysticism.[224] McGinn has previously dedicated other works to the subject, such as *The essential writings of Christian mysticism*.[225] In this work, he discusses the development of Christian mysticism over time: the first stage being the early modern era of monasticism and church Fathers, the era of "New Mysticism" starting around 1200 and extending to the 17th century, and the third stage, the "crisis of mysticism", which continues "at least into the past century".[226] Without denying its theological significance, I want to point out another interesting viewpoint adapted in the work. McGinn argues that Christian Mysticism is not about chronological order but about specific distinctive characteristics of mysticism as part of Christianity. He suggests that, from a Christian perspective, a more nuanced definition of mysticism may be written because of its long history and development in the religion. This definition is more complex than the simple understanding of mysticism in the ordinary sense (strange and indescribable) and what could be summarized as the perennial point of view, i.e. that mysticism is the core of all religions. McGinn articulates a threefold understanding of mysticism: "the preparation for, the consciousness of, and the effect of what the mystics themselves have described as a direct and transformative presence of God."[227]

Among earlier writers of Christian theology, one influential author need to be mentioned here: Evelyn Underhill, an English researcher and writer who published several influential works on mysticism in the early 20th century. One of the most well-known ones is titled *Mysticism*.[228] Her work is essentially connected to her Anglo-Catholic faith and her definition of mysticism is rooted in these traditions as well. Her definition concentrates on the direct experience as opposed to faith that is learned. This aspect resembles James's idea of first-hand and second-hand experiences, moreover, the religion of the healthy-minded and the sick souls. Underhill also dealt with and analyzed the works of several Christian mystics: she has extensively engaged in and written about the work of the Flemish mystic Jan van Ruysbroeck's,[229] Teresa of Avila, and Augustine. She also researched Neoplatonic mysticism and the works of Plotinus and worked with Rabindranath Tagore on the translated edition of Kabir's poems.

One of the contemporary critics of normative theological discourse is Komjathy. He argues that Christian theological approaches are normative discourses connected to existentialist questions, centering around a particular concept of the sacred. The theological discourses are focused on the theological importance and relevance of mysticism and its soteriological values. He says that a so-called "historical theology" has not yet developed, and

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[224] Currently including seven volumes starting from the foundations of Christian mysticism leading until the 17th-century mysticism in France, Italy, and Germany.

[225] (McGinn, The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism, 2006)

[226] (McGinn, The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism, 2006, p. i)

[227] "In the first volume of my ongoing history of Christian mysticism, The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century, (New York: Crossroad, 1991), I set forth an understanding of mysticism as that part, or element, of Christian belief and practice that concerns the preparation for, the consciousness of, and the effect of what the mystics themselves have described as a direct and transformative presence of God." (McGinn, The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism, 2006, p. xiv)

[228] (Underhill, Mysticism: a Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness, 1911)

[229] (Underhill, Ruysbroeck, 1915)

this sort of theology would be descriptive, not favoring any religious tradition.[230] Moreover, he says that these days, theological approaches are not favored or considered relevant.[231]

Jones shares a similar and, in a sense, more radical view of the same problem from a philosophical perspective. He argues that contemporary theology is not concerned with the transcendent anymore. Moreover, Jones blames the split between spirituality and theology in Christianity as one of the main reasons there was a decrease in interest in mysticism in early modernity. He further points out that liberal churches discourage mystical experiences and mysticism as unnecessary. In conservative churches, mystical knowledge of God is considered blasphemous, and other religious experiences related to personal salvation are emphasized.[232] He also mentions aspects of Christian theology and explains that for postmodern theologians, it is impossible to experience God directly for logical reasons. According to Jones, the "experiential" approach, which treats mystical experiences as real experiences, is considered obsolete in religious studies.[233] The reduced emphasis on meditation in Eastern and Western monasteries is also connected to a rigid conformity to rules, in Jones's understanding.

In contrast, Dorothee Soelle[234] argues that, from a theological point of view, mysticism is more vital today than ever. Mystical awareness is the key to our survival and a better world.[235] She considers mystical experiences different and vital for another reason than many researchers. She does not concentrate on the directness of the experience, or as she calls it, "a new vision of God," rather, she emphasizes the effects of the experience. Mystical unions provide a different view of the world: seeing it from a divine perspective.[236] She further argues that the social aspect of mysticism is not separable from the experience. Whether mysticism is a withdrawal from society or, on the other end of the scale, a revolution against it, it always involves a 'no' to the world as it is in its current form. Soelle argues that mysticism is inherently resistance,[237] and that we are all mystics[238].

Theological perspectives of mysticism concentrate on understanding the phenomenon within a religious tradition, often writing about its significance for the tradition. In many cases there is a lack of reflection on nonreligious experience and on mysticism as a phenomenon in comparison to similar cases in other religious traditions. This view of mysticism as an overarching phenomenon can be questioned by referring to present examples and on the basis

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[230] "Normative issues would be bracketed or explored from a comparative perspective. There can be no doubt that the comparative study of mysticism reveals alternative, mutually exclusive but perhaps equally viable, theologies (contra Perennial Philosophy)." (Komjathy, 2011, p. 858)

[231] "In addition to the medieval heresy trials, one finds an example of such concern in the "Norms of the Congregation for Proceeding in Judging Alleged Apparitions and Revelations," issued by the Papal Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on February 25, 1978. There are similar reservations concerning the relevance of "mystical experiences" in certain Zen Buddhist movements and in specific Daoist internal alchemy communities, not to mention contemporary secular-materialist dismissals of mystical experience as nothing more than social constructions or neurophysiology (see below). The underlying motivations and political dimensions of such attempts to corral mystical experiences also deserve consideration." (Komjathy, 2011, p. 856)

[232] (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, pp. 334-335)

[233] (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, p. 211)

[234] Dorothee Soelle (also written as: Dorothee Sölle) was a German liberation theologian. (1929-2003)

[235] (Soelle, 2001, pp. 297-298)

[236] "Thus what mystics call 'becoming at one' is never a possession that cannot be lost. What really happens in mystical union is not a new vision of God but a different relationship to the world-one that has borrowed the eyes of God." (Soelle, 2001, p. 293)

[237] (Soelle, 2001, pp. 1-9)

[238] (Soelle, 2001, p. 302)

of religious studies. "It was perhaps the greatest insight of Friedrich Baron von Hugel's great book, *The mystical element of religion*, to emphasize that mysticism is only one part or element of a concrete religion and any particular religious personality. No mystics (at least before the present century) believed in or practiced 'mysticism.' They believed in and practiced Christianity (or Judaism, or Islam, or Hinduism), that is, religions that contained mystical elements as parts of a wider historical whole."[239]

Philosophy

It is far from an easy task to grasp the philosophical connections of mysticism under such space limitations as in the present dissertation.[240] I have already elaborated on some of its epistemological relevance related to constructivism and perennialism. I have also mentioned ineffability and will get back to other aspects of mysticism connected to the philosophy of language, such as the cataphatic, apophatic, and translinguistic language of mystical texts. Mysticism is connected to metaphysical questions about the relation of the transcendent and the immanent – as mystics purportedly cross the line between them, claiming their unity. Mystical knowledge raises some epistemological questions, too, discussed by what is called "the Doxastic Practice Approach" and the "Argument from Experience".[241] Some scholars argue that mysticism entails radical individualism, which raises moral philosophical questions.[242] The phenomenon also has its implications related to the philosophy of mind.[243] Furthermore, philosophers have contributed significantly to categorizing mystical experiences, which I will elaborate on in Chapter 3. Here I concentrate only on some of the most influential works, which focus on mysticism and create a theoretical contribution to understanding it, starting with Walter Stace's work.

One of the most influential philosophical works on mysticism is Walter Stace's *Mysticism and philosophy*. In this book, Stace explores the philosophical implications of mysticism, related to epistemology, philosophy of language, ethics, etc. He defines the common core of a fully developed mystical experience as a particular type of "apprehension of *an ultimate nonsensuous unity in all things*"[244] (emphasis in the original). Some mystical experiences are considered borderline cases, exhibiting only some similar but not central characteristics of mysticism.[245] His understanding of mysticism is rooted in the twofold typology of extrovertive and introvertive experience, implying an axiological hierarchy. I will discuss this in detail in Chapter 3. In addition to Stace, William Wainwright's impressive

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[239] (McGinn, The Foundations of Mysticism, 1994, p. xvi)

[240] Among many philosophers Plotinus, Nicolaus Cusanus and Schleiermacher could be mentioned here, the latter also in terms of personal experiences. (Schleiermacher, 1996)

[241] (Jones & Gellman, 2022)

[242] I will elaborate on Ernst Troeltsch's related ideas in Chapter 3.

[243] (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, pp. 125-131)

[244] "The most important, the central characteristic in which all fully developed mystical experiences agree, and which in the last analysis is definitive of them and serves to mark them off from other kinds of experiences, is that they involve the apprehension of *an ultimate nonsensuous unity in all things*, a oneness or a One to which neither the senses nor the reason can penetrate. In other words, it entirely transcends our sensory-intellectual consciousness." (Stace, The Teachings of the Mystics, 1960, pp. 14-15)

[245] He talks about this in detail in *Mysticism and Philosophy* (Stace, Mysticism and Philosophy, 1961) and briefly in *Teachings* (Stace, The Teachings of the Mystics, 1960, p. 15)

collection of essays[246] and important handbook[247] should be mentioned as a significant contribution to the philosophical treatment of mysticism.

Philosophy of mysticism: Raids on the ineffable (2016) by Richard H. Jones is one of the most recent monographs on mysticism. The author seeks to provide a comprehensive account of many of the crucial issues raised by scholarly research on mysticism from the perspective of postmodernity. Jones considers his book *Philosophy of mysticism* to be a vital addendum to Walter Stace's *Mysticism and philosophy* (1960). *Philosophy of mysticism* provides a comprehensive guide to understanding the issues and problems associated with mysticism, such as how mystical experiences are categorized and scientifically investigated, whether mystics' claims about their experiences are cognitive, and how to deal with the alleged insights into ultimate reality they offer. It also looks at different aspects of mysticism from the perspective of philosophy, such as the compatibility of mysticism with metaphysics, language, rationality, morality, and science.

Richard H. Jones's definition highlights neglected aspects of mysticism, namely the preparation for the experience and the transformation of lifestyle following the mystical experience.[248] Jones argues that starting with William James, the philosophical discussion and definitions of mysticism were reduced to the mystical experience and neglected the above-mentioned aspects.

Therefore, in the introduction of his book about *Philosophy of mysticism*, Jones describes mysticism this way:

"But in this book, "mystical" will refer only to phenomena centered around an inward quest focused on two specific classes of experiences. […] It is a "way" (yana, dao) in the sense of both a path and a resulting way of life. […] Nevertheless, mysticism is traditionally more encompassing than simply isolated mystical experiences: it is about living one's whole life aligned with reality as it truly is (as defined by a tradition's beliefs)." (Jones, 2016. 2.)

In Jones's work, mystical experiences are still considered to be the *differentia specifica* of mysticism: they help distinguish mysticism from metaphysics and other forms of religiosity. His typology of mystical experiences is essential in his argumentation about why mysticism should be taken seriously by scientists and philosophers. He uses and further develops the previously established distinction of extrovertive and introvertive mystical experiences.

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[246] (Wainwright, Mysticism: A Study of its Nature, Cognitive Value, and Moral Implications, 1981)
[247] (Wainwright, The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion, 2004)
[248] The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy similarly defines mysticism: "'Mysticism' is best thought of as a constellation of distinctive practices, discourses, texts, institutions, traditions, and experiences aimed at human transformation, variously defined." In contrast with most of the definitions, human transformation is defined here as the goal of mysticism instead of unity with ultimate reality/transcendent. A large emphasis is put on the apparatus supporting the mystic and setting up the mystical tradition." (Jones & Gellman, 2022)

The concept of mysticism used in the present dissertation

Mystical experiences are fascinating and puzzling study subjects for many disciplines, as I have pointed out before. In the center of the whole phenomenon lies the experience itself, and it has a central role in mysticism in the figurative and literal sense as well. Figuratively, mysticism is characterized and essentially centered around a distinctive experience. Literally speaking, it is perceived to stand in the center, following any preparations for it and preceding its effects. However central part mystical experiences have in mysticism, mysticism is more than mystical experiences.[249] As this distinction has a crucial role in my argumentation, I endeavor to highlight a threefold concept of mysticism in this part.

This threefold concept is the base for understanding mysticism in this dissertation. It plays a crucial part in the hypothesis that traditional and modern mysticism can be compared in the first place, and possible similarities can be highlighted. The 'antecedents' and the 'aftermath' – everything that comes before and after the mystical experience – will be referred to as the 'contextual elements of mysticism' because they are considered subjects of contextual influences, as opposed to mystical experiences, which are not.

As for the comparison of traditional and modern forms of mysticism, it entails the following. The reason why these phenomena from different times can be compared in the first place is the specific experience. If there is no essential similarity in mystical experiences of traditional and modern mysticism, then the specificity that both have antecedents and aftermath is not sufficient to establish that both are forms of "mysticism" – given the fact that many human activities, experiences, etc. have antecedents (leading up to a significant event) and aftermath (with a similar sense of them being life-changing). Therefore, while analyzing the similarities and differences between the antecedents and aftermath is significant, it is crucial to also look at the mystical experiences themselves.

It is important to note that this conception is not based exclusively on any of the above-mentioned disciplines. Psychology, religious studies (primarily phenomenological and comparative approaches), theology, and philosophy all provide their interpretations. This will also be visible from the researchers quoted here. Moreover, while some authors, such as McGinn and Komjathy, present a similar division, I implement different focuses in my argumentation, primarily focusing on authors who emphasize one of the elements of the threefold concept and highlight that element the best: Gerardus van der Leeuw for the antecedents, Richard King for the mystical experience, and Richard H. Jones for the aftermath. I briefly return to McGinn's and Komjathy's similar approaches after that.

Antecedents

What precedes mystical experiences belongs in the first element: practices, preparatory activities, religious, traditional resources, and support. Gerardus van der Leeuw's work about the phenomenology of religion[250] highlights this part of mysticism. He focuses on the

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[249] (Komjathy, 2011) states: "In the field of religious studies, the term is probably best understood as synonymous with mystical experience; such experiences differ according to particular mystics and religious traditions." In contrast to Komjathy, I argue that mysticism is not exactly synonymous with mystical experience. While it can be argued that James heavily and restricting focused on mystical experiences, in this work, the so-called contextual elements (antecedents and aftermath) will also be taken into consideration.

[250] (Leeuw, Bendl, Dani, & Takács, 2001, pp. 427-441)

phenomena of overarching cultures and different religious traditions. He describes mysticism in two parts according to the phases of the mystical path: preparation and union. Here I focus on the former, which he calls "asceticism", taken literally as *practice*.[251] Asceticism here means the practices of preparation. These practices vary based on different traditions, and the similarity lies in their goals and the way they are described. These preparational practices aim to lessen the ego and prepare the mystic for unity – to eliminate duality. Mystics and mystical traditions tend to emphasize the description of these practices: they are carefully divided into stages and described in detail.

The preparation may or may not be crucial in regards to the occurrence of the mystical experience. As I have pointed out, the criterion of passivity does not necessarily stand in every case. Some mystical experiences occur without preparation or previous involvement in the practices of religious or mystical traditions. Whether or not it is the case regarding certain mystical experiences, these elements are undoubtedly relevant to mysticism. If one accepts the criterion of passivity, then these preparatory methods are perceived to have limitations. Their effectivity is not denied but limited to only bringing the person closer to mystical experiences – to a stage where they are more open to having such experiences than before. If one denies the idea of passivity, then it must be assumed that some of these activities might lead to mystical experiences directly. So, what exactly belongs to the preparatory phase?

First, ascesis, in the original sense of the word: practice. Sometimes it is realized in the form of strict self-discipline. Otherwise, it is understood to cover traditional or non-traditional practices intended to make the person receptible to the mystical experiences. Different religious traditions have different methods for opening the person to such experiences: meditation, prayer, contemplation, activities related to the body assuming certain positions, possibly in repetitions, or under disciplining.[252] The help or intervention of the master/guru, which was mentioned earlier at the criterion of ineffability, may also belong to this stage.

Second, textual support for and descriptions of the preparatory phase. It is typical in mysticism to describe this part gradually: getting closer to the mystical experience and going through certain stages, each presenting its positive effects and challenges. When the stages towards the mystical experience are described, they often contain important information about the experience itself (or at least its interpretation). For example, Dógen's approach to the depth of koans reveals five stages that reflect the absolute and relative relation. It starts with emptiness: "the relative within the absolute" and ends with the fifth non-dual stage: "It is one thing – neither absolute nor relative, up nor down, profane nor holy, good nor bad, male nor female."[253]

These descriptions frequently have educational purposes as well. For example, Teresa of Avila does not only describe the end of the mystical path, the total union, which I quoted before, but other visions and raptures on the mystical way as well. Her concept is one of the most elaborate: presenting the soul as a castle with seven rooms. The seventh is the innermost room and the center of the soul – it is also the place for the complete union. Getting towards it

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[251] (Leeuw, Bendl, Dani, & Takács, 2001, p. 429)

[252] Gerardus van der Leeuw presents an excellent summary from a phenomenological point of view of this stage of mysticism. (Leeuw, Bendl, Dani, & Takács, 2001, pp. 429-435)

[253] (Dógen, Loori, & Tanahashi, The True Dharma Eye: Zen Master Dōgen's Three Hundred Kōans, 2011, pp. 38-39)

and gradually proceeding in the rooms are described as aiding her sisters in similar mystical ways and possibly avoiding the fears and dead ends on the way. Even though many mystical texts do not have such a clear educational agenda, they may provide some footholds and guidance on the pathless ways.

The mystical experience

The second phase is the mystical experience, also known as the mystical union or *unio mystica*. Along the line of van der Leeuw, it can be described as the complete elimination of the ego and duality. This means that the epistemological duality of subject and object is temporarily suspended. For similar reasons, some scholars do not call mystical experiences 'experiences'. One example for that is based on Roman Catholic theological foundations: McGinn refers to the unio mystica as 'presence',[254] While Forman, coming from a philosophical perspective, calls them "events".[255] Richard H. Jones presents a relevant concept related to the so-called "empty-depth" mystical experiences, which are questionable in terms of how mystics can recall what happened to them during the experience if there was no epistemological duality.[256] All three of these approaches are worthy of further consideration, which might lead to the revision of the terminology. However, the goals of the present dissertation do not allow such a lengthy detour. Whether it is an 'event' or 'presence', mystics are in some subjective ways aware[257] of what happens to them, and therefore it falls broadly within the scope of what we call experience. Therefore, I will stick to the established and well-known terminology, calling this a mystical experience.

The definition of mystical experience adopted for our current purposes from Richard King is the following: it is a direct experience of oneness with the ultimate reality (however differently it is conceived).[258] The way the mystic and the tradition regard the ultimate reality varies. Moreover, it serves as a neutral and inclusive term describing the object of mystical experiences. At this point, I will focus on two other terms: oneness and experience. These entail further theoretical considerations beyond what I have presented earlier.

Unity

The concept of oneness/unity has been discussed from an epistemological point of view. In this regard, the distinction – or the lack of it – between the subject and the object of the experience is crucial. Both philosophical and theological discussions have explored what oneness, or in other words, unity, might mean and entail regarding the definition of mysticism.

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[254] (McGinn, The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism, 2006, p. xv)
[255] (Forman R. K., The Innate Capacity: Mysticism, Psychology, and Philosophy, 1998, p. 7)
[256] "The result is an awareness where all sensory, emotional, dispositional, and conceptual apparatuses are in total abeyance. And yet throughout the process, one remains awake—indeed, mystics assert that only then are we as fully conscious as is humanly possible." (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, p. 9)
[257] This question is especially debatable in terms of PCE or empty-depth mystical experiences. However, as I have pointed out earlier, Jones and Forman argue that these are not black-outs, and mystics can at least differentiate these occurences from what is happening before and after them.
[258] Once again, the full definition: "In a comparative context mysticism has come to denote those aspects of the various religious traditions which emphasize unmediated experience of oneness with the ultimate reality, however differently conceived." (King, Mysticism and spirituality, 2005, p. 306)

Zaehner established a typology[259] of mystical experiences based on this criterion. He distinguished "dualistic", "monistic", and "panenhenic" mystical experiences.[260] Dualistic mystical experiences maintain some of the duality between the subject and the object of the experience (similarly to theistic experiences). Panenhenic mysticism is also dualistic, but contrary to dualistic experiences, which signify a theistic experience, it is a unity between the self and nature. Monistic experiences dissolve all duality; they are the extreme manifestation of unitive experiences ("pure consciousness event" or the "absolute ontological oneness of everything").

Steven T. Katz applied this distinction to Christian and Jewish mysticism. He argued that Christian mysticism provides the possibility of complete unity, while Jewish mysticism remains dualistic.[261] He distinguished "absorptive" (monistic) and "non-absorptive" (dualistic) tendencies in Christianity. The former tendency includes Meister Eckhart, Tauler, Suso, among many, sharing a Neoplatonist influence.[262] There is a similar differentiation to Katz's in Hinduism between *bhakti* and *jnana*. The former is the "mysticism of love", which requires openness, receptivity, and devotion; it is a dual mysticism between the Lover and Beloved. The latter, *jnana*, is the mysticism of intellect – a non-dual unity of the person and the ultimate reality. Not only a differentiation but a distinction or hierarchy is laid down here. *Bhakti* is a simpler version of mysticism and an entry towards higher, more complex forms of mysticism (*jnana*).[263] In relation to and based on Christian mysticism, Bernard McGinn states that instead of a union, a "direct presence of the divine" would be a more inclusive and correct term. He argues that there is more than one type of union, and a complete, absorptive union is a rare case in mysticism, and many of the well-known Christian mystics would not be considered mystics on this basis.[264]

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[259] I will discuss different categories of mysticism in Chapter 3.
[260] Zaehner's typology of theistic, monistic, naturalistic (panenhenic) mysticism belongs here and was criticized as overly simplistic and reductionist. "Zaehner's well-known investigations flounder because his methodological, hermeneutical, and especially epistemological resources are weak. Indeed, his researches reinforce the felt pressing need to pursue such inquiries in more sophisticated conceptual terms." (Katz, Language, Epistemology and Mysticism, 1978, p. 32)
[261] "[…] I believe, the formative influence of the essential incarnational theology of Christianity which is predicated upon an admixing of human and divine elements. in the person of Jesus which is outside the limits of the Judaic consciousness. Thus, an essential element of the model of Christian spirituality is one of divine-human interpenetration on the ontological level which allows for a unity of divine and human which Judaism rules out. Essential here too is the Neoplatonic influence on Christian thought, especially for Christian mysticism as represented by the greatest of all Neoplatonic mystics, Plotinus" (Katz, Language, Epistemology and Mysticism, 1978, p. 41)
[262] (Katz, Language, Epistemology and Mysticism, 1978, p. 42)
[263] "The formative impressions found in the seven bhavas listed earlier are set aside by the predominance of discriminative knowledge (jnana). Of the intellect's eight forms, knowledge holds the most elevated position, the key to liberation through which the distinctiveness of purusa from prakrti is discerned. Samkhya Karika states:
It is by seven forms (of bhavas)
that pralqti binds herself for herself.
And indeed, for the sake of purusa,
she frees herself by means of one (knowledge). (v.63)" (Chapple, 1990, p. 58)
[264] (McGinn, The Foundations of Mysticism, 1994, pp. xvi-xvii)
About different types of union: "Among the other major mystical categories are those of contemplation and the vision of God, deification, the birth of the word in the soul, ecstasy, even perhaps radical obedience to the present divine will. All of these can be conceived of as different but complementary ways of presenting the consciousness of direct presence." (McGinn, The Foundations of Mysticism, 1994, p. xvii)

In line with the *Stanford encyclopedia*'s definition, I will consider the experience of unity as a deciding factor whether we are talking about a mystical experience or not. Furthermore, keeping these theoretical considerations in mind, oneness or union might entail both a dualistic and a monistic experience in mysticism. Acknowledging that for some traditions, these differences present a different level of the experience or a level of spiritual development of the person, value judgments are not made here, e.g. stating that one experience is less of a mystical experience than the other.

Aftermath

The third part of the concept used here indicates aspects of mysticism that follow the mystical experience both in time and causality. The different levels of interpretation, the integration and recording of mystical experiences belong here. Moreover, specific implications, including the transformation or changes in the mystic's life, views, and actions are considered essential to the third element of mysticism. In the introduction, I have shown some examples of actions and transformations based on mystical experiences. I will return to two more examples in Chapter 4 when I compare Thomas Merton's and John of the Cross's mysticism. Beyond these two examples, one of Maslow's characteristics of the peak experience explains the activities people are inspired to do after mystical experiences. "The person feels himself more than at other times to be responsible, active, the creative center of his own activities and of his own perceptions, more self-determined, more a free agent, with more 'free will' than at other times."[265]

Richard H. Jones is one of the scholars emphasizing this element of mysticism. He highlights the transformative effects of mystical experiences, which influence people's lives for an extended time.[266] McGinn also highlights the understanding of mysticism "as a process or way of life".[267] This perception has its implications for the study of mysticism. First, the necessity to study it within the context. Second, to treat it as a process, not just a sole and momentarily experience. This means that what comes before and after the experience are also important objects of study.

Even though I mentioned Gerardus van der Leeuw for the preparatory phase and Jones's concept for what follows mystical experiences, this does not mean that they restrict the concept of mysticism to these aspects. These authors are quoted because they emphasize it in a way that highlights their significance for understanding mysticism.

Similar concepts of mysticism

Tripartite divisions similar to the above mentioned one by McGinn's and Komjathy's have also been suggested. McGinn emphasizes that definitions cannot cover the complexity of mysticism. Therefore, he creates a threefold understanding of the concept, stating that mysticism is "the preparation for, the consciousness of, and the reaction to what can be described as the immediate or direct presence of God."[268] It is important to note that he created

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[265] (Maslow, 1994, p. Appendix A/18)
[266] (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, p. 12)
[267] "I prefer to give a sense of how I understand the term by discussing it under three headings: mysticism as a part or element of religion; mysticism as a process or way of life; and mysticism as an attempt to express a direct consciousness of the presence of God." (McGinn, The Foundations of Mysticism, 1994, pp. xv-xvi)
[268] (McGinn, The Foundations of Mysticism, 1994, p. xvii)

this concept to grasp Christian mysticism. McGinn deals with historical examples of experiences and calls the changes in mysticism from the mid-17th century until about 100 years ago the 'crisis of mysticism', and the mysticism of the past 150 years is called "unchurched" mysticism. So, his view of mysticism suggests, naturally, a traditional Christian theological approach. However, I find it applicable in other cases too, should we stick with King's more neutral definition.

Komjathy shares a similar division. He mentions four primary dimensions of mysticism, stating that none of these are more important than the other, and they suggest investigating their relationship to one another. "Mystical experience consists of four primary dimensions: (1) the trigger (source), (2) the actual experience (not reducible to physiology), (3) its interpretation, and (4) the context."[269] If we understand this distinction also to be a "timeline" for mysticism, then Komjathy's concept is more elaborate on the circumstances and conditions of the experience. He dedicates two aspects of the concept to distinguish the interpretation and context. As these aspects are included in the previous distinctions as well but more straightforwardly, I will stick with those.

Summary and implications

Therefore in this work, mysticism is treated, first, as an autonomous category – a *sui generis* phenomenon – from a non-reductionist, perennialist approach, taking pure experience as a possibility. Second, it is understood to comprise three layers or phases. First, the preparations and practices preparing for the mystical experience (antecedents); second, the mystical experience itself, understood as the "direct experience of oneness with the ultimate reality,"[270] and, finally, the fruits and consequences of the experience, i.e. its interpretation and transformative effects (aftermath).

The aspects these approaches highlight are dependent on the context of the mystic for different reasons. Preparatory elements are often directly taken from a tradition. The interpretation of the experiences is highly dependent on the historical, cultural, religious, and/or personal context as well as the language of the mystic. Contrary to what these two stages imply, the contextual dependency of mystical experiences is not taken for granted here. As I have pointed out before, although they fall into the same culturally dependent category as any other experiences from a hard contextualist perspective, observed from other philosophical perspectives, this consonance is not clear-cut.

Why is this threefold concept relevant to the discussion of modern mysticism? One criticism against modern mysticism is that it heavily focuses on experiences and neglects the other two aspects of the phenomenon; therefore, modern mysticism seems incomplete. However, I aim to argue that demanding the same thorough fulfillment in the structure that some "classical" experiences have does not mean that these aspects are not present in modern mysticism. Moreover, this threefold concept allows me to highlight the contextual elements of mysticism and point to contextual shifts related to cultural and religious changes.

These last remarks on the contextual aspects of mysticism lead to the next part of the dissertation, where the differences and similarities between modern and traditional mysticism

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[269] (Komjathy, 2011, p. 855)
[270] (King, Mysticism and spirituality, 2005, p. 306)

are discussed. What might it entail that mysticism has changed? In Chapter 3, I will explore the answers related to the contextual element of mysticism through typologies.

Chapter 3. Traditional and Modern Mysticism

Introduction

When delving into mysticism as a research topic, it is easy to encounter works of "classical" mystics, mainly from the Middle Ages, and secondary literature referring to them. One might wonder after a while, what mysticism is like after the Middle Ages – as modern examples rarely present themselves as obviously as medieval ones. The mysticism of modern times seems more of a puzzle than mysticism in general. Finding comprehensive handbooks on today's mysticism or collections of writings, and encountering core authors similarly to medieval mysticism is a difficult task. Even in contemporary works on mysticism, it is fashionable to refer to classical authors, even if the theory is not explicitly based on such figures such as in Otto's case comparing Shankara's and Meister Eckhart's mysticism.[271] Classical mystical works are "handy" as they are well-rounded and usually have extensive secondary sources studying them, which are easy to refer to; moreover, they contribute significantly to the prestigiousness of the research. Also, in current theoretical works, classical authors are referred to as paradigmatic examples,[272] while the absence of contemporary examples is not reflected on. Even when one can find contemporary examples, their theoretical interpretation is narrow and one-sided, reflecting a particular trend in research. For example, *Mysticism and experience: Twenty-first-century approaches,*[273] which focuses on contemporary approaches to mysticism, tackles the following topics: drug-induced experiences (e.g. ayahuasca) and meditative states, mainly examined in a clinical and laboratory setting. This volume and the examples clearly reflect current research trends and the neural turn. Not only do the research trends influence the choice of examples, but, most likely, the examples taken into consideration affect the creation of definitions, categories, and criteria of mysticism.

Indeed, not all scholars approach contemporary accounts similarly. Alister Hardy, who has been mentioned before, adopted an evolutionary biological view on religious experiences. He considered *spiritual awareness*[274] biologically natural and more or less universally reported by humans.[275] In 1969 he founded the Religious Experience Research Unit[276] in Manchester College to explore the nature and function of religious experiences in the human species and the frequency of reports on such experiences.[277] In order to explore this idea of religious experiences, he conducted research on accounts of direct experiences of the sacred from the

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[271] (Otto, Bracey, & Payne, Mysticism East and West: A Comparative Analysis of the Nature of Mysticism, 1932)

[272] (Stace, Mysticism and Philosophy, 1961) (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016)

[273] (Kohav, 2020)

[274] Since the second half of the 20th century, the word spiritual has become a multi-layered term, often creating confusion. It is essential to mention that Hardy was not pushing a religious interpretation of the research. As he states it: "I am essentially concerned with man's spiritual feelings in general: with increasing knowledge about this sense of awareness and with finding out more about the effect it may have upon a man's life" (Hardy, The Spiritual Nature of Man: A Study of Contemporary Religious Experience, 1979, p. 2). The experience is described with many characteristics. See: (Hardy, The Spiritual Nature of Man: A Study of Contemporary Religious Experience, 1979, pp. 1-2)

[275] (Hay, 'The Biology of God': What is the Current Status of Hardy's Hypothesis?, 1994, pp. 2-6)

[276] Since 2000, the Religious Experience Research Centre has continued the work, based in Lampeter at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David. It is currently taking care of the archive of over 6,000 contemporary accounts of these first-hand religious and spiritual experiences. (n.a., Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre, n.d.)

[277] (Hay, 'The Biology of God': What is the Current Status of Hardy's Hypothesis?, 1994, p. 2)

1960s on. He started his research by publishing articles in the British national press, asking the readers to answer the following question: "Have you ever been aware of or influenced by a presence or power, whether you call it God or not, which is different from your everyday self?"[278] Following that, pamphlets, and, in the second phase, questionnaires were also used to collect more accounts. The accounts were classified into 92 categories, and other characteristics such as their development were also examined.[279]

Hardy's and the Religious Experience Research Centre's (RERC) attempts are undoubtedly remarkable. Exploring and thematizing religious experiences as relevant and present in everyday life through the accounts of "ordinary" people goes against the idea of secluded and long-gone experiences. However, the above-mentioned Hardy question, as well as current inquiries[280] embrace an extensive set of experiences. It fits in the concept of "spiritual awareness", but it is much too broad to be adapted here without narrowing it down.

The term 'spiritual' is often associated with an overwhelmingly diverse and inconceivable set of phenomena related to contemporary examples. Carrette and King argue that interest in spirituality started increasing in the 1950s and was closely associated with mysticism for a while but slowly started to replace the idea of mysticism. Spirituality was de-traditionalized and this-worldly; therefore, it fit into "secular" markets. In contrast, mysticism remained associated with traditions and otherworldliness, resulting in spirituality being preferred and mysticism losing its appeal.[281] According to Carrette and King, the process of a religion becoming a psychological event is an ideological process that results in the privileging of the internal economy of the self over the external economy of social relations. It is, therefore, fundamentally linked to the history of Western capitalism.[282] The authors summarize the current meaning of spirituality in the following way:

> "Spirituality is now a private, psychological event that refers to a whole range of experiences floating on the boundary of religious traditions. […] The lack of specificity allows it to be effective in the marketplace and reduces its concern for social ethics and cultural location. […] In transpersonal psychology spirituality emerges as a product of religious fragmentation and eclecticism, hidden in the psychological structures of individualism. It is a box without content, because the content has been thrown out and what is left is a set of psychological descriptions with no referent."[283]

Mystical experiences have always been challenging for scholars as they are difficult to study due to their ineffable nature, subjectivity etc. In the past decades, there have been at least two

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[278] (Hay, 'The Biology of God': What is the Current Status of Hardy's Hypothesis?, 1994, p. 5) The question was reformulated quite a few times since then.
[279] (Hardy, The Spiritual Nature of Man: A Study of Contemporary Religious Experience, 1979)
[280] The current joint research of RERC and the Center for Mind and Culture (CMAC) focuses on spiritual experiences and their effects on the person during Covid-19. Besides describing the experience, the person completing the form is asked to refer to changes in perspective, behavior, perception, relationships, and possible involvement of altered state of consciousness. The form describes the latter in the following way: "An altered state of consciousness is when your perceptions, memories, emotions, thinking, sense of time, or level of awareness is somehow different from your normal waking consciousness. Examples include meditation, drunkenness, daydreaming, sleep, psychosis, hypnosis, or extreme focus." (n.a., COVID-19 and Spiritual Experiences, 2021)
[281] (Carrette & King, Selling Spirituality: The silent takeover of religion, 2005, pp. 42-44)
[282] (Carrette & King, Selling Spirituality: The silent takeover of religion, 2005, pp. 68-69)
[283] (Carrette & King, Selling Spirituality: The silent takeover of religion, 2005, p. 73)

trends in academia regarding the study of mysticism: first, the reduction of mystical experiences to their biological functions. Research in eurological studies and cognitive religious studies focuses on complex data to understand the experience as it is. Interestingly, the reductionist tendency of this trend coincides with the twofold route that the psychology of religion has taken, according to Komjathy.[284] Second, research deals with what seems like an overwhelming amount and variety of experiences. It is questionable whether such a quantity of mystical experiences have just arisen or has just been recognized and always been there. For the former, an explanation could be the concepts of resacralization and desecularization;[285] for the latter, Hardy's concept could be. What is certain is that through the widespread accessibility of information in contemporary times, people have access to knowledge of an increasingly greater variety of religious and mystical techniques, teachings, and experiences than ever before. While exploring this notion would be intriguing, it would result in a significant detour, which is not appropriate for a work that does not primarily focus on the contextual changes related to modern mysticism. However, it is essential to briefly reflect on the challenges that the variety of modern phenomena present for scholars.

To attempt to interpret, define, classify and analyze the numerous and widely varied religious-spiritual-mystical experiences is not easy. Not that the general understanding of the variety of religious experiences has been evident before. Some scholars choose to redefine categories and include everything or at least as much as it is possible to include; others stick to existing categories and definitions and are very restrictive. General differences in naming them (religious, spiritual, mystical, numinous, extraordinary etc.), the relation of these names and definitions of each other are just two profound unclear issues of these current debates. For example, Hardy's followers refer to "spiritual" experiences, Otto's to "numinous" ones, and James's to "mystical" ones. A relatively straightforward concept is articulated in each of these authors' texts. However, their relation to each other is not clear: for example, these categories might have overlapping examples. The overlap is not the problem. The problem starts with the present-day challenges of referring to newly emerging phenomena and classifying already existing phenomena. We could see this as a minor issue as long as the phenomena are analyzed scientifically. Regardless, what makes this an important question here is, first, the personal significance and position of such experiences in relation to the "ordinary" religious experiences; second, the scope that the category can cover is different. Whether these qualities are defined by the four Jamesian criteria or by some other system, the difference between mystical experiences and ordinary religious experiences is clear, at least at the theoretical level, as opposed, for example, to spiritual experiences, which refer to a much larger scope of experiences, often including near-death experiences, conversion experiences, and deeper religious feelings. For the same reason, it is more challenging to define spiritual experiences and delimit their range. For clarity, I will continue to refer to mysticism and mystical experiences and use the terms "mysticism" and "mystical" according to the theoretical foundations presented in Chapter 2.

In the present chapter, I focus on what seems to be a current challenge for the study of mysticism: how we deal with the variety of experiences emerging seemingly everywhere.

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[284] He differentiates sympathetic and integral, as well as skeptical and reductionist approaches. (Komjathy, 2011, p. 858)

[285] (Davie, 2010), (Berger, The desecularization of the world: Resurgent religion and world politics, 1999)

However, I would like to clarify that the subject of this chapter is not diversity itself, but categories, typologies and other theoretical and methodological tools to understand this diversity is. As this dissertation explores the possibility of comparing mysticism throughout the ages, these tools have a central role. The possibility of comparison increasingly becomes a pressing scientific question in contemporary society where mysticism cannot be clearly pinpointed and examined. The comparison itself could be relevant on constructivist grounds, but in this work I aim to explore whether an essentialist approach of the phenomenology of religion can be adopted for the subject. The reason for this approach is the *sui generis* understanding of mystical experiences, and based on that their essential similarity and comparability.

First, I discuss three of the most relevant contemporary examples dealing with mysticism in modernity, primarily Richard H. Jones's conception. As I will show later, this idea has limitations but involves a crucial distinction between the so-called classical and modern mysticism. I also explore Sophia Rose Arjana's idea of modern mysticism. And finally, Don Cupitt's conception of modern mysticism is discussed as a counterexample to the previous two negative approaches. These examples showcase a trend that even though a distinction between modern and, for example, classical mysticism, as well as some characteristics are sometimes discussed, the subject is not well researched nor theorized. The first two cases vaguely compare classical and modern versions of mysticism. They both pair this distinction with the exclusion of modern examples based on their difference from classical ones and their incapability to fit into existing ideas, definitions, and categories. Later, I argue that the problem is not necessarily the comparison itself as a method.

Similar comparisons are regularly used in the study of mysticism – particularly in theoretical works which categorize mysticism. Therefore, secondly, this chapter will catalog the most common categories of mysticism or mystical experiences. Through these examples, I want to point out the overall applicability of categories in the study of mysticism. Moreover, I aim to showcase elaborate examples of categories, which will serve as guidelines for the third part of the chapter.

Third, the idea of traditional and modern mysticism as categories of comparison will be overviewed. Each category will be explored through two characteristics: culture and subject. These characteristics summarize the main contextual changes in mysticism on the historical, institutional, and individual levels. Therefore, based on the threefold concept of mysticism implemented in this work, these categories refer only to two: the antecedents and the aftermath. As an essentialist approach has been adopted in this work, mystical experiences are considered similar throughout the ages; therefore, their comparison will not start from the premise of change but from the idea of their essential similarity. A comparison of mystical experiences will be presented in Chapter 4.

Confronting modern mysticism

"Superficial Spirituality" - Richard H. Jones

Richard H. Jones[286] takes categorical positions regarding understanding mysticism in contemporary society in his recent handbook, entitled *Philosophy of mysticism*.[287] Serious mysticism is dying, while superficial spirituality is increasing. It is part of a more extensive process in modernity, in which people have lost sight of the ontic dimension of reality. These standpoints are articulated as part of the idea of the secularization of mystical experiences in the epilogue. [288]

I want to highlight two problematic aspects of these arguments. In this part, I focus on the strikingly drawn yet vaguely established distinction between a classical and a modern version of mysticism. In Chapter 5, I will return to Jones's link between the change of mysticism, secularization, and modernity. Right now, let us investigate what mysticism means today according to an influential, contemporary work.

Philosophy of Mysticism

Philosophy of mysticism: Raids on the ineffable, is one of the most recent monographs on the philosophical study of mysticism. In this work, Jones seeks to provide a comprehensive account of scientific developments and questions that have emerged with postmodernism since Walter Stace's book on mysticism was published in 1960.[289] Jones tackles a wide range of topics in a "sensible and balanced"[290] way. Besides some shortcomings,[291] *Philosophy of mysticism* provides a comprehensive overview and guide to the following topics: categorization of mysticism and the theoretical understanding behind the categories; whether or not mystics' claims about their experiences are cognitive in nature; and how science should deal with the alleged insights mysticism offers into ultimate reality. The book also gives an insight into various aspects of mysticism from the perspective of philosophy, such as the compatibility of metaphysics, language, rationality, morality, and science and mysticism.

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[286] Jones has a Ph.D. from Columbia University and a J.D. from the University of California, Berkeley. He has written books on the scientific study of religious experiences (in particular about mystical experiences), on Theravada Buddhism and Advaita Vedanta.

[287] (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016)
Richard Jones has recently published another work on the subject. (Jones R. H., An Introduction to the Study of Mysticism, 2021). I do not discuss this work in detail in this dissertation for two reasons. On the one hand, the book was published after I finished the present dissertation. On the other hand, it covers a topic similar to Jones's earlier works, and it does not appear to articulate novel ideas on the subjects discussed here.

[288] The elements of this concept connected to secularization will be elaborated on in Chapter 5.

[289] Ralph W. Hood, Jr. considers Jones's book not only a good review on the literature of the scientific study of mysticism but a critical extension of Stace's work with a "sophisticated discussion of the extent, range, and metaphysical implications of mysticism" (n.a., Philosophy of Mysticism Raids on the Ineffable, n.d.).

[290] This is how Jerome Gellman has described Jones's approach, and it indicates that Jones avoids the usual problem of philosophical texts on mysticism, namely, that of arguing for or against mysticism with a clear bias (Gellman, 2016).

[291] The book provides many examples from Theravada Buddhism, Advaita Vedanta, and Hinduism (Miller, 2017) It lacks a similarly thorough understanding and examples of Sufism, Christian, and especially Jewish mysticism (Gellman, 2016) and (Miller, 2017). (Miller, 2017) points out specific examples where Jones cites different authorities with identical views without a detailed explanation, creating the impression of "parallelomania".

Richard H. Jones's concept of mysticism focuses on the path of preparation (antecedents) and especially on the transformation of lifestyle following the mystical experience.[292] Therefore, in *Philosophy of mysticism*, Jones describes mysticism as follows:

"But in this book, 'mystical' will refer only to phenomena centered around an inward quest focused on two specific classes of experiences. […] It is a 'way' (yana, dao) in the sense of both a path and a resulting way of life. […] Nevertheless, mysticism is traditionally more encompassing than simply isolated mystical experiences: it is about living one's whole life aligned with reality as it truly is (as defined by a tradition's beliefs)."[293]

First, Jones notes that mystical experiences are indeed distinguishing characteristics of mysticism, and it is this factor that differentiates it from metaphysics and other forms of religion. Second, the typology of mystical experiences presented in this work plays a significant role in his argument for why mysticism should be taken seriously by scientists and philosophers. Third, mystical experiences are also considered significant and examined concerning the cognitive claims of mystics.

Through this approach, he implicitly highlights the purportedly neglected aspects of the phenomenon. The centrality of the aftermath plays an essential role in the argumentation about the unworthiness of modern mystical phenomena. As I will point out shortly, Jones argues that modern mysticism lacks this aspect.

The epilogue

The epilogue of the *Philosophy of mysticism* is titled "The demise of mysticism today". In this part, Jones articulates the above mentioned standpoints about mysticism today. The title itself provides a glance into its subject: the present (ir)relevance[294] and future of mysticism. His purpose is to explain the changes in mysticism in the light of religious, cultural, historical, and/or theological changes in modernity. He also briefly discusses the idea of the secularization of mystical experiences. In my view, the secularization of mystical experiences emerges more as an impression than a well thought out argument supported by relevant research and data. Nevertheless, I consider it a highly debatable concept worthy of further discussion.

Jones argues that the present times could be characterized as an "anti-mystical climate". He lists religious, psychological, and cultural aspects in modernity that create the anti-mystical climate and work against taking mysticism seriously. He begins with academic circles, first of all, the naturalists, who deny the cognitive claims of mysticism and the possibility and explanation of

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[292] Gellman Jerome and Jones highlight the transformational aspect of mysticism rather than on the *mystical* union in another work as well. "'Mysticism' is best thought of as a constellation of distinctive practices, discourses, texts, institutions, traditions, and experiences aimed at human transformation, variously defined. In contrast with most of the definitions human transformation is defined here as the goal of mysticism instead of unity with ultimate reality/transcendent. A large emphasis is put on the apparatus supporting the mystic and setting up the mystical tradition" (Jones & Gellman, 2022).

[293] (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, p. 2)

[294] According to Jones, mystics experience aspects of reality that non-mystics do not. Therefore, the study of mystical experiences, especially empty-depth mystical experiences, might influence the views on the nature of consciousness and mind. Philosophers and theologians must consider the experiential aspect of mystical experiences. In addition, Jones highlights the importance of what he calls "mystical selflessness" as it exposes different cultures' underlying values and beliefs. (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, pp. xiii; 28-29)

transcendent realities – since these cannot be scientifically proven.[295] He also mentions the postmodernists who argue against genuine mystical experiences.[296] Jones concludes that, in philosophy, the subject of mysticism is marginalized.[297]

Regarding the science of religion, mystical experiences are no longer considered significant because of the popularity of constructivism and attribution theory. Like the naturalists, those who accept mystical experiences deny that they are cognitive. Finally, the scientific study of mystical experiences is relegated to neurosciences.[298]

Aspects of Christian theology are also discussed, explaining that for postmodern theologians, it is logically impossible to experience God directly, and that the 'experientialist' approach, which would regard mystical experiences as genuine experiences, is considered outdated by Jones [299] He then discusses what is happening outside academic circles, briefly noting "the West", where there is an alleged general decline of 'serious mysticism'.[300] The latter aspect is closely connected to the secularization of mystical experiences, which I will return to in Chapter 5.

Furthermore, Jones raises the question of whether religions will be able to survive without generating experiences of transcendent realities. He begins his reflection on the problem by outlining the changes that mysticism faces in today's society, i.e., the natural realm can no longer be ignored by mystics, since, in modernity "we no longer live in a sacred universe".[301] This raises some questions about the possibility of mystical experiences and the desire of mystics to change how they interpret introverted experiences and act in the world.[302]

Finally, Jones talks about a possible 'mystical revolution'[303] that could change the status of religion and impact science. He argues that mysticism could be helpful in today's society: it could encourage people lead more meaningful, morally thoughtful, and compassionate lives; moreover, it would be an answer to the 'thirst for transcendence'.[304]

Overall, I think the epilogue stands out significantly from the book because it is more personal in tone and less scientific in focus. It is more like a set of impressions and feelings; it introduces a very heavy vision of mysticism without a well-rounded concept – which in hindsight seems to be the underlying driving force behind the main text. Almost all of the selected studies and authors cited in the afterword serve the purpose of bringing the text to prove the point about classical and modern mysticism without really questioning the concept

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[295] (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, pp. 333-334)
[296] (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, p. 334)
[297] (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, p. 334)
[298] "In sum, mystical experiences, if they are accepted at all, have been pushed aside as at most a curiosity for neuroscience" (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, p. 334).
[299] (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, p. 334)
[300] (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, p. 334)
[301] (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, p. 335)
[302] "That is, the problem for anything resembling a classical mystical way of life today is how to reinject the world into a nonnaturalistic framework with transcendent realities without denying the world's full reality—one that incorporates both an eternal ontic vertical dimension and a historical horizontal dimension as both real and important. But if successful, mysticism can replace the image of a totally transcendent deity with one that is also immanent in space and time, since the God of theistic mysticism is experienceable and the ground of the natural world" (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, p. 340).
[303] (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, pp. 343-344)
[304] (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, pp. 345-346)

and the implicitly articulated ideas behind it. This lies in contrast to the "sensible and balanced"[305] main chapters, whereas the epilogue is primarily vague and one-sided.

Despite all of this, this work raises important questions about modernity, secularization, and mysticism. In the next part of the present dissertation, I will address the questions that it explicitly raises: the decline of mysticism, its future, and experiences that question the boundaries of existing categories and definitions of mysticism. Jones briefly introduces these ideas; therefore, I scrutinize this conception by analyzing the concept of classical mysticism and today's mystical phenomena.

Classical mysticism

In the epilogue of *Philosophy of mysticism*, Jones describes a form of mysticism called "classical mysticism,"[306] which refers to a traditionally and theoretically recognized set of experiences and general form of mysticism. It is a (traditionally speaking) pure, undamaged, and complete version of mysticism. It involves a mystical way of life and focus on the transcendent[307] and takes the mystical cognitive claims seriously. The idea is presented in opposition to today's mystical phenomena. What makes classical mysticism different from today's mystical phenomena is the long-term commitment, traditional teachings, adherence to complex monastic ethical codes etc.

The phrases used to describe this phenomenon are the following: classical mysticism, classical mystical way of life, serious mysticism (336), "serious change in a mystical direction" (336), "commitment to any rigorous traditional spirituality with its developed depth" (336), complete mystical way of life (as opposed to mystical experiences only) (328), traditional mysticism (337).[308] The people involved in this type of mysticism are called classical mystics. As Jones uses the phrase classical mysticism the most, I will use it accordingly.

Classical mysticism seems alien in today's society: passivity, ascetic renunciation, forgetting about the body, neglecting the natural world, and selflessness, which goes against the culture of self-assertion. Because of this, classical mystics appear irrational, passive, and immoral. However, today's mysticism seems to flourish, while serious mysticism is dying.[309]

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[305] (Gellman, 2016)

[306] "classical mysticism" (6, 27, 49, 103, 173, 189, 192, 333, 385), "classical mystics" (xvi, 11, 39, 41, 46, 81, 93, 100, 101, 102, 103, 126, 128, 171,174, 177, 188, 189, 193, 200, 234, 235 335, 276, 282, 284, 326, 340, 342), "Mystics from classical cultures" (234), "classical mystical way of life" (284, 340), "classical mystical position" (342), "classical mystical point of view" (343), "classical mystical metaphysics" (143, 269), "classical mystical traditions" (37, 38, 46, 71, 191, 193, 235, 276, 369), "classical traditions" (38), "classical mystical belief-systems" (274). Other relevant references in terms of the use of 'classical' include "classical Indian traditions" (353), "classical non-Western cultures" (374); "classical Hindus" (375), "classical Hinduism" (368), "classical theism" (193), "Classical Daoism" (276), "classical masters" (279), "classical Indian culture" (280), "classical Indian culture" (306), "classical Asian factual beliefs" (301), "classical philosophical schools of Hinduism" (311).
The majority of these expressions point to "Eastern" religious traditions. Other than these references, the word "classical" is scarcely mentioned. (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016)

[307] I refer to Jones's understanding of the premodern mindset as a precondition for mystical experiences (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, pp. xv-xvi, 234, 335).

[308] (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016)

[309] "Ironically, serious mysticism is dying even as New Age spirituality is increasing; many young people describe themselves as 'seekers'; people claiming to be mystics are flourishing on the Internet." (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, p. 336)

The insight into the vertical dimension of life and the mystics' commitment to a total transformation provides the basis for defending the transcendent ground of this world. According to Jones, these cognitive claims of the transcendent might make people feel uncomfortable in a society where people lost sight of the transcendent.

As has been mentioned above, Jones describes the purportedly decreasing version of mysticism ("classical" mysticism) with several phrases, and now I will look at what these imply.[310] The word *classical* suggests that this type of mysticism is based on traditional forms, developed over a long period of time, and considered an enduring value. *Tradition* and *traditional* also refer to a more extended period, the development and use of beliefs, principles, and actions. The developed depth, which Jones links to classical mysticism, primarily refers to the group level, which provides the individual with a set of traditional teachings, techniques, rules, etc. The depth and complexity of traditional techniques require a commitment for an extended period and cannot be acquired easily and quickly. Classical mysticism entails a change and long-term commitment to a mystical direction, following the mystical experience. Mysticism does not end with the experience, but as Jones suggests, the main part, i.e. a mystical way of life starts after that. Moreover, traditional spirituality[311] is said to be rigorous (careful, thought-through, and controlling) and serious (which implies long-term dedication, commitment, and a meaningful practice). This effort might highlight further insights regarding both phenomena as today's mysticism is discussed in contrast to classical mysticism.

Mysticism today

In an influential account, then, today's mysticism is described in opposition to classical mysticism as an incomplete, temporary, superficial, experience-based, and self-centered phenomenon, which focuses on the natural realm, and even if there are any claims of the transcendent experienced, those claims are ignored. At the same time, this new kind of mysticism seems to flourish and replace classical mysticism. The phrases Jones uses to name these phenomena, however, are primarily derogative: 'superficial spirituality of the New Age' (336), 'Buddhism Lite' (336), 'watered-down spirituality' (336), and 'naturalistic spirituality' (337).[312]

According to Jones, today's mysticism involves both a change and a loss of tradition. The change of tradition is understood as an unwelcome appropriation of traditional techniques and teachings. An example mentioned by him is mindfulness meditation, because it is widespread, popular, and in some ways distant from traditional teachings. For these reasons Jones refuses to acknowledge it as a form of mysticism.[313] He seems to worry that tradition is taken out of focus by people ignoring traditional religious metaphysics, traditional religious

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[310] The Cambridge English dictionary's definitions are used regarding the words "tradition(al)", "classical", and "rigorous". For the interpretation of the rest of the words, I use the textual context as I consider this a much more illuminating and specific source than their definitions. (n.a., Classical), (n.a., Traditional)

[311] One of the synonyms for the phenomenon of classical mysticism in Jones's work.

[312] (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016)

[313] Jones refers to the Buddhist teachings of selflessness, which are transformed in psychotherapy to enhance the sense of self (Jones, 2016, p. 336).

goals, and monastic codes of ethics, and that eventually, as a result of these processes, traditions will discontinue.[314]

Instead describing the concept of today's mysticism further, Jones focuses on the characteristics of possible new mystical systems, which are imagined as an adaptive, revised version of classical mysticism. Jones sees mysticism today as a detour, a temporary occurrence in the period of transitioning from and toward a focus on transcendental dimensions of life. Jones's conception of mysticism does not seem to reflect the current changes in these phenomena. First, he blames modernity and western culture for an 'anti-mystical climate' in which traditional versions of mysticism cannot be maintained, and people seek temporary relief in the version of religious experiences. Second, in light of this conception, mysticism is only relevant as it can return to its traditional form – at least to some extent – by rising to the challenges of modernity and making a come-back in the form of new mystical systems. Therefore, without elaboration, today's mystical phenomena are almost entirely set aside as they do not resemble classical mysticism. In conclusion, from Jones's perspective, modern mysticism is not considered "serious" and is, therefore, scientifically ignored.

Muddled Mysticism - Sophia Rose Arjana

In *Buying Buddha, Selling Rumi*[315], Sophia Rose Arjana[316] primarily explores orientalism related to mysticism and the mystical marketplace. Orientalism and colonization have been widely discussed as related to religions in the past decades.[317] Neither concept is novel, yet they are rarely discussed in association with mysticism. In connection to mysticism, Richard King's work on orientalism should also be mentioned.[318] The idea of the religious or spiritual marketplace also has its history in the study of religion.[319] Arjana mainly refers to consumerism related to mysticism and uses the expression "mystical marketplace". I will return to the concept of the mystical marketplace in Chapter 5; right now, I focus on her idea of modern mysticism only.

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[314] "Traditional religious metaphysics and transcendent goals are ignored; traditional mystical ethical codes are at best watered down. For example, one can adopt aspects of a Buddhist way of life while being agnostic about its factual claims about rebirth and karma (Batchelor 1997). A total inner transformation is not always the goal. Teachers of complicated metaphysical doctrines are no longer needed, nor is adherence to difficult monastic ethical codes. Traditional meditative techniques may be adopted to calm the mind or to focus attention fully on the present […]" (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, pp. 336-337).
[315] (Arjana, 2020)
[316] Sophia R. Arjana is Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Western Kentucky University. She has a Ph.D. from the University of Denver. Her research interests include anti-Muslim rhetoric, Islamophobia, pilgrimage, gender, religion, and popular culture.
[317] The original concept articulated by Edward Said (Said, 1979).
[318] A significant contribution to the topic related to mysticism by Richard King (King, Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial theory, India and 'the mystic East', 1999).
[319] As a critical response to the theory of secularization and the vitality of religion, especially in America, Iannaccone, as well as Stark and Bainbridge, proposed the theory of religious market (or rational choice theory), focusing on the transaction between people with religious needs (which is a human characteristic) and the constantly renewing options offered by religions to choose from (Stark & Bainbridge, The Future of Religion: Secularization, revival, and cult formation, 1986). See also (Roof, 1999). Máté-Tóth notes that the theory is centered around the USA, and its relevance outside of it is minimal (Máté-Tóth, Vallásnézet: A kelet-közép európai átmenet vallástudományi értelmezése, 2014, p. 80).

Arjana's understanding of the history and concept of mysticism is elaborated in the first chapter of her work.[320] She perceives the concept of mysticism (and religion) as a creation of western scholars. On the one hand, she argues that mysticism is too wide and meaningless to be used adequately.[321] On the other hand, she claims that it reflects a Western point of view, asserting the Protestant dominance and forcing categories on Eastern religions and mysticism which do not fit them. These ideas serve as a well-usable base for her argumentation. Once again, this argumentation is not novel, as has been discussed concerning religion. Hartmann points out that despite these arguments, Arjana still uses these categories; moreover, she makes many confusing statements regarding her examples.[322]

She argues that mysticism (practices, products, techniques, etc.) is also part of a more extensive process of consuming the Western idea of the Exotic East. A muddled orientalism has gained ground based on the Western ideas of religion and mysticism. This served as a basis for branding and colonizing religious and mystical texts, knowledge, subjects, practices, etc. It results in creating and consuming products, practices, and lifestyles perceived as authentic. Based on the generalized spirituality of the East and the mystification of Eastern traditions,[323] mystical tourism, products, poems, culture, tv shows, and films are created. One of the most vital aspects of this work are the relevant and various examples the author works with. She starts with religious festivals such as the Burning Man and the Hanuman Festival, continues with tourism to Bali, also referring to products branded as mystical such as tote bags with Rumi quotes, and finally analyzes one tv show (*Lost*) and the movie *Star Wars* based on its religious elements and inspirations. She mentions several examples of mystical movements inspired by Eastern traditions such as Theosophy, Full Circle, Hamid Bey, and Tantra. According to Arjana, they use or abuse symbols and teachings – using the word yogi, mixing symbols and teachings from different traditions, oversimplifying teachings, and making people believe that a crash course on meditation/yoga is sufficient.[324] She ultimately argues that consumerism and whitewashing are exploiting religious traditions. The argumentation is similar but more elaborate than Jones's.[325] While Jones blames this process overall on secularization, Arjana gives a more detailed explanation of the processes behind the phenomena not primarily referring to secularization but orientalism and colonialization.

Even though Arjana says that mysticism is much too broad, she is restricting the phenomena to some parts of its contextual elements. Not much is being talked about in relation to experiences, other than people longing to escape the problems of capitalist society, being enchanted, and perceiving experiences as consumable. In this sense, I would call these experiences and phenomena spiritual rather than mystical.

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[320] (Arjana, 2020, p. Chapter 1)
[321] "The adoption of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam into new mystical communities is made easy due to the amorphous, fluid nature of modern mysticism. Concepts like mysticism and spirituality are, in a sense, meaningless. As Carrette and King point out: 'The desire to attribute a universal essence to the meaning of spirituality also ignores the historical and cultural traces and differences in the uses of the term.' When used in North America, spirituality can serve to both colonize other people's religious traditions while assuming a Christian language. This seems especially true of Asian religions. ''Spirituality' is a means of colonizing and commodifying Asian wisdom traditions.'" (Arjana, 2020, p. 72)
[322] (Hartmann, 2021)
[323] (Arjana, 2020, pp. 194-212)
[324] From Theosophy to Tantric sex, in (Arjana, 2020, pp. 68-76)
[325] It is worth noting that Arjana does not refer to Jones's text.

Neither changes nor commodification are new in religions. In Arjana's work commodification is mentioned in relation to Islam (particularly Sufism), Buddhism, and Hinduism. Not much is said about the commodification within traditions, kitsch, and other related cases. At some point, she mentions that a similar trend of consuming within religious traditions exists.[326] It might be argued that these processes are too obscure and oversimplify complex mystical traditions. Nevertheless, I do not mean to undermine the cross-cultural hegemonic effects of colonization and orientalism; I aim to point out a slightly similar process.

Another, possibly more relevant question is how these processes affect "tradition". Arjana argues that modern mysticism is harmful:[327] it affects communities, practitioners, and teachings, while others make a profit from it. Why is mysticism singled out regarding this problem? According to Arjana, it is harmful mainly because the concept is too broad and meaningless. "It is extremely difficult to work out what mysticism is, which makes it a particularly good product to exploit for profit."[328] Whether something is called mysticism is decided based on the loyalty or closeness to, or credit given to the tradition[329] and its effects on the practitioners and community. She mentions, though, that not every creation of modern mysticism is harmful, as some produce 'healthy communities' and 'beneficial practices'.[330]
The juxtaposition of traditional and modern also reflects clearly the author's point of view. She presumes a stark contrast between traditional and modern in the sense that modern is the exploitation or the muddled version of a tradition.[331] She argues that modern mysticism, or rather the mystical marketplace, exploits tradition. Tradition is understood here as an unchanged, clearly distinguishable, and unique framework, providing the proper form of religious practices, symbols, and teachings. Traditional examples are referred to as 'real',[332]

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[326] "Religious voices have provided some sound critiques of these consumptive practices, urging followers to return to what they call tradition. However, many of these same people just push more products on the consumer in the name of religion." (Arjana, 2020, p. 106)

[327] "The colonizing of religion is not only an issue of commodification. Individuals who practice their religious and cultural traditions — African American, Native American, Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim—are concerned with spiritual harm. In the case of Tibetan Buddhism, there is considerable debate regarding whether its popularity is compromising to the religion. As Dagyab Kyabgön Rinpoche writes, the "superstition, sectarianism, and dogmatism" caused by Tibet's popularity results in a serious problem. 'Inner development, as Buddhism teaches, is impossible under these conditions, and stagnation, delusion, and defensive rigidity stand in their place.' In other words, dabbling in other people's religions can cause real damage." (Arjana, 2020, p. 74)

[328] (Arjana, 2020, p. 40)

[329] "I define cultural colonialism as *borrowing, adopting, or stealing another person's culture, religion, or tradition without giving credit to that tradition or being part of that tradition or identifying with that tradition.* Modern mystical teachers often incorporate parts of religious practices from Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam into their business models, and in many cases, they claim ownership over them. In doing this, they can profit from other people's religious traditions through an assumption of identity." (Arjana, 2020, pp. 63-64)

[330] (Arjana, 2020, pp. 74-75)

[331] It erases or obscures cultural foundations. "Often seen as tools for improvement — yoga classes, meditation retreats, reading Rumi — they are marketed by obscuring or erasing their ethnic or cultural foundations." (Arjana, 2020, p. 110). Modern mysticism reconstitutes and puts traditions up for sale: "Modern mysticism often involves the reconstitution of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam into new forms that result in an astounding number of products, from Rumi restaurants to Buddhist sex toys." (Arjana, 2020, p. 118). It whitewashes traditions through obscuring original practices. "Sufism was separated from Islam through a process of whitewashing that described the tradition as Christian or universalistic." (Arjana, 2020, p. 31) "However, it is whitewashed through the removal of Hindu references in yoga poses, in both CorePower Yoga (designed for caloric burn) and Bikram yoga, which prohibits any chanting." (Arjana, 2020, p. 51)

[332] "Fictive becomes the real orient: This was Said's point as well: that the fictive Orient becomes the real Orient in the minds of the colonizer. The concept of simulacra helps us understand the business of mystical tourism, for what is presented is often a copy of what people desire: an experience that cannot be quantified. For example, there

representing 'core'[333] values and teachings. On the other hand, modern examples of mysticism are described as muddled[334], and mutated[335].

Two main issues arise based on the works of Arjana. On the one hand, modern Western culture and capitalism are simplistically characterized by consumption and exploitation. This standpoint in itself is problematic, but Arjana moves further than this. She practically presupposes that the West is currently incapable of producing authentic (traditional) mysticism and exploits Eastern traditions to fulfill its needs. On the other hand, she sharply contrasts an authentic version of mysticism close to the tradition with a current watered-down version of mysticism. Not only is the dichotomy problematic, but the devaluation of the contemporary phenomenon is based on the idea that it does not resemble traditional forms. In these senses, Arjana's argumentation shows a striking similarity to Jones's. Jones explains the changes behind the differences through secularization: a general decline of religiosity in modernity. Arjana considers the historical, political and religious distinctness between East and West to be the primary source of differences in the treatment of mysticism.

Mysticism of secondariness – Don Cupitt

In *Mysticism after modernity* (1998)[336] Don Cupitt[337]looks at the shift in understanding mysticism in late modernity and postmodernity. The wider range of issues examined by the work and serving as a backdrop to the author's argumentation on mysticism is related to this shift as well: Cupitt aims to better understand postmodernity by understanding religion after modernity. Cupitt focuses primarily on mysticism, particularly mystical texts from a postmodernist and post-structuralist perspective.[338] He argues that mysticism is a way of writing: "we do not need to invoke 'experience' in order to explain it".[339] The focus is not on what is allegedly experienced (the encounter or union with the transcendent, or knowledge claims of it etc.) but their linguistic and social effects and characteristics.

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is literally a 'staging' of authenticity that takes place in mystical tourism, where the performance of spirituality is part of the commercial exchange at the basis of tourism." (Arjana, 2020, p. 14). "Tantra is another misunderstood aspect of Hinduism. In the West it is often associated with sexual practices (the Kama Sutra, and Sting's famous interview in which he extolled the virtues of yogic sex are two examples). In reality, a tantric is something quite different." (Arjana, 2020, p. 148)

[333] "A great irony in the commodification of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam is that, at their core, these are religions that see an ethical life as taking precedence over materialism." (Arjana, 2020, p. 121) "One of the problems with the 'pick and mix' approach is that core religious teachings are often misunderstood or ignored." (Arjana, 2020, p. 162)

[334] Muddled orientalism characterizes modern mysticism (Arjana, 2020, pp. 62-98).

[335] "However, the opportunistic elements warned against by Kabat-Zinn are surely underestimated here, and there is insufficient attention given to the ways in which such forces have managed to produce a grossly mutated version of mindfulness until it has now become a commodified consumerist product used to sell everything from colouring books and musical relaxation compact discs (CDs) to apps for mindful gardening, cooking, and driving." (Arjana, 2020, p. 155)

[336] (Cupitt, 1998)

[337] Don Cupitt (born in 1934), was an Anglican priest who also taught Philosophy of Religion at the University of Cambridge. He is no longer a Church of England member, as of 2008.

[338] Significant differentiation between modern and postmodern perspectives: "When a Modern reads a mystical text, he seems to understand *realistically* all the talk about experience, a spiritual world, the Unitive State, timelessness, immediate knowledge, and so on. When a Postmodern reads the same text, she reads it as a literary construct produced within a literary tradition." (Cupitt, 1998, p. 10)

[339] (Cupitt, 1998, pp. 10-11)

Similarly to the two authors before, Cupitt contrasts past and present versions of mysticism. Classical mysticism is differentiated from the new "postmodern type of religious experience".

The former is explained from the religious perspective, particularly from the process of institutionalization in world religions.[340] Cupitt argues that classical mysticism is essentially a deconstruction of the monopoly in control and authority over the promised personal salvation.[341] Mystics bypassed these borders not primarily through their experiences but through their language and expressions. He argues that negative theology is intentionally subversive[342] and dangerous.

Postmodern mysticism is also called the "mysticism of secondariness. It is perceived as "a form of religious consciousness that actively rejoices in and affirms all the features of the postmodern condition".[343] The secondariness is meant both and neither in the Aristotelian and/or Platonic way, by referring to the concept of primary and secondary substances. Treating everything else as secondary, Cupitt argues that mysticism subverts these distinctions. For Cupitt, mysticism does not affirm the truth of the tradition and religious orthodoxy, but he deliberately uses a confusing language to cross its borders. Mysticism turns the world upside down until "[t]here is no pure datum, no primary substance, no absolute, nothing that is always ontologically prior nothing is always real from every point of view."[344] This idea goes completely against Jones's and Arjana's concept of classical mysticism perceived as a phenomenon embedded in and affirming tradition. Cupitt deems similar concepts of mysticism and approaches to studying it outdated and calls for a new one.[345]

It is already visible that classical mysticism and the mysticism of secondariness are not in conflict. Focusing on language and mystical texts, Cupitt argues that postmodern mysticism is the "continuation and a radicalization of the older tradition..."[346] It is not only a forwarder in a linguistic sense but its function as well: "reducing everything to secondariness".[347] In this way, postmodern mysticism is mysticism in its totality.

However, it is essential to note that Cupitt's approach excludes many classical examples of mysticism. In this sense, many "classical" mystics are only perceived to be important from the perspective of the tradition – as long as their claims affirm it. This does not fit into Cupitt's idea of all mystics being deconstructors.[348] Moreover, he stresses that visions and the supposed intervention of divine grace/transcendent are only crucial from the perspective of the religious authority. Cupitt argues that, based on these characteristics, mysticism was retrospectively

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[340] Cupitt argues that the controlling effects and power of authority, as it maintains itself, is influential in Christianity, Islam, and Judaism.

[341] (Cupitt, 1998, pp. 2-3)

[342] "These writers play curious games with religious language, exploiting its paradoxes and tensions in ways that seem very often to enrage the authorities." (Cupitt, 1998, p. 6)

[343] (Cupitt, 1998, p. 2)

[344] (Cupitt, 1998, p. 7)

[345] "In that case, the kind of religion and the kind of mysticism that sought for something that is eternally primary is out of date. We need attempt a quite novel approach." (Cupitt, 1998, p. 8)

[346] (Cupitt, 1998, p. 3)

[347] (Cupitt, 1998, p. 6)

[348] Soelle shares a similar view: she argues that the social aspect of mysticism is not separable from the experiential – and whether mysticism entails a withdrawal, it always involves a 'No', to the world as it is in its current form. Soelle says that mysticism is inherently resistance. (Soelle, 2001, p. 302)

identified falsely. Cupitt does not demote the whole concept of modern mysticism like Jones and Arjana do but limits it to a great degree.

To start exploring the complex issue of modern mysticism, first, I have discussed authors who implement a distinction between modern mystical phenomena and a traditional version of it. A common characteristic of the authors under discussion is that they define classical mysticism based on some religious and philosophical assumption of tradition. In the case of simplistic distinctions (Jones, Arjana), I have attempted to give a short theoretical and conceptual explanation in order to see the underlying differences behind the dichotomies. I believe that the difference is not necessarily in the change of mysticism or mystical experiences per se but in the perceived distance articulated in the relation between traditional and modern mysticism. In Chapter 4, I return to the theories and ideas which might implicitly influence these dichotomies.

Nevertheless, such comparisons might not be useless altogether, and they can highlight the differences between two related phenomena (traditional and modern versions of mysticism) with different characteristics. Therefore, in the next part, I am focusing on this method's benefits and the illuminating effects of such comparisons. I turn to categorization: a standard method of showcasing differences in mysticism and mystical experiences. Through this, I aim to show that categories are adequate but not comprehensively and exclusively applicable tools for explaining mysticism and mystical experiences. Moreover, I aim to highlight the relevant connections of these categories to the concept of traditional and modern mysticism.

Categories

This section starts a lengthy yet essential detour related to mysticism in modernity. The three above mentioned theoretical examples have shown that modern mysticism is generally automatically degraded through its comparison with traditional forms of mysticism. It is discussed mainly in terms of its inadequacy compared to classical or traditional forms of mysticism. Its 'serious' scientific inquiry has not happened yet: we only know what it lacks, not its positive characteristics. Moreover, these comparisons are not only narrow-minded in terms of modern mysticism but also in regard to classical mysticism. They entail a specific view of religious and mystical traditions and their working methods. They refer to traditions as unchanging, clear concepts which people have been sticking to for centuries.

However, the fact that mysticism has undergone significant changes seems unambiguous. Yet, these changes are not reflected in current theoretical works of mysticism. How could research reflect on these changes? The approach of this work, on the one hand, is based on the assumption that mystical experiences are fundamental anthropological experiences, and, therefore, they are considered to be essentially similar throughout the ages and different cultures. In light of the threefold conception of mysticism, this entails that the hypothetical similarity of mystical experiences should be examined. I will return to this in the next chapter.

On the other hand, the historical and religious changes of the past centuries clearly affected mysticism too. These changes could be detected through the contextual elements of mysticism: the antecedents and the aftermath, or, more precisely, the changes in the historical, personal and religious circumstances of mysticism. To do that, this section focuses on how changes in terms of the contextual elements of mysticism could be conceptualized. Therefore, a standard method in the study of mysticism, i.e. categorization is implemented here.

Let me explain why this detour is essential, and why it is considered a detour in the first place. Categorization as a tool for conceptualizing modern mysticism is useful as there are no descriptions of the characteristics of modern mysticism other than its differences from its classical versions. Therefore, at this point in the research, this should be the starting point. Categorization enables scholars to start from a well-researched concept (like the classical forms of mysticism) and work in comparison with that.

At this point, it is crucial to stop and clarify the intention behind implementing a comparative approach. It might be a helpful tool if one aims to conceptualize a phenomenon that is overwhelmingly variable yet challenging to pinpoint. However, I do not aim to get stuck with a biased and vaguely conceptualized version of it, which I have shown through the works of Jones and Arjana. They implemented this tool to prove a point already made, namely, that modern mysticism is inferior and not worthy of scientific attention. However, I keep the original idea that modern mystical phenomena can be understood compared to a classical version. From this point on, therefore, I will refer to this collation as "modern mysticism and traditional mysticism".

Therefore, the concepts of both modern and traditional mysticism are drawn up as temporary tools of clarification. Their purpose is to highlight the characteristics, similarities and differences of modern mysticism to a well-researched form of mysticism. The aim is not to cement traditional mysticism as a backdrop against which to decide what counts as mysticism. It is simply a handy starting point as many (Western) researchers base their theoretical

approaches around it. Furthermore, the aim is not to apply a historical approach and once and for all distinguish the old, classical way of mysticism from the new version of it. The approach is primarily phenomenological, centered around mystical experiences as fundamental anthropological experiences. This attempt is called a detour because once the clarification is successful, one should return to the concept of mysticism and the concept should be revised through the findings of the current forms of mysticism. As mysticism (particularly mystical experiences) is considered an anthropological constant, revising its concept in light of some newly emerging examples should be an ongoing process.

Therefore, in the second half of this chapter categories of mysticism will be central. First, let us see why they are relevant in the study of mysticism and in terms of the present work. During the 20th century, it was more popular to consider mystical experiences along with types or categories rather than defining them. Mysticism is ineffable and diversified, making it challenging to cover the whole phenomenon in one definition. Categories, types, and classifications are much more applicable in this sense. They offer an easily understandable travelogue, so one does not get lost in the jungle of experiences. They can cover a large variety of experiences while still accentuating their essence, i.e. what makes them mystical. For example, we could say that both extrovertive and introvertive mystical experiences are direct personal experiences of the ultimate reality, but the former include sensory inputs, while the latter do not.

Therefore, I consider categories especially useful regarding mysticism. They enable us to point to differences in contemporary mysticism while also showcasing that it has the core elements of mysticism in it. However, categories have their disadvantages as well. They tend to be oversimplifying as they might restrict the phenomena. They often delimit the concept of mysticism or mystical experiences, saying that it is either this or that and nothing in between. Sometimes categories are used in order to bypass the task of defining the subject with all its theoretical and methodological difficulties. To highlight both the advantages and disadvantages of categorization, in this section, I discuss some categories related to mysticism. The categories I elaborate on will be discussed in two parts.

The first group of categories mentioned here refers to the contextual elements of mysticism (the preparation for and the fruits of the experience). In both cases, I will introduce a typology and show what the distinction is based on. I will also highlight how this distinction developed throughout the years. Moreover, I will briefly refer to the current use and applicability of the categories. The difference between religious and non-religious mysticism can be applied to all three stages of mysticism; therefore, it stands out. However, it is usually referred to as either the first or the third element of mysticism. Eastern vs. Western mysticism also refers to religious affiliation but from a rough differentiation between world religions. Female vs. male mysticism mainly refers to the implications of cultural, social, and gender differences in mysticism. Finally, the cataphatic, apophatic, vs. translinguistic types imply linguistic and interpretative approaches to the explanations of the ultimate reality.

The second group will include examples that make distinctions based on supposed differences in the mystical experience. As we do not have direct access to these experiences, it could be argued that these differences are ultimately interpretative. The concept of extrovertive and introvertive experiences make a difference between whether or not sensory inputs influence the content of the experience. Ergotropic and trophotropic are terms used to refer to experiences

with or without visions and specific auditory experiences. The differentiation between dualistic and monistic experiences, talking about the characteristics of the mystical union, also belongs here.

Religious vs. non-religious mysticism

The term "non-religious" mysticism refers to the fact that the particular example of mysticism is not (clearly) affiliated with a religious tradition (as opposed to religious mysticism, which is). This might refer to any or all three stages of mysticism. This differentiation was also called "sacred" vs. "profane" mysticism by Zaehner and Stace, and "religious" vs. "secular" by Schroeder, the latter primarily referring to mystics.

Zaehner presented examples for both categories, the profane being the use of mescaline, nature mysticism with examples from Proust and Rimbaud. Walter Stace discussed the mysticism of Plotinus as secular or non-theological mysticism.[349] "And first we take Plotinus as representing the classical pagan world. Plotinus was not an adherent of any organized religious system but a believer in the metaphysics of Plato, which he sought to develop and advance."[350] In this sense, whether mysticism is secular depends on the religious affiliation or non-affiliation of the mystic.

Theodore Schroeder's article is possibly one of the first mentions of "secular mystics".[351] In this article, Schroeder distinguishes between religious mystics and secular mystics. In doing so, he attempts to shed light on the alleged psychological causes of wars and the emergence of omnipotent leaders. He uses the words "secular" and "anti-mystical" synonymously, with a negative connotation. This is due to Schroeder's idea that mysticism and mystical experiences are to be associated with the early, immature stages of human intellectual and psychological development.

As for current understanding and the relevance of the distinction, I have pointed out in the second chapter that William James was pioneering in recognizing the relevance of non-religious mysticism. He studied a wide array of mystical experiences, some of which could be considered non-religious in the above-mentioned sense: the "Aha!" experience, "Déjà vu" etc. We can find other examples of non-religious mystical experiences, for instance, Zaehner's "panenhenic" category"[352] and most of the examples for extrovertive subcategories in Jones's work[353]: mindfulness, cosmic consciousness, and nature mysticism might belong here.

From a theological perspective, religious mysticism would be a mystical experience that fits into the religious tradition in its entirety: the possible preparatory activities, the experience itself, and its interpretation with the given symbols. Transtradition experiences could be an example and an exception here.[354]

From a philosophical perspective, this distinction might focus mainly on what precedes and follows the mystical experience. In this sense, a mystical experience could indirectly be

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[349] (Stace, Mysticism and Philosophy, 1961, pp. 105-112)
[350] (Stace, Mysticism and Philosophy, 1961, p. 105)
[351] (Schroeder, 1921)
[352] (Zaehner, 1980)
[353] (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, pp. 12-19)
[354] As noted by Louis Komjathy, some individuals may have had "transtradition" experiences which do not fit their 'initial' religious tradition and might lead to religious conversion. (Komjathy, 2011, p. 855)

considered religious if the preparatory activities belong to and/or the interpretation fits into a particular religious tradition.

What distinguishes mystical experiences from other religious experiences has already been stated: their direct nature and unity with ultimate reality. What is the deciding factor when it comes to non-religious experiences? The answer is the same: direct unity with ultimate reality, although the ultimate reality might be perceived very differently here, depending on the person. What connects them besides this definition is the personal (and often times) social significance and effect of the experience.

Regarding the topic of this dissertation, (non-)religious mysticism is relevant in the differentiation of traditional and modern mysticism. The presence and distinction of non-religious mysticism are closely connected to modernity.[355] Based on Troeltsch's concept, which I am presenting in the next section, it can be argued that there were only religious experiences in church civilization. Even the experiences that questioned the system or tradition or were considered heretics were religious.

Eastern vs. Western mysticism

Mystical traditions are often categorized as "Eastern" or "Western" based on the world religions they are closest to. Mystical traditions related to Christianity, Judaism, and Islam are often described as Western, and Hindu and Buddhist mystical traditions are categorized as Eastern. From a perennialist perspective, this differentiation might only apply to the contextual elements of mysticism, related to the mystical tradition: practices, books, rituals, a linguistic and cultural basis for interpretation etc. From a constructivist perspective, this difference also extends to the mystical experience itself.

Nevertheless, this differentiation prevailed mainly in the early and mid-20th century. It was somewhat helpful in pointing out differences between Eastern mysticism for Western audiences, and they were often shown as opposed to or in relation to the well-known western examples. As these characteristics are thoroughly researched today, both on their own and in a comparative context, such an overly generalizing category is less relevant now. The focus is, instead, on the post-colonial theoretical implications of the subject.[356]

Of the scholars who have applied this category, a few of the most influential ones are cited here. Rudolf Otto explored the differences between Eastern and Western mysticism through the works of Sankara and Meister Eckhart. With an ecumenical yet sophisticated mindset, Otto combined theological and religious studies approaches to highlight the differences in Sankara's and Meister Eckhart's work.[357]

Frits Staal took this distinction further in his book *Exploring mysticism*.[358] The distinction between Western and Eastern mysticism is based on the accessibility of knowledge and support of mysticism. Contrary to Eastern traditions, Western religious traditions are considered to be irrational, and discouraging towards obtaining knowledge and reaching

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[355] Here I am referring to the psychological demarcation of religious experiences, which I have pointed out in Chapter 2.
[356] (King, Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial theory, India and 'the mystic East', 1999)
[357] (Otto, Bracey, & Payne, Mysticism East and West: A Comparative Analysis of the Nature of Mysticism, 1932)
[358] (Staal, 1975)

mystical experiences. According to Staal, this prevented the flourishing of mystical traditions in the West. Staal uses examples from world religions but discusses Christianity and Hinduism in many of his examples. This simplistic differentiation, but especially the generalizations and examples listed as associated with Christianity, are vague. His understanding of mysticism is limited to such a work: masters and disciples, texts and schools, meditational techniques passed on. He uses "Eastern" standards and no wonder Western religions "fail" in comparison. Even though the comparison presented in the work is no longer relevant, Staal's unique methodological approach, which I mentioned earlier, is.

R. C. Zaehner's work[359] compares the dualistic and monistic tendencies in Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism. He favors the non-dualist approach of Vedanta. Another well-known work on the subject is that of Bede Griffiths, a Benedictine monk who lived in India and later became a yogi. The work is titled *Marriage of East and West*. He compares Vedic, Jewish, and Christian Mysticism from a theological perspective.[360]

Instead of comparisons, today it is probably a much more popular, notable, and fruitful attempt to discuss mysticism related to certain world religions: Christian, Buddhist, Jewish, etc. Some works refer to each world religion,[361] others focus on only one.[362]

Postcolonialism and the comparison of religions are especially intricate topics discussed in works such as Richard King's.[363] The introduction and application of Western categories of religion and religious experience do not necessarily fit the "Eastern" phenomena. Jean C. MacPhail (also known as Sister Gayatriprana) points out the Eastern influence on the West related to religious experiences.[364] Postcolonialist approaches aim to study religious and mystical traditions on their terms without a hierarchical view of them. "This includes the specific conceptions of self and existence among mystics and the ways in which those views challenge received worldviews and enculturation."[365] On the other hand, postmodern approaches tend to look at mysticism from the perspective of relativity. Some key points of postmodern approaches are reducing mysticism to knowledge and highlighting the greater significance of its social and political dimensions.[366] Some could conclude that, in this way, the validity of the study of mysticism is questionable.[367] Others are invested in researching

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[359] (Zaehner, 1980, old.: 106-128). For another example of numinous experience, see (Marshall, Mystical Encounters with the Natural World: Experiences and Explanations, 2005, p. 68).

[360] (Griffiths, 1982)

[361] (Carmody & Carmody, 1996)

[362] Besides the above-mentioned grand work by Bernard McGinn about the different stages of Christian Mysticism, Amy Hollywood and Patricia Z. Beckmann published an outstanding handbook on this subject recently, (Hollywood & Beckman, 2012). On Jewish Mysticism, see (Matt, 1995). On Sufism, see (Ernst, 2011). On Tantra and Hindu mysticism, see (Feuerstein, 1998). On Buddhist mysticism, see (Suzuki, 2002).

[363] (King, Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial theory, India and 'the mystic East', 1999)

[364] "I show how India has contributed to the West's ongoing development in the world of spiritual perception and experience, particularly in more recent history. The West has experienced a progression from an initial struggle to assert the validity of the inner worlds of experience (countering materialistic reductionism), and on to more robust exploration of the interior world of the spirit. There is also emerging a psycho-technology to explain and develop those worlds, not only trans-personally, but also trans-traditionally. I also illustrate the progression of ideas in the text with color images that suggest in a more holistic framework the interconnections and influences discussed in the text." (MacPhail, 2008)

[365] (Komjathy, 2011, p. 859)

[366] "Some major voices in the postcolonialist and postmodern study of mysticism include Grace Jantzen, Richard King, Jeffrey Kripal, Robert Sharf, Mark Taylor, and Steven Wasserstom." (Komjathy, 2011, p. 859)

[367] (Komjathy, 2011, p. 859)

mysticism as a universal human phenomenon: trying to point out genetic bases transcending cultural differences.[368]

Mystical experiences sometimes seem to confirm these categories. Christian mystics have a particularly Christian experience, as Katz points out. But, in reality, different metaphors and mystical accounts suggest an overarching similarity across mystical traditions. Love mysticism and metaphors of night and emptiness can be found described similarly in many religious and cultural traditions in different eras.[369] At the same time, contemporary examples seem to question this universality and overarching feature by their initial variety. They do not seem to fit into these categories and show much similarity. This variety is somewhat reflected in Jones's work, focusing on the most recent findings of the study of mysticism. Jones's categories of mysticism involve a variety of subcategories, such as mindfulness meditation and nature mysticism.

The differentiation of Eastern and Western mysticism or mysticism related to a specific religion is relevant to our general understanding of mysticism, but especially regarding modern mysticism. It seems to connect to it in two indirect ways: by generally transcending these categories and combining and applying different elements of several traditions. This is starkly different from the idea of single-focused traditional mysticism.

Male vs. female mysticism

Distinguishing male and female mysticism is typically characteristic of medieval Christian mysticism.[370] This distinction is based on the characteristics traditionally, historically, and religiously assigned to each gender.[371] These characteristics are understood to have a significant impact on the "perception of individual mystics and have shaped the performance of mysticism – the acts, words, and gestures with which mystics have presented themselves to others."[372]

Furthermore, this distinction between male and female mysticism is heavily associated with the body. Alison Weber says that women were "trapped" in their bodies in medieval times, and it was the only way for women to have a voice in society. Their mystical experiences,

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[368] "They found that whilst churchgoing had much more to do with upbringing than heredity, spiritual awareness was strongly linked to genetic inheritance, thus supporting Alister Hardy's contention that it is biologically inbuilt. In a still more recent twin study in Japan, Juko Ando and his colleagues have made a similar finding in relation to spiritual awareness, suggesting that biology transcends East/West cultural differences." (Hay, Religion under Siege: A Scientific Response. A Lecture given to the Alister Hardy Society meeting at Oxford, December 1, 2007, 2008, pp. 148-149)

[369] Examples of that include poems by Mirabai, Rumi, and John of the Cross.

[370] It is important to mention another significant work on the subject, which I do not elaborate on here, (Fuller, 2008)

[371] Alison Weber argues that gender is historically constructed. It has changed and become more precise throughout the ages. Gender is usually the consequence of the biological sex. The two categories of gender describe the role of man and woman as society sees it. Moreover, it is defined by the historical, religious, and scientific context. Certain acts and characteristics are related to genders and can be described as 'masculine' and 'feminine'. What is described as a masculine characteristic is usually the opposite of a feminine one. "That is, in different ways throughout history, cultures have defined specific mental and emotional characteristics, aptitudes, and deficiencies as 'feminine' and 'masculine'. Likewise, societies have defined specific economic, political and cultural activities as appropriate for one sex to the exclusion of the other." (Weber A. , 2012, p. 316). The theory presented by Thomas Laqueur fundamentally questions this distinction. He argues that texts from before the enlightenment present a "one elastic sex" model. There is no sharp distinction between the two sexes, but rather a fluidity or scale signified a place in society and cultural roles (Laqueur, 1992).

[372] (Weber A. , 2012, p. 315)

therefore, were closely related to their bodies and throughout the body: visions and raptures. Stigmas and the humanity of Christ were the focal points of their contemplation and prayers. *Imitatio Christi*, the imitation of Christ's life, had a crucial role in their lives, and it often resulted in punishing the body. The way to get closer to God was thought to lead through punishing the body.[373] While men were associated with light, order, activity, and the soul, women were associated with darkness, chaos, passivity, and the body. King shares a similar idea to Weber's about medieval female mystic's emphasis on rapture and visions. However, he connects this to an exclusion from intellectualism. Grace Jantzen takes this subject further and in a more complex way and explores the topic of authority related to medieval Christian mysticism. She emphasizes that indifferences in power have shaped what mysticism was, and, often, the exclusion or silencing of female mystics.[374]

This difference is significant in expressing what was experienced in the mystical union. Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, who were contemporaries in establishing the Discalced Carmelite Order, mirror this difference well. They both describe their mystical journeys, and both of them struggle with its articulation. However, the way they articulate their experiences is different. Teresa suggests that her inability to describe her experience is related to her sex. She often describes herself as a woman who is weak and does not have the proper knowledge.[375] Moreover, there is a difference in the way the mystical union is perceived. Teresa's description of the experience is cataphatic, and John of the Cross's is apophatic.[376] It could be assumed that cataphatic mysticism, with the aim to describe the mystical journey as closely as possible, is not the way of people who are incapable or not knowledgeable.

Another relevant aspect of gender related to Christian mysticism is *unio mystica,* which is often described as love, marriage, and engagement with Christ. The Song of Songs is a prevalent mystical theme, and this is the theme of John of the Cross's mystical text quoted in this work. Bernard of Clairvaux's interpretation involves taking on female characteristics and the bride's qualities.[377] This union is spiritual in nature, though, in the case of some visionary female mystics such as Hadewijch and Angela of Foligno, associations of a physical union have been brought up.[378]

The gender-related contextual differences in mysticism are well-grounded; however, these characteristics do not necessarily apply to the experience itself. As the Dogen quote highlights the last stage of mysticism: "It is one thing — neither absolute nor relative, up nor

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[373] "First, female mystics struggled with the issue of authority in ways that were not required of male clerics. Second, female mystics frequently employed a fervent, erotic language, figuring the pursuit of God as love madness. Third, female mysticism is strongly associated with charismatic graces, such as visions, locutions, and ecstasies. Finally, late medieval women's spirituality was characterized by extreme penitential practices." (Weber A. , 2012, p. 317)

[374] "Mostly excluded from formal theological training and therefore uninitiated in the abstract intellectualism of the mysticism of negation, many of these women placed a great deal of emphasis upon visions as a source of spiritual knowledge and authority, and in some cases were persecuted and even executed for their claims." (King, Mysticism and spirituality, 2005, p. 309)

[375] "There is one danger I want to warn you about (although I may have mentioned it elsewhere)11 into which I have seen persons of prayer fall, especially women, for since we are weaker there is more occasion for what I'm about to say." (Teresa, Kavanaugh, & Rodriguez, The Interior Castle, 1979, p. 83)

[376] I will discuss this distinction in the next subsection.

[377] (Krahmer, 2000) and related to this notion's gender-relativizing aspects: (Szugyiczki, Nemek relativitása a vallási hagyományokban, 2017)

[378] (Klaniczay, Az égi szerelem: Misztika és erotika a középkorban, 1994)

down, profane nor holy, good nor bad, male nor female."[379] Weber also argues that when one reaches the mystical union or has a mystical experience, none of these distinctions count anymore.[380] It does not matter what the nationality, age, gender, or generally the background of the mystic is. However, the background of the mystic plays a vital role on the way to his or her experience and later how they are remembered. Gerardus van der Leeuw shares the same opinion. As mystics reach the union, purportedly, none of the differences between them count anymore. In the state of mystical union, there are no religious or ethical rules and no roles to live up to. One does not have to meet the requirement of society or gender.[381]

Even from such a short summary, it is visible that researchers in the past decades changed and caught up with the missing or incomplete discourses on body and gender in mysticism.[382] Is this category applicable outside the context of medieval Christian mysticism? How much does gender influence mysticism today? These critical questions are not explored in the works mentioned above and would serve as future perspectives on the research of modern mysticism too.

Kataphatic vs. apophatic vs. translinguistic mysticism

The following category is based on one particular aspect of the contextual elements: language. The ineffable nature of mysticism was established earlier, and I also pointed out that mystics relate to this differently. The difference between cataphatic and apophatic mysticism highlights the theological-philosophical ideas behind these approaches.

The category of apophatic mysticism describes mystical experiences where what is experienced is considered ultimately indescribable – nothing positive can be said about it: neither statements, affirmations, nor qualities. This leads us to the meaning of *apophasis*: negation. Apophatic mysticism is also called a negative theology in Christian mysticism.[383] John of the Cross's quoted work belongs to this category. Another example of this category is *Tao Te Ching*.[384]

The works of Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagite laid the foundations for the light symbolism of medieval art and apophatic mysticism. His works were influenced by early Christian mystical writings based on Neoplatonic and Christian doctrines. Similarly to Plotinus, in Dionysius'

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[379] (Dógen, Loori, & Tanahashi, The True Dharma Eye: Zen Master Dōgen's Three Hundred Kōans, 2011, pp. 38-39)

[380] "For still others, the possibility of union with a loving God promised that ultimately sex was irrelevant and that human notions of what men and women must be and do were meaningless." (Weber A. , 2012, p. 327)

[381] "A misztika nemek és vallások fölötti, ebben nem ismer határokat." "Mysticism is beyond genders and religions, in this sense, it knows no boundaries." (Leeuw, Bendl, Dani, & Takács, 2001, p. 396)

[382] Carrette argues that, decades ago, it was not okay to talk about the body and erotic religious ecstasy, and James avoided it too. However, contemporary discourses in psychology and religious studies tackle the "politic of the body" (Carrette, The Return to James: Psychology, Religion and the Amnesia of Neuroscience, 2002, pp. xlvi-xlvii).

[383] The Christian tradition's first significant figure is Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. His works, particularly *Mystical theology* had a significant influence on the perception of light in the Middle Ages. (Pseudo-Dionysius & Rolt, 2000). On apophatic and cataphatic mysticism in John of the Cross's and Teresa of Avila's work: (Szugyiczki, Fény és sötétség: Avilai Szent Teréz és Keresztes Szent János misztikája. Bachelor's Thesis., 2015)

[384] Further examples of apophatic mysticism in the "West" (71-100) and the "East" (101-122) can be found in (Grinsven, 2016).

work, light emanates from the heavens, from the heavens towards the earthly/material world. Divine grace is conveyed in the form of light emanating downwards from above.

Mysticism is usually focused on light and enlightenment. Another term for this is *via illuminativa*, whereas Pseudo-Dionysius has a mysticism of darkness, as God cannot be fully known by man, and human cognition will never reach the essence of God. All our knowledge of God is, therefore, necessarily 'negative'. Here the term for mysticism is *via negativa*. The experience mentioned in *Mystical theology*[385] describes God's light as darkness from the point of view of human understanding.

Affirmative statements about God belong to affirmative theology, and negations to negative theology, which emphasizes divine transcendence: God is ultimately unknowable and incomprehensible to humans. Moreover, as the soul draws closer to God, it becomes less and less able to express its experience in words (cf. ineffability and James). "Moreover, as one ascends the celestial hierarchy towards God, words fall away, whilst at lower levels, words become more and more effective in their representation of reality. The goal, argued Dionysius, was for the Christian to aspire to the highest realm and achieve a knowledge of God which left all conventional knowledge behind in a mystical 'darkness of unknowing' […]."[386]

Cataphatic or affirmative theology shares an opposite view. Contrary to apophatic mystics, cataphatic mystics do make some claims about what is experienced. They use positive terms such as 'God is loving'. Teresa of Avila's mysticism generally exemplifies this approach.

A third, less frequently used linguistic tendency in the study of mysticism is the translinguistic tendency. Here silence is the focus.[387] The ineffable quality of mystical experiences sometimes leaves mystics in complete silence: therefore, they do not use words at all so that they avoid inadequately describing what was experienced.

These categories help to understand the multi-faceted linguistic expressions of mystical experiences. They often are based on significantly different theological views about the transcendent. In this work this aspect will not be considered further. However, it would be beneficial to elaborate on the subject in further research about modern mysticism. In the next chapter, I will point out the differences between John of the Cross's clearly apophatic mystical language and Thomas Merton's modes of expressions.

Extrovertive vs. introvertive mysticism

One of the most influential categories in the study of mysticism and regarding the topic of this dissertation are the extrovertive and introvertive types of mysticism. Later, I will argue that Saint John of the Cross had mostly introvertive, while Thomas Merton had mostly extrovertive experiences. This difference seems to be applicable generally both to traditional and modern mysticism, with certain exceptions.

If the mystical experience includes sense-perceptual, somatosensory, or introspective content influenced by sensory inputs, it is usually considered an extrovertive experience. In contrast, when sensory inputs do not play a role in shaping the content of the mystical

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[385] (Pseudo-Dionysius & Rolt, 2000)
[386] (King, Mysticism and spirituality, 2005, p. 308)
[387] "One may focus on the linguistic tendencies of mystics: kataphatic (based on affirmations), apophatic (based on negations), or translinguistic (silence as primary)." (Komjathy, 2011, p. 856)

experiences, these are considered introvertive ones.[388] These categories focus primarily on mystical experiences instead of the preparational practices or what follows the mystical experience. In the following pages, I describe the history of this distinction and the differences regarding the work of some of the most prominent scholars of the study of mysticism: Rudolf Otto, Walter Stace, and Richard H. Jones. The distinction between "extrovertive" and "introvertive" mystical experiences comes from Rudolf Otto's work. [389] It was later adopted, named, and developed by Walter Stace.[390] Recently, Richard H. Jones introduced further subcategories to it and focused on the so-called "empty-depth mystical experiences".[391]

Rudolf Otto

Rudolf Otto's book mentioned above, *Mysticism East and West*, is a comparison of Western and Eastern mysticism, particularly Meister Eckart and Sankara's work.[392] In this book, Otto distinguishes two types of mystical experiences found both in the East and West: the "mysticism of introspection" or the "inward way" vs. "mysticism of unifying vision" or the "outward way". The difference between the two categories lies between the attitudes towards the object, the path to its achievement, and thereby the fundamental attitude of the mystic. However, Otto argues that these categories are interconnected and work together towards fulfillment. Therefore, Otto's attitude is strikingly different from those who concentrate on the differences between the two types.

The *mysticism of introspection* involves a withdrawal from outward things such as the world, and a turn towards the self, such as the depth of the soul, where secret knowledge and the transcendent can be reached. The mysticism of unifying vision is also described as the way of unity/unifying vision/ the vision of unity. This vision is characterized as unifying, describing a mode of perception which does not focus on the objects' multiplicity. "The emphasis on unity, and the struggle against all diversity is its chief characteristic."[393] It is nothing like the sorts of unity one has a perception of, based on ordinary sense experiences. Mystics look to the world and see its multiplicity; in contrast, they leap to an intuition/knowledge of unity, which can be seen as a fantasy or a glimpse into the eternal relationship of things. They see things as they are – existing and not in creation – and see the One instead of multiplicity. Otto distinguishes three stages of the unifying vision, the first being the lowest level of unity.[394] Otto's distinction

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[388] In *Zen and the brain*, Austin compares 'eyes opened, and eyes closed conditions' (Austin, 1998, pp. 582-584). The differences between extrovertive and introvertive mysticism are not the same as the distinction in Austin's case. Introvertive experiences may happen while the eyes are opened, and vice versa. Following these authors, I want to point out briefly that the differentiation is based on whether the incoming sensory inputs influence the content of the experience.

[389] (Otto, Bracey, & Payne, Mysticism East and West: A Comparative Analysis of the Nature of Mysticism, 1932).

[390] (Stace, Mysticism and Philosophy, 1961)

[391] (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, pp. 21-25)

[392] The book was published in 1932 and is based on the Haskell lectures he gave in 1924 at Oberlin College, Ohio. This book presupposes the inquiry made in *Das Heilige* and links up with (Religious Essays) Das Gefühl des Überweltlichen. Otto's colleagues translated the work.

[393] (Otto, Bracey, & Payne, Mysticism East and West: A Comparative Analysis of the Nature of Mysticism, 1932, p. 43)

[394] At the vision of the first stage there is not only the identification of all things moreover the identification of the perceiver and the perceived. The mystic sees things as himself. Things are no longer differentiated from him. "The opposites coincide without ceasing to be what they are in themselves." (Otto, Bracey, & Payne, Mysticism East and West: A Comparative Analysis of the Nature of Mysticism, 1932, p. 48) This vision is perceived not through ordinary thinking (discursive thought) but mystical intuition. At the second stage of the unifying vision, unity

between the inward and the outward way was the basis for the extrovertive and introvertive categorization. However, the terms extrovertive and introvertive were established by Walter Stace in 1960.

Walter Stace

Walter Stace's classical work *Mysticism and philosophy*[395] was one of the main handbooks on mysticism for decades. In this book, he further developed the categories of extrovertive and introvertive mystical experiences, as mentioned above. There is a clear difference between these two types of experiences in terms of characteristics and quality. Despite their differences and hierarchical status, these are merely differences in perception. Stace has considered the ultimate reality to be unalterable: only its perception changes.

He examined the "extrovertive type of mystical consciousness" in seven cases.[396] Stace's understanding of this category is not significantly different from Otto's unifying vision: the outside world is, on the one hand, seen in its multiplicity and as intrinsically one. The distinction of many objects is kept while their identical nature is simultaneously perceived. On the other hand, this unity is more than 'one plus one'. It is a unity beyond mere understanding: it can only be grasped in a mystical state of consciousness.[397]

Introvertive mystical experiences are described more elaborately in Stace's handbook.[398] They are also called "pure consciousness", "Void", "One", "Infinite", and "nothingness". These experiences happen without empirical content such as sensory images, abstract thoughts, reasoning processes, volitions, and other particular mental content. It is emptiness, but not unconsciousness. Stace calls it "pure consciousness": a consciousness with no empirical content, only the content of itself.[399] The examples of pure experiences or introvertive mysticism are perceived to be universally the same.[400]

Stace also recognizes certain cases which fit in between these categories. He explores John Masefield, a British poet's case, and Margaret Prescott Montague's essay entitled "Twenty

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becomes one, but not in the sense that oneness is the result of many/multiplicity. "The One itself becomes the object of intuition as that which is superior and prior to the many. It is the many, not as the many is one but as the principle in which the many is grounded." (Otto, Bracey, & Payne, Mysticism East and West: A Comparative Analysis of the Nature of Mysticism, 1932, p. 49). At the third stage of the vision, the 'many' come into conflict with the One – the One can no longer be many. The meaning of Oneness changes here. Out of the unity of many grows a Oneness as Aloneness. "[…] [T]he relationship of original immanence – the immanence of the unity in and of things in the One – passes and is transformed into complete transcendence." (Otto, Bracey, & Payne, Mysticism East and West: A Comparative Analysis of the Nature of Mysticism, 1932, p. 52)

[395] (Stace, Mysticism and Philosophy, 1961)

[396] Stace regards it as representative set of cases as they are taken from different eras and religious background. Two Catholics, one Protestant, one pagan from classical times, one modern Hindu, two from among the intellectuals of North America – with no particular religious affiliation. (Stace, Mysticism and Philosophy, 1961, pp. 62-63)

[397] (Stace, Mysticism and Philosophy, 1961, pp. 60-81)

[398] (Stace, Mysticism and Philosophy, 1961, pp. 85-123)

[399] "The self, when stripped of all psychological contents or objects, is not another thing, or substance, distinct from its contents. It is the bare unity of the manifold of consciousness from which the manifold itself has been obliterated." (Stace, Mysticism and Philosophy, 1961, p. 86)

[400] "[…] and there is no doubt that in essence they are the same all over the world in all cultures, religions, places, and ages. They are, however, so extraordinary and paradoxical that they are bound to strain belief when suddenly sprung upon anyone who is not prepared for them." (Stace, Mysticism and Philosophy, 1961, p. 85)

minutes of reality". Such cases share specific characteristics of the two main types: they have a family resemblance to these. [401]

In both cases, the unity with ultimate reality is thought to be identical because of the unchangeability of ultimate reality, although there is a clear-cut difference in practical influence and philosophical implications between these types.[402] According to Stace, extrovertive, mystical experiences occur unsought, while introvertive experiences happen after years and years of practice. As space and time are the conditions of multiplicity, extrovertive experiences are, to a certain extent, spatial and temporal, while introvertive experiences go beyond space and time. This second aspect follows the final and main difference: extrovertive mysticism represents a half-absorbed unity, while introvertive mysticism is the full completion of the *unio mystica*: a direct apprehension instead of a mere perception.[403] Stace goes even further, claiming that extrovertive experiences can reach their completion in introvertive ones.

> "These facts seem to suggest that the extrovertive experience, although we recognize it
> as a distinct type, is actually on a lower level than the introvertive type; that is to say, it
> is an incomplete kind of experience which finds its completion and fulfillment in the
> introvertive kind of experience."[404]

Thus, Stace clearly states that introvertive experiences require more preparation than extrovertive ones; they lack the twofold nature of extrovertive experiences, making a complete mystical union possible. In Stace's perception, this means that they are "purer". All in all, introvertive mystical experiences are superior to extrovertive ones and provide a goal of completion and fulfillment, while extrovertive mystical experiences are not there just yet.

Paul Marshall

One of Stace's critics, Paul Marshall, elaborated on the complexity of extrovertive experiences. Marshall summarizes and advances characteristics of extrovertive experiences, with a particular focus on some features neglected by Stace: auditory, somatic, synesthetic, and paranormal phenomena. His understanding of extrovertive mystical experiences is connected to the natural world. [405] The natural world here means particular objects and processes that can be a subject of ordinary sense-perception, including items that are not perceivable because of their size (too small or too large) or distance [406] The correct understanding of the natural world

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[401] (Stace, Mysticism and Philosophy, 1961, pp. 81-85)

[402] "The extrovertive type of mystical consciousness is in any case vastly less important than the introvertive, both as regards practical influence on human life and history and as regards philosophical implications." (Stace, Mysticism and Philosophy, 1961, pp. 62-63)

[403] (Stace, Mysticism and Philosophy, 1961, p. 66) See also: "Consciousness or mind is a higher category than life, the top rung of the ladder of life. The extrovertive mystic perceives the universal life of the world, while the introvertive reaches up to the realization of a universal consciousness or mind." (Stace, Mysticism and Philosophy, 1961, p. 133)

[404] (Stace, Mysticism and Philosophy, 1961, p. 132)

[405] "Extrovertive mystical experiences are mystical experiences in which the natural world occupies the 'mystical' focus of the experience. The subject feels united with the world, intuits a special unity between its parts, discovers some deep meaning, and sees a special luminosity in them." (Marshall, Mystical Encounters with the Natural World: Experiences and Explanations, 2005, p. 28)

[406] "It is important to note that 'natural world' is used quite broadly here: it refers to the world of objects and processes that we find presented or represented in everyday sensory experience, a world that includes familiar items such as mountains, trees, animals, human beings, tables, and bicycles, as well as objects and processes that are not capable of being perceived in the ordinary manner but which have a claim to be contents of the universe in the way that the familiar objects and processes are. These include items that are not visible to the naked eye because

is essential because Marshall defines extrovertive experiences according to their contents and not their circumstances. "In the usage to be followed here, extrovertive experiences are extrovertive by their contents but not necessarily extrovertive by their circumstances. The natural world is always a mystical focus but need not be the setting, trigger, or means of cultivation."[407] In this sense, the transcendent is perceived only through its entirely or partially immanent form in the natural world. Marshall says that such experiences are common, especially in modernity, but we can also find examples of these experiences in pre-modernity. In his latest book, Paul Marshall extends the categories mentioned above.[408] Instead of the twofold distinction of extrovertive and introvertive mysticism, he introduces a threefold typology, according to which mystical experiences can be this-worldly, other-worldly, or no-worldly. Each of these categories and all three of them together have overlapping examples.[409]

Robert K. C. Forman

Forman adds two criteria of comparison to the set established by Walter Stace.[410] Forman argues that, if we consider these aspects, extrovertive experiences are more advanced. Forman uses the distinction of Ramana Maharishi, the 20th century Hindu guru, to describe the difference between extrovertive and introvertive experiences. He points out that Stace could not grasp the true nature and potential of extrovertive experiences. If someone looks at Maharishi's distinction between samadhi and Sahaja Samadhi, it becomes clear that extrovertive experiences are superior in this interpretation. "Samadhi is a contemplative mystical state and is 'introvertive' as Stace employs the term. Sahaja samadhi is a state in which a silent level within the subject is maintained along with (simultaneously with) the full use of the human faculties."[411] Therefore, Sahaja samadhi (an extrovertive experience) is continuous as opposed to samadhi, which is introvertive. They can be maintained 24 hours a day.[412] Neither sleeping, eating, nor drinking snaps a person out of it. Samadhi is transient, just as James and other authors rooted in Western culture (such as Otto and Stace) thought about mystical experiences. This permanence of extrovertive experiences gives an added aspect to the comparison and value to them in relation to introvertive ones: they are more complex and maintained during everyday activities and sleeping. They are more complex when it comes to the mystic's journey as well: they require more practice.[413]

Thus, it is important to note that mystical experiences can be distinguished on the basis of their duration as well. As I have shown, Robert Forman focuses on extrovertive experiences

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they are too small, too large, or too distant." (Marshall, Mystical Encounters with the Natural World: Experiences and Explanations, 2005, p. 28)

[407] (Marshall, Mystical Encounters with the Natural World: Experiences and Explanations, 2005, p. 30)

[408] The shape of the soul 2019. Paul Marshall Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019.

[409] (Marshall, The Shape of the Soul: What Mystical Experience Tells Us about Ourselves and Reality., 2019, p. Chapter 1)

[410] (Forman R. K., 1990)

[411] (Forman R. K., 1990, p. 8)

[412] This distinction is a clear example of temporary and permanent mystical experiences – a categorization that is not dealt with separately here. The differentiation is based on the transiency or duration of the experience.

[413] "I believe that such a permanent mystical state is typically a more advanced stage in the mystical journey. It seems to me that much misunderstanding has arisen because people have looked at the most advanced, sophisticated, and (perhaps) interesting form of experience — Sahaja Samadhi, extrovertive — prematurely, that is, without first understanding the more rudimentary form of experience." (Forman R. K., 1990, p. 8)

because of their length and complexity. Sahaja Samadhi and Rumi's[414] enduring state of mystical experience are just a few examples mentioned, which question the transient criterium of mystical experiences by William James.

This hierarchical representation of mystical experiences has been questioned by many. Even though mystics themselves often establish stages in mysticism and mystical perception, the hierarchy is not value-based in their cases. .[415] Robert K. C. Forman turned this hierarchy around and considered the twofold nature of extrovertive mystical experiences as the reason why they might be more permanent than introvertive ones. All in all, both Stace and Forman advocate for the type of experience they deem better, based on the amount of preparation and seriousness required. Stace's ideas are most likely primarily based on Western experiences, and Forman's might be based on his experience in transcendental meditation, which values Sahaja samadhi more – the experience maintained through waking and sleeping states during everyday activities.

Richard H. Jones

Contrary to Stace and Foreman, Richard H. Jones does not make a value difference between introvertive and extrovertive mystical experiences, or at least does not devalue extrovertive ones. Jones perceives both categories as having an inner dimension and involving insight into the ultimate reality.[416] Extrovertive ones are "this-worldly": they entail differentiated content. They are also dualistic and include sensory input to which mystics are passively receptive. On the other hand, in introverted experiences, sensory content is withheld from the mind; the mind is empty of all sense-experiences.

Jones uses and further develops the distinction between "extrovertive" and "introvertive" mystical experiences. First, he introduces more subcategories considering the last decades' mystical phenomena, then draws up three subcategories within extrovertive experiences: "nature mysticism", "cosmic consciousness", and "mindfulness state of consciousness".[417]

In nature mysticism, nature is perceived as transfigured. The boundaries between nature (what is experienced) and the sense of self are obliterated, contrary to our everyday state of consciousness, when the mind perceives the boundaries within natural objects and is aware of its own difference from them. Besides a profound sense of connectedness, nature mysticism

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[414] (Komjathy, 2011, p. 856)

[415] Though the hierarchy of mystical experiences is problematic from a scientific perspective. Stace and Forman are missing out on experiences. Newberg and d'Aaquili's hierarchical order of states of consciousness is also considered problematic by Komjathy. (Komjathy, 2011, p. 856). Mystics themselves sometimes make a hierarchy often in terms of describing the road towards the *unio mystica* and other similar experiences along the way. Teresa of Avila's *Interior castle*, and John of the Cross's *Dark night* are fitting examples. However, none of these works seem to make this differentiation in relation to extrovertive and introvertive types of mystical experiences, but, similarly to James, to what extent each experience is mystical. (Teresa, Kavanaugh, & Rodriguez, The Interior Castle, 1979), (John, Kavanaugh, & Rodriguez, The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross. Revised edition, 1991), Also in Hinduism, a differentiation is made between *bhakti* and *jnana*. The first is the mysticism of love which requires openness, receptivity, and devotion. It is a dual mysticism in terms of the 'participants' - the lover and the beloved. The second one (*jnana*) is the mysticism of intellect – a non-dual unity of the person and the ultimate reality. Not only differentiation but a distinction is being made here. *Bhakti* is a simpler version of mysticism and an entry towards higher, more complex forms of mysticism (*jnana*).

[416] (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, pp. 1-36)

[417] (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, pp. 13-19)

might be experienced as a vivid glow of nature, a complete unity with nature, a felt love immanent in the natural world, etc. The experiences vary in intensity and length. [418]

Cosmic consciousness is closely connected to nature mysticism in Jones's understanding. As for the transcendent and the shift to cosmic consciousness, Jones says the following: "A sense of a transcendent reality grounding the universe may be part of an experience and not merely an inference made after the experience is over. This is a shift from nature mysticism to a cosmic consciousness."[419]

Nature mysticism and cosmic consciousness seem to cover the range of focus for extrovertive experiences. Yet mindfulness meditation has a distinguished place for Jones as it is one of the three subcategories of extrovertive mystical experiences. He defines it this way: "Mindfulness is thus not about attaining a state of consciousness unconnected to observations, or seeing something special about the world, or anything more (or less) profound than seeing the flow of the world as it is free of the constraints of our conceptualizations and emotions." [420] Contrary to nature mysticism and cosmic consciousness, what seems to be an added level is that mindfulness meditation is free of conceptualizations.[421] This could very well account for the inclusion of this subcategory. Another simple reason might be the growing popularity of mindfulness meditation outside of academic research.

Second, Jones also focuses on the so-called "empty-depth mystical experience", one of the subcategories of introvertive experiences. Let us first look at introvertive experiences in general, then turn to the empty-depth experience. Introvertive mystical experiences are described the following way:

> "The inward turn begins with objects of concentration, but it is not a matter replacing the content with an image of nothingness (e.g., a big, black, silent, empty space), but of eventually emptying the mind of all thought, emotion, sensation, and any other internal distinguishable content. Extrovertive states may be long-lasting or even permanent, but introvertive experiences are transient, being disrupted by life in the phenomenal world."[422]

They are divided into two subcategories: those with differentiated content in the mind during the experience, which might be theistic or non-theistic in nature, vs. introvertive experiences with non-differentiated content, which are called empty-depth mystical experiences.[423] Theistic ones have a personal nature as a sense of self realizes another reality (divine presence, God, etc.). Non-theistic mystical experiences still have differentiated content, but they are not personal. These experiences may vary in different religions. This means that Jones leaves the possibility open for context, influencing the content of the mystical experience.

The so-called "empty-depth mystical experience" refers to an empty introvertive experience. Phenomenologically this type is without differentiated content: even the sense of self, will and processes of the mind are void. This is strikingly similar to Robert Forman's "pure

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[418] (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, p. 14)
[419] (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, p. 13)
[420] (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, p. 19)
[421] "But one state of consciousness may be free of all conceptualizations: a "pure" mindfulness involving sensory differentiation but not any conceptualizations." (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, p. 13)
[422] (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, p. 20)
[423] (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, pp. 1-36)

consciousness event", which is described as a wakeful, contentless, nonintentional form of introvertive mysticism, not shaped, constructed, or formed by epistemological processes responsible for ordinary sense experiences.[424] Jones refers to Forman while stating that this state might simply be a pure state of consciousness just as Forman describes it. Jones further mentions that it is not a complete emptiness nor a state of unconsciousness; because mystics can distinguish it from what has happened before and after it. Therefore, empty-depth mystical experiences are open to the mystics' interpretation after the experience. [425]

However different the subcategories and the supposed idea of hierarchy between extrovertive and introvertive states is, the distinction is quite clear. Extrovertive states involve sensory input in shaping the mystical experience, while introvertive ones do not. Later I will argue that neither category belongs exclusively to traditional or modern mysticism. Furthermore, I will explore the idea that traditional mysticism involves primarily introvertive experiences, and modern mysticism primarily extrovertive experiences. Along this line, Stace mentions some historical examples of extrovertive and introvertive experiences. Even though Jones's concept of introvertive mysticism is based on the idea that they require rigorous preparation, this does not mean that extrovertive experiences did not occur in traditional contexts or that introvertive experiences would disappear in modernity. However, the majority of the modern examples I researched are extrovertive mystical experiences, and the majority of traditional mystical experiences I found are introvertive. I do not make a similar hierarchical distinction between the two categories like Forman and Stace did. Nevertheless, it would be relevant to discover the reasons behind these supposed preliminary connections between traditional introvertive and modern extrovertive categories. With regard to mystical experiences, I will return to this issue in Chapter 4. I will also refer to this later in Chapter 3, in connection with the contextual elements of mysticism through public and performative characteristics.

Ergotropic vs. trophotropic mysticism

These two categories focus on whether different visionary and hallucinatory experiences can be considered mystical. The question is often discussed based on Roland Fischer's distinction between ergotropic and trophotropic states.[426] Fischer did not create a twofold differentiation but a scale of experiences where "[t]he former involves high levels of perceptual, emotional, and/or intellectual stimulation, while the latter involves low levels."[427] Ergotropic states often involve visions, hallucinations, and other (auditory) perceptions, while trophotropic states do not.

Forman adopted and further developed Roland Fischer's scale based on the distinction between extrovertive and introvertive mysticism.[428] He applied the idea of ergotropic states to

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[424] (Forman R. K., 1990, pp. 8, 22-24)
[425] (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, p. 22)
[426] "[…] one along the perception-hallucination continuum of increasing ergotropic arousal, which includes creative, psychotic, and ecstatic experiences; and another along the perception-meditation continuum of increasing trophotropic arousal, which encompasses the hypoaroused states of Zazen and Yoga samadhi." (Fischer, 1973, p. 59)
[427] (Komjathy, 2011, p. 857)
[428] (Forman R. K., 1990, pp. 5-7)

introvertive mysticism, and trophotropic states to extrovertive mysticism. The former signifies visions, hallucinations, and auditory experiences, common in introvertive mysticism. The latter stands for extrovertive, wakeful states. This is not only an application of a theory but a base for Forman to consider only the latter kind of mysticism. He considers wakeful or extrovertive experiences to be mystical. His distinction is much more articulate and well-grounded than Walter Stace's, yet it is still considered problematic.[429] Ninian Smart shares a similar connection but in a different manner. In his definition of mysticism, introvertive experiences are considered mystical, but these "are not described in terms of sense-experience or of mental images".[430]

The present work will favor neither extrovertive nor introvertive, nor ergotropic or trophotropic experiences. However, these distinctions raise two critical issues: the scholarly value judgment and the limits of the concept of the mystical experience. The former problem is connected to subjects that I elaborated on earlier in this work about the particularly sensitive position of the scholar in studying mysticism. Both Stace and Forman's categorizations involve value judgments based on the mystical traditions they know and value more. For Stace, it is primarily "Western," and for Forman, it is "Eastern" mysticism.

The second problem leads to a short but necessary detour from the subject. Both authors mentioned above decided on what counts as a (valuable) mystical experience. I do not argue against that scholarly endeavor, only the partial manner of doing it. It is important to attempt to define what is considered mystical and what is not, not necessarily because we can accurately decide it from the desk in the office or the laboratory, but because otherwise we will end up with a chaotic bunch of examples where either anything goes, or we do not even deal with the subject.

Anomalous experiences such as out of body experiences, near-death experiences, or paranormal abilities are sometimes associated with mystical experiences and raise similar questions of classification. There seems to be a general consensus of them not being mystical.[431] A more frequently debated question is whether drugs or alcohol-induced states are considered mystical.[432] James considers the drunken consciousness a fraction of the mystical mind. Alcohol can "stimulate mystical faculties of human nature, usually crushed to earth by the cold facts and dry criticisms of the sober hour".[433] As Ayahuasca, an entheogen that South American shamans traditionally use, has become increasingly popular, research on the subject has proliferated. Zaehner supervised, took mescaline, and explored his findings as part of secular mysticism.

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[429] "There have also been recent, problematic attempts to limit mystical experience to trophotropic experiences (Forman, 1990) and to categorize mystical experiences in a hierarchical ordering of states of consciousness (d'Aquili & Newberg, 1999)." (Komjathy, 2011, p. 856)
[430] "For the purposes of this article I shall treat mysticism as primarily consisting in an interior or introvertive quest, culminating in certain interior experiences which are not described in terms of sense-experience or of mental images, etc. But such an account needs supplementation in two directions: first, examples of people who typify the mystical life should be given, and second, mysticism should be distinguished from that which is not (on this usage) mysticism." (Smart, Interpretation and Mystical Experience, 1965, p. 75)
[431] (Komjathy, 2011, p. 859), (Forman R. K., Mysticism, Mind, Consciousness, 1999, pp. 4-5), (Winkelman, 2017)
[432] This distinction could be its own category: mediated and unmediated experiences.
[433] (James, The Varieties of Religious Experience A Study in Human Nature. Centenary edition, 2002, p. 300)

Categories in relation to traditional and modern mysticism

Categories are excellent auxiliary tools for understanding mysticism. They have the ability to illuminate what definitions refer to. They can clarify a wide variety of instances, which ultimately enables us to understand the complex phenomenon of mysticism better. However, categories only apply as auxiliary tools, and the scientific inquiry should not end with them. Stopping at pointing to a similar group of experiences and explaining them is a job half done. Once the different instances and their characteristics are pointed out, one should return to the initial definition and revise it if necessary. Therefore, this is exactly what I attempt to do in this work. First, in the final part of Chapter 3, I point out the possible differences between what I call traditional and modern mysticism. Second, I highlight these differences in Chapter 4 through two examples. Finally, in Chapter 5, I argue for the necessity of returning to and revising the definition of mysticism.

Traditional and modern mysticism

In this section, I will drawing a theoretical distinction between traditional and modern mysticism. I argue that there is a contextual difference behind the two categories which can be identified based on two reference points: the cultural and personal context. That is to say, the contextual characteristics of and differences between traditional mysticism and modern mysticism can be grasped through the focus on cultural and personal context. Therefore, from the perspective of cultural context, I argue that we can talk about traditional mysticism in the cases when the tradition of the mystic exclusively determines the first and third phases of mysticism: antecedents and aftermath. Traditional mysticism is primarily, but not exclusively, associated with the Middle Ages and the concept of the all-encompassing church civilization.[434] In contrast, modern mysticism presupposes plurality in schemes of explanation, which also prevails in the antecedents and aftermath.

As for the subject of mysticism, traditional mysticism is considered private here, primarily referring to the experience taking place in solitude. Moreover, it is considered individual, as it stresses the union between the individual and ultimate reality. Modern mysticism is characterized primarily as public, as it often takes place in or presupposes a social-communal setting, and, secondarily, as performative, as it is closely connected to a specific point in time and space.

In this characterization, I refer primarily to the contextual elements of mysticism, as I believe that this is where the relevant differences can be found. However, it is essential to talk about the situation of mystical experiences as they are central to the concept of mysticism *per se*. In the last part of this chapter, I argue that mystical experiences can be characterized as essentially similar, despite the contextual differences prevailing in the first and third elements of mysticism. I take a perennialist standpoint on mystical experiences and argue that even though contextual changes have drastically altered the form of mysticism, it has not entirely changed or disappeared. This statement is tested in the next chapter when I compare one typical example from each category.

The very naming of the categories carries many assumptions with it; therefore, I aim to briefly clarify them here. The terms 'traditional' and 'modern' are chosen intentionally to reflect some of the negative underlying assumptions of mysticism and religion in general. The authors I discussed above (especially Jones and Arjuna) did not use these terms[435] but implicitly employed a well-known and superficial dichotomy built upon it to strengthen their arguments. These assumptions are particularly striking when viewed in comparison. Traditional religiosity and mysticism are thought of as embedded in the cultural-religious norms and teachings, following well-established age long practices, and generally being permanent, unchanged, and true to their roots. At the same time, modern religiosity and mysticism are perceived as a rootless, incomprehensibly diverse, mutated version of the tradition which uses traditional

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[434] In the English translations of *Protestantism and progress* another form of the phrase is used too: church-directed civilization (Troeltsch & Montgomery, Protestantism and Progress: a Historical Study of the Relation of Protestantism to the Modern World, 1912, pp. 17-26). I will stick to church civilization, as it is more common.

[435] For example, Jones uses the terms 'classical mysticism' and 'superficial spirituality', while Arjuna labels contemporary phenomena as 'muddled'.

elements as it pleases. The present work aims to question the dichotomic understanding of religion, and particularly, of mysticism.

Culture

The majority of mysticism is embedded in a sociocultural context: the preparation for the mystical experience, which is often prescribed by tradition; the phrases and narratives that serve as a base for interpretation; and the community context in which its effects take place. Even though I stick to the essentialist understanding of mysticism as a phenomenon that entails that (pure) mystical experiences are not dependent on the context – the majority of what is visible in mysticism for the non-mystics and what is available for researchers in the study of mysticism is context based. This visible appearance of contextual elements leads some scholars to judge what mystical experiences are like in different eras and religions. Even though I disagree with such conclusions, based on the above mentioned philosophical differences between essentialism and contextualism, it is true that the contextual parts of mysticism influence how scholars treat mysticism in general, and whether they consider it a worthwhile subject for their area of study or not.

Culture affects not only mysticism internally (from the perspective of the mystic) but externally: the understanding and acceptance of mysticism might vary in different periods, even within the same religious tradition. So, it is not only the practices and the narratives which change over time, but what is expected of mysticism changes too, both from an insider (religious/theological) and an outsider (secular, philosophical) perspective. How do these understandings/institutions fit mysticism into their narrative? As a phenomenon that is, in its essence, radically subjective and often questions institutional boundaries.

In the first part of the comparison, I concentrate on the difference between the cultural landscape of modernity and the Middle Ages. As I mentioned earlier, this differentiation is one of the cultural bases of this categorization. It was highlighted before that a similar dichotomic confrontation of mysticism results in a vast and simplifying explanation. I wanted to point out that the theory or the philosophical analysis of mysticism is stuck at this simplistic differentiation. However, I argue that the differentiation itself has the potential to highlight significant contextual changes if it is applied with care. Moreover, it can shed light on the underlying arguments on why modern mysticism is viewed negatively.

Middle Ages, church-culture

In this part of my dissertation, I want to make the implicit theoretical distinction between classical and modern versions of mysticism clearly and concisely. Therefore, first, I will focus on the differences in culture, highlighting a type of mysticism that I will call traditional mysticism, and another one, which I will name modern mysticism from now on. This distinction from the perspective of culture can be understood well with the use of Ernst Troeltsch's concept of modernity and the Middle Ages. Therefore, I discuss the relevant elements of his differentiation regarding the historical and cultural differences between traditional and modern mysticism.

In this work, traditional mysticism is understood to be related primarily but not exclusively to the Middle Ages historically, and culturally to the so-called church civilization.

Restrictions apply to this differentiation as Troeltsch refers to 'Modern European and American Culture', and his primary point is to highlight the effects of Protestantism on modern culture.[436]

Troeltsch's approach is theoretical, and he aims to prove that every era can be understood in relation to the previous one, especially when it is over, from the perspective of the era that follows it.[437] Troeltsch argues that the point of history is to understand the present and the future. To do that, one must examine the previous era from which the present one originated. This will be understandable through the qualities of the two eras discussed here (church civilization and modernity), the characteristics of the two eras are in relation to one another. In his work, Troeltsch distinguishes between modernity and the so-called church civilization – the preceding era.

Church civilization is described as an all-encompassing point of understanding, which covers and intertwines with every aspect of life. On the one hand, it is centered around a core aspect of Christianity: the distinction and distance between human and divine. On the other hand, the focus is vastly on the divine/transcendent. Church civilization is also described as a belief in the absolute and direct divine revelation and the institution of the church – the organizational form of revelation. It is an authority-based culture with an ascetic view of life, which emphasizes concentration on the afterworld. It organized every part of life in its entirety, and there was no essential difference between religious and everyday life – they intertwine totally.

However, some cases of mystical experiences which were recorded in Western Christianity in the Middle Ages seem to question the idea of the all-encompassing church civilization. Many of the mystics had to face harsh criticism and inquisition from the church. They often feared being considered lunatics or heretics.[438] Through these cases, we get the picture that mysticism was not common and especially not accepted – not even in the church civilization of the Middle Ages. [439] According to Troeltsch, even these examples – even heresy – fits in with the explanatory scale of church civilization. The essence of church civilization is that it is all-encompassing. Every deviance and act of questioning borders[440] is still within the framework. There is no such aspect of life and no theoretical concept that this point of understanding does not cover – not even the experiences and explanations, which it pushes to its limits. By providing some sort of an explanation to these deviances, it strengthens its explanatory powers and authority even further than before.

I think that this idea is only applicable generally/globally if it is taken in a loose sense – as an all-encompassing, permeating, dominating authority present in every aspect of life. The

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[436] "[…] the conception of modern civilisation as developed in Europe and America." (Troeltsch & Montgomery, Protestantism and Progress: a Historical Study of the Relation of Protestantism to the Modern World, 1912, p. 9)

[437] Jones talks about modernity in opposition to the pre-modern era, similarly to Troeltsch.

[438] Therefore, even though many mystics were considered heretics in their own time, or at least had to be very careful in taking their position and articulating their experience, they stayed true to it while not giving an impression of attacking the current cultural and religious system. John of the Cross was imprisoned despite his education and position in the Discalced Carmelite Order.

[439] This fear of being called a lunatic and not sharing religious experiences is not solely a problem in this era but even today. Hay highlights it and also mentions that this is why it might be hard to research religious experiences. (Hay, 'The Biology of God': What is the Current Status of Hardy's Hypothesis?, 1994)

[440] I have touched upon the idea earlier of how border-crossing contributes to the functionality and strength of religion related to Geertz's and Tweed's work. Troeltsch's understanding of the church civilization depicts such a strong all-encompassing point of understanding that it could successfully incorporate attempts acts and theoretical attempts of border-crossing.

original idea is deeply rooted in, and refers to Christianity, particularly Protestantism. If the idea of church civilization were taken in its original entirety, it would only apply to the Middle Ages, with the above mentioned geographical restrictions. However, I consider this approach applicable to traditional mysticism outside of this era and geographical area, too – in the case when the contextual elements are in a similar sense dominantly permeated by the tradition. This means that traditional mysticism is not restricted to the Middle Ages in Europe, in my understanding. While the geographical restrictions are easily questionable, this is not necessarily true for its temporal aspects. As I will point out shortly, today the circumstances are less and less conducive for the sole dominance of religious-traditional effects over the contextual elements of mysticism. Therefore, at this point in my work, traditional mysticism remains connected to the Middle Ages.

Modernity and pluralism

The present section primarily focuses on two authors: on the one hand, Troeltsch's concept of modernity, which is presented in comparison with the church civilization, and, on the other hand, Peter L. Berger's theory of pluralism. The latter concept is necessarily comparative but understands modernity and religiosity in modernity in its own terms: the pluralism of secular and religious discourses shaping culture. For this reason, Berger's paradigm is an essential addition to Troeltsch's theory. Moreover, it was published more than 100 years after Troeltsch's work. While Troeltsch's concept is surprisingly accurate, Berger has witnessed and reflected on major processes which escalated in the 20th century. Let us take a look at Troeltsch's concept first.

According to Troeltsch, the essence of modern culture can be understood in opposition to church civilization. Modern culture offers autonomous cultural notions which rely on their direct cogency and immanent efficacy. It is no longer defined by an all-encompassing notion such as church civilization – it is independent of it. Here we might already suspect that the transcendent has a much smaller role. Adding to this notion is the fact that the authorities of modern culture, if there are any, are based on rationality and autonomy. Instead of a belief in the transcendent, the focus shifts towards personal convictions and/or beliefs. The all-encompassing cogency of the church civilization is replaced by individualism. Instead of a unified and organized structure, the new system splinters into numerous opinions and theoretical and practical goals, which are not in a hierarchical order. This means that the church does not have a stable foundation anymore.

Moreover, there is a change of direction in human life. Instead of living in an absolute separation of the immanent and transcendent and focusing on the latter, modernity directs people towards the immanent. The purpose of life is this-worldly in every sense: the goal is to make life as ideal as it can be. There is also a general sense of optimism: a belief in progress.[441] The ascetic lifestyle of the Middle Ages – refusing the this-worldly focus of the embodied existence – disappears. Lastly, instead of a simple life, people live in constant reflection.

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[441] Evolution based theories of religion/culture also view history and cultural changes as a linear process. These theories assume two general directions. Some of them perceive this process as progress, pointing to culture/religion reaching its most fulfilled version today. The majority of these theories assume a decline over the centuries: gradually losing all the original, pure ideas which were still present in primitive religions. Examples can be found in (Capps, 1995, pp. 53-104).

According to Troeltsch, the success of modernity as a new era comes from autonomously forming cultural notions with an immanent and direct effect. If there is any authority, it is based on rationality and autonomy. The emphasis is on personal beliefs. Therefore, the following ideas describe modernity the best: individualism, an immanent focus and constant reflection on life – as opposed to an intuitive form of life. With the shattering of the stability of religious authority, a faith in progress appears, and with it,, the authority of rationality and autonomy.

There is a similar differentiation in Richard H. Jones's book about mysticism. He makes a similar distinction between premodernity and modernity but suggests a straightforward process of gradually losing the transcendental aspect of the world during the latter as time progresses.[442] He links the idea of a sacred universe, belief in a comprehensive myth, and the embeddedness of the transcendental realm in the immanent, to premodernity. In opposition to that, modern society either completely forgot about the transcendent, or even if people have experiences of it, it is hard to take the content of mystical experiences seriously.[443] The transcendental dimension is not in the focus of scientific research on mysticism, not to mention mystics who also lost interest in anything transcendental, and look for only the immanent aspects and material bodily benefits the experiences may provide. "For many today the only ontic claim that mystical experiences can support is that only the natural mind and body is involved, not a transcendent mind or other reality."[444]

Moreover, Jones suggests that we are in a civilizational crisis, visible through spiritual decline and malaise (detachment from religious tradition is emphasized).[445] Based on Paul Tillich's thoughts, Jones thinks that a religious reawakening and regaining of the lost sacred dimension is needed but seems impossible in the near future.[446] It is interesting to note that loss of interest in mysticism is due more to this aspect of our culture than to science. According to Jones, mysticism is seen as counterproductive to our society and self-assertion. He describes the present as a time of uncertainty, an age of distraction, and the culture as materialistic, too affluent and comfortable, promoting self-assertion.

We can see that almost all the aspects of modernity, which Richard H. Jones deems as unfavorable and hindering from the perspective of religion, are essential in the definition of modernity – according to Ernst Troeltsch.[447] Both authors use the opposition but in a different way. For Troeltsch, there is no value difference or superiority between the eras, and their difference is essential in defining them and regarding the existence of modernity. For Jones, however, the loss of (contact with) tradition and focus on the transcendent, along with the characteristics of today's society, results in a civilizational crisis and a spiritual malaise of many. Troeltsch's idea shows that even if these eras are analyzed in opposition or relation to each other, it does not necessarily mean that one has to be superior to the other.

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[442] Sophie R. Arjana's argumentation is essentially similar to Jones's, but her argumentation is much more relevant and elaborate than Jones's as she connects these processes with orientalism and colonialization. Nevertheless, she assumes modern phenomena to be primarily negative versions of traditional ones.

[443] (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, pp. 338-339)

[444] (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, p. 337)

[445] (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, pp. 343-345)

[446] (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, pp. 345-346)

[447] (Troeltsch & Montgomery, Protestantism and Progress: a Historical Study of the Relation of Protestantism to the Modern World, 1912, pp. 9-42)

In arguments such as Jones's, rigid dichotomies between the traditional and the modern provide a robust and easily understandable starting point. However, this involves taking a decidedly negative and often superficial view of one of the phenomena. Therefore, I consider this approach problematic. I will elaborate on the implications of such conceptions in the last chapter. Now I turn towards a different approach.

Peter L. Berger's concept of modernity discusses the period in terms of its own characteristics, not in relation to another one. The notion is centered around pluralism, and it reflects on the wide variety of religious phenomena today, not only from the perspective of the "consumers", but also from that of the scholars. Instead of generally ignoring these or deeming them a decline because they are not what they were, we may ask some questions. The empirical evidence suggests that secularization can no longer be maintained in a general sense. Therefore Peter L. Berger introduces a new paradigm based on the implications of the phenomenon of pluralism, tackling the co-existence of different religions as well as that of religious and secular discourses.[448] Pluralism is able to reflect on the fluid construction and existence of new religious phenomena instead of focusing on a rigid dichotomy of the sacred/religious vs. the secular. Moreover, pluralism compels the individual to make choices between different religious and non-religious possibilities, which heavily contributes to the wide variety and vast number of experiences scholars might encounter. In Chapter 5 I elaborate further on this concept and refer specifically to its applicability regarding the rethinking of the concept of mysticism.

Subject

In the present section, I turn towards discussing the contextual features related to the subject of mysticism. Traditional mysticism is considered private and individual in this sense, while modern mysticism is understood as public and performative. The former characteristics refer to traditional mystical experiences happening primarily in solitude and concentrating on the union between the individual and the ultimate reality. The latter describes modern phenomena, primarily in public and communal settings, and bearing performative characteristics in the sense that time and space have particular relevance to them.

Naturally, research on traditional mysticism relies on reported cases that stood the test of time. This historical and religious selectivity does not provide the "full picture" of mysticism in the Antiquity and the Middle Ages, if one was possible at all. Few cases of mystical experiences were recorded in Western Christianity in the Middle Ages. Based on the few examples, one might get the idea that mysticism was not common in general. James's concept of the twice-born could support the rarity and exclusivity of the phenomenon in church civilization, while Hardy's theory[449] could support the universality and frequency of spiritual experiences in our time. However, a comparison of the frequency of mystical experiences in church civilization and modernity would be unsubstantiated and premature, primarily because of the difficulties or impossibility of adequate retrospective research about mysticism in the Middle Ages beyond the well-known classical examples.

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[448] (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, p. ix)
[449] "[…] he attempted to demonstrate that some awareness of the sacred is more or less universally reported in the human species." (Hay, 'The Biology of God': What is the Current Status of Hardy's Hypothesis?, 1994, p. 2)

Private, Individual

Both features of traditional mysticism are based on William James's definition of religion, which I touched upon in Chapter 2. Central to James's concept is the mystical experience, defined as "the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude" [450] Traditional mysticism – particularly the contextual features related to their subject and mystical experiences – is considered private. These experiences are viewed primarily as solitary, which entails that they happen primarily in solitude, but experiences occurring in communal settings are not excluded either. The crucial factor is that the communal settings and people surrounding the mystic do not play a direct role in shaping the mystical experience. Therefore, even if the experience happens in a communal setting, it is not considered essentially public or communal, similarly to modern mysticism.

The idea of solitary experiences touches upon some highly debatable problems.[451] Many of James's critics argue that he misplaced his emphasis by concentrating on the passively experienced mystical events of the few chosen people (the twice-born) and neglecting the religion of the masses and other types of religious experiences.[452] On this basis, he is also blamed for promoting "spiritual elitism".[453] Nicholas Lash criticizes the fact that James detaches the notion of the solitary experience from the community context. [454] Moreover, Lash's critical thoughts are focused instead on the contextual influence of the traditions behind mystical experiences. He argues that isolation does not make much sense from the perspective of the context. What he calls "nakedness"[455] in the experience is also known as emptiness or detachment. He does not claim that it does not exist but the idea that it is achievable only after rigorous practices. Even though it is not explicit, this standpoint can be interpreted in opposition to sudden and passively experienced events described by James. However, I do not think Lash's and James's concepts are mutually exclusive. Lash emphasizes the context, tradition, and preparation, while James focuses on the experience. The latter does not automatically entail that there was no contextual influence or preparation but focuses on how mystics perceive the experience as suddenly coming upon them. Any juxtaposition and separation of the personal and institutional dimensions of religion is a valid criticism. [456]

However, with James's emphasis on mystical experiences, all other types of religious experiences seem to fade away. Charles Taylor's criticism, which I discussed in Chapter 2,

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[450] (James, The Varieties of Religious Experience A Study in Human Nature. Centenary edition, 2002, pp. 29-30)
[451] Among many contributors, this issue is debated by Dorothee Soelle. (Soelle, 2001, pp. 157-175) She warns that mystical experiences are not private in the sense that they do not belong to or affect the community. "What interests me is how mystics in different ages related to their society and how they behaved in it […]. I seek to erase the distinction between a mystical internal and a political external. […] There is no experience of God that can be so privatized that it becomes and remains the property of one owner, the privilege of a person of leisure, the esoteric domain of the initiated." (Soelle, 2001, p. 3)
[452] Mentioned in Chapter 2, related to Charles Taylor's review.
[453] Croce provides counter-arguments against these critical points. (Croce, 2013)
[454] (Lash, 1988, pp. 52-60)
[455] (Lash, 1988, p. 59)
[456] In the Preface of *Religions, values, and peak-experiences*, Maslow reviewed his emphasis on the individual and mystical side of religion, neglecting the legalistic and organizational side of it, claiming that "[t]he profoundly and authentically religious person integrates these trends easily and automatically. The forms, rituals, ceremonials, and verbal formulae in which he was reared remain for him experientially rooted, symbolically meaningful, archetypal, unitive." (Maslow, 1994, p. Preface)

rightly points out that communal experiences should not be neglected either. Furthermore, Taylor points to a phenomenological and philosophical question of whether individual experiences are possible. He implicitly articulates that experiences depend on language and that language almost exclusively depends on the community, and we borrow these terms and understandings with it from the community.[457] Therefore, when I characterize traditional mysticism as private, I do not refer to contextual detachment but solitude. Does this mean that there were no communal experiences and other religious experiences in church civilization? Absolutely not.

Therefore, the differentiation in my characterization of mysticism is not based on whether the community, context, and tradition are influential in shaping mysticism. It is crucial in both cases. As I have mentioned before, in traditional mysticism, many elements of the journey were shared in books, guidelines, techniques, and whole traditional support systems were built. Moreover, these were only available if one was part of the religious community, often in the form of religious orders. Therefore, it would be ignorant to claim anything other than mysticism was highly dependent on the community. This seems radically different from the embeddedness in the tradition as far as mystical traditions go or on the bigger scale as far as the church civilization goes. However, I do not think there is a contradiction here – all of the preparation and the connectedness of the tradition was effective in the first and third phases of mysticism: antecedents and the aftermath. But in this work, traditional mysticism is understood as a solitary, inward journey based on these contextual elements.

Moreover, the subject of mysticism is also understood as individual, entailing, on the one hand, an individual mystical journey. In this sense, I perceive traditional mysticism emphasizing the individual both in the preparatory phase of mysticism and regarding the *unio mystica*. The former means that even though the traditional techniques and guidelines might play an essential role in shaping the mystical way, the individual takes a specific path; the latter refers to the union of the individual and the divine/ultimate reality.

On the other hand, the individuality of traditional mysticism is a specific quality. As Eugene Taylor points out, James argues that mysticism promotes idiosyncrasy: "They (*mystic states*) affirm the idiosyncratic life of the individual regardless of the evolutionary direction of the group."[458] This quality goes hand in hand with breaking down boundaries: questioning and challenging the existing religious and cultural system. Even though it seems to promote a self-centered lifestyle, Taylor also stresses that idiosyncrasy in mysticism leads to selflessness, cultural contributions, and a changed worldview. Ernst Troeltsch's threefold concept of church vs. sect vs. mysticism can also be connected here.[459] Ernst Troeltsch considers mysticism a religious dimension connected to the level of the individual, in addition to the church (the level of society) and sect (the level of the group), and highlights aspects relevant to mysticism. Mysticism is described as radical individualism, neutrality, or adversity towards religious institutions and history; it considers the dogmatic dimension of religion relative on an experiential basis. From the perspective of morality, it is not affiliated with a specific religious tradition; actions and decisions are based on emotional and spiritual impressions and

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[457] Experience after the linguistic turn (Bernstein, 2010, p. Chapter 6).
[458] (Taylor E. , Introduction: Section One. The Spiritual Roots of James's Varieties of Religious Experience, 2002, p. xxxiii)
[459] (Troeltsch & Wyon, The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches, 1931)

exhilaration. Therefore, one of the key characteristics of mysticism is radical individualism. Troeltsch does not talk about mysticism *per se* but creates a theoretical background that could explain the contemporary religious processes.[460] The latter understanding makes individuality an essential characteristic of mysticism and disregards much of its contextual embeddedness. In this dissertation I take a rather neutral standpoint in terms of traditional mysticism: I consider it individual in the sense that the individual mystical path is emphasized, and communal settings and people surrounding the mystic do not play a direct role in shaping the mystical experience.

It is important to briefly note the influence of William James's work, particularly *Varieties* on Troeltsch's threefold sociological concept of church-sect and mysticism. As Máté-Tóth points out, Troeltsch aimed to integrate the ideo-historical, institutional and personal dimensions. James's influence can be detected, particularly on the latter: the personal dimensions.[461]

Public, Performative

At first glance, one might think that the communal aspect of mysticism must be a religious and traditional setting like a monastery or a religious community. Ariel Glucklich discusses one modern example of that.[462] He researched a community of people who left behind their professions and urban life to live a communal and inherently mystical lifestyle in Neot Smadar, Israel. Their aim is to implement contemplative and mystical teachings of Hinduism and Buddhism in everyday life activities. Even though there are examples of that and traditional community settings in modernity, I argue that this is not the primary setting and characteristic of modern mysticism. In traditional mysticism, there are no modern elements, as religious pluralism in the Bergerian sense is in opposition with the all-encompassing nature of church civilization. However, in modernity, we might find traditional aspects which live on and are transforming.

Modern mysticism is considered public as opposed to traditional mysticism, which is primarily private. What does the word public entail here? This question is particularly pressing if the Jamesian description of mystical experiences is considered, as the solitary experiences of individual people. I argue that modern mysticism is primarily public, which entails its two main characteristics. On the one hand, it means that communal and group (essentially, public) settings are the usual circumstances of modern mysticism. On the other hand, it means that the here and now – the spatial and temporal context – closely connected to the community environment significantly influences the experience (performative).

Even though solitary experiences have been in focus until now, it is essential to mention that communal experiences are central to the study of religion. In this section, I will only refer to two related concepts to highlight some of these approaches. First, I will discuss the concept of collective effervescence developed by Emile Durkheim, since, in my opinion, this idea is one of the cornerstones of the theoretical explanation of modern mysticism. Second, I will focus

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[460] McGuire in M-TA – 145.

[461] „Troeltsch, amint látni fogjuk, integrálni próbálta az eszmetörténeti, intézményes és személyes dimenziót, utóbbi jelentőségét elsősorban James Varieties-e révén belátva." "Troeltsch, as we will see, attempted to integrate the intellectual historical, institutional, and personal dimensions, realizing the significance of the latter primarily as influenced by James's *Varieties*." (Máté-Tóth, A misztika szociológiája: Ernst Troeltsch harmadik típusa, 2008, p. 144)

[462] (Glucklich, 2017)

on two concepts of Victor Turner's, liminality and *communitas*, which shed light on the essential elements of Durkheim's concept from the perspective of ritual theory.

In *Elementary forms of the religious life*, Émile Durkheim introduced the concept of collective effervescence. To understand this idea better, it is crucial to note that Durkheim's concept of religion recognizes the rational, dogmatic, and theoretical aspects of religion but stresses the importance its emotional aspect. [463] He argues that religion, and more specifically group experiences, are the foundation of community.[464] Furthermore, the heat refreshes and redefines the individual and the community from time to time as individuals get together to perform dances, songs, or orgiastic plays in unison.

Detached from the work of everyday life, from social hierarchy and rules, in a state of collective effervescence, one leaves the profane behind and temporarily enters the sacred world.[465] Not only are collective taboos, rules, and barriers dissolved, but individual behaviors also become delirious. The group and individual dimensions interweave and enhance each other. In the group fervor, free of boundaries, the experience of group unity dominates. And at the individual level, experiencing the sacred – the individual is charged by it, leaving behind their everyday self[466], and redefining themselves on that basis. Therefore, from a communal perspective, there is a strengthening of group cohesion and a kind of rebirth from an individual perspective.

As an example, Durkheim refers to an Australian rite, the corroboree. Later in his work, Durkheim applies the idea of collective effervescence on social processes and argues that similar heat and changes also occur in society. He concentrates his examples in Europe and mentions the Renaissance, Reformation, and the French Revolution.[467]

Turner's threefold description of the ritual process[468] is partially based on his findings regarding Ndembu rituals. Parts of this concept, particularly the notion of liminality and *communitas* hold characteristics similar to Durkheim's concept. However, one of the

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[463] For both James and Durkheim, experience is primary, and then, building on that, the process of institutionalization takes place. For James, this is an individual experience out of which teachings and communities of religion evolve; for Durkheim, the experience is communal. For Durkheim the collective effervescence is not only the base of religious institutionalization but also the base of the societal structure. (Durkheim & Cosman, 2008, pp. 158-166)

[464] The energy/power of the communal union is later objectified. One example of that is the totem. (Durkheim & Cosman, 2008, p. 174)

[465] Emile Durkheim: Karen E. Fields (trans.) 1995: *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. The Free Press, New York. "Book 2/The Elementary Beliefs": "Origins of These Beliefs: Origin of the Idea of the Totemic Principle or Mana". (207-242)

[466] "It is not difficult to imagine that a man in such a state of exaltation no longer knows himself. Feeling possessed and led by some external power that makes him think and act differently from normal times, he naturally feels he is no longer himself. He seems to have become a new being: the decorations he dons and the masks he uses to cover his face give material form to this internal transformation even more than they induce it. And as all his companions feel transfigured in the same way at the same moment, and translate their feeling through their shouts, gestures, and posture, it is as though he really were transported into a special world entirely different from the ordinary, a setting populated by exceptionally intense forces that invade and transform him." (Durkheim & Cosman, 2008, pp. 164-165)

[467] "A day will come when our societies will once again experience times of creative effervescence and new ideas will surge up, new formulas will arise that will serve to guide humanity for a time. And having lived during these times, men will spontaneously experience the need to revive them through thought now and then, that is, to sustain the memory of them by means of festivals that regularly recreate their fruits. We have already seen how the French Revolution instituted a whole cycle of festivals to preserve the principles that inspired it in a state of perpetual youth." (Durkheim & Cosman, 2008, p. 323)

[468] (Turner V. , 1977)

differences is that the ritual process begins with separation from the community. It involves a person or group detaching from a previously fixed point in the social structure through symbolic behaviors. This process serves as a base for the period of liminality as it prevents these people from fulfilling the duties of their social position and entering a state where the strict boundaries that exist in everyday life are suspended.

The separation is followed by a state of liminality, during which the rite's subject enters an unstructured state that resembles neither the previous nor the coming one. It can be described as chaotic from an outsider's perspective, compared to everyday circumstances. In the liminal state, differences in rank and status disappear, get reversed, or become homogenized.[469] Liminal persons are temporary entities: all the features that distinguish categories and groups are suspended in their case. The lack of differentiation observed in the liminal period is a prerequisite for establishing a new status. They then acquire the knowledge, and, through physical hardship and humiliation, the experiences that are a prerequisite for their reintegration into the community. In the third stage, after the changes, the reunion with the community takes place: *communitas*.

Both of these concepts highlight a homogenous, extraordinary, and sacred state that transforms and revitalizes the individual's life and the whole community. Mary Douglas and Charles Taylor also recognized the transformative aspect of ritual disorder and ecstatic experiences. Douglas wrote about the connection between power and danger.[470] Taylor pointed out that experiences happening in communities are more than everyone's experiences added together. Moreover, there is a shared value and experience in such cases.[471] Even though the ritual process involves a separation, and the focus is on the people who are part of the ritual act, the community also plays an essential role in Turner's concept.[472] The public characteristic of modern mysticism I present here seems to go against the individual-centered idea of modern societies. How does this fit with the concept of modern mysticism, then?

I argue that people in modern societies seek these experiences precisely to experience the transformative effect and the power of communal unity, and, possibly, to get close to the sacred. What is the transformative power that communal gatherings seem to possess? According to Durkheim, the community context magnifies, reinforces, and harmonizes the experiences and reactions of individuals.[473]

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[469] A homogenization of rank and status distinctions can be observed in the *isoma* rite. (Turner V. , 1977, pp. 44-93)

[470] "Energy coming from disorder and ecstatic experiences: Douglas saw a link between power and danger. Humans seek to create order by their classification systems, but they do not totally reject disorder because they recognize the potential for change that it contains. The potency of disorder is recognized in ritual activity. Energy to command spirits, special powers to heal, to change weather conditions, comes from those who, for a time, leave rational control behind as they enter ecstatic states generated by ritually induced trances and frenzies." (Kessler, 2012, p. 157)

[471] One example he gives is the Catholic Church as a sacramental communion. (Taylor C. , Varieties of religion today: William James revisited, 2002, pp. 24-25)

[472] The reason behind this lies possibly in the examples of tribal life he studied. In these cases, the individual cannot be assumed or understood without the community.

[473] "The very fact of assembling is an exceptionally powerful stimulant. Once the individuals are assembled, their proximity generates a kind of electricity that quickly transports them to an extraordinary degree of exaltation. Every emotion expressed is retained without resistance in all those minds so open to external impressions, each one echoing the others. The initial impulse thus becomes amplified as it reverberates, like an avalanche gathering force as it goes. And as passions so strong and uncontrolled are bound to seek outward expression, there are violent gestures, shouts, even howls, deafening noises of all sorts from all sides that intensify even more the state they

Therefore, modern mysticism is considered public based on Durkheim's idea of collective effervescence. This entails that the collective aspect is not just one element of mysticism: it is not only a gathering of individuals who have some type of religious experience. The communal and collective settings are essential in modern mysticism: they play an important role in shaping mysticism and the individual's experience.

It is interesting to note that while mysticism has been individualistic in church civilization, alongside the sustaining power of organized community and tradition, mysticism in individualistic modern societies seems to be centered around experiences of unity especially in group settings. Interesting, but not surprising, especially if mysticism is seen as a deconstructor or questioner of the current system. Later in this dissertation, I clarify and nuance this picture, pointing to the fact that unity seems to be the key element in modern mysticism, not community/group settings. I argue that these settings provide an effective and easily accessible form of unity and an essential and much-needed human connection. Many examples show unity with nature or natural elements which are common and transformatively powerful. However, both concepts are examples of surrender and dissolution in unity.

Even though the concept of performance appeared in the 1960s, its supposed religious roots date back to the Middle Ages.[474] Gábor Klaniczay traces it back to the notion of suffering[475] and the appearance of theatrical representation of religiosity[476]. Both of these notions were articulated and became popular for the first time in the acts of Saint Francis. His flabbergasting and scenic acts were all experiences and conveyances of religious teachings. Some of them were enlightening, like the staging and manger before Christmas; others were meant to show suffering as a solitary act, like dressing in the clothes of a beggar. Other scholars of religion use the notion of performance to understand religious phenomena better. Barry Stephenson argues that ritual and performance theory can highlight aspects of koans within Zen tradition that textual and psychological methods were unable to. [477] Koans are more than riddles that can be thoroughly studied by literature and psychology. Koans are not only read and (hopefully) understood but practiced, embodied, and enacted.[478]

The connection between performance and ritual is clear from the works of Richard Schechner.[479] He connects Victor Turner's ideas about social drama and rites with Erving Goffman's ideas of performance; based on this, he claims that performances in the broad sense were always common in humanity. "[P]eople were always involved in role-playing, in constructing and staging their multiple identities."[480] The two concepts are not only connected

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express. Probably because a collective feeling cannot be expressed collectively unless a certain order is observed that permits the group's harmonious movements, these gestures and cries are inclined to be rhythmic and regulated, and become chants and dances." (Durkheim & Cosman, 2008, pp. 162-163)

[474] (Klaniczay, Elgyötört test és megtépett ruha: Két kultúrtörténeti adalék a performance gyökereihez, 1995)

[475] Particularly its connection to justice delivered in the afterlife, ordeals, and inquisition; the suffering of martyrs; and asceticism. The concept of *Imitatio Christi* also belongs here, which is explored from a performative perspective in (Nju, 2011)

[476] He mentions the Alleluja movement from 1233 and the Flagellants.

[477] (Stephenson, 2005)

[478] (Stephenson, 2005, p. 481)

[479] One of the key figures and the creator of performance theory, who was also a theater director. In this work, his concept of performance will be explored.

[480] (Schechner, 2004, p. x)

in the theatrical terminology (drama) but because "participants (of rites) not only do things, they show themselves and others what they are doing or have done; actions take on a reflexive and performed-for-an-audience aspect."[481] Similarly to performances, rituals entail displaying what is done to be meaningful and effective. In performance, the viewer plays an essential role in creating – or recreating the experience in themselves.[482]

The most important characteristics of performance that serve as a basis for calling modern mysticism performative are its temporal and spatial determinedness and its communal and relational aspect. The former entails an experience that is one-time, irreproducible, and irrevocable. This does not mean that traditional mysticism and mystical experiences were reproducible, but the fact that the spatial and temporal context of modern mysticism (the here and now) plays an essential role in it. The exact circumstances with the same people or scenery at the exact same time shape modern forms of mysticism. The latter means that all of this is closely connected to the community/surroundings. The group does not only serve as a fellow performer and experiencer but as an audience at the same time.

Some other aspects of performance might also be relevant to modern mysticism. Border crossing is essential in performance: both from the perspective of the act and the location. It aims to transcend conventions connected to the theater by destroying its methods and means completely.[483] Exploring these characteristics further, in the future, would be beneficial.

Further considerations and common characteristics

This approach does not entail a substantial distinction between two cultural forms in the sense that one would replace or exclude the other. It is important to note that, in the present dissertation, church civilization is not applied restrictively to the Middle Ages. Unlike the all-encompassing nature of this cultural form, the qualities listed above might also appear in societies after the Middle Ages. This means that theoretically, traditional mysticism might also appear in modernity.[484] I do not consider the statement valid when reversed: modern mysticism cannot appear in the Middle Ages. Not only because of the apparent chronology but also because the characteristics of modern mysticism, especially its pluralistic quality, was not present. Once again, this statement does not claim that multiple religions did not exist or coexist in medieval times, only that church civilization was all-encompassing, and it incorporated questioning borders and crossing insider and outsider influences[485], thereby strengthening its authority and explanatory power. A more relevant question to explore would be how effective and all-encompassing a tradition can be in modernity which is primarily characterized as pluralistic.[486]

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[481] (Schechner, 2004, p. 159)
[482] (Schechner, 2004, pp. 193-194)
[483] (Klaniczay, Elgyötört test és megtépett ruha: Két kultúrtörténeti adalék a performance gyökereihez, 1995)
[484] As Linda Woodhead points out: "Equally, the crude imposition of these latter categories may obscure the fact that in many parts of the world religion forms an integral part of a total culture and society—so much so that it is not even distinguishable as a separate sphere." (Woodhead, 2002, p. 3)
[485] Examples of the former include movements of monastic renewal and Meister Eckhart's debated mystical claims; for the latter, the Iberian Peninsula was inhabited by Christian, Muslim and Jewish people in the Middle Ages.
[486] I will return to this in Chapter 5, where I will go into further details about pluralism.

Even though I am not talking strictly about modernity but mysticism being modern, it is important to note some limitations regarding this term. First, the differences between modernity and modernism.[487] Second, as Linda Woodhead cautions, beyond a Europe and Christianity-centered idea of modernity starting from the French Revolution and the emergence of nation states, modernity shows a much more diverse picture. [488] When focusing on religions and cultural differences, it is quite evident that the concept of modernity is not universal, just like there is no clear universal starting point or uniform progression of modernity.[489] She proposes a more nuanced notion of modernity, reflecting on what modernity means for a particular religion or culture, and how it happened. This approach of modernity takes specific "profound changes or 'revolutions'" as a base: the dominance of the nation state, colonialism and postcolonialism, cultural and economic rationalization, universalism and difference, a turn to the self and turn to life, secularization and sacralization.[490] I believe that Troeltsch and Berger's concepts meet the legitimate expectations of theories of modernity, even in the light of Woodhead's reflections. Troeltsch and Berger define overarching yet critical characteristics of modernity, which are applicable to the complex political, social and especially religious processes of modernity. Moreover, as I will point out in Chapter 5, Berger's theory of religious pluralism provides a nuanced and comprehensive theoretical basis for understanding religion in modernity. This theory is able to give a simple yet stable foundation to reflect on the different cultural and religious realities.

Another notable issue in the narratives of modern mysticism is rigid dichotomies between sacred tradition followed by secular modernity. Oftentimes, the implicit base for these dichotomies is connected to the paradigm of secularization. Since I will go into detail about these issues in the last chapter, here I mention them only briefly. As Casanova summarizes the idea: "[m]odern traits, moreover, are not developed necessarily in contradistinction to or even at the expense of tradition, but rather through the transformation and the pragmatic adjustment of tradition."[491] The paradigm of secularization applied to mysticism is particularly visible in the works of Jones and, to some extent, in Arjana's book. Jones's concept of mysticism dying and the ideas he shares of it with Arjana becoming superficial are based on the rigid traditional vs. modern dichotomy. Compared to traditional mysticism, modern mysticism is presented as lacking essential traditional elements and not being authentic enough to consider it seriously. The lack of similarity or traditional characteristics in modern phenomena leads them to either degrade or altogether reject their scientific study. Has modern mysticism, in fact, lost every "mystical characteristic" compared to traditional mysticism, as these authors suggest? Based on this idea mentioned above, the idea of rigid dichotomy and the wording of this question are highly problematic. What often lies behind it is the scientific "worth" of modern phenomena.

In what follows, I argue that traditional and modern mysticism are starkly different in context yet similar in their essence and, therefore, worth studying. When I say that mystical experiences have stayed the same, I do not blatantly claim to have an idea of the true nature of

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[487] (Benavides, 1998) and (Taylor M. C., 1998)

[488] "The Western experience of modernity and modernization cannot serve as the definitive model of 'evolution' and 'development' which is then imposed on all cultures and societies." (Woodhead, 2002, p. 5)

[489] (Woodhead, 2002, p. 4)

[490] (Woodhead, 2002, pp. 5-14)

[491] (Casanova, 2006, p. 13)

mystical experiences, either in terms of contemporary or historical examples. Furthermore, I do not argue that a religious experience or contemporary phenomenon is only worth studying if it is called mystical. However, I argue that it is not something that scholars studying mysticism should dub as watered down, muddled, or superficial and throw out as a common spiritual phenomenon not worth scientific inquiry.

What is it then that connects traditional and modern mysticism so one can say they are both forms or types of mysticism? What is the essential similarity in the two phenomena? I argue that mystical experiences are similar, which can be seen when their characteristics are compared. In support of this conclusion, in the next chapter I provide a detailed analysis and comparison of two representative examples: the mysticism of John of the Cross and of Thomas Merton. John of the Cross's mysticism is considered a typical example of traditional mysticism. However, the study of modern mysticism is problematic not only because of the lack of theoretical coverage and examples but also because the performative nature of the experience makes it difficult to present the phenomenon. The mysticism of Thomas Merton, however, offers an insight into the transition between modern and traditional mysticism, highlighting the latter's characteristics. It is, therefore, helpful in outlining some crucial contrasts properly, and in preparing further studies to be devoted to its clarification.

Chapter 4. Comparison

Introduction

The following comparison considers two mystics. The mysticism of John of the Cross is discussed here as a typical example of traditional mysticism. From a theological perspective, the traditionality of the mysticism of the Mystical Doctor is unquestioned. Here, his works are considered traditional based on the characteristics outlined by Ernst Troeltsch: primarily because of its embeddedness in the all-encompassing church civilization as well as its individual and private characteristics. As I will demonstrate it below, the contextual elements reflect this embeddedness.

Thomas Merton's figure and work, and especially his autobiography, *The seven storey mountain*, was and is still popular not only among religious audiences but outside of them as well, among those who seek inspiration on spiritual paths. Even though his mystical experience in Louisville is quite well-known, he is not widely considered a mystic. He is often associated with contemplation rather than mysticism.[492] Merton's mysticism is considered a primary example of modern mysticism, not because of his popularity but because of the representation of modern elements (public, performative, and representing pluralism). In Merton's case they occurred mostly related to a traditional setting. Therefore, they showcase the transition and highlights the characteristics of modern mysticism. I argue that an example that shows the transition can highlight the differentiation between traditional and modern mysticism well. Moreover, as I point out below, a typical example of modern mysticism cannot be pinpointed in a similar way as for traditional mysticism.

In this chapter, I focus on the comparative analysis of John of the Cross's and Thomas Merton's mysticism. This analysis is based on the threefold notion of mysticism: antecedents, mystical experience, and the aftermath. Therefore, in this chapter, first, I start with the antecedents, which highlight the preparation for the mystical experience and the contextual background of the mystic. By contextual background, I mean the personal, historical, and religious context of the mystics and their experiences.

Second, I highlight the key phrases of the descriptions of mystical experiences. It is already visible that I do not discuss and compare them based on contextual characteristics, and I aim to examine their supposed similarity. The idea of this similarity is derived from the concept of their overarching primary anthropological feature for which the theoretical background was laid down in Chapter 2. Therefore, I do not compare their contextual differences, but I closely observe the textual sources, highlighting their key phrases. After that, similar expressions will be grouped to see if there are any overarching characteristics to examine.

Third, I discuss the aftermath of the mystical experience: its interpretation and effects both on the person and the community; moreover, I refer to actions possibly inspired by mystical experiences.

Once again, the first and third part of the comparison deals with the contextual elements of mysticism, where the previously mentioned characteristics of traditional and modern

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[492] As McCaslin points out, this – to some extent – is based on his own narrative. Even though he dedicated much attention to mysticism, in his wording, he focused more on contemplation to avoid negative connotations of the term mystic(al). (McCaslin, 2012, p. 26)

mysticism come into play. Therefore, I will simultaneously involve these characteristics in the comparison when presenting these passages. In the case of John of the Cross's mysticism, I aim to point out the private and individual characteristics and elements of church civilization. In Merton's case, plurality and the public and performative characteristics will be examined.

As I mentioned in the Introduction (Chapter 1), the analysis presented in this work focuses on comparing traditional and modern phenomena and not one particular mystical tradition's historical development from its traditional to its modern forms. Seemingly, the choice of John of the Cross and Thomas Merton as examples suggests the opposite and is strengthened by the notion that Thomas Merton studied and wrote about John of the Cross's mysticism.[493] Their relationship could be further explored through the developments of Christian mysticism, in particular through a close analysis of Edith Stein's interpretations of John of the Cross's works.[494] While the choice of authors recalls the reflection on this important feature, it is not central to this dissertation and therefore remains to be the topic of future research. For now, the focus remains on these two typical examples, through which the characteristics of modern and traditional mysticism will be examined.

Textual resources

The two mystics' personal, religious, and historical contexts are discussed based on primary and secondary sources. John of the Cross's context is examined in light of works primarily by Kieran Kavanaugh and Bernard McGinn. In the case of Merton, his autobiography as well as his correspondence provide primary resources, and William Harmless' and Susan McCaslin's works are used as secondary resources.

Finding key figures of modern mysticism is a complex problem, partly, simply because of the relatively short time modernity has been around. Church civilization did not suddenly end with the "historical end date(s) of the medieval age" (1492/1517). As John of the Cross's work showcases, it still prevailed decades and perhaps centuries later. Similarly, the flourishing of modern mysticism did not start along with the first signs of modernity. I argue that globalization, pluralism in the cultural and religious landscape, and the swift flow of information play a significant part in it. Therefore, due to the relatively short time these have existed, the recognition and highlighting of key figures of modern mysticism have not happened yet. Traditional mysticism called for a recognition and highlighting of key figures with its private and individual characteristics.

Moreover, the cultural setting of traditional mysticism allowed and encouraged highlighting individual examples to strengthen the tradition and provide an example to follow. The characteristics of modern mysticism, especially its public and performative nature, might not allow such a focus at all. It is firmly based on an ephemeral environment of the present time

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[493] (Merton, The Ascent to Truth, 1979)

[494] Firstly, this research should primarily focus on Edith Stein's book based on John of the Cross's mysticism (Stein & Koeppel, 2002). Secondly, it should highlight the mystical influences of Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross in Stein's thinking and philosophy. (Jani, A misztika útja Edith Stein gondolkodásában: Avilai Szent Teréz hatása, 2023), (Payne, 1999) Thirdly, it should touch upon more complex notions related to Stein's work: the ontological roots of phenomenology and the problem of empathy. (Jani, 2022) (Stein & Waltraut, On the problem of empathy, 1989)

and place, where the focus is not on a singled-out individual but on the community. I do not mean that the mystical experience is communal in itself but that community settings (or, in other words, its public and performative characteristics) influence it to a great degree. Therefore, Merton's and others' transitionary examples between modern and traditional mysticism might be the only way to highlight the characteristics of modern mysticism, looking only at a single example. Nonetheless, in further research, it would be worth returning to modern mysticism to examine its characteristics based on a more extensive database and contemporary examples.[495]

The description of Thomas Merton's four mystical experiences will be analyzed in this chapter based on the distinction of Susan McCaslin. She points out that Merton's life was full of similar religious experiences[496] but focuses on four major mystical experiences.

> "These experiences, to be discussed in turn, are: his revelations in Rome at the age of eighteen (1933); the illumination in Cuba (1940); the epiphany at Fourth and Walnut in Louisville, Kentucky (1958); and his final unitive awakening at Polonnaruwa in Sri Lanka (1968)."[497]

The general description of the events is often longer than the actual passages describing the mystical experience. Therefore, I want to specify which parts I am considering. His first mystical experience in Rome is discussed in the *Seven storey mountain*.[498] The section starting with 'I was in my room' and ending with 'as though he were a sort of intermediary' will be examined.[499] The description of the Cuban mystical experience is also found in Merton's autobiography[500], starting with '[t]hen, as sudden as the shout…' and ending with 'I have never forgotten".[501] The Louisville mystical experience was published in *Conjectures of a guilty bystander*, here I am not taking a single contiguous section but several smaller parts. The first one starts with: "In Louisville, at the corner" and ends with "a separate holy existence is a dream".[502] The second follows with "This sense of liberation" until "shining like the sun".[503] The last one starts with "I am one with them…" and ends with "But the gate of heaven is everywhere".[504] His last mystical experience was posthumously published in his *Asian journal*.[505] The section discussing his experience starts with "Looking at these figures…" and ends with "It is we, Asians included, who need to discover it.".[506]

In Merton's case, it is relatively easy to find parts of the texts which talk about mystical experiences. Even though only the Louisville experience is well-known, secondary literature and other texts by Merton point to the significance of the other ones. The exact sections of the texts describing mystical experiences are also outstanding even without the aid of McCaslin's

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[495] (n.a., Alister Hardy RERC Archive Database)
[496] "Timeless moments in nature, archetypal dreams, locutions, epiphanies, and hints about profound imageless states reached in contemplative prayer punctuate Merton's journals and published writings." (McCaslin, 2012, p. 24)
[497] (McCaslin, 2012, p. 23)
[498] (Merton, The Seven Storey Mountain, 1999, pp. 137-139)
[499] (Merton, The Seven Storey Mountain, 1999, pp. 137-139)
[500] (Merton, The Seven Storey Mountain, 1999, pp. 320-322)
[501] (Merton, The Seven Storey Mountain, 1999, pp. 320-321)
[502] (Merton, Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander, 1989, p. 156)
[503] (Merton, Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander, 1989, p. 157)
[504] (Merton, Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander, 1989, p. 158)
[505] (Merton, Burton, Brother Hart, & Laughlin, 1974, pp. 231-236)
[506] (Merton, Burton, Brother Hart, & Laughlin, 1974, pp. 233-236)

paper. Merton's style of writing makes it easy to point them out. He talks of them as though they are happening at the moment, or he remembers them as vividly as they were at the time. The effects and significance of the experience in his life make separating them from everyday experiences easy. All of them are first person accounts that describe not only the experience itself but an explanation of the context and the significance of the experience.

Moreover, the fact that each of them happened in a significant place and time, and these circumstances are clearly marked, helps finding these paragraphs. Furthermore, the interpretations of the experiences shine through the contextual details in the text. Merton tends to use shorter sentences at the beginning and typical words such as 'suddenly' and 'overwhelming'. Even though the ineffability of the experiences is limiting, he uses several terms or metaphors in an attempt to give accurate accounts. Overall, Merton's mystical language shines through with simplicity and clarity, charged with the effects and memories of the experience, oftentimes giving the impression of in-person conversation.

Locating a similar interpretation is difficult, if not impossible, in the case of John of the Cross. Undoubtedly, he is one of the most significant figures of Christian mysticism,[507] (he was called *Doctor Místico)* and Spanish poetry.[508] Along with many other authors, both McGinn and Kavanaugh talk about his works overflowing[509] with mysticism. Kavanaugh even mentions that he frequently received 'special graces' and lost his awareness of the surroundings in contemplation during masses.[510] His imprisonment in Toledo is also considered a deprived but mystically rich state. "Now more than ever he could listen to nature through his senses; the flowers, the whistling breezes, the night, the dawn, the rushing streams, all spoke to him. God was present everywhere."[511] He wrote or finished some of the poems (*Spiritual canticle, The fountain*) after having a kind jailer who gave him a pen and paper.[512]

However, neither of these prestigious and excellent secondary sources talk explicitly about John of the Cross's experiences and about which texts showcase them, implying only that they happened (several times) and that they profoundly influenced and infused his works.[513]

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[507] "John of the Cross blazes as a star of the first magnitude in the constellation of Christian mysticism." (McGinn, Mysticism in the Golden Age of Spain. 1500- 1650, 2017, p. 230)

[508] "As a poet, first of all, John presented the rich content of his mystical experience in lyric poetry, and by this has contributed a sublime treasure to Spanish literature." (Kavanaugh, General Introduction, 1991, p. 33)

[509] John of the Cross's "poetry is more than a simple overflow of mystical experience it is an artistic creation of the highest craftsmanship as well." (Kavanaugh, Introduction to the Poetry, 1991, p. 41)

[510] "His experience of God was always rooted in the life of the Church, nourished by the sacraments and the liturgy. Witnesses of his life spoke of the devotion with which he celebrated Mass. A center of his contemplation, Mass often proved to be an occasion for special graces. During the celebration, he could become so lost in God that he had no consciousness of his surroundings." (Kavanaugh, General Introduction, 1991, p. 27)

[511] (Kavanaugh, General Introduction, 1991, p. 20). Here Kavanaugh also mentions vaguely the following: "These verses suggest that in that cramped prison, stripped of all earthly comfort, he was touched with some rays of divine light. The cramped conditions faded, the friar's awareness expanded. 'My beloved, the mountains.' Here too, in the dark emptiness, a spiritual synthesis began to flower. 'Faith and love will lead you along a path unknown to you, to the place where God is hidden.' Everything else gone, no one could divest him of these, and they gave him God." (Kavanaugh, General Introduction, 1991, pp. 18-19)

[512] "..[…] he wrote in a letter: 'After the whale swallowed me up and vomited me out. […]' From the darkness of the whale he came into the clarity and beauty of the Andalusian landscape. Here in solitude his career as a poet was fixed. As far as we know, during this grand period he completed the corpus of his poetry, except for the last stanzas of Cántico espiritual, which he finished in Baeza and revised later in Granada, and ¡Oh Llama de amor viva!, also written in Granada." (John & Barnstone, The Poems of St. John of the Cross, 1972, p. Introduction)

[513] Barnstone's interpretation of this problem is that John of the Cross is not called a mystical writer because mystical tendencies or implications can be found in his works, but because they were inspired by mystical

Other than some implicit suggestions of intimacy with God,[514] special graces, and being touched by divine light and composing poetry during the imprisonment,[515] they do not speak about it. They imply that the texts are to be considered mystical without referencing their mystical sources.

These remarks do not question whether John of the Cross was a mystic or his experiences mystical. I simply aim to point out that some of the most well-known translations of and secondary literature discussing his work are ambiguous in an essential question without any clear explanation for the silence. In light of the comparison, the following questions arise: when, where, and, most importantly, how did his mystical experiences happen, and why aren't they noted? This gap in the secondary literature cannot be explained away with the characteristics of the era, place, or the religious order. John of the Cross's experience shared with Teresa of Avila was recorded, and Kavanaugh even mentions that it happened in May 1572 in Avila during their conversation on Trinity Sunday.[516] The reason for this must be more than the unusual sight of two levitating people. Teresa reportedly had several similar ecstatic experiences, and her experiences were quite accurately recorded. Even though she had problems with her confessors misunderstanding her mystical experiences, and she constantly made excuses and explained herself in her writings, she was the one who was asked to record her experiences. Detailed descriptions can be found in both her autobiography and *The interior castle*.[517] Moreover, even though Kavanaugh writes about John of the Cross, he mentions one of Teresa's experiences with an accuracy we do not see in John's case.[518] He also mentions that John of the Cross was involved in the process of publishing Teresa's works after her death.[519]

Although Teresa's situation differed from John of the Cross's, she was overall in a much more stable and influential position despite her difficulties. After Teresa's term as a prioress in the monastery of the Incarnation in Avila, John of the Cross was eventually persecuted and imprisoned.[520] She tried to intervene and pleaded for mercy from the king.

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knowledge. "The point I wish to make clear is that the appellation mystical poet–Doctor Místico as he was called– is correct in that San Juan was himself a mystic and the origin of his poems lies in the mystical experience." (John & Barnstone, The Poems of St. John of the Cross, 1972, p. Introduction)

[514] (Kavanaugh, General Introduction, 1991, p. 26)

[515] "In the midst of this deprivation, Fray John was seeking relief by composing poetry in his mind, leaving to posterity some of the greatest lyric stanzas in Spanish literature – among them a major portion of The Spiritual Canticle. These verses suggest that in that cramped prison, stripped of all earthly comfort, he was touched with some rays of divine light." (Kavanaugh, General Introduction, 1991, pp. 18-19)

[516] "Toward the end of May 1572, John of the Cross arrived in Avila and entered the feminine religious world, a world that was to become his special field of spiritual ministry. This ministry included guiding Teresa herself. From her he received as much as he gave in those years of profound and open conversation, a conversation that once on Trinity Sunday so soared that the two not only went into ecstasy but were seen elevated from the ground." (Kavanaugh, General Introduction, 1991, p. 16)

[517] (Teresa, Kavanaugh, & Rodriguez, The Interior Castle, 1979) (Teresa, Kavanaugh, & Rodriguez, The Book of Her Life, 2008)

[518] "On November 18, 1572, while John was her director, Teresa unexpectedly received the grace of spiritual marriage. She was now in the seventh and final dwelling place of her spiritual journey; there in the center room of the interior castle she came to know the highest state of intimacy with God." (Kavanaugh, General Introduction, 1991, p. 16)

[519] "[…] attends a meeting of definitors in Madrid. He brings Ana de Jesus with him for a foundation of nuns in Madrid. The definitory decrees the publication of Teresa's works and substitution of the Roman liturgy for that of the Holy Sepulcher, which the Carmelites had been using." (Kavanaugh, General Introduction, 1991, p. 31)

[520] (Kavanaugh, General Introduction, 1991, p. 18)

An understandable explanation for the hiatus would be a personal reason (if John of the Cross did not consider them important to note)[521] or if, for various historical and religious reasons, the accounts of the mystical experiences had not been written at all or had been lost. Because of the problems with religious authority mentioned above, it may have been better not to talk about or record them at all. However, there is no explicit or implicit reference to this notion either in the secondary literature. Even so, a question that would be essential in understanding John of the Cross's work remains not only unanswered but also unjustly untouched.[522]

Furthermore, almost all the original texts of his poetry and literature have been lost, and only a few survive to this day: *The sayings of light and love* and some letters.[523] This presents a problem of working from different codices, with different places and dates of their creation and their trustworthiness. Kavanaugh used two revised Spanish editions for the translation.[524] He marked which codex was considered by specialists more trustworthy and, therefore, was used for the translation. I rely on his translation throughout the present work.

Many of John of the Cross's commentators focus on the *Dark night of the soul* and the *Ascent to Mount Carmel*, like Denys Turner, who talks about the former work related to the apophatic traditions in Christian mysticism.[525] Edith Stein discusses the theological connections of the work and highlights the connections between the *Dark night* and the *Living flame* as two stages of the experience in contemplation.[526] McGinn shares this idea when he introduces John of the Cross's work. He agrees that the *Dark night* is one of his most important works, but he argues that it should be read with the *Living flame of love* as it is the fulfillment of the latter.[527] The total emptiness of the soul is the condition of the full possession of God in mysticism.[528]

At the initial stages of my research, I was planning to analyze the *Dark night* and the *Ascent to Mount Carmel*, as they are the most discussed works regarding the mysticism of John of the Cross. I considered this factor particularly important, as his work is taken as an example

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[521] "San Juan himself seems to have understood the relation of poem to commentary better than most of his critics and readers. He writes: Since these stanzas then were composed in a love flowing from abundant mystical understanding, I cannot explain them adequately, nor is it my intention to do so. I only wish to shed some general light on them, since your Reverence has desired this of me. I believe such an explanation will be more suitable. It is better to explain the utterances of love in their broadest sense so that each one may derive profit from them according to the mode and capacity of his spirit, rather than narrow them down to a meaning unadaptable to every palate. As a result, though we give some explanation of these stanzas, there is no reason to be bound to this explanation." (John & Barnstone, The Poems of St. John of the Cross, 1972, p. Introduction)

[522] Therefore, I disagree with the following statement by Barnstone: "The question of whether […] poems themselves convey the mystical experience, is secondary and not the issue." (John & Barnstone, The Poems of St. John of the Cross, 1972, p. Introduction)

[523] After his persecution, the nuns destroyed his letters and papers to protect him. (John & Barnstone, The Poems of St. John of the Cross, 1972, p. Introduction)

[524] (San Juan & Pacho, Obras Completas, 1982), (San Juan, Rodriguez, & Salvador, Obras Completas, 1980)

[525] (Turner D. , 1995)

[526] "In the Passion and death of Christ our sins were consumed by fire. If we accept that in faith, and if we accept the whole Christ in faith-filled surrender, which means, however, that we choose and walk the path of the imitation of Christ, then he will lead us 'through his Passion and cross to the glory of his resurrection.' This is what is experienced in contemplation: passing through the expiatory flames to the bliss of the union with love. This explains its twofold character. It is death and resurrection. After the Dark Night, the Living Flame shines forth." (Stein & Koeppel, 2002, p. 180)

[527] (McGinn, Mysticism in the Golden Age of Spain. 1500- 1650, 2017, p. 230)

[528] McGinn elaborates on the crucial dialectic of the *todo-nada*, which nuances the idea of John's apophatic views (237-238) and the concept of four nights (269-285). (McGinn, Mysticism in the Golden Age of Spain. 1500- 1650, 2017)

of traditional mysticism. Indeed, they are invaluable contributions to not only Spanish literature or Christian mysticism but mysticism in general. However, I soon realized that I could not use them for the purposes of this dissertation, as they are not suitable for presenting mystical experiences. They are, most likely, heavily based on John of the Cross's experiences and realizations. They elaborately guide the reader on the path leading towards the mystical experience but do not seem to showcase mystical experiences. As I mentioned earlier, secondary sources do not offer a guidance in this: there were no references to John of the Cross's experiences, not even their textual traces.

Therefore, I had to approach the question following a different logic and search for the signs of mystical language, particularly linguistic clues of the description of mystical experiences. Indeed, a similar straightforwardness to Merton's descriptions cannot be expected. Nonetheless, I was looking for the signs of mystical language: use of metaphors and/or concealing language, a peculiar sense of time, first person singular narratives, and any major or uncontrollable emotional, mental, and/or physical reactions or movements mentioned. Initially, it proved to be greatly difficult, as John of the Cross's work is filled with mysticism. He uses elaborate metaphors that simultaneously conceal and enlighten the meaning of words. Usually, this language is reserved for the unspeakable in mysticism, but these are basic features in his work, and, therefore, they could not be used as clues.

When searching for the famous notions of spiritual purification (such as the night of the sense and the spirit, spiritual dryness, wood and fire; and the metaphors of God and Christ such as the nurturing mother, the beloved, the betrothed), I found myself in the same situation not only in case of the *Dark night* but in the case of all of his other major prose and *Lyra: The spiritual Canticle*, *The living flame of love*, and *The sayings of light and love*. The metaphors did not lead closer to finding texts describing mystical experiences.

John of the Cross elaborately discusses the path leading to the mystical union. He is cautious in describing the yearning to meet again with the beloved, referring to the union that had happened before, yet not actually talking about it. He does not reveal its content or how it happened. The peculiar sense of time was not a definitive clue either. It is prevailing in the *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, articulated together with the lyrical self leaving the everyday circumstances. The walk in the night and the meeting in the secret garden also strengthens this image.

The first person singular narrative was the element that helped the most in finding the mystical texts which are suitable for this analysis. Among the minor poems, I have found the *Stanzas concerning an ecstasy experienced in high contemplation.*[529] This poem is descriptive and straightforward in the sense that other works of John of the Cross are not.[530] These two characteristics (descriptiveness and straightforwardness) seem to be as relevant as the first person singular narrative. In it, he talks about what he experienced and felt. While this

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[529] (John, Kavanaugh, & Rodriguez, The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross. Revised edition, 1991, pp. 53-54). Kavanaugh refers to the Spanish codex titles of the poems, which in this case is *Coplas del mismo hechas sobre un Extasis de harta contemplación.* He uses the translation of these titles to refer to the English versions: *I entered into unknowing.* However, in other works, they are more often referred to with the first line or a couple of words of the poem. Therefore, the same poem is also known as *Entréme donde no supe.*

[530] "[…] yet poetry was so important to him that it was, he wrote in his commentaries, the only means of expressing the ineffable." (John & Barnstone, The Poems of St. John of the Cross, 1972, p. Introduction)

seemingly simple first person singular narrative is a standard feature of Merton's texts, in John of the Cross's writings it is exceptional.

Another glaring detail about it is the absence of metaphors. Many secondary sources focus on the well-known metaphors mentioned above, which are usually used to describe the *unio mystica*. In John of the Cross's case, their absence seems serve as a better clue. The description of bodily reaction to the mystical experience – stammering, written about in the second stanza – seems to confirm this. However, it must be mentioned here that I do not consider bodily and other uncontrollable reactions as definitive signs or preconditions of mystical experiences. In this case, it can be regarded as an affirmation of the experience. For these reasons, I consider this poem as a primary example for the analysis.

As clues cannot be found in John of the Cross's prose, I continued searching among the poems, and as a result of it, I was able to affirm the uniqueness of the *Stanzas of contemplation*. The rest of the poems are not straightforward and descriptive first person singular narratives as the previously mentioned poem. As Kavanaugh points out, they are more than overflows of mystical experiences, they are creations.[531] Moreover, in the process of this artistic creation, the distance between the experience and the text seems to grow and arguably shorten. From the perspective of the regular reader, a metaphor can shorten the way and aid the understanding, but for the purposes of this analysis, it certainly elongates it.

Another poem, *A gloss (with spiritual meaning)*[532] presents an interesting case in this search, as it seems to contain both writing styles. Most of it is written as John of the Cross's other works; however, it includes one short section that might be considered in the analysis. Even though it is written as a first person singular narrative, the first and third stanzas partially, and the second one wholly talk about mystical experiences and their effects. The first half of the first stanza describes it as follows:

> "My soul is disentangled
> from every created thing
> and lifted above itself
> in a life of gladness
> supported only in God."[533]

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[531] John of the Cross's "poetry is more than a simple overflow of mystical experience it is an artistic creation of the highest craftsmanship as well." (p. 41) However, soon after this, he says: "In some of his poetry, John contemplates the great Christian mysteries; in the rest, he speaks of his spiritual experiences, which also bear a doctrinal content." (p. 42) (John, Kavanaugh, & Rodriguez, The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross. Revised edition, 1991)

[532] Also known as: Glosa "a lo divino", or Sin arrimo y con arrimo. (p. 70). There is another poem in the Collected works with the same Spanish, and a slightly different English title *A gloss (with a spiritual meaning)* starts as: "Por Toda la Hermosura" or "Not for all of Beauty". (p. 71) The two are not to be confused. The second one is written in the style of the other works of John and, in my opinion, does not directly reflect mystical experiences.
(John, Kavanaugh, & Rodriguez, The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross. Revised edition, 1991)

[533] (John, Kavanaugh, & Rodriguez, The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross. Revised edition, 1991, p. 70)

The second half of the third stanza touches upon the mystical union:

> "And so in its delighting flame
> which I am feeling within me,
> swiftly, with nothing spared,
> *I am wholly being consumed.*"[534]

Following the findings mentioned above, based primarily on Kavanaugh's and McGinn's works, I checked other (less well-known) editions of John of the Cross's poetry.[535] Willis Barnstone's[536] translation, and more importantly, the introduction to his edition proved to be a confirmation for the selection of *Stanzas of contemplation* and *A gloss*. Barnstone shares a similar logic and points to the clear mystical diction and mystical concepts of the minor poems.[537] He lists three minor poems – the *Stanzas of contemplation*, *A gloss*, and the *Stanzas given a spiritual meaning*.[538] He talks about the *Stanzas of contemplation* as it "describes the mystical act. It is a fine poem, but it remains essentially a description of conditions necessary for the mystical experience, of characteristics of the mystical experience, and of the effects of that experience. It is not, however, the experience itself or an allegorical equivalent of it."[539] He emphasizes the other two minor poems stating that they "clearly do use a mystical vocabulary and come closer to expressing something of the experience."[540] Though he is not clear enough about his understanding of the mystical vocabulary.

He further states that the process of mysticism is apparent in these poems in a way that it cannot be detected in major or central poems.[541] However, Barnstone argues that it is not due

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[534] (John, Kavanaugh, & Rodriguez, The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross. Revised edition, 1991, p. 70)

[535] This edition covers 14 poems and nine ballads. Along with the most noted ones, "By the waters of Babylon", "Young shepherd" and "I live yet do not live in me" also appear. (John & Barnstone, The Poems of St. John of the Cross, 1972). Nims's translation covers two codices: the codex of Sanlucar de Barrameda and the Codex of Jaen. (John & Nims, The Poems of Saint John of The Cross, 1979). There are editions dedicated to one work, similarly to the *Dark night* and the *Ascent*, like David Lewis' translation of the *Spiritual canticle of the soul* (John & Lewis, 1995).

[536] It is worth noting that Barstone is an American poet and scholar of religion who translated several mystical texts from different cultures. A selected list of those can be found in (John & Barnstone, The Poems of St. John of the Cross, 1972, p. Books by Willis Barnstone).

[537] "The term 'minor poems' is customarily applied to poems other than Cántico, Noche oscura, and ¡Oh Llama de Amor Viva!, the three central poems which are the subject of San Juan's extensive commentaries." (John & Barnstone, The Poems of St. John of the Cross, 1972, p. Introduction). McGinn only briefly mentions other examples of John of the Cross's poetry (other than the major poetry). (McGinn, Mysticism in the Golden Age of Spain. 1500- 1650, 2017, pp. 239-242)

[538] It is translated as *Full of hope I climbed the day*. (John & Barnstone, The Poems of St. John of the Cross, 1972) It is also known as *Otras del mismo a lo divino* or, *Stanzas given a spiritual meaning*. (John, Kavanaugh, & Rodriguez, The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross. Revised edition, 1991), and *Tras de un amoroso lance* – based on its first line, and Of Falconry (John & Nims, The Poems of Saint John of The Cross, 1979).

[539] (John & Barnstone, The Poems of St. John of the Cross, 1972, p. Introduction)

[540] (John & Barnstone, The Poems of St. John of the Cross, 1972, p. Introduction)

[541] "But unlike the minor poems, the central poems use little or no diction which is conceptually mystical […]" 44. "In Noche oscura, perhaps the greatest of San Juan's poems, the text alone does not provide us with certain basic characteristics of the mystical experience, such as total self-detachment from the senses, a rising toward the godhead, a dying in life from time and space; these attributes are stated in the minor poems, some of which, as we have said, are explicitly mystical in their conceptual presentation, and which can only be understood in this light." (John & Barnstone, The Poems of St. John of the Cross, 1972, p. Introduction). Barnstone quotes a more elaborate not on the same subject by Guillén (Guillén, 1961, p. 115) speaking of the *Spiritual canticle*: "Strictly speaking, with complete theoretical rigor, they are not, they cannot be mystical. The almost perfect autonomy of the images,

to the absence of mystical experiences, but a different expression of them.[542] Previously he discussed the three steps of the mystical process in the works of John of the Cross: the *via purgativa*, the *via illuminativa*, and the *via unitiva*.[543] He referred to the characteristics some of these stages and their usual descriptions. Here he only mentions that this process is clearly detectable in the minor poems, but he does not mention how. The characteristics he wrote about can also be found in the major poems and the commentaries; therefore, it is not straightforward what he means by the clarity in the minor poems. Barnstone leads this argument towards a unique reading of the poems and an equally unique interpretation and understanding of John of the Cross's life: "But we must read his poems to discover the poet – and this lyric voice will be the true spiritual biography of the man."[544]

I agree with the second statement about the different expressions and the supposed underlying intense mystical experiences. However, I disagree with his emphasis on the latter two poems. Earlier I discussed the relevance of *A gloss* based on the aspects I consider in this comparison. I consider the *Stanzas given a spiritual meaning* much less clear than the *Stanzas of contemplation*. The second and the third verses use a first person singular narrative which might give short glimpses into the experience. However, these glimpses are firmly embedded in the lyrical expression: they are articulated as the metaphor of the mystical flight and its contrast of being subdued and abased simultaneously. Therefore, considering these realizations, I use the following parts in the analysis, while still keeping the *Stanzas of contemplation* as the primary focus:

> "[…] I had to fly so high
> that I was lost from sight;
> and though in this adventure
> I faltered in my flight, […]
>
>
> When I ascended higher
> my vision was dazzled, [...]
>
>
> The higher I ascended
> in this seeking so lofty

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so continuously referring to human love, admits neither the evocation of the experience, which is not conceivable or revealable, nor the interposing of thought upheld by allegorical scaffolding outside the poetic structure." (John & Barnstone, The Poems of St. John of the Cross, 1972, p. Introduction)

[542] "In the three central poems, however, we have an intense experience, but the nature of its presentation is totally different. San Juan informs us that the 'experience overflows in figures and similes, and from the abundance of their spirit pour out secrets and mysteries rather than rational explanations.' The figures and similes–or allegory– of these three poems may suggest a mystical reference." (John & Barnstone, The Poems of St. John of the Cross, 1972, p. Introduction)

[543] "We may now ask what steps San Juan followed in his mystical experience and how these steps appear in the poems. To summarize briefly, the soul may reach union with God when man goes through three basic stages: 1. vía purgativa, 2. vía iluminativa, 3. vía unitiva. In the first, purgative, stage, through discipline and will, one escapes from the dark night of the senses, annihilating the self; in the second stage, an illumination, one sees and feels the presence of God. In the third, man becomes one with God; man's soul (the esposa, or bride) is consumed in perfect love as it joins in spiritual matrimony with God (esposo, or husband). The steps are characterized by pain and darkness, by journeying by the great light of faith, by a rising into ecstasy, union, and oblivion. A fourth stage is sometimes added, which is the peace and beatitude that follow the union." (John & Barnstone, The Poems of St. John of the Cross, 1972, p. Introduction)

[544] (John & Barnstone, The Poems of St. John of the Cross, 1972, p. Introduction)

the lower and more subdued
and abased I became.
I said: No one can overtake it! […]"[545]

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[545] (John, Kavanaugh, & Rodriguez, The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross. Revised edition, 1991, pp. 56-57)

Context: Antecedents

John of the Cross

Kieran Kavanaugh paints the picture of John of the Cross as a sensitive, educated, and humble man with many trials in his life. Kavanaugh talks about John of the Cross's suffering almost as though they laid the groundwork for his mystical experiences. Indeed, his circumstances were often harsh: he lost his father early on in life, which resulted in great financial difficulties for the family. Below, I delve deeper into the context of John of the Cross: first, the personal context; and second, the historical and religious context – still understanding these aspects as interwoven. As Kavanaugh and other resources have written about John of the Cross's life in great detail, I want to highlight only a few relevant elements of it here, especially his education, his connection to Teresa of Avila, his imprisonment, and the hostile religious and political atmosphere in the second half of his life.[546]

Personal context

Saint John of the Cross was born on June 24, 1542, in Fontiveros, known as Juan de Yepes. From the age of two, he was raised by his mother alone. Despite their poverty, John received education: first, elementary education for the poor. Later on, he served as an acolyte in La Magdalena (a monastery for Augustinian nuns); he became a nurse at the hospital in Medina under the charge of Don Alfonso, who helped him to get further education. At 17, he studied in the Jesuit school, took lectures in rhetoric, Latin, and Greek, and got acquainted with classical Latin and Spanish literature. Besides the position offered at the hospital and with the Jesuits, surprisingly and unexpectedly, John joined the recently founded Carmelite novitiate in Medina, which was known for the contemplative spirit and devotion to Virgin Mary. This was the time when he changed his name to John of St. Matthias.

Around 1564 he arrived at Salamanca to study philosophy and theology at the prestigious university. Natural philosophy, astronomy, ethics, grammar, logic, and music courses were offered there. In 1567-1568 John registered in theology, where he also had to study with doctors belonging to his own religious order, such as John Baconthorp.

In 1567 John was ordained as a priest and went to Medina. In the same year, he met Teresa of Avila for the first time. He was not completely satisfied with his studies as he was aiming for the contemplative life of the Carmelites. Teresa of Avila developed a new contemplative style for the Carmelites, first in Avila and then in Medina. She aimed to expand with new communities of friars; she heard about John of the Cross and his education and came to interview him. She was 52, and he was 25 at that time. In 1568 John finished his studies and traveled with a small group and Teresa from Medina to Valladolid to learn about these ways and to establish a new monastery.

After this short period of "apprenticeship" with Teresa, he was given the task of transforming a farmhouse in Duruel into the first monastery for friars. He changed his name to John of the Cross. After Mancera and Pastrana, he eventually traveled to Alcala to set up a house of studies he directed. In 1572 John of the Cross arrived in Avila to be the nuns' confessor

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[546] Based on Kavanaugh's text. (John, Kavanaugh, & Rodriguez, The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross. Revised edition, 1991)

and spiritual leader. His tasks included guiding Teresa herself. According to Kavanaugh, this was a religiously and personally intense and influential period in his life. He does not only talk about their ecstatic experience, which I mentioned in the previous chapter, but also about their conversations and the way they shaped each other's thinking and writings.[547]

His imprisonment in Toledo happened between December 2, 1577, and August 15, 1578. The imprisonment, with the persecution before and after it, is regarded as one of the most profound influences in John of the Cross's life. The physical torture, the inhuman circumstances,[548] the darkness and solitude in his cell are pictured as a firm ground for mysticism. Teresa pleaded with the King for John to be released, but she failed. In the dark and airless cell, he composed some of his poems. As I mentioned earlier, near the end of his imprisonment, he could write down some of these, as he got pen and paper from his jailers. His escape from the prison was miraculous. Even though he did not talk about this experience,[549] some elements of the escape and imprisonment are uncannily visible in the *Ascent to Mount Carmel*.[550]

After his recovery, in 1582, he spent some time in Granada, where he became the prior of Los Martires. Most of his commentaries and poems were written here.[551] At the end of his life, he suffered from erysipelas and other illnesses. He died on December 14, 1591. The first edition of his works (without *The spiritual canticle*) was published in 1618. He was canonized in 1726, and his feast day was added to the Roman Catholic calendar in 1738. He was declared Doctor of the Church in 1926.

Historical and religious context

The 16th and 17th centuries are often called the golden age of Spain, when the country reached its peak in military power and culture as well. By this time, the Spanish Empire had strengthened and gained immense wealth due to global exploration and colonization. The silver from Mexico and other goods from the colonies solidified its global economic dominance and

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[547] "The experience of those years, when from so privileged a position the confessor could see God's work in Teresa, left more of a trace in John's later writings than one might first suppose. With the exception of the Bible, Teresa provided a source more enlightening than all of the books Fray John had studied." (John, Kavanaugh, & Rodriguez, The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross. Revised edition, 1991, p. 16). "St. Teresa, also, it should go without saying, awakened in him particular admiration, so much so that he carried her portrait about with him. " (John, Kavanaugh, & Rodriguez, The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross. Revised edition, 1991, p. 26)

[548] Kavanaugh describes it in the following way: "His accusers locked him first in the monastery prison, but at the end of two months, for fear of an escape, they moved him to another spot, a room narrow and dark, without air or light except for whatever filtered through a small slit high up in the wall. The room was six feet wide and ten feet long. There John remained alone, without anything but his breviary, through the terribly cold winter months and summer's suffocating heat. Added to all this were the floggings, fasting on bread and water, wearing the same bedraggled clothes month after month without being washed-and the lice." (John, Kavanaugh, & Rodriguez, The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross. Revised edition, 1991, p. 18)

[549] (John, Kavanaugh, & Rodriguez, The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross. Revised edition, 1991, p. 20)

[550] "When the friars seemed to be asleep and the house all still, he pushed hard on the door of his prison and the lock came loose. This enabled him to leave his prison and find his way in the dark to the window. By means of a kind of rope made out of strips torn from two old bed covers and attached to a lamp hook, he escaped through the window onto the top of the wall." (John, Kavanaugh, & Rodriguez, The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross. Revised edition, 1991, p. 19)

[551] (John, Kavanaugh, & Rodriguez, The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross. Revised edition, 1991, p. 21)

ensured the trade of luxury goods. Not surprisingly, the abundance made itself felt only for the aristocrats. The Habsburg monarchs of the Spanish Empire in the lifetime of John of the Cross were Charles I (1516-56)[552] and Philip II (1556-98). The empire's dominance in Europe relied heavily on its military power on land and sea. However, the Golden Age is more connected to a cultural renaissance. The Habsburg monarchs were well-known patrons of the arts. Remarkable pieces of literature, architecture, painting, and music were created in this period.[553]

The complex and diverse religious landscape of the Iberian Peninsula at the time cannot be thoroughly discussed here. Therefore, I want to point out only some of its essential elements such as the *Reconquista*, religious reforms, and revival movements. The *Reconquista* did not mean the persecution of Jewish and Muslim minorities. In the beginning, a sort of coexistence of the faiths was present, but it was followed by forced conversions, the expulsion of Jews in 1492, and an obsession with religious purity[554].

Following the *Reconquista*, Spain became one of the strongest defenders of Catholicism and, therefore, had a key role in the Counterreformation. For this reason, it was usually called "The most Catholic Kingdom". Even though the Reformation divided many European countries, Spain remained relatively stable in its religion: at least the support of the Pope and the Spanish Inquisition ensured that. McGinn summarizes the post-Reformation period and Spain's closed nature to the European turmoil in relation to mysticism like this: "The paradox of the situation was that such a repressive religious realm, one dominated by suspicion of interior spirituality and mysticism, also produced so many major mystics."[555]

Another important aspect should be mentioned here: Spain's religious reforms and revival movements. Both of these processes shared the emphasis on the interior prayer and returning to the origins.[556] Kavanaugh summarizes them in relation to the Discalced Carmelite order and highlights the Franciscan influences on Teresa's knowledge of the interior prayer.[557] The daily tasks in the early Discalced Carmelita communities included two hours of mental prayer and manual prayer. The nuns would spend their day mostly in silence and solitude, while the friars would "engage in study and preaching and the ministry of the sacraments".[558]

McGinn summarizes three central tendencies related to mysticism in the Golden Age: "the reform of religious orders; the spiritual reform associated with Cardinal Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros (1436-1517); and the new emphasis on interior prayer." Cisneros was the head of the inquisition and was particularly interested in interior prayer and mysticism. McGinn elaborates on the subject and points out that this interest provided a fruitful base for mysticism throughout Cisneros' lifetime – even though the suspicion of mysticism grew after his

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[552] Also known as Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor.
[553] To mention only a few artists of the Golden Age: Diego Velázquez, El Greco, Miguel de Cervantes, Lope de Vega.
[554] Meaning a pure lineage – free from converted people. (McGinn, Mysticism in the Golden Age of Spain. 1500-1650, 2017, pp. 3-4)
[555] (McGinn, Mysticism in the Golden Age of Spain. 1500- 1650, 2017, p. 3)
[556] "Certain common characteristics marked the spirit of this Spanish reform: the return to one's origins, primitive rules, and founders; a life lived in community with practices of poverty, fasting, silence, and enclosure; and, as the most important part, the life of prayer. People used different terms to designate the new communities that had these traits: reformed, observant, recollect, discalced, hermit, contemplative. The name 'discalced' became the popular one in referring to Teresa's nuns and friars because of their practice of wearing sandals rather than shoes." (Kavanaugh, General Introduction, 1991, p. 13)
[557] (Kavanaugh, General Introduction, 1991, pp. 13-14)
[558] (Kavanaugh, General Introduction, 1991, p. 15)

lifetime.[559] Cisneros supported the publication of 16 works related to late medieval Franciscan and Dominican mysticism. Related to the works of his cousin, García Jiménez de Cisneros, McGinn points out the late medieval influences of Spanish mysticism, particularly the division of the three elements: purgation, illumination, and union.[560]

Contextual influences on John of the Cross's mysticism

As for the influences on John of the Cross's mysticism, each scholar focuses on different features. I have already mentioned some WHAT? by Bernard McGinn. In addition, he thoroughly describes the early stages of Spanish mysticism in the quoted book.[561] Kavanaugh stresses the importance of Biblical resources as an authority, and how John of the Cross quoted them from memory. Traditional sources were not read critically at that time. "The point is that instead of historical scholarship, textual accuracy, and a cautious mind with regard to the received wisdom, John's world set high store by a tradition handed down through the centuries and mediated through sometimes corrupt texts."[562] The Biblical passages were not only textual sources but handholds on? the mystical way, where he could recognize some resemblances and identify his experiences with Biblical ones. One example of that is the Song of Songs.[563] Kavanaugh also briefly mentions other influences: Thomas Aquinas, the scholastics, Augustine, Neoplatonism, German and Rhineland mystics, earlier Spanish mystics, Spanish poetry, and symbolic and linguistic influences from Islam.[564] Kavanaugh is very vague in this enumeration, often saying that the texts suggest such influences without telling exactly what influence they had. Barnstone is somewhat more exact on this front as he talks about Platonic influences, as well as that of Hebrew, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish poetry, songs, Raimundo Lull's mysticism, the influence of León Hebreo, and Jewish mysticism.[565]

Finally, an important and direct influence on his life and work should be mentioned. I have already touched upon the special connection between Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross. They both had a significant impact on each other's work. They both played a significant role in the creation and early formation of the reform branch of the Carmelite Order, the Discalced Carmelite Order. Teresa trusted John of the Cross to lead one of its branches. He also became her confessor. She valued him not only because of his education, which Teresa lacked, but even more because of his sensitivity and openness. In him, she found a trustworthy and understanding guide on the mystical path after suffering from other confessors' work.

Although the two authors were closely connected, they belong to different traditions regarding the description of mystical experiences. St. Teresa of Avila's concept of light and

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[559] (McGinn, Mysticism in the Golden Age of Spain. 1500- 1650, 2017, pp. 4-6)
[560] (McGinn, Mysticism in the Golden Age of Spain. 1500- 1650, 2017, p. 7) He also briefly mentions this work's possible influence on forming the Ignatian spirituality.
[561] (McGinn, Mysticism in the Golden Age of Spain. 1500- 1650, 2017, pp. 11-61)
[562] (Kavanaugh, General Introduction, 1991, pp. 35-36)
[563] (Kavanaugh, General Introduction, 1991, p. 36)
[564] "In both structure and outline of thought John's writings display the influences of Aquinas and the scholastics. Certain elements of the mysticism reflect Augustine and Neoplatonism. Some images and stages suggest both the German and Rhineland mystics and the themes, problems, and language of the earlier Spanish mystics. A susceptibility to sensual impressions and symbols characteristic of Spanish poetry in this period is obvious; there may also be symbolic and linguistic influences from Islam. But however much we speculate on all this, the only book that can be properly called a fount of John's experience and writings is the Bible." (John, Kavanaugh, & Rodriguez, The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross. Revised edition, 1991, p. 35)
[565] (John & Barnstone, The Poems of St. John of the Cross, 1972, p. Introduction)

darkness is based on an affirmative theology, which sees God as knowable to people, within certain limits. Moreover, although the mystical journey of the soul cannot be compared to a linear line (sometimes approaching the interior of the castle, sometimes returning to the outer apartments), it can be considered a unidirectional endeavor. The union with God in the central apartment of the castle is described through metaphors of light and fire.[566] In contrast, in John of the Cross's perception, although God is a brilliant luminosity and illuminates the soul, humans can only perceive the divine light as darkness. John of the Cross describes the purification of the soul with metaphors of dark: as the two nights of the soul.[567] The light of God purifies the two parts of the soul: on this basis, we distinguish between the dark night of the sensual and the spiritual part. John of the Cross's concept of light and darkness follows the Pseudo-Dionysian tradition, which is an approach is based on and emphasizing the divine transcendence: God is ultimately unknowable and incomprehensible to humans. Any knowledge of him is expressed in negations as opposed to affirmative sentences about the divine.

Thomas Merton
Personal context

One of the best-known sources of Thomas Merton's life is his autobiography, *The seven storey mountain*,[568] which I draw on, together with the summary of *Abbey of Gethsemani*, to discuss the life events relevant to my study.[569] Merton was born in 1915 in Prades, France, to New Zealander and American parents. The family moved to other countries and traveled abroad several times. Merton's parents died young. After his father died in 1931, he spent the summer with his grandparents in the USA. In the same year, he began his studies in modern languages at Cambridge University. During his first year at there, by his own admission, he spent much of his time in local pubs and led a dissolute life.[570] In 1934 he moved to the United States and enrolled at Columbia University, where he studied literature until 1938. In the same year, he had his conversion experience, which I discuss below in the context of Merton's religious beliefs.

Merton is highly critical of the first 23 years of his life in his autobiography. He contrasts this period with his later conversion experience and religious "career". He often describes these 23 years as a dark and misguided period during which he not only failed to see the good and the light that Christianity and God had given him but rejected it.[571] It is also possible to contrast

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[566] (Teresa, Kavanaugh, & Rodriguez, The Interior Castle, 1979). For an analysis of the different light and fire metaphors, see (Szugyiczki, Fény és sötétség: Avilai Szent Teréz és Keresztes Szent János misztikája. Bachelor's Thesis., 2015)

[567] (Görföl, 2021)

[568] (Merton, The Seven Storey Mountain, 1999)

[569] (n.a., Thomas Merton)

[570] "It did not take very much reflection on the year I had spent at Cambridge to show me that all my dreams of fantastic pleasures and delights were crazy and absurd, and that everything I had reached out for had turned to ashes in my hands, and that I myself, into the bargain, had turned out to be an extremely unpleasant sort of a person — vain, self-centered, dissolute, weak, irresolute, undisciplined, sensual, obscene, and proud. I was a mess. Even the sight of my own face in a mirror was enough to disgust me." (Merton, The Seven Storey Mountain, 1999, p. 576)

[571] "They were only graces in the sense that God in His mercy was permitting me to fly as far as I could from His love but at the same time preparing to confront me, at the end of it all, and in the bottom of the abyss, when I

his life's first and second halves. The former was characterized by numerous moves, family losses, an ever-changing environment, and the search for an individual path, while the relative permanence of the monastery characterized the latter as a place of the monastic community; and by dedicated monastic work inside and outside the monastery.

His conversion experience in 1938 occurred while reading a work by English Jesuit priest and poet Gerard Manley Hopkins.[572] Merton was subsequently received into the Catholic Church November 16, 1938, at Corpus Christi Church. In 1941 he entered the Abbey of Our Lady of Gethsemani Trappist Monastery in Kentucky. He became a novice in 1942 and was ordained a priest in 1949. Between entering the monastic order and his ordination, he wrote several books.[573]

After his mystical experience in Louisville in 1958, he took an outspoken stance for peace during the Cold War and criticized the US nuclear weapons and Cold War culture.[574] At this time, he began to engage in discussions with prominent theologians and religious scholars, committed himself to ecumenism, became interested in mystical movements of other religions, and became a leading figure in interfaith dialogue. In 1964 he was allowed to leave the monastery to meet in New York with D. T. Suzuki, the famous Japanese Zen scholar.

Both global issues and contemplation and Zen were his focal points in the 1960s. Between 1965 and 1968, he wrote two works on Zen[575] and published his book *Conjectures of a guilty bystander*, which includes, among other things, an interpretation of his mystical experience. In 1968 he was invited to a conference for Western and Eastern monks in Bangkok. On his way to Asia, he stopped in New Mexico, California, and Alaska and spent two months traveling in India. He met the young Dalai Lama in Dharamshala. In Sri Lanka, he had another mystical experience at the ancient ruins of Polonnaruwa. He arrived in Bangkok, the venue of the conference, on December 7. A few days later, on December 10, 1968, he died as a result of an electric shock.

Historical and religious context

In what follows, I want to provide some insight into the historical and religious context of Thomas Merton's mysticism. This historical context is the Cold War era in the United States.

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thought I had gone farthest away from Him. Si ascendero in coelum, tu illic es. Si descendero in infernum, ades. For in my greatest misery He would shed, into my soul, enough light to see how miserable I was, and to admit that it was my own fault and my own work. And always I was to be punished for my sins by my sins themselves, and to realize, at least obscurely, that I was being so punished and burn in the flames of my own hell, and rot in the hell of my own corrupt will until I was forced at last, by my own intense misery, to give up my own will." (p. 152) "As you have dealt with me, Lady, deal also with all my millions of brothers who live in the same misery that I knew then: lead them in spite of themselves and guide them by your tremendous influence, O Holy Queen of souls and refuge of sinners, and bring them to your Christ the way you brought me." (p. 159) (Merton, The Seven Storey Mountain, 1999)

[572] "All of a sudden, something began to stir within me, something began to push me, to prompt me. It was a movement that spoke like a voice. 'What are you waiting for?' it said. 'Why are you sitting here? Why do you still hesitate? You know what you ought to do? Why don't you do it? … Suddenly I could bear it no longer. I put down the book, and got into my raincoat, and started down the stairs. I went out into the street… And everything inside me began to sing – to sing with peace, to sing with strength and to sing with conviction." (Merton, The Seven Storey Mountain, 1999, p. 248)

[573] *Thirty poems* 1944. *A Man in the Divided Sea* 1946. *Exile Ends in Glory* 1947. *The Seven Storey Mountain* and *What Are These Wounds?* 1948.

[574] (Harmless, 2007, p. 24)

[575] *Mystics and Zen Masters* 1967 and *Zen and the Birds of Appetite* 1968

Following J. Ronald Oakley's division, I divide the early period of the Cold War – the 1950s – into three periods.[576] The first period (1950-1952) is linked to McCarthyism, the founding of the National Council of Churches, and the strongest wave of religious revival. The second period (1953-1956) begins with President Eisenhower's inauguration and the end of the Korean War. During this period, international tensions diminished, but new internal tensions came to the fore, which had a strong religious resonance. This led to a strengthening of existing religions and so-called spiritual "alternatives". The third phase of the 1950s (1957-1961) saw the return of tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union following the launch of Sputnik I. Pope John XXIII was elected in 1958. Despite protests, the desegregation of Little Rock Central High School in Arkansas was one of the USA's most significant religious and ethical events of this decade.[577] In January 1959, the Second Vatican Council was convened. In 1960, the first Roman Catholic president of the USA, John F. Kennedy, was elected. Ironically, Merton's body following his death in Thailand, was returned to the US in a military plane carrying the bodies of soldiers killed in the Vietnam War.[578]

These sociohistorical and religious changes are reflected in Merton's statements and the descriptions of his experiences and reflections on his place in the world as a human and a monk. Later, I will point out that related to these issues and sometimes to his descriptions of mystical experiences, he expressed humanitarian, political, and religious opinions many times.

Mystical influences

On one occasion during his university years, Merton hosted a Hindu monk, Mahanambrata Brahmachari, whom he asked about Hindu mysticism. Merton later regarded this meeting and conversation as a turning point in his religious life.

Later on in his life, he corresponded with theologians, religious scholars (Jacques Maritain, Jean Leclerq, Martin Marty), writers, and poets (Boris Pasternak, Czeslaw Milosz, Henry Miller). He received letters from Popes John XXIII and Paul VI. In total, he wrote about 4,000 letters. However, he was not only concerned with the challenges of Christianity, he also took a keen interest in the monastic and mystical traditions of other religions. He was in contact with the Jewish theologian Abraham Heschel, the Islamic scholar Louis Massignon, the Pakistani Sufi Abdul Aziz, the Vietnamese Buddhist monk and peace-activist Thich Nhat Hanh, and the Japanese scholar of Zen Buddhism, D. T. Suzuki.[579]

Merton studied contemplation and mysticism from multiple different traditions.[580] He published numerous essays and books on the subject. The webpage of the Thomas Merton Society[581] offers detailed information on the subject and an exhaustive list of all of Merton's publications.[582] I have previously mentioned some of his works on Zen which I consider relevant, especially regarding his fourth mystical experience.

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[576] (Ellwood, 1997, pp. 20-21)
[577] (n.a., Little Rock School Desegregation)
[578] (Harmless, 2007, p. 28)
[579] (Harmless, 2007, p. 25)
[580] (McCaslin, 2012, p. 27)
[581] (n.a., Classification of the Merton Collection)
[582] (Burton, 2016)

Now I want to briefly touch upon another relevant work, *The ascent to truth,*[583] published in 1951. It might be evident from the title that the book is centered around John of the Cross's works. It is a theological study considering Thomas Aquinas' theology. Later on, Merton was very critical of this work regarding its theological value but recognized the role of love and discipline in contemplation through the works of John of the Cross.[584] From the point of view of my dissertation, Chapter 5, *Knowledge and unknowing in Saint John of the Cross*, Chapter 16: *A dark cloud enlightening the night*, and Chapter 17: *The loving knowledge of God* are the most relevant. Here Merton touches upon an important notion of the *via negativa*: the enlightening darkness with its rational contradiction and mystical meanings. Whether John of the Cross's work was indeed an influence towards the negative theology is not clear at his point. The question of whether Merton's mysticism is closer to the *via negativa* (apophatic mysticism) or the *via affirmativa* (kataphatic mysticism) will be explored later in this dissertation, related to the analysis of his mystical experiences.

Comparison

What are the differences and similarities in the personal, religious, and historical contexts of John of the Cross and Thomas Merton? Beyond the apparent contrasts, I aim to point out the elements that support or contradict the characteristics of traditional and modern mysticism I presented at the end of the previous chapter. First, the cultural elements will be considered, and I will return to the subjective parts at the end of this chapter. To briefly summarize what I have stated earlier: in the case of traditional mysticism, culture was characterized by the Middle Ages and church civilization, referring to an all-encompassing understanding, primarily but not exclusively connected to the Middle Ages. On the other hand, modern mysticism is characterized by modernity and plurality in schemes of understanding.

There are some striking examples in the works of the two authors as well as the secondary literature, which are clearly connected to these characteristics. First, let me point these out. The continuity and all-encompassing nature of church civilization seem to be clearly reflected in Kavanaugh's notion of John of the Cross. Kavanaugh refers to his thoughts and works as though they remained constant and unchanged in their topics and focus throughout John of the Cross's lifetime. "No essential change of thought occurs in his teaching; there is no 'earlier John' to contrast with the 'later John'. The themes he dwells on also remain constant".[585] On the other hand, Thomas Merton's writings show a considerable diversity of topics that reflect his changing interests. There is a remarkable arch starting from the outsider's perception of faith, going through the interest in other religious and mystical traditions, and ending in a universal understanding of faith and human connectedness.

The second example refers to the historical and religious context of John of the Cross. Barnstone argues that mysticism "was an outlet for the spiritual energy of such heretics as San Juan, Santa Teresa, and Fray Luis (all of whom were to pay dearly for their individual spiritual

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[583] (Merton, The Ascent to Truth, 1979)
[584] (Belcastro, 2001, pp. 15-17)
[585] (Kavanaugh, General Introduction, 1991, p. 33)

roads and means of reaching ideas beyond the confines of Catholic theology).”[586] Barnstone relates this idea to the Counter-Reformation and the strictness within the Catholic church following it. This notion connects to two questions in this work. First, does this mean that these authors could step out of the all-encompassing church civilization? Second, is the idea of mysticism as an outlet connected specifically to traditional mysticism?

Even though Barnstone is not thinking in the context of church civilization, I do not consider the words 'heretics' and 'outlet' to refer to the idea that these authors stepped out of the all-encompassing understanding of it. First of all, they simply did not intend to do so. Many of their writings refer to the theological soundness and orthodoxy of their thoughts. Second, the attempts to reform the Carmelite order were based on returning to the foundations, as I have mentioned earlier. Third, Troeltsch argues that even those ideas which were considered heretic remained within the system of church civilization. Its all-encompassing nature means that it could give sound explanations to all sorts of questions and challenges to its system.

However, I do not argue that mystics such as John of the Cross were conformists and had a lukewarm approach toward faith and the structures of the church. Through their mysticism, they questioned the problems within the church and the limitations of its explanatory powers. Naturally, this has caused immediate tension and conflict, which resulted in some sort of solution or explanation in the long term. The immediate conflict is not surprising, but in terms of the church civilization, this long-term solution is what is relevant. In the long term, these people were either labeled heretics and remained marginal in church or were often claimed as great authorities of the tradition. Just like John of the Cross became Doctor of the Church, their sufferings were even glorified later.[587]

Did the change of cultural notions alter the status and function of mystics as well? My second question essentially addresses this notion. It is now clear what their role was in church civilization. What is the role of mystics in modernity? What might they question or step out of? This is a complex question that I will only partially attempt to answer here, and I will return to in the next chapter. I consider the border challenging or limit questioning function of mystics a general feature. It was present before the Middle Ages, and I think it has been an overarching characteristic over time. This is the reason why Cupitt describes them as 'deconstructors', and why Soelle describes mysticism essentially as resistance. Both of them relate their ideas to modernity. Thomas Merton's example supports this idea. Merton's religious and historical context was not hostile toward his mysticism. It allowed exploring his interest in other mystical traditions, resulting in his traveling quite frequently outside the monastery. These explorations seemed to deepen his faith. He was not persecuted but celebrated for his mystical writings and actions. This initial picture might give a different idea of the subject: that Merton was not a deconstructor – or that he only mildly stepped beyond the religious limits by exploring different traditions. However, Merton still appeared as a deconstructor based on his mystical experiences – not necessarily in terms of religious beliefs and doctrines, but in terms of society and global

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[586] (John & Barnstone, The Poems of St. John of the Cross, 1972, p. Introduction)

[587] This confirms the idea of Thomas A. Tweed about religions being functionally flexible when it comes to notions questioning their limitations. This fluidity and adaptability are crucial to their vitality. If they can incorporate these ideas into their teachings and expand their offered explanation of how things work, they may progress with time and remain relevant. This is what church civilization was fantastic in. The modern eye tends to look at it as though it was something rigid and unchanging, but tradition has changed and significantly adapted throughout the profound historical, political, and religious changes of the centuries.

issues. The religiously based and mystically experienced idea of people belonging together became a radical notion in the context of the Cold War United States. Therefore, I argue that the border challenging attempts of mystics are overarching features.

Let us turn back to comparing traditional and modern mysticism through the works of John of the Cross and Thomas Merton. The next element I compare is the relation between the transcendent and the immanent. As Troeltsch refers to it in relation to church civilization: the persuasive power and focus of transcendence (faith) are central, while the difference between the divine and human becomes absolute. This is coupled with the ascetic or otherworldly orientation of thoughts and actions. In modernity, the persuasiveness of the immanent is said to be in focus together with a general mundane orientation of life. This means that the focus is no longer on leading an ascetic life in light of the afterlife but on the ideal transformation of the life one is currently living. The idea that John of the Cross embodies elements of church civilization is perhaps unquestioned, and the transcendent focus in his life and mysticism is perhaps also undoubted.

Due to philosophical, social, and/or religious changes, the distance and difference between the transcendent and the immanent is not the same in modernity. The deep dedication and focus of the monastic way of life could make traditional mysticism possible even today. On this basis, I have previously argued that traditional mysticism is still possible and elements of it can be present today to some extent. However, I think that the circumstances have changed significantly, to mention only one: Berger argues that pluralism today is almost entirely inescapable. What is the situation with Thomas Merton, then? At first glance, he led a life similar to John of the Cross's, in a monastery. Based on his autobiography, a more detailed and nuanced picture can be drawn. Prior to his conversion, he had led an immanently focused lifestyle. This focus did not disappear completely, even after his conversion and during his monastic life. The ultimate focus shifted or was complemented: he was dedicated to his faith, yet he remained somewhat active outside of the monastery as well. One of his revelations highlights this twofold focus perfectly. In his Louisville mystical experience, he realized that monastic life is essentially based on an illusion of separation from the rest of society.

> "Certainly these traditional values are very real, but their reality is not of an order outside everyday existence in a contingent world, nor does it entitle one to despise the secular: though "out of the world" we are in the same world as everybody else, the world of the bomb, the world of race hatred, the world of technology, the world of mass media, big business, revolution, and all the rest. We take a different attitude to all these things, for we belong to God. Yet so does everybody else belong to God. We just happen to be conscious of it, and to make a profession out of this consciousness. But does that entitle us to consider ourselves different, or even better, than others? The whole idea is preposterous."[588]

In traditional mysticism, the focus is on the distance between the transcendent and the immanent, and on the bridging of these in the mystical experience. Merton's accounts show a different picture of modern mysticism. The distances and differences are articulated mainly on the level of the immanent in his last two experiences. The Louisville experience articulates two of these: first, the illusory difference between people, and, second, the illusory difference

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[588] (Merton, Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander, 1989, p. 157)

between laity and clerics. The Sri Lankan account focuses on the purity and impurity of people. However, the Roman experience centers around the burdensome memories of his sinful past self and the effects of divine grace. The Cuban account reports the "concrete and experimental"[589] contact with the divine, which was enlightening and joyful for Merton. In this sense, his first two mystical accounts seem traditional.

It is important to note that all of these accounts – even the last two – talk about the connection to the transcendent and sometimes contain even theological references, and these connections are more or less explicitly articulated in the accounts. Therefore, in Merton's case, the question is not the relevance of the divine authority. A significant shift here is that the focus is no longer on the ultimate difference between the transcendent and the immanent but rather on the immanent – more precisely, how the awareness of the transcendent alters the perception of the immanent related to one's life and actions. In this sense, all of his mystical accounts are similar and modern.

The distances and the articulation of closeness are also expressive in this instance. In John of the Cross's case, the intimate union with God and the process of purification by divine grace are expressed with various metaphors: the betrothed, the beloved, bride and bridegroom, the mother nursing her child, etc. In the *unio mystica*, the distance between the transcendent and the immanent is bridged. In Merton's case, the union with God is expressed as a swift and illuminating connection – a proximity to the enlightening divine truth. The expression of the intimate and loving union refers to other people or the rest of humanity. This bond implicitly appears in the Cuban experience when the divine light is considered ordinary and accessible to everyone. The notion is explicitly articulated in the Louisville revelation, where Merton refers to the crumbling of the illusory differences and the realization of the propinquity of humanity. Finally, it peaks in the Sri Lankan experience, where this unity is not a realization anymore but a foundation. The last experience is a long way from the first one, where the transcendent is still *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. So, Merton's accounts do not only talk about crossing the borderline between the transcendent and the immanent but stepping over some inherently immanent boundaries. These boundaries are illusory differences between the sinful and the sin free, the pure and the impure, the lay and the clerical. This is not a contemplation of these abstract concepts but a "concrete and experimental" mystical realization of the connectedness of humanity. In sum, both references to distance and the closeness in the mystical accounts reveal that in John of the Cross's case, the ultimate differences between the transcendent and the immanent are articulated in line with the characteristics of traditional mysticism. However, in Merton's writings, a change of focus towards the immanent is prevailing, with a solid theological and transcendent base.

I want to point out here that Merton's life and mysticism reflect the shifts and differences between traditional and modern mysticism with his twofold focus on both the transcendent and the immanent. Even the possibility of such reflection is connected to modernity. The all-encompassing nature of church civilization did not make it possible, and there was no 'outside view' of it. Once again, let me point out that while church civilization is described as all-encompassing, it does not mean a rigid and closed-off system but a relatively flexible

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[589] (Merton, The Seven Storey Mountain, 1999, p. 321)

explanatory power that was able to cover all dimensions of life. Such an all-encompassing cultural notion is not present in modernity.

The authority of modern institutions and cultural ideas are based on rationality and autonomy. Autonomous cultural ideas such as globalization and individualism and a general optimism and belief in progress are present, according to Troeltsch. This was visible in Merton's life, particularly in the anti-war narratives, his vision of humanity and people belonging together, and his involvement in interreligious dialogue. These actions and changes were closely connected to and inspired by the Louisville realization.

Similarly, the process of mysticism is considered spontaneous in traditional mysticism and reflected in modern mysticism. Here I am not referring to how mystical experiences happen but to their interpretation and reception. All of Merton's experiences are embedded and reflected on within a larger personal, religious, or historical context. The Roman experience in the personal context of a sinful life; the Cuban experience had later personal impact of moving towards monastic life and heightened interest in Roman Catholicism; the Louisville experience was articulated along with anti-war narratives and the Cold war as a historical context; the Sri Lankan experience reflects on the purity of the experience while referring to the impurity of the world. Similar reflections cannot be found in John of the Cross's case. He did not consider it essential to talk about his imprisonment and suffering. The focus was not on himself, social changes, or the context, but on the mystical way of life.

The comparison so far was closely connected to Troeltsch's conception and viewed modernity from the perspective of church civilization. Let me now turn to Peter L. Berger's conception, which focuses on modernity and describes it not in terms of a comparison but through its own characteristics. The Iberian Peninsula was far from a religiously homogenous landscape despite the efforts to convert Muslims and Jews. As I have mentioned earlier, among many other influences, the symbolic and linguistic influences of Islamic and Jewish mysticism can be traced in John of the Cross's works. However, these influences did not essentially alter John of the Cross's mysticism but, instead, slightly varied the picture of it along with his poetic and prosaic style.

Thomas Merton's case is entirely different. Different areas of Merton's works and context should be examined when it comes to plurality. First, his cultural and historical context. Starting from early on in his life, he traveled and moved frequently. He also lived in Europe and the United States; he traveled to Italy, Cuba, and later in his life to Asia. Meanwhile, he got acquainted with Hinduism and Orthodox Christianity. This leads us to the second point: Merton's deep interest in other traditions, particularly Zen. Following his Louisville mystical experience, he developed and actively pursued these interests by connecting with people from different religions; and studying other contemplative traditions. Even though both authors lived in what we might call a religiously diverse cultural context, their interests and focus are different. These diversities cannot be held similar, based on Berger's understanding of religious pluralism today.

The third element leads this exploration deeper into Merton's mystical texts. As I will write about these texts below in more detail, let me highlight only generally the relevant information here. Merton was not only interested in other religions, but his interests are also reflected in his experiences and their accounts. He uses neutral or general language or expressions from different traditions. Examples of this can be found in his accounts of the

Cuban, the Louisville, and the Sri Lankan experience. In my perception, these expressions serve a twofold purpose. On the one hand, their generality points to the similarities in people: "they are all walking around shining like the sun."[590] On the other hand, their neutrality makes it easier for non-religious or non-Christian audiences to grasp some of the essence of his experience. The Cuban account talks about the "light of faith" offered to everybody.[591] In the Louisville experience, the 'le point vierge' concept is explained as a pure center in everyone, which belongs to God and serves as the common base for humanity.[592] The Sri Lankan experience is a unitive experience, and a general expression of that is that "everything is emptiness and everything is compassion", "everything is clear".[593] Merton had excellent writing skills, which could incorporate complex teachings and mystical meanings articulated in a widely understandable manner. I argue that Merton's mystical texts were meant to be understood by broad audiences, and this is part of the performative nature of his mysticism. Does this use of language mean that he had broad and neutral experiences? The profoundly religious and theological grounding of his accounts is striking in the first two. However, the Louisville experience could easily be watered down to a unitive vision of peace and happiness. But as McCaslin points out, it is also deeply rooted in a complex theological concept of Sophia.[594] Instead of watering these accounts down, the theological concepts, as well as other religious-contemplative influences, should be studied. Considering these principles, the Sri Lankan experience seems unique – not because it took place in the geographical and religious context of Buddhism, and not only because it was evoked by the Buddha statues in Polonnaruwa, but because of the language of the experience.[595] The use of language seems to signify a different – unitive – experience. However, to have some worthwhile remarks on this account and all others, let us dive into the mystical texts themselves.

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[590] (Merton, Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander, 1989, p. 157)
[591] (Merton, The Seven Storey Mountain, 1999, p. 321)
[592] (Merton, Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander, 1989, p. 158)
[593] (Merton, Burton, Brother Hart, & Laughlin, 1974, p. 235)
[594] (McCaslin, 2012, pp. 34-36)
[595] "As Christopher Pramuk points out, 'Pollanaruwa [sic] need not be interpreted as a complete break from Merton's Christ-haunted view of reality. On the contrary, Pollanaruwa sums up what is for him the whole climate of the New Testament: 'all matter, all life is charged with dharmakaya,' the self-emptying love and mercy of God.'" (McCaslin, 2012, p. 38)

Experience

John of the Cross

As there are no further relevant contextual facts related to the poems that were chosen for the analysis, here I will concentrate only on a summary of the said poems, mainly on the *Stanzas concerning an ecstasy experienced in high contemplation*,[596] which showcases the language of apophasis in the following ways. The understanding and knowing are described as unknowing because of the ultimately transcendent nature of God. Highlighting this, contradicting words accompany each other throughout the whole poem:

> "…*my spirit was given*
> *an understanding while not understanding*…"[597]

This perception is primarily described as unknowing, in contrast with the refrain where "transcending all knowledge" refers to all common and/or rational knowledge that can be gained in regular states. As in the fourth stanza, where it is said that all previous knowledge seems worthless in the light of the newly gained one, and the sixth and seventh stanza also clearly refers to logic and rational thinking as insufficient ways of reaching this state. The fifth one takes this a step further by saying that the closer the person gets to God ("The higher he ascends…"), "the less he understands". The middle of the fifth stanza is an exquisite example of the light and darkness depicted in negative theology: "the cloud is dark which lit up the night". The transcendent is ultimately dark, symbolizing that it cannot be wholly known, yet it has illuminating effects. What can be learned about this experience from statements and not negations are not much: it is said that it involved peace and holiness and left the mystic stammering.

A gloss with spiritual meaning is summarized briefly by Kavanaugh this way: "Without support yet with support. The poet sings of the happiness that comes from life in God, detachment, and a love that grows in dark faith."[598] Here, I want to concentrate only on the two short passages I am considering in the analysis. The first of them talks about the soul's detachment from the limitations of the world and its lift towards God and the mystical union. At the poem's end, the second part describes the transformation caused by divine love, which is referred to as flame. The union becomes complete, with nothing left behind. A similar metaphor can be found in the *Dark night* as well. There the process of purification is described as the fire transforming the log by heating and drying it.

Stanzas given spiritual meaning[599] talk about chasing the "prey", which refers to the loved one/God. This poem is packed with contradicting words. The contradiction lies between the high flight of the soul towards God and the humility and subdued state it reaches along the way.

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[596] (John, Kavanaugh, & Rodriguez, The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross. Revised edition, 1991, pp. 53-54)

[597] (John, Kavanaugh, & Rodriguez, The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross. Revised edition, 1991, p. 53)

[598] (Kavanaugh, Introduction to the Poetry, 1991, p. 43)

[599] (John, Kavanaugh, & Rodriguez, The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross. Revised edition, 1991, p. 57)

Thomas Merton

In contrast with John of the Cross's case, the context of Merton's mystical experiences is well-documented in his autobiography and other works. The first happened in Rome in 1933, when he was 18 and visited the city.[600] This is the only mystical experience out of the four prior to his conversion. Later, he refers to himself as becoming a pilgrim from a tourist after visiting Byzantine mosaics which had a substantial impact on him. Merton expresses sharp criticism of his way of thinking back then and paints the mystical experience as one of the turning points on the way out of a sinful life. As he reports it: returning to his accommodation in Rome at night, he felt the presence of his deceased father, which invoked the mystical experience. This short episode touched him profoundly and shone a light on his present situation, out of which he desired to find liberation. Allegedly, this was the first time in his life when he saw himself from an utterly different perspective and truly wanted to leave behind his lifestyle. It is important to note that, in my understanding, this experience is not considered mystical because of his alleged connection with his late father but because of the realization it invoked and the direct connection and communication with God, which he briefly reports.

The second mystical experience happened approximately two years after his conversion experience.[601] It took place in Havana, Cuba, in 1940 in a Roman Catholic church, during mass. During the service, at a certain point, the children of the choir cried *Creo en Diós* ("I believe in God"). This sudden and loud confirmation of faith was what preceded and invoked his mystical realization, similarly to how his late father's felt presence had invoked his previous mystical experience. His realization and experience of God's presence were closely connected to the Consecration. "Then, as sudden as the shout and as definite, and a thousand times more bright, there formed in my mind an awareness, an understanding, a realization of what had just taken place on the altar, at the Consecration: a realization of God made present by the words of Consecration in a way that made Him belong to me."[602] Closing his account, he summarizes the length and the effects of the mystical experience this way: "It lasted only a moment: but it left a breathless joy and a clean peace and happiness that stayed for hours and it was something I have never forgotten."[603]

As a short detour from the contextual facts, I want to point out something rare and remarkable in this text. Merton articulates the ineffable and direct nature of mystical experiences and their lasting effects exquisitely. In these sentences, he merges the deep involvement of the mystic with a latter, more objective, and reflective perspective – a combination that is rarely found. The reflections start after he referred to the realization of God's presence as 'light'.

> "When I call it a light that is a metaphor which I am using, long after the fact. But at the moment, another overwhelming thing about this awareness was that it disarmed all images, all metaphors, and cut through the whole skein of species and phantasms with which we naturally do our thinking. It ignored all sense experience in order to strike directly at the heart of truth, as if a sudden and immediate contact had been established between my intellect and the Truth Who was now physically really and substantially

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[600] (Merton, The Seven Storey Mountain, 1999, pp. 137-139)
[601] (Merton, The Seven Storey Mountain, 1999, pp. 320-322)
[602] (Merton, The Seven Storey Mountain, 1999, pp. 321-322)
[603] (Merton, The Seven Storey Mountain, 1999, p. 321)

before me on the altar. But this contact was not something speculative and abstract: it was concrete and experimental and belonged to the order of knowledge, yes, but more still to the order of love."[604]

Thomas Merton had his most well-known mystical experience in Louisville on March 18, 1958. His interpretation of the experience is found in *Conjectures of a guilty bystander*, first published in 1966.[605] In this work, Merton first describes the circumstances of the experience: it took place at a busy intersection of Fourth and Walnut Streets in the center of Louisville's shopping district. Looking at the ordinary image of the city, at the passers-by, he was struck by a sudden realization, namely, that he loved these people and that, despite appearances, they were not strangers or isolated from each other.

He described the experience as an awakening from a dream, where the dream is a false image of the isolation of people that he experiences as a monk. In this illusion, the monastery appears as full of renunciations, as 'supposed holiness'[606] and as an isolated holy existence. And the monks are portrayed as 'pseudo-angels'[607] and men of the spiritual life. He recognizes that in the monastery, it is easy to fall into the illusion of isolation from the world and the illusion of becoming other people, or, as he puts it, another race, by becoming a monk.[608] Merton reports that in his mystical experience, he saw people as he thought they appeared in God's eyes – as they really existed: he saw their essence, which is beyond the reach of sin, desire, illusion, or self-knowledge. He wished that people could see themselves and each other in this mystical way. Merton said that then there would be no more war, hatred, or envy. He calls this essence in people by several different terms: the depth of their hearts, the core of their reality, *le point vierge* ("the untouched/pure/virgin point").[609] According to Merton, this core/reality/point belongs to God, is ordered by him, and his glory shines through it. He describes this point with various metaphors of light, and at the end of his interpretation, he says that if we could see this light in all people, it would remove the cruelty and darkness of life.

The last mystical experience discussed here happened in Sri Lanka in 1968, not long before his death, when he was visiting the statues of the Buddhas in Polonnaruwa. His account was posthumously published in *The Asian journal of Thomas Merton*. The style of this writing is different for probably the above-mentioned reasons: the sentences are often shorter, or they reflect a natural conversation and narrative. He talks about the statues and how he approaches them. Then, suddenly his perception changes. When it comes to the description of the mystical experience, the usual poetic style and mystical influence shine through the text. As he looked at the statues, his perception suddenly changed: he saw them and other issues through the lens

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[604] (Merton, The Seven Storey Mountain, 1999, p. 321)
[605] (Merton, Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander, 1989, pp. 156-158)
[606] (Merton, Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander, 1989, p. 156)
[607] (Merton, Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander, 1989, p. 157)
[608] "It was like waking from a dream of separateness, of spurious self-isolation in a special world, the world of renunciation and supposed holiness. The whole illusion of a separate holy existence is a dream. Not that I question the reality of my vocation. or of my monastic life: but the conception of 'separation from the world' that we have in the monastery too easily presents itself as a complete illusion: the illusion that by making vows we become a different species of being, pseudoangels, 'spiritual men', men of interior life, what have you." (Merton, Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander, 1989, pp. 156-157)
[609] The secret beauty of their hearts, depth of their hearts, the core of their reality, "Le point vierge", point of nothingness, point of pure truth, little point of nothingness, and point of absolute poverty. (Merton, Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander, 1989, p. 158)

of a newly born inner clarity and evidence. "The thing about all this is that there is no puzzle, no problem, and really no 'mystery'. All problems are resolved and everything is clear, simply because what matters is clear."[610] After this short summary of both John of the Cross's and Thomas Merton's mystical experiences, in the following part of the chapter, I will reflect more closely on the mystical texts as I analyze them.

Comparison

Now that a primary picture of the two authors' contexts has been drawn, I want to examine their mystical texts in search of expressions that lead as close to the experience as possible from a textual resource. I have previously written about the method of choosing these texts. To summarize: when looking for the key expressions, I searched for what I consider typical features of mystical language. When I say typical, I refer to my previous readings of mystical texts from different cultural contexts and theoretical works (such as King's, Forman's, and James's), which give an idea about what might be helpful. Therefore, I was looking for raw, direct language, occasional difficulty putting the experience into words, and an overall sense of vulnerability that might point to the fact that the person was affected by the experience. Certainly, the multiple interpretations, editing and translations of the text do not allow us to get very close to the experience. However, I think it might not become distant in time like other experiences: as mystical experiences leave behind a strong impression and often live vividly in the person's memory and later on on the pages of their work.

All in all, considering the theoretical background and previous knowledge, the following characteristics were searched for: use of metaphors/concealing language, a peculiar sense of time, first person singular narratives, and any major or uncontrollable reactions or physical movements mentioned. In Merton's case, all four of the given experiences fit the criteria. They proved to be rich sources of expressions. This is primarily because Merton was very articulate and straightforward in his writings. Therefore, it was relatively easy to highlight the expressions based on the typical features. In the case of John of the Cross, it was much more challenging, even after locating the fitting parts of his work. As I mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, some of these elements, such as the use of metaphors, did not provide any considerable help initially in locating the sections. Needless to say, a similar straightforwardness was not expected. Also, there were considerably fewer words found in his texts as one whole poem and two segments of another one were used.

Following that, many different directions were considered for the comparison: simply pointing out the similarities and differences between the two authors' expressions, and locating a few chosen words in other passages of the authors' texts to find out more about their possible meaning. Eventually, I ended up with none of this, but a third method. I followed the direction of the expressions in Merton's texts. Initially, I noticed that there were repeating words, such as *suddenly* and *overwhelming*. After that, I discovered some patterns: he frequently uses antonyms and binary oppositions to highlight the intensity of the experience; he regularly refers to light and darkness when talking about the direct connection with God – just to mention a few of these patterns.

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[610] (Merton, Burton, Brother Hart, & Laughlin, 1974, p. 235)

Based on the patterns, frequency, and similarity of words, four groups could be identified, which I labelled as *opposites; time; depth;* and *body, actions, feelings, and perception*. The opposites include antonyms and terms describing light and darkness. The latter (light and darkness) were initially considered a separate group, but because of their frequent usage depicting opposite states of mind and differences between the divine and human reality, I decided to include them here. The category of time includes any expressions referring to how time has passed in relation to the mystical experience: whether it happened out of nowhere, went by quickly, or made the usual flow of time alter the mystics' perception. The 'depth' refers to expressions related to the intensity of the mystical experience, and words that refer to its extraordinary qualities and overwhelming nature. The fourth group is "body, actions, feelings and perceptions". It includes any mental, emotional, and bodily effects of the mystical experience and terms describing the mode of perception (*I was aware of..., realization, understanding*, etc.). Another crucial element in this group is the uncontrollable bodily reactions described in the text.

The groups seemed adequately applicable to the terms from John of the Cross's texts too. I have found numerous examples for the opposites and depth categories, one significant example regarding bodily reactions, and some not-so-apparent words referring to time. Therefore, the comparison of the two authors' texts will be presented along these four groups.

Opposites

In John of the Cross's case, words with opposite meanings are centered mainly around knowledge and light and darkness. This is in line with negative theology, as I mentioned earlier. The use of words with contradictory meanings is in itself a means of apophatic expression. This way, one can indirectly point to something and not mark it as the complete expression of truth. John of the Cross and Merton share some opposites on the basis of apophatic mysticism. However, I do not consider Merton an unambiguously apophatic mystic. In my opinion, he exhibits some signs of cataphatic mysticism.[611] Even though numerous examples can be found in Merton's text when he talks about God being darkness (Rome), and being blinded by the manifestation of God's presence (Cuba), he mostly mentions a light that made him realize his present condition (Rome), light being the essence/marking the presence of God, which his father communicated towards him (Rome), a blinding, neutralizing, extraordinary yet ordinary light (Cuba), the invisible light of heaven (Louisville), billions of points of light – pure center in every person (Louisville), aesthetic illumination (Sri Lanka), getting beyond the shadow and the disguise (Sri Lanka). In the Louisville experience, these words are used in a more mundane meaning, referring to the darkness and cruelty of life.

Light and darkness are used in a variety of ways in Merton's text. As I mentioned earlier, he is very critical of his past self, actions, and beliefs in his autobiography. He refers to this era as not finding his way, constantly making bad decisions, or in other words generally being in

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[611] McCaslin's paper seems to confirm this idea: in Merton's work, "these two ways constitute a dance." (p.25) However, she says earlier: "A survey of Merton's writings and visions suggests that he discovers a ground in silence for his experiences in what European Christian mystical theology has called the via negativa or apophatic way. That is, his experiences (along with the images and symbols by which he expresses them) spring from a place of 'unknowing' – of nameless mystery." (p.25) (McCaslin, 2012)

the darkness. His experience in Rome shines through this darkness as his first direct experience of the divine. Light is also connected to humans: in the case of the Cuban experience, it is connected to children, and in the Louisville experience he talks about people shining like the Sun. Merton also uses opposites to highlight the difference between the experience from previous states and latter ones (just like in the case of the Roman experience, after which there was not a significant change in his behavior). He uses light and darkness also to point out his situation at the time of the experience and its role in his life. Here both light and darkness seem to refer to the encounter with God during the mystical experience. On the one hand, light signifies the enlightening effect of the mystical experience: Merton realized his present conditions for a second.[612] The divine light is put implicitly in contrast with his present condition: terrible things keeping his will enslaved – he writes almost as if the flash of divine light could enlighten this darkness. On the other hand, he describes the mystical experience as God has reached out to him out of his darkness, and this clearly shows an apophatic idea of God.

The *Stanzas of contemplation* gives a number of other examples of opposites for the perception: understanding vs. not understanding, knowing vs. unknowing. Some similarities in the two authors' expressions include referring to mystical knowledge. What John of the Cross expresses with the tension between knowing and unknowing is articulated as the difference between speculative and abstract knowledge versus concrete and experimental way of knowing in Merton's texts. In the description of the Cuban experience, the mystical experience, more specifically, the mystical perception, is described as concrete and experimental as opposed to speculative and abstract. What had been given/accepted in faith before now became physical and substantial;[613] what had been believed before became knowledge and love.[614] However, Merton talks about this light of faith being ordinary – deepened and reduced to obviousness as opposed to fancy or strange. "To put it simply: it was nothing but the essence of faith presented in a simple and deep way."

In the description of the Louisville experience, the opposites have a similar role in the sense that they aim to help understand mystical perception as opposed to the everyday one. Moreover, Merton articulates a strong critique of monastic life with its isolation, sense of separateness, supposed holiness, and illusory difference. At the heart of the interpretation of the experience is the opposition between the monks, the monastery, and ordinary people and the outside world. This illusion of space is a consequence of the physical isolation and confinement associated with the monastery. Furthermore, the isolation between people comes into being with the monastic vow and is fulfilled in the monastic work, or more precisely in the difference of work: monks are concerned only with spiritual life. According to Merton, "monasticism" supports the maintenance of this illusion: monks have a different attitude toward the world and towards people. Monastic thinking also reinforces the image of isolation in spaces and between

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[612] "I was pierced deeply with a light that made me realize something of the condition I was in..." (Merton, The Seven Storey Mountain, 1999, p. 138)

[613] "It ignored all sense experience in order to strike directly at the heart of truth, as if a sudden and immediate contact had been established between my intellect and the Truth Who was now physically really and substantially before me on the altar." (Merton, The Seven Storey Mountain, 1999, p. 321)

[614] "But this contact was not something speculative and abstract: it was concrete and experimental and belonged to the order of knowledge, yes, but more still to the order of love." (Merton, The Seven Storey Mountain, 1999, p. 321)

people. In Merton's mystical experience, these two illusory distances are bridged. The difference between clerics and laity is no longer fundamental: it is expressed in the fact that members of the clergy are conscious of the religious doctrines of belonging to God, and this is reflected in their vocation.

While the distance and opposition between religious and secular spaces and persons are explicitly articulated in the interpretation of experience, there is a more substantial but less noticeable difference in interpretation. This difference can be drawn between people's illusory 'vision' in everyday life and the mystical vision that focuses on essential qualities. The former focuses on the separateness and differences between people. I believe that the vision of these differences originating in the mystical experience and articulated here are essential in terms of Merton's actions later in his life. I will return to this below.

A similar differentiation between religious and secular spaces cannot be found in John of the Cross's quoted writings. The only similar difference he makes is between the mystical and the human dimensions, as he refers to leaving behind every created being.[615] *The Stanzas of spiritual meaning* can be connected here with the high-low differences depicting the flight of the soul with its humiliation along the way. The humiliation is referred to with two peculiar expressions: subdued and abased.[616] Another interesting mutually exclusive/self-contradictory idea is being "faltered in the flight".[617] Yet it makes all the sense in the context of apophatic mysticism: underlining the human fallibility along the mystical way.

The world's sinfulness and impurity, in contrast with God's perfection and purity, are expressed in Merton's writings, while John of the Cross draws a similar line between humans and God. More precisely, John of the Cross refers to the distance and difference between himself and God: the height of God versus humans' subdued and abased nature. While in the description of the mystical experience in Rome, Merton talks about the mystical experience as it freed him out of the slavery of his will. One of the most striking opposites articulated in Merton's Sri Lankan experience is the one between purity, clarity (both in the physical and mental sense) and garbage, shadow, and disguise; the habitual half-tied vision of things or the surface-level perception of the world, the former pointing to the mystical perception and the

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[615] "My soul is disentangled
from every created thing
and lifted above itself
in a life of gladness
supported only in God."
A gloss (with spiritual meaning)
(John, Kavanaugh, & Rodriguez, The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross. Revised edition, 1991, p. 70)
[616] "The higher I ascended
in this seeking so lofty
the lower and more subdued
and abased I became."
Stanzas given a spiritual meaning
(John, Kavanaugh, & Rodriguez, The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross. Revised edition, 1991, p. 57)
[617] "I had to fly so high
that I was lost from sight;
and though in this adventure
I faltered in my fligh"
Stanzas given a spiritual meaning
(John, Kavanaugh, & Rodriguez, The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross. Revised edition, 1991, p. 56)

latter to everyday perception (in the mental sense) and pollution (in both senses of the word).[618] The idea of purity also appears in the Louisville experience, where Merton talks about *le point vierge*, describing it as pure, untouched by sin and illusion, pure glory, nothingness, and absolute poverty. The latter two expressions refer to the signs of dependence on God.

Time

Only a few straightforward expressions of time can be found in John of the Cross's poems: *while*, *always* (*Stanzas of contemplation*) and *swiftly* (*A gloss*). The first two of these refer to the time of the mystical union when the soul gains direct knowledge. The third one is unequaled in the sense that it refers to fast movement: the mystic being swiftly consumed in the union. These expressions of time seem to refer to a status that lasts relatively long (like *while* and *always*). The rest of the examples refer to a duration of time only in a figurative sense, such as, "I was left stammering", "I remained in unknowing", "my senses were left deprived", and "he is left in unknowing" (SC).[619] It is especially remarkable that the verb *left* is included three times in one poem, not necessarily because of the verb itself, but because of all the additional space, time and happenings it invites into the poem without actually talking about it. In my impressions, these give a sense of mystical experiences transcending the limitations of time, as though they were able to transcend the regular flow of time. This limitlessness could also be connected to the *via negativa* as the transcendent nature of God cannot be described in regular terms of time and space.[620]

Merton's expressions of time show the exact opposite of this. Strikingly, all descriptions of Merton's experiences start with a sentence that involves the word *suddenly*.[621] Moreover, the words *sudden* and *suddenly* appear three times in the Louisville description and four times in the Cuban one. According to these descriptions, all of the mystical experiences seem to happen out of nowhere and in a flash[622] for Merton. Not only antonyms but expressions of time seem to highlight the essential differences of these experiences from everyday ones as well as their significance and depth.[623] In addition, expressions related to time point to the fact that these

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[618] "This is Asia in its purity, not covered over with garbage, Asian or European or American, and it is clear, pure, complete." (Merton, Burton, Brother Hart, & Laughlin, 1974, p. 236)

[619] The *Stanzas given a spiritual meaning* do not include any expressions of time.

[620] I owe thanks to Prof. Máté-Tóth for pointing out this connection.

[621] Examples in The Seven Storey Mountain (Merton, The Seven Storey Mountain, 1999): "Suddenly it seemed to me that Father, who had now been dead more than a year, was there with me." (p.138) "I was overwhelmed with a sudden and profound insight […]" (p.138) "It was as if I had been suddenly illuminated by being blinded by the manifestation of God's presence." (p.321). In the *Conjectures* (Merton, Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander, 1989): "[…] I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all those people, that they were mine and I theirs […]" (p.156) "To think that such a commonplace realization should suddenly seem like news that one holds the winning ticket in a cosmic sweepstake." (p.157) "Then it was as if I suddenly saw the secret beauty of their hearts […]" (p.158). In the Asian Journals (Merton, Burton, Brother Hart, & Laughlin, 1974): "Looking at these figures I was suddenly, almost forcibly, jerked clean out of the habitual, half-tied vision of things […]" (p.233). Moreover, right before he starts talking about the Rome experience, he writes: "It came in a strange way, suddenly, a way that I will not attempt to explain." (Merton, The Seven Storey Mountain, 1999, p. 138) It is used in a similar way, to describe passivity and ineffability. Before he describes the Cuban experience and talks about the context, he uses suddenly and sudden three times and once shortly after it.

[622] "The whole thing passed in a flash, but in that flash, instantly, I was overwhelmed with a sudden and profound insight into the misery and corruption of my own soul.. […]" (Merton, The Seven Storey Mountain, 1999, p. 138)

[623] "And now I think for the first time in my whole life I really began to pray — praying not with my lips and with my intellect and my imagination, but praying out of the very roots of my life and of my being […]" (Merton, The Seven Storey Mountain, 1999, p. 138). "[…] this light was something far above and beyond the level of any desire

experiences are shocking to Merton – they come out of nowhere,[624] he has "no say in them" and the fact that they are overwhelming – for the amount of time they last, they take all of his being to focus on the experience, and the fact that these episodes present a challenge to him after the experiences – interpretation and putting that piece/puzzle into the bigger picture. Even though they do not usually last for a long time, they seem difficult to forget.[625]

In the description of the Roman experience, he also talks about feeling a sense of urgency to escape his present conditions for the first time in his life.[626] The description of the Cuban experience is rich with terms used to denote time. Some of the expressions refer to the experiences coming out of nowhere and happening relatively swiftly: *sudden*, *struck*, *immediate*; *it lasted only a moment*. When referring to their effects, the terms show the opposite: its effects staying for hours and leaving a lasting impression that he could not forget.

The terms *present* and *presence* are between the two ends because they refer to a temporary encounter that taps into a timeless reality that leaves behind long-lasting effects. The Cuban account is articulated as a "manifestation of God's presence" and "the realization of God made present". The Roman one refers to the realization of his father's presence and the realization of his present condition.

Depth, perception

The depth, significance, and inexplicability of the experiences are highly stressed in both Merton's and John of the Cross's cases. The vast majority of the words belong to this category. In connection with the use of opposites, these terms further highlight the difference between ordinary sense and mystical experiences. The struggle of verbalizing the nature and personal meaning of such experiences results in a rather passionate, detailed, and straightforward description in Merton's case –in quite a bit of contrast to John of the Cross's way. John of the Cross uses metaphors in the "usual" mystical way – both concealing and highlighting the ineffable aspects of the experience. Furthermore, he only hints the depth of the mystical experience and rarely is straightforward like Merton.[627] Both succeed in showing the depth of the experience, but in completely different ways – one by describing it and the other by concealing it.

One of the most common terms in Merton's case is *overwhelmed*, which appears in the first three accounts.[628] If I had to choose one term to summarize this category, this would be the

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or any appetite I had ever yet been aware of." (Merton, The Seven Storey Mountain, 1999, p. 321). "It was a light that was so bright that it had no relation to any visible light and so profound and so intimate that it seemed like a neutralization of every lesser experience." (Merton, The Seven Storey Mountain, 1999, p. 321). "It ignored all sense experience in order to strike directly at the heart of truth, as if a sudden and immediate contact had been established between my intellect and the Truth Who was now physically really and substantially before me on the altar." (Merton, The Seven Storey Mountain, 1999, p. 321)

[624] "The whole thing passed in a flash" (p. 138) "[…] yet it struck me like a thunderclap […]" (p.321) (Merton, The Seven Storey Mountain, 1999)

[625] "It lasted only a moment: but it left a breathless joy and a clean peace and happiness that stayed for hours and it was something I have never forgotten." (Merton, The Seven Storey Mountain, 1999, p. 321)

[626] "[…] and my soul desired escape and liberation and freedom from all this with an intensity and an urgency unlike anything I had ever known before." (Merton, The Seven Storey Mountain, 1999, p. 138)

[627] The latter statement can easily be imputed to cultural and timely differences.

[628] "[…] I was overwhelmed with a sudden and profound insight into the misery and corruption of my own soul […]" (p.138). "[…] another overwhelming thing about this awareness was that it disarmed all images, all

one. Although sometimes it can be challenging to articulate mystical experiences, the content of the experience itself is said to be unambiguous for mystics. The following expressions testify to this: *vivid, real* (Rome), *extreme obviousness* (Cuba), *commonplace realization* (Louisville), *evident/evidence, obvious, simple, straightforward*, and *clear* (Sri Lanka). The Sri Lankan experience has captivating articulations of this notion:

> "Looking at these figures I was suddenly, almost forcibly, jerked clean out of the habitual, half-tied vision of things, and an inner clearness, clarity, as if exploding from the rocks themselves, became evident and obvious. […] The thing about all this is that there is no puzzle, no problem, and really no "mystery". All problems are resolved and everything is clear, simply because what matters is clear."[629]

These words (*overwhelmed* and *overwhelming*) also appear in the *Stanzas of contemplation*.[630] They refer either to the intensity of the union when the senses are deprived or the sweeping 'amount' of mystical knowledge gained.

The intensity and directness of the experience are expressed with the following terms in John of the Cross's case: *exalted, profound, absorbed, supreme, loftiest, highest, transcending, something so secret (Stanzas of Contemplation)[631], wholly, consumed, every created being, nothing spared (A gloss)[632]*. Once again, the distance and difference between transcendent and immanent are in focus. In Merton's case, the focus is either on the divine, or mostly on himself as a mystic and how the experience affected him and his perception. He uses the following terms: *pierced deeply, profound insight, intensity*, "I was talking to him as well as to God".[633] (Rome), "it struck me like a thunderclap", "the thing that struck me most", "disarmed all images, all metaphors", "cut through the whole skein of species and phantasms", "strike directly at the heart of truth", *direct* (Cuba).[634] "pierced through the surface and have got beyond the shadow and the disguise" (Sri Lanka).[635] Besides it being overwhelming and serious, in the Louisville experience, it is expressed with terms such as *joy*, *relief*, and *liberation*, which is different from the other three expressions.

Referring to the depth in which the experience affected him, Merton uses the terms *my whole being, the very roots of my life, the very roots of my being, my soul* (Rome)[636], *in my mind, made Him belong to me*, "immediate contact had been established between my intellect

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metaphors […]" (p.321) (Merton, The Seven Storey Mountain, 1999). "[…]I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization […]" (Merton, Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander, 1989, p. 156). The word is used once more in the Louisville account but referring to the everyday perception which cannot overwhelm him anymore after the mystical experience: "As if the sorrows and stupidities of the human condition could overwhelm me, now I realize what we all are." (Merton, Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander, 1989, p. 157)

[629] (Merton, Burton, Brother Hart, & Laughlin, 1974, pp. 233-235)

[630] "I was so 'whelmed" (p.53)
"This knowledge in unknowing
is so overwhelming" (p.54)
(John, Kavanaugh, & Rodriguez, The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross. Revised edition, 1991)

[631] (John, Kavanaugh, & Rodriguez, The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross. Revised edition, 1991, pp. 53-54)

[632] (John, Kavanaugh, & Rodriguez, The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross. Revised edition, 1991, p. 70)

[633] (Merton, The Seven Storey Mountain, 1999, p. 138)

[634] (Merton, The Seven Storey Mountain, 1999, p. 321)

[635] (Merton, Burton, Brother Hart, & Laughlin, 1974, p. 236)

[636] (Merton, The Seven Storey Mountain, 1999, p. 138)

and the Truth", *concrete and experimental contact* (Cuba)[637], "I am one with them", "they are my own self" (Louisville)[638], "I was suddenly, almost forcibly, jerked clean" (Sri Lanka)[639]. A similar depth and totality are articulated when talking about the world and other people: core, "the secret beauty of their hearts", *vanish completely*[640] (Louisville)[641], *everything, all matter, all life, completely simple and straightforward; clear, pure,* and *complete,*[642] "I have now seen and have pierced through the surface and have got beyond the shadow and the disguise"[643] (Sri Lanka). John of the Cross has expressions with the same meaning: "with nothing spared, I am wholly being consumed" (*A gloss*).

It is interesting to note that the description of the Roman experience has two expressions that refer to the tremendous and overwhelming effects of the encounter. The encounter with Merton's father, who passed on, shone a light on his present life, which filled him with horror. Merton also uses the word *startling* when describing his father's presence. Rudolf Otto's idea of the experience of the holy might be an explanation for the terms mentioned above. Such an experience is not only *fascinans*[644] but *tremendum* as well. In the other three accounts, negatively startling expressions cannot be found. Even though all the other experiences were sudden and unique, they did not have shocking effects. One explanation for that could be the familiarity with such experiences; the other could be having some narratives to describe it both from personal experience and religious context (as all the other experiences happened after his conversion).

Another puzzling question might be the absence of the word *overwhelmed* in the last (Sri Lankan) account. Although the Sri Lankan experience came "suddenly and almost forcibly" like the others, Merton does not talk about it being *overwhelming* for him. He uses expressions to describe the clarity and possibly the familiarity of the mystical experience and realization: *inner clearness, clarity, evident, obvious, simple, straightforward, resolved, illumination,* and *complete.*[645]

Connecting to the depth and the effects of the mystical experience, the *Stanzas of spiritual meaning* come into play: *subdued* and *abased.* Another example could be the previously quoted "with nothing spared" (*A gloss*), referring to the total emptiness before the union.

Perception is a central aspect of John of the Cross's poems. It is simple in its variety yet holds vast meanings with its indications, as I mentioned earlier in the case of knowing and unknowing. Other than these expressions, *perfect knowledge* (*Stanzas of contemplation*) is an important one referring to mystical knowledge as opposed to everyday knowledge, and 'I

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[637] (Merton, The Seven Storey Mountain, 1999, p. 321)
[638] (Merton, Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander, 1989, p. 158)
[639] (Merton, Burton, Brother Hart, & Laughlin, 1974, p. 233)
[640] Referring to the light which could vanish all darkness and cruelty completely
[641] (Merton, Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander, 1989, p. 158)
[642] Referring to Asia in comparison with Europe and America. (Merton, Burton, Brother Hart, & Laughlin, 1974, pp. 235-236)
[643] (John, Kavanaugh, & Rodriguez, The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross. Revised edition, 1991, p. 70)
[644] Demonstrating the overflow of positive emotions is the Louisville experience, which is described as liberation, joy, and relief resulting from waking up from a dream of illusions.
[645] Referring to Asia in comparison with Europe and America. (Merton, Burton, Brother Hart, & Laughlin, 1974, pp. 233-236)

understood' and 'my spirit was given an understanding' are also in the same poem.[646] He also talks about deprived senses referring to the emptiness preceding the mystical union.[647]

Merton also uses a variety of expressions to describe the mystical mode of perception, often more than once in the same sentence, like in the case of the Cuban experience. As I mentioned earlier, the Sri Lankan experience does not include any references to feelings and actions, yet the wording related to perception is particularly elaborate in it. Merton uses the following terms to describe perception: 'sudden and profound insight', 'the sense of his presence', having his father on his mind (Rome)[648], *awareness, understanding, realization, being illuminated* (Cuba)[649], *realization, waking from a dream, understand, see* (Louisville)[650], "jerked clean out of the habitual, half-tied vision of things", "inner clearness, clarity, as if exploding from the rocks themselves, became evident and obvious", *sense* (of beauty and spiritual validity), (aesthetic) *illumination, know, see*, "pierced through the surface and have got beyond the shadow and the disguise" (Sri Lanka)[651].

Bodily reactions, actions, feelings

In three of the four mentioned experiences, Merton talks about some kind of instant and uncontrollable bodily reaction to the mystical experience. In the case of the Roman experience, he was moved to tears. He felt breathless after his second mystical experience in Cuba. The rest of the Cuban examples are quasi-bodily reactions as he talks about being blinded by the manifestation of God's presence,[652] and that the ordinary nature of the experience took his breath away. In Louisville, he felt such joy from the liberation from the illusory difference between monks and ordinary people that he "almost laughed out loud", and his joy erupted in words[653]. In the case of the Sri Lankan experience, there is no similar example. While it is an accentuated element of his descriptions, the same cannot be said in John of the Cross's case, although one straightforward example appears in *Stanzas of contemplation* as he talks about

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[646] (John, Kavanaugh, & Rodriguez, The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross. Revised edition, 1991, p. 53)
[647] "my senses were left
deprived of all their sensing"
(John, Kavanaugh, & Rodriguez, The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross. Revised edition, 1991, p. 53)
[648] (Merton, The Seven Storey Mountain, 1999, p. 138)
[649] (Merton, The Seven Storey Mountain, 1999, p. 321)
[650] (Merton, Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander, 1989, pp. 156-158)
[651] (Merton, Burton, Brother Hart, & Laughlin, 1974, pp. 233-236)
[652] "It was as if I had been suddenly illuminated by being blinded by the manifestation of God's presence." (Merton, The Seven Storey Mountain, 1999, p. 321)
[653] (Merton, Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander, 1989, p. 157)

being left stammering.[654] Another seemingly metaphorical expression is the "my vision was dazzled" in the *Stanzas*.[655]

Just like bodily reactions, immediate actions may also accompany mystical experiences. One of the examples of that for Merton is praying; the rest of them are sentences that allegedly erupted from him verbally or mentally right after the experience/realization of its content: "I was talking to him as well as to God" (Rome) [656], "[a]nd the first articulate thought that came to my mind was: 'Heaven is right here in front of me: Heaven, Heaven!'" (Cuba)[657], 'almost laughed out loud", "[a]nd I suppose my happiness could have taken form in the words: 'Thank God, thank God that I am like other men, that I am only a man among others.'" (Louisville)[658]. There are no similar actions in the last experience. Because of the lack of context, it is not clear whether "No one can overtake it!" could be understood this way in the Stanzas with Spiritual meaning.[659]

The feelings associated with a mystical experience reflect, on the one hand, about it being overwhelming and intense (especially the Roman experience) and being filled with love, happiness, and other positive feelings (Cuba, Louisville). The words expressing feelings are *startled*, "I was pierced deeply", *horror* ("filled with horror"), "my whole being Rose up in revolt", "my soul desired escape, liberation and freedom from all this", *intensity, urgency*, an agonizing sense of the presence of his father (Rome)[660], *struck* (twice), *love*, *joy*, *clean peace*, *happiness* (Cuba)[661], *love, happiness* (Louisville)[662]. In the case of the Sri Lankan experience, no feelings are mentioned, but Merton talks about an inner clarity. Feelings are scarcely mentioned in John of the Cross's texts: a life of gladness and delighting flame are two examples from *A gloss*.[663]

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[654] "That perfect knowledge
was of peace and holiness
held at no remove
in profound solitude;
it was something so secret
that I was left stammering,
transcending all knowledge."
(John, Kavanaugh, & Rodriguez, The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross. Revised edition, 1991, p. 53)
[655] There is another expression, which in meaning could belong here, but it is metaphorical; therefore, I do not consider it: faltered (Stanzas with Spiritual Meaning). (John, Kavanaugh, & Rodriguez, The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross. Revised edition, 1991, p. 56)
[656] (Merton, The Seven Storey Mountain, 1999, p. 138)
[657] (Merton, The Seven Storey Mountain, 1999, p. 321)
[658] (Merton, Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander, 1989, p. 157)
[659] "The higher I ascended
in this seeking so lofty
the lower and more subdued
and abased I became.
I said: No one can overtake it!
And sank, ah, so low,
that I was so high, so high,
that I took the prey."
(John, Kavanaugh, & Rodriguez, The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross. Revised edition, 1991, p. 57)
[660] (Merton, The Seven Storey Mountain, 1999, p. 138)
[661] (Merton, The Seven Storey Mountain, 1999, p. 321)
[662] (Merton, Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander, 1989, pp. 156-158)
[663] (John, Kavanaugh, & Rodriguez, The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross. Revised edition, 1991, p. 70)

Comparison

In the following paragraphs, I summarize the main similarities and differences based on the four dimensions of the analysis staring with the opposites. I have found two distinct uses of these expressions based on the mystical texts of Thomas Merton and John of the Cross. On the one hand, they serve the purpose of illuminating parts of the mystical knowledge for the reader. The tension of ineffability vs. the need for expression often results not only in the use of metaphors in mystical texts, but apparently in the use of words with opposite meanings. Both authors use words related to light and darkness to refer to mystical knowledge and experience. While for John of the Cross the mystical knowledge of God is often associated with darkness, Thomas Merton regularly refers to it as light or illumination. Together with expressions of perception (understanding, realization, perception, illuminating), this suggests that Thomas Merton's mysticism is cataphatic rather than apophatic.

On the other hand, terms of opposite meanings mark the differences between the sacred and the profane, or the mystical and the ordinary. In John of the Cross's case, the distance between God and the person is stressed through the words 'lofty' and 'subdued and abased'. The divine is often depicted as the beloved who cannot be reached, only longed for. Thomas Merton's focus lies elsewhere: between clerics and the lay people, between purity and impurity. These differentiations closely belong to modernity. First, because of their reflective nature, which within the context of church civilization would simply not have made sense. Second, because of its immanent focus, despite Merton's strong religious connectedness.

The use of expressions to aid with the difficulties originating in the ineffable nature of mystical experiences is a substantial similarity in these cases. The light vs. darkness opposites are also often used to describe the experience in other mystical authors' texts as well. This is also a relevant and meaningful similarity, though not necessarily an essential one. The different theological and linguistic approach of cataphatic and apophatic mysticism is not necessarily a sign of the changing times. One of John of the Cross's contemporaries, Teresa of Avila's work, was an outstanding example of cataphatic mysticism.

The other difference highlighted here was where the focus of the mystical text is in regard to the distance between the transcendent and immanent. This is much more revealing than the theological/linguistic example before. However, I argue that this does not necessarily reveal differences in the mystical experiences but rather in the context. I think that John of the Cross's focus on the distance between the transcendent and the immanent showcases the characteristics of church civilization. In contrast, Thomas Merton's focus on the immanent and reflections on the sacred vs. profane differences mirrors the characteristics of modernity. As has been pointed out earlier, this does not mean that the focus is exclusively on the immanent, only that the direct connection with the transcendent alters the vision of the immanent, and this becomes the center of the interpretation. I will return to this last notion in the last chapter, highlighting that some scholars argue that modern mysticism is solely or overwhelmingly focused on the immanent, and, therefore, should not be considered mysticism at all.

The second dimension derived from the expressions was *time*. Here opposite tendencies were found. While John of the Cross's expressions refer mainly to long-lasting events, Thomas Merton stresses that the experiences happen suddenly, out of nowhere, and last for a short time. Interestingly, there are counter-examples in both texts: Merton uses the words *present* and

presence, which might refer to a slightly more extended period of time, while John of the Cross uses the word *swiftly* to talk about the happening of the mystical rapture. These terms give the impression of relatively long-lasting states, which happen gradually rather than out of nowhere, even if they carry away the person swiftly. John of the Cross's expressions and the unclarity of the context do not allow me to draw meaningful conclusions in this area. In contrast, Merton is clear about the surprising nature and the brevity of the experiences. However, he highlights that their effects stayed with him long after the sudden events.

What might these differences in temporal expressions highlight in relation to mysticism in general and the category of traditional and modern mysticism? In an attempt to answer the first question, I refer to some previously mentioned notions. William James deals with the temporal characteristics of mysticism with the criterion of transiency, stating that mystical experiences do not last long (usually a few minutes or, at maximum, an hour). The other notion is related to the concepts of samadhi and sahaja samadhi – the latter referring to long-lasting mystical states (even during sleep). Based on this categorization, both lengthy and short mystical experiences are common. Referring to the start of the mystical experiences is an entirely different question. Merton regularly opens his accounts with the word *suddenly*, and John of the Cross refers to the rapture with the term *swiftly*. In my opinion, these expressions of time are closely connected to passivity rather than just transiency. They refer to the fact that the experience came out of nowhere or felt overwhelming. The emphasis is on the fact that the mystics themselves did not induce them. This stands even in the case of John of the Cross: the rapture comes *swiftly* even after practicing mental prayer for decades. So far, both authors' mystical experiences seem to fit existing theories. They are not diversions of the classical concepts of mysticism, only varieties of it. They share the suddenness and the passivity, while they most likely differ in their lengths.

The category of depth and perception did not reveal any significant divergence either. Both texts included references to the direct nature of the experience; they both referred to the intensity and other effects of the mystical experience. An apparent reference to that is the term *overwhelmed*. The only difference in this category is another example of the variety of mystical expressions, which is not a difference in the experience per se but a linguistic and cultural difference. This is the concealing language in John of the Cross's case and the clarity in Merton's writings. Naturally, this does not mean that Merton can wholly describe the mystical event, but the fact that he aims to explain, while John of the Cross conceals (yet illuminates) them with metaphors and antonyms. I consider this difference related to the apophatic vs. cataphatic differentiation that has been mentioned. The difference, therefore, lies in the style of writing about the ineffable, not in the clarity of the actual experience.

Finally, *bodily reactions, actions, and feelings* are a category that is considerable in Merton's texts, while John of the Cross only occasionally refers to it. Despite some examples, such as stammering, life of gladness, and delighting flame, no references were found. John of the Cross is simply not descriptive regarding himself and the bodily reactions and feelings

brought on by the experience.[664] The mystical way toward the union is elaborately described, along with the burning and longing for the beloved. The union is only vaguely referred to. The lack of contextual information makes it even more challenging to unravel these aspects. Thomas Merton's texts, on the other hand, reveal intense reactions and feelings induced by the experience: being filled with horror, love, happiness, and exclamations. Once again, I attribute this difference to contextual and cultural shifts from the focus on the transcendent along with its ultimate distance and differentiation from the immanent; to personal and focused descriptions of the mystical union.

As I stated earlier, these dimensions were deducted from the mystically relevant expressions found in Merton's text and confirmed by John of the Cross's writings. The groups show a significant resemblance and some differences to the four Jamesian criteria of mystical experiences. These dimensions were not created based on it, but the Jamesian criteria support this concept; therefore, I would like to note it here. The dimension of antonyms primarily connects to ineffability, as these words often deal with the tension of needing to express the experience with the inefficiency of language to do so. The second group (time) is associated chiefly with transiency. Although some of the expressions, such as *suddenly* and *swiftly*, are connected to the Jamesian understanding of passivity. The category of depth and perception can easily be associated with the noetic quality referring to the insight into the ultimate reality and the sense of authority along with it. This category might also be connected to ineffability based on words such as *startling*, *overwhelming*, and *secret*. Finally, *Bodily reactions, actions, and feelings* could be connected to *Passivity*. However, this would require understanding this criterion in a broader sense. James primarily understands it as mystical experiences that are not inducible. Here passivity would refer to how mystical experiences are brought about and how they take place — referring to the mystic experiencing an out-of-control situation, which is manifested in their uncontrollable bodily reactions, actions, and surprising or overwhelming feelings. Even with the overlaps and differences, the Jamesian criteria seem to support the dimensions examined in the two authors' texts.

What has been presented in this chapter shows that despite the significant contextual differences, the mystical texts of Thomas Merton and John of the Cross do not suggest any significant differences in their mystical experiences. The differences found here either result from contextual alterations or point to the variety of mystical experiences. Most contextual changes are connected to the general shift of focus in modernity – from the transcendent to the immanent. Other differences depicting the variety within mystical experiences are the length of mystical experiences and the differences in the mystical language associated with apophatic and cataphatic mysticism. All in all, the analyzed texts have shown examples of all four dimensions, and even within the dimensions, significant similarities have been found regarding the uses of the expressions. Therefore, I consider my preliminary hypothesis about the similarity of mystical experiences regardless of context to be supported by the mystical texts of John of the Cross and Thomas Merton.

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[664] I believe it is safe to say that it was intentional, as Teresa of Avila was much more elaborate on these fronts while carefully choosing any possibly authority-challenging words.

Context: Aftermath

In this part, I examine what followed the mystical experiences of Thomas Merton and John of the Cross. I mainly focus on the changes occurring after the mystical experiences as well as the reception of the authors. I also mention relevant details of the description of the mystical experiences. Despite the fact that the hagiography of John of the Cross gives relatively detailed information about his life and works, without any specificity on the mystical experiences, it is not possible to be precise and detailed regarding this issue. Therefore, the references to the aftermaths of mystical experiences are much shorter than Merton's. Thomas Merton's case is the exact opposite of John of the Cross's, as his autobiography, other works, and secondary literature provide detailed information on the topic.

John of the Cross

What is relatively clear about the aftermath of the mystical experiences is that John of the Cross has utilized his experiences to help others on their way. His experiences prompted him to formulate his thoughts, thus helping his fellow monks and nuns on the mystical path to God. He presumably aimed to provide guidance on the oftentimes challenging mystical path to avoid getting off it because of confusion. I have analyzed some of his poems in this work, but this attempt becomes especially clear in his prose works. The *Ascent to Mount Carmel*[665] gives excellent examples of these attempts. In this work, remarkable writing skills, poetic sense and a carefully thought through structure are combined. The text guides the reader through a metaphoric mystical journey leading towards, but not entirely up to, the mystical union. The metaphor of the two nights describes the purification of the senses and the spirit. The soul at the beginning of its journey is compared to a baby, still very dependent on their mother.[666] Nevertheless, during the dark nights, especially during spiritual dryness, the soul "grows up". The states of spiritual dryness are especially challenging in the process of purification, hence this and the subsequent guidance through the journey. The soul is also compared to a log of wood, which the divine fire makes like itself through the process of burning.[667] With such metaphors, complex processes are explained, and with detailed and caring descriptions, the difficulties of others are meant to be helped.

Both John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila understood that an educated and sensitive spiritual leader could make all the difference in one's mystical path. When one has not had similar purifications and experiences, the fear and the misinformation or misguidance can cause problems. Teresa of Avila suffered from confessors who were not experienced in the subject and could not help but caused damage.[668] She did not only have John of the Cross as her

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[665] (John, Kavanaugh, & Rodriguez, The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross. Revised edition, 1991, pp. 114-352)

[666] "Their experience resembles that of a suckling child who finds that the breast is taken away just when it is beginning to taste the milk that was gathered there for it." (John, Kavanaugh, & Rodriguez, The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross. Revised edition, 1991, p. 192)

[667] "Another example: If fire is to be united with a log of wood, it is necessary for heat, the means, to prepare the log first, through so many degrees of heat, with a certain likeness and proportion to the fire. [...] If the intellect, then, is to reach union with God in this life, insofar as is possible, it must take the means that bears a proximate likeness to God and unites with him." (John, Kavanaugh, & Rodriguez, The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross. Revised edition, 1991, p. 174)

[668] "Having suffered much from the vincible ignorance of her confessors, Teresa was keen to spare her daughters anything similar. John, at the time, tended to stress the limitations of learning. Teresa thought an expert was a

confessor but appointed him to be the confessor of her fellow nuns in Avila. Moreover, it was not only an inwardly but an outwardly challenging case – as the Spanish Inquisition and the strictness of the Counter-Reformation in Spain were not the ideal circumstances in which to be vocal about one's mystical struggles. In such a context, guidance played a crucial role.

Reception

As for the reception of John of the Cross, I will start with a summary of how the textual resources are treated. Following his death in 1591, the first edition of his works (without the *Spiritual Canticle*) was published in 1618 in Alcalá.[669] Only four years after that, in 1622, the first French edition was published. Kavanaugh provides a detailed list in the *Collected works* of the authentic works and the possible dates and places of their creation.[670] He also mentions the trustworthiness of the available manuscripts and codices and their differences.[671] Interestingly enough, Kavanaugh argues that the texts are not simply descriptions of the mystical way, but they were meant to awaken a similar experience in readers.

> "But in his work as a theologian John also, in veiled ways, sought to transmit something of his own intimate experience of God's mystery so as to awaken a similar experience in his readers. He presented the mystery so others might come close and be totally transformed by it: 'One speaks badly of the intimate depths of the spirit if one does not do so with a deeply recollected soul.'"[672]

This interpretation calls for reflections on passivity and gives an essentially different approach to the mystical texts of John of the Cross. While Merton's can be treated as descriptions of the context and the content of the mystical experience, John of the Cross's cannot. According to Kavanaugh, these texts were not meant to be descriptions of a specific experience of a specific person but a presentation of the "mystery", so that "others might come close and be totally transformed by it".[673] Therefore, aiming to find out details of the experience in these texts is a failed mission from the start.[674] However, I argue that the poems I presented above allow us to glimpse into the personal dimension of mystical experiences while fulfilling these aims.

I have already gone into details about John of the Cross's reception during his lifetime. His persecution and imprisonment were discussed at the beginning of this chapter, and I want to add to this his reception after his death here. The latter process was fast and totally in opposition to his reception during his lifetime, when he was heavily criticized. Pope Clement X beatified him in 1675, Benedict XIII canonized him in 1726, and 200 years after that, in 1926, Pius XI declared him Doctor of the Universal Church. John of the Cross is also known as the Mystical Doctor.

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person with a degree who knew a lot about something; John didn't seem to think anybody knew much about anything- an expert was someone who knew the mistakes that could be made and how to avoid them." (Kavanaugh, General Introduction, 1991, pp. 14-15)

[669] The 1630 complete Spanish edition has already included the Spiritual Canticle.

[670] (Kavanaugh, General Introduction, 1991, pp. 34-35)

[671] (Kavanaugh, General Introduction, 1991, p. 34)

[672] (Kavanaugh, General Introduction, 1991, p. 37)

[673] (Kavanaugh, General Introduction, 1991, p. 37)

[674] Even if one takes Kavanaugh's understanding as far as I did here, it still does not explain that the mystical experiences are not reflected on in the major secondary works.

Kavanaugh adds that John of the Cross does not have such a variety and amount of work as other Doctors of the Church, but he is valued highly for his poetry. His contribution to poetry in general and to Spanish poetry in particular is immense. He had a great impact on early Spanish poetry, and he is still considered one of its prominent figures. He is valued not only as a historical figure but also for his impact on the Castilian language.[675] For these reasons, in 1952 he was named as the patron saint of Spanish poets.

Thomas Merton

In Merton's case, the context and the accounts of the experience are relatively straightforward, and a discovery of the effects of the experiences are supported by his autobiography, letters, and journal entries. The descriptions of the Roman (1933) and the Cuban (1940) experiences are found in Merton's autobiography, *The seven storey mountain*, which was first published in 1948. The Louisville experience happened in 1958, and its description was published in *Conjectures of a guilty bystander* 10 years later. The Sri Lankan experience occurred in 1968, not long before his death. This account, among the other journal entries of the Asian trip, was published posthumously in *The Asian journal of Thomas Merton* (1973).

The Roman experience brought two effects with it. One of those was Merton's first interest in monastic life, specifically in becoming a Trappist monk. In *The seven storey mountain*, he dwells on his life before his conversion and particularly emphasizes the moments which led him closer to God. These events stand out from his regular flow of life, which he perceives as sinful and neglectful. The Roman experience was not only the first major step toward religiosity and monkhood, but the captivating Byzantine mosaics also raised his interest in studying Eastern Orthodox Christianity and Byzantine icons.[676]

The Cuban experience happened after his conversion experience (1938). If the Roman experience is described as the first central turning point toward monastic life, the Cuban experience can rightly be deemed a pivotal moment regarding his decision to actually do so.[677] He joined the Abbey of Our Lady of Gethsemani in 1941. The cultural and religious curiosity toward Latin America and Latin Roman Catholicism later in his life can also be connected to this event.[678]

The Louisville experience brought a great deal of changes into Merton's life. One of the most significant fruits of this experience was that he became interested in global issues: advocating for peace and questioning the Cold War and the idea of war in general after the experience. The experience also "opened him up" towards interreligious dialogue and spurred some travel and lots of correspondence. Finally, the third significant effect of this experience is the questioning of monastic isolation, which is clearly articulated in the *Conjectures* when explaining the experience itself. All these effects are presumably deeply rooted and connected in the mystical vision of people sharing the same pure core and therefore belonging together. These effects will be highlighted here through their interconnectedness.

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[675] "1874: The Royal Academy of the Spanish Language includes John of the Cross in its official catalogue of writers who can serve as authorities in the use of words and phrases in the Castilian tongue." (Kavanaugh, General Introduction, 1991, p. 33)
[676] (McCaslin, 2012, pp. 27-28)
[677] (McCaslin, 2012, p. 30)
[678] (McCaslin, 2012, p. 30)

In the *Conjectures* Merton stresses that he is not questioning the legitimacy of his vocation. In his view, the values represented by monastic orders are real and meaningful and not only valid within the walls of the monastery. His mystical experience led him to recognize that clergy and laity belong to God in the same way essentially, and that we all live in the same world. The separation of people and the secular and religious worlds in this way has no justification. The difference is that members of the clergy have recognized this relationship and cultivated it professionally.

The seemingly commonplace realization that Merton himself is a member of the human race was a source of great relief and joy. He saw the human race as God's chosen race, despite all its absurdities and flaws. He realized in the previously mentioned experience that this isolation was indeed illusory. Though monks might perceive their existence/work differently, there is no distance between people. Merton realized a connectedness – before, he perceived other people as aliens, as strangers, and now as his own self.

This is the vision that Merton implicitly sees as the cause of wars, envy, and hatred: the cause of all evil peculiar to the human race. The latter focuses on the essence of human beings. Merton recognizes this first in himself and then in other people when he experiences the unity and togetherness of humanity. This unity, in his view, applies not only to the human beings present at the moment on Earth, but to all of humanity (to the human beings of the ages that have ever lived, are living, and will live). The basis for this similarity and belonging is explained by Merton with a strong theological foundation: the election of humanity by God, or, to put it another way, the core of God's guided/intelligent existence present in all human beings is the cause of communion.[679] In contrast to wars and discord, the realization of this mystical knowledge would, according to Merton, transform humanity: they would kneel and respect[680] each other, and all darkness and hatred would disappear[681] from the world.

To describe the togetherness of human beings, Merton uses a variety of terms and metaphors. He uses light metaphors to describe the togetherness of human beings and the chosen nature of humanity: each person shines like the sun.[682] He also calls the core of human reality the point of spark[683] and the pure diamond[684] that shines with the invisible light of the heavens. The totality of these sparks would shine like the sun and remove all darkness.[685] He

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[679] In several places in the interpretation, it is mentioned that the basis of the unity of humanity is the election by God: the incarnation of Jesus Christ. (Merton, Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander, 1989, pp. 156-158)

[680] "If only they could all see themselves as they really are. If only we could see each other that way all the time. There would be no more war, no more hatred, no more cruelty, no more greed… I suppose the big problem would be that we would fall down and worship each other." (Merton, Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander, 1989, p. 158)

[681] "It is in everybody, and if we could see it we would see these billions of points of light coming together in the face and blaze of a sun that would make all the darkness and cruelty of life vanish completely." (Merton, Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander, 1989, p. 158).

[682] "There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun." (Merton, Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander, 1989, p. 157)

[683] "At the center of our being is a point of nothingness which is untouched by sin and by illusion, a point of pure truth, a point or spark which belongs entirely to God, which is never at our disposal, from which God disposes of our lives, which is inaccessible to the fantasies of our own mind or the brutalities of our own will." (Merton, Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander, 1989, p. 158)

[684] "It is like a pure diamond, blazing with the invisible light of heaven." (Merton, Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander, 1989, p. 158)

[685] "It is in everybody, and if we could see it we would see these billions of points of light coming together in the face and blaze of a sun that would make all the darkness and cruelty of life vanish completely." (Merton, Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander, 1989, p. 158)

describes the mystical experience as a sudden awakening from a dream, a realization that brought him great joy and relief.

Based on the knowledge he gained during his mystical experience, Merton draws the following conclusions about his own life and vocation. He formulates a critique of monasticism, which also contains a deep self-reflection: he questions the sense of being chosen/different based on the isolation of monks.[686] Merton leaves behind neither monastic values nor the monastic way of life. He sees monastic solitude as necessary and valuable for the realization of similar mystical truths. Immersion in everyday life and a secular 'tightly collective existence' does not allow it.[687] However, in light of the mystical experience, monastic solitude is no longer synonymous with isolation. Merton sees monastic solitude and work as not merely his own but as owing a debt to others who are no longer strangers: they are no longer 'they', but 'my own self'.[688]

Merton's interpretation of his experience leads him to personal and global questions. In three places, he mentions global and later current issues in a somewhat explicit way. The first time is when he transcends the dichotomy of the monastery and the outside world and writes that all human beings live in one world: a world of bombs, racial hatred, technology, mass media, big business, and revolution.[689] As I have mentioned earlier, he was also concerned with anti-war narratives and further political engagement.[690] Following his mystical experience, Merton paid particular attention to global and social issues. The experience of liberation from the illusion of separation set him on a new path, becoming one of the innovators of interreligious dialogue. Based on his mystical experience, he devoted much of his time to the question of ecumenism, the reunification of Christians.[691]

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[686] A similar notion appears in an earlier description of the Cuban experience, though it is not articulated in a similarly nuanced way: "And yet the thing that struck me most of all was that this light was in a certain sense 'ordinary' — it was a light (and this most of all was what took my breath away) that was offered to all, to everybody, and there was nothing fancy or strange about it. It was the light of faith deepened and reduced to an extreme and sudden obviousness." (Merton, The Seven Storey Mountain, 1999, p. 321)

[687] "This changes nothing in the sense and value of my solitude, for it is in fact the function of solitude to make one realize such things with a clarity that would be impossible to anyone completely immersed in the other cares, the other illusions, and all the automatisms of a tightly collective existence." (Merton, Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander, 1989, p. 158)

[688] "My solitude, however, is not my own, for I see now how much it belongs to them and that I have a responsibility for it in their regard, not just in my own. It is because I am one with them that I owe it to them to be alone, and when I am alone, they are not "they" but my own self. There are no strangers." (Merton, Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander, 1989, p. 158)

[689] "Certainly these traditional values are very real, but their reality is not of an order outside everyday existence in a contingent world, nor does it entitle one to despise the secular: though 'out of the world' we are in the same world as everybody else, the world of the bomb, the world of race hatred, the world of technology, the world of mass media, big business, revolution, and all the rest." (Merton, Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander, 1989, p. 157)

[690] "Mystical contemplation is for Merton the only true basis for effective political engagement since it roots us, not in the demands of the egocentric self, but in universal love and compassion. Without the mystic pauses, silences, and unions, activism burns itself out and becomes ineffective." (McCaslin, 2012, p. 42). "As Merton moves to the end of his journey, he becomes more and more drawn to the commonalities and correspondences among religions. However, his inter-spiritual legacy is to celebrate a unity of diversities rather than an amalgam of sameness." (McCaslin, 2012, p. 42)

[691] " If I can unite in myself the thought and the devotion of Eastern and Western Christendom, the Greek and the Latin Fathers, the Russians with the Spanish mystics, I can prepare in myself the reunion of divided Christians. From that secret and unspoken unity in myself can eventually come a visible and manifest unity of all Christians. If we want to bring together what is divided, we can not do so by imposing one division upon the other or absorbing one division into the other. But if we do this, the union is not Christian. It is political, and doomed to further

According to Scruggs, Merton's two principles for interfaith dialogue are position and intention.[692] The position is the believer's stance from which they seek a common ground with representatives of other religions or denominations in interreligious dialogue. According to Merton, the openness and humility required for this can be drawn from the believer's own experience of faith.[693] The second principle is the intention, which is closely linked to the fundamental aim of interreligious dialogue.[694] The principle of intention rejects the defensiveness of apologetics and the irresponsibility and recklessness of syncretism.

Finding common ground is therefore crucial to interreligious dialogue.[695] For Merton, this common ground is ecumenical and rests on two pillars: humility and the shared humanity. Humility stems from the recognition by both sides of the fundamental difficulty of intellectually grasping their own faith.[696] Besides being evident and effective in establishing common ground, the emphasis on shared humanity is presumably closely related to the experiential knowledge of Merton's mystical experience.[697] For him, the liberation from the illusory notion of human difference and distance was a revelation. His aims went beyond the reunification of Christians.[698]

As far as Merton's last mystical experience is concerned, there is not much to be told about its effects, as it occurred shortly before his death. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note what the description of the Sri Lankan experience seems to showcase about Merton. It was the least "traditional" of the four experiences, in the sense that it was not connected to – at least not strongly – Christianity. Not because it took place in Sri Lanka, and the Buddha statues in Polonnaruwa seemed to play a part in the awakening, and not only because he refers to emptiness and dharmakaya, but because of its unitive nature. However, Merton awakened to a truth that transcended the boundaries between the Asian and Western cultures and different religions.[699] Even though the experience was strongly connected to its context, the realization

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conflict. We must contain all divided worlds in ourselves and transcend them in Christ." (Merton, Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander, 1989, p. 21)

[692] Scruggs, R. (2011) 411-426.

[693] "'Faith seeking understanding' as a theological method for interreligious dialogue recognizes the distance between the gift of faith received and the rigor of faith understood. It therefore empathetically and humbly seeks after common ground for the purpose of mutual understanding, but it cannot reduce its reasoned faith to the level of reason only, or what Merton calls 'banal argumentation' […]" (Scruggs, 2011, p. 422)

[694] (Scruggs, 2011, p. 412)

[695] The sophianic Christianity allows him to get into conversations with other religious traditions without losing his own religious ground, as McCaslin points out based on Christopher Pamuk. (McCaslin, 2012, p. 35). More about sophianic Christianity related to Merton: (Pramuk, 2009)

[696] (Scruggs, 2011, p. 419).

[697] For a summary of some philosophical issues concerning knowledge gained through mystical experiences, see (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, pp. 37-121)

[698] "For myself, I am more and more convinced that my job is to clarify something of the tradition that lives in me, and in which I live: the tradition of wisdom and spirit that is found not only in Western Christendom but in Orthodoxy, and also, at least analogously, in Asia and in Islam. Man's sanity and balance and peace depend, I think, on his keeping alive a continuous sense of what has been valid in his past." (Merton, Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander, 1989, p. 194)

[699] McCaslin's arguments confirm the idea of transcultural and transreligious experience. She even goes further, stating that it shows that Merton became a transcultural and transreligious person: "It is yet another expansion of the widening circle whereby he becomes effectively a transcultural, transreligious person." (McCaslin, 2012, p. 36)

went beyond Asia or Buddhism. He stated that it was not obvious but something to be discovered even for Asians.[700] Merton discovered the clarity and purity beyond these limits.[701]

Reception

Unlike John of the Cross, Thomas Merton was accepted and popular throughout his lifetime – not necessarily because of his mystical experiences, but due to his autobiography and how he represented monastic life in the context of the mid-20th century US. His famous autobiography, *The seven storey mountain*, was a bestseller, and it is listed among the best 100 non-fiction books of the century on the National Review's webpage.[702] A riveting short review accompanies the book, which is number 75 on this list, by Richard John Neuhaus, an American Roman Catholic priest: "A classic conversion story of a modern urban sophisticate."[703] Without jumping to far-reaching conclusions, I want to draw attention to some of the eloquent words in this sentence. First, the book's content is summarized briefly as a conversion story, which is quite accurate. As I have pointed out earlier, Merton powerfully contrasts his life before and after the conversion. The fact that it is described as a 'classic conversion story' provides food for thought, and I am hesitant whether Merton himself would have characterized it similarly. Nonetheless, it is used as a word evoking authority and tradition, in my opinion, and it contrasts with the other half of the sentence, where Merton himself is described as a 'modern urban sophisticate'. It does not necessarily represent his present personality but rather an image of him: a picture of an everyday man living an ordinary yet sinful lifestyle in the modern world, which is turned upside down after his conversion experience. It might not be surprising that this idea was inspiring for many people.[704] He was popular and is widely celebrated as a writer within Catholic Christianity and outside of it as well. He is mainly remembered as a Trappist monk and is acknowledged for interreligious dialogue and his research regarding Zen tradition. His Louisville experience is certainly well-known, and a number of studies focus on his mystical works; however, what is surprising is that he is not widely thought of as a mystic.[705] Why might that be? For now, this question will be left here without any attempts to answer it. However, in the last chapter, I will indirectly return to it, where I will introduce some problems with researching mysticism in modernity.

Comparison
Private-Public

The beginning of the chapter explored one of the elements of the traditional-modern categories of mysticism: culture. The current part is a reflection on the other characteristic: subject. Therefore, in this part, I examine the private vs. public, then the individual vs. performative notions related to the mysticism of Thomas Merton and John of the Cross. To briefly define it: subject refers to the context of the mystical experience, its effects on the person

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[700] "It is we, Asians included, who need to discover it." (Merton, Burton, Brother Hart, & Laughlin, 1974, p. 236)
[701] "I don't know what else remains but I have now seen and have pierced through the surface and have got beyond the shadow and the disguise." (Merton, Burton, Brother Hart, & Laughlin, 1974, p. 236)
[702] (Senior Editors, 1999)
[703] (Senior Editors, 1999)
[704] (n.a., Religion: The Mountain, 1949)
[705] (McCaslin, 2012, p. 26)

and community, and the relation of the mystic towards their surroundings. Within this notion, traditional mysticism is described as private and individual, referring to experiences mainly happening in solitude and to mystical journeys that are primarily solitary. In contrast, modern mysticism has public and performative characteristics. This suggests that modern mystical experiences mostly happen in public or within a group context, and they are deeply linked to this context and its temporal and spatial aspects.

Besides the levitation together with Teresa of Avila, there are only vague references to the divine encounters of John of the Cross. These references, as well as the descriptions in the prose works and lyric indications of the *unio m*ystica, seem to lead to the confirmation of private experiences. This is not a unique characteristic of the mysticism of John of the Cross, but presumably the consequences of the monastic lifestyle and practices. Even if there were witnesses or companions to these experiences, like in the example mentioned earlier, these did not seem to alter the experience, as the focus was essentially inward. Reportedly, some of Teresa of Avila's raptures were witnessed by other nuns. Kavanaugh mentions similar examples (without a specific context) in the case of John of the Cross: "A center of his contemplation, Mass often proved to be an occasion for special graces. During the celebration he could become so lost in God that he had no consciousness of his surroundings."[706] This quote highlights that even if mystical experiences happened in a "public" setting, they could not be characterized as public in a way that it is understood in this work.

Even though Thomas Merton spent much of his life in a monastery, none of his mystical experiences happened there. Before his conversion, the first happened during his travels to Italy, and the second occurred far from his home, the Abbey of Our Lady of Gethsemani: in Cuba. In comparison, the Louisville experience was not far from it. McCaslin refers to it as "right at home in the monk's own neighbourhood of nearby Louisville."[707] However close it was to the monastery, it still involved a short journey and a busy street crossing full of people. The last one happened in Sri Lanka, during what he called his last trip to Asia. Remarkably, all these experiences are connected to traveling and public spaces. Even though they were shorter or longer episodes in monastic life, this does not paint the picture of solitary mysticism.

However, these outward circumstances in themselves would not necessarily mean that Thomas Merton had a different type of mystical experience than John of the Cross. Nonetheless, I argue that three out of the four of Thomas Merton's mystical experiences are different: highly connected to the public setting. I aim to point out here that the elements of his immediate context and the public setting shaped the mystical experience. To do that, I refer to the extrovertive and introvertive categories of mystical experiences which I elaborated on in Chapter 3. This difference is not visible from the expressions mentioned above and the dimensions, but only from a wider perspective, which I will examine now. To summarize it briefly, extrovertive experiences include sensory inputs from the surroundings, while introvertive ones do not. I consider Merton's mystical experiences in Louisville, Cuba, and Sri Lanka extrovertive experiences. The descriptions of the experiences, quoted above, clearly contain references to extravertive elements in relation to the content of the mystical experiences.

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[706] (Kavanaugh, General Introduction, 1991, p. 26)
[707] (McCaslin, 2012, p. 32)

While both authors include elements of their context and surroundings, these are not used in the same way for the same purposes. John of the Cross has seemingly external elements woven into the mystical descriptions – a garden, prey, beloved, a ladder, etc. But these elements are to be taken metaphorically,[708] although the ladder and the secret escape through the gardens in the night conspicuously invoke the circumstances of his escape from prison. The difference is that these elements most likely did not induce the experience or were not included in the experience. At first sight, it seems like a bold action to assume anything of John of the Cross's experiences, and the rest of his texts not analyzed in this work provide the base for this assumption. He regularly and metaphorically uses similar poetic images, some of which are even explained in his prose works. Adding to this, John of the Cross's mystical journey involved orderly practices of mental prayer, which, according to Stace,[709] result often in introvertive experiences. These aspects suggest that John of the Cross presumably had introvertive experiences. In contrast, Merton's contextual elements in the mystical texts are to be taken as literal descriptions of the spatial and temporal context of his experience. The mass and the choir of children in Cuba, the crossing of Fourth and Walnut in Louisville, and the Buddha statues in Polonnaruwa describe his circumstances at the time. Indeed, these experiences are more than just an intense experience of reality, they lead further than the physical world.

I argue that in every case, a threefold arc can be observed in Merton's mystical accounts. It starts with the context, which triggers the mystical realization; it continues with the immediate realization of divine truth; and, finally, this realization is connected back to the context, this time not through the everyday perception but the perception altered by the divine revelation/mystical experience.

The contextual trigger in the Cuban experience was the choir of children crying *creo* in unison. The Louisville description is explicit about the role of pedestrians in shaping the experience. It is also important to note that the urban setting of the busy street crossing has also contributed to the realization of the illusory difference in monastic lifestyle. The Sri Lankan account is also straightforward about the triggering elements of the context, the Buddha statues in Polonnaruwa, with Merton starting the description this way: "Looking at these figures I was suddenly, almost forcibly, jerked clean out of the habitual, half-tied vision of things".[710]

The second part of the arc refers to the fact that the content of these realizations is strongly connected to these contextual elements. The affirmation of faith by the Cuban children led to "an awareness, an understanding, a realization of what had just taken place on the altar, at the Consecration: a realization of God made present by the words of Consecration in a way that made Him belong to me."[711] The Louisville experience mentions Merton belonging to people, and people belonging to him: "I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all those people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers",[712] and, moreover, people "walking around shining like

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[708] Barnstone argues that some of his works can be read literally as love poems. However, it is clear that the three poems mentioned in this work describe mystical unions. (John & Barnstone, The Poems of St. John of the Cross, 1972, p. Introduction)

[709] Introduced in Chapter 3.

[710] (Merton, Burton, Brother Hart, & Laughlin, 1974, p. 233)

[711] (Merton, The Seven Storey Mountain, 1999, pp. 320-321)

[712] (Merton, Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander, 1989, p. 156)

the Sun."[713] The experience involves an awakening from the illusory separation: "It was like waking from a dream of separateness, of spurious self-isolation in a special world, the world of renunciation and supposed holiness. The whole illusion of a separate holy existence is a dream."[714] It is essential to note the religious and theological roots of this realization again: the chosen nature of the human race through the life of Jesus Christ. The experience in Polonnaruwa included the sudden realization of inner clarity and lucidity which made everything seem resolved and obvious for Merton.

The way these realizations were connected back to the context is the following. The Cuban experience temporarily awakened him to the immediate and experiential contact between him and the divine truth (described as a majestic yet ordinary light). Furthermore, as he puts it: "Who was now physically really and substantially before me on the altar."[715] The Louisville description connects both realizations back to the pedestrians walking by, but at this time from an altered perspective – them belonging together makes wars completely unjustified. The same connectedness overwrites the illusion of monastic separateness. The Sri Lankan awakening showed Asia to Merton in its purity. All in all, it seems clear from the narratives in the accounts that the sensory inputs fundamentally determined the nature of the experiences at the time: the people he saw around him, the sunlight, or being in a busy part of the city.

Finally, let me point out a small but similar element in all three of these experiences. In each case, the wish of sharing this experience with others and the notion of divine truth being mystically accessible to everyone appears. The Cuban description talks about the divine light being ordinary in the sense that it is accessible to everyone. The Louisville account shows both the frustration of ineffability and a wish that everybody should realize the human connectedness: "And if only everybody could realize this! But it cannot be explained."[716] And lastly, based on the awakening in Polonnaruwa, Merton says that everybody should discover Asia in its purity, including Asians.[717] I consider this threefold arc and examples from three experiences clear proof of their extrovertive characteristics.

What does this notion entail about the private or public characteristics of Merton's mysticism? I have already pointed out some of its results on him (advocacy for peace, initiating interreligious dialogue, etc.), and how the experiences were connected to reality in a greater perspective. Furthermore, McCaslin rightly points out the following:

"none of Merton's more significant visions are purely private but encompass the relation of the individual to the community. They are personal revelations that have universal significance. They focus on the sacred in the midst of the everyday and collapse our usual distinction between ordinary and sacred time. In 1961, Merton writes to Chinese author John C. H. Wu: 'I do not know whether or not I am always happy with mystical writings that are completely out of touch with ordinary life. On the contrary, it seems to me that mysticism flourishes more purely right in the middle of the ordinary.'"[718]

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[713] (Merton, Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander, 1989, p. 157)
[714] (Merton, Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander, 1989, p. 156)
[715] (Merton, The Seven Storey Mountain, 1999, p. 321)
[716] (Merton, Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander, 1989, p. 157)
[717] (Merton, Burton, Brother Hart, & Laughlin, 1974, p. 236)
[718] (McCaslin, 2012, p. 41)

Therefore, not only Thomas Merton's mystical experiences but his mysticism can be called public. The majority of his experiences can be characterized this way because of the extrovertive elements, and his mysticism is described as public because of its universal significance and effects.

Are extrovertive experiences exclusive to modernity? Certainly not. As I have mentioned in Chapter 3, Walter Stace has examined extrovertive mystical experiences in various cases throughout time and various religious affiliations. I agree with Stace that neither extrovertive nor introvertive experiences are exclusively connected to an era. This is one of the reasons why the differentiation between the private and public characteristics of mysticism is not decided on these factors. The other one is that the private vs. public differentiation entails a more extensive discussion and more factors to be taken into consideration than simply focusing on whether or not sensory inputs are included in shaping the content of the experience. The effects and the articulation of the experience are some of these aspects.

However, as I pointed out in Chapter 3, Stace does argue that introvertive experiences require long and intense preparation, and, because of this, the majority of the experiences in the Medieval Age were introvertive. Could this be the reason why most of Merton's experiences are extrovertive? Based on Robert Forman's arguments, this notion can be questioned, as he focuses on the opposite: extrovertive experiences require more training than introvertive ones.[719] Is there indeed a shift from introvertive experiences to extrovertive ones in modernity? If yes, what might be the reasons for this shift? These questions will be explored in Chapter 5.

In the last few pages, I have explored some of the characteristics of John of the Cross's and Thomas Merton's mystical experiences and mysticism. These confirm the idea of traditional mysticism being private while modern mysticism is public. However, before I move on to the other two aspects, let me point out some facts that nuance this dichotomy. Even though I describe traditional mysticism as private, I do not refer to it as a completely secluded, independent path of loners. Thinking of traditional mysticism without its essential embeddedness in Church and church civilization would be a mistake. Kavanaugh adequately describes this as follows:

> "All the while, the living and collective consciousness of the whole Church is present. In John's teaching, God will not bring clarification and confirmation of the truth to the heart of one who is alone. Such a one would remain weak and cold in regard to the truth. As he went out from himself and passed through the spiritual night John entered more and more into the substance of the Church, into God's self-manifestation in time. He found no difficulty in relying on the judgment of the Church in matters relating to the expression of his experience and teaching. Church life, doctrine, and prayer supplied the context in which he read and used Scripture."[720]

As Kavanaugh points out in the last sentence, the expressions, teachings, and prayers – the essential context of mysticism – are provided by the Church in traditional mysticism. Church civilization is all-encompassing in this sense as well. While I agree with these statements, I still argue that the mystical way was private for the reasons I have presented above.

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[719] I assume this idea is strongly connected to Hinduism and perhaps Forman's practices of Transcendental Meditation, which is rooted in the Hindu tradition.
[720] (Kavanaugh, General Introduction, 1991, p. 36)

On Merton's side of the discussion, the exception of the public characteristics (and extrovertive ones, too) is one of his experiences I have not elaborated on in this chapter. The Roman experience is difficult to pinpoint in the extrovertive vs. introvertive dimension, and it certainly did not happen in a busy or crowded place. Merton was alone in his room when the presence of his late father evoked a mystical experience. There is an external trigger in this instance, just like in the case of his other experiences, but this time, it does not shape the content of the experience: his realizations do not revolve around his father. His insight is about his own 'corrupt' lifestyle and one of his first connections with God, asking for help in prayer. Therefore, I consider this experience an introvertive rather than an extrovertive one. This goes against Stace's ideas of the necessary thorough preparation for introvertive experiences and, more importantly, nuances the 'public' characteristic of modern mysticism.

Individual and performative

As for the individual and performative characteristics, context and the community are relevant in different ways. In traditional mysticism, the context and community are especially relevant in preparation for and the interpretation of the mystical experiences, as well as in the effects following them, while the circumstances with a specific time, space, and audience shape examples of modern mystical experiences significantly. The distinctness is connected to the differences between extrovertive and introvertive mystical experiences, but these characteristics entail more than that.

The individual characteristic of traditional mysticism can be observed in the case of John of the Cross. Despite its strong connectedness to tradition, the mystical way is personal in the end. The tradition provides techniques in preparation for the mystical experience; previous examples serve as reference points and language to interpret the experience. It is also a base that was constantly deconstructed by the mystics. They were not only deconstructors in relation to the tradition but also contributed to it. As I have mentioned earlier, it was most likely important for John of the Cross to provide explanations and guidance to his fellow members of the Carmelite order. However, this guidance served as a general map to aid people in recognizing some of the significant milestones on the mystical way, which was ultimately personal. Even the idea of people progressing in a mystical way of purgation, illumination, and union seems a characteristic of traditional mysticism. The specificity with which Teresa of Avila described the seven chambers of the Interior Castle and with which John of the Cross details the two purgatory nights suggest that there was a more or less clear mystical way. Even though Merton is a unique example of modern mysticism through his monastic life and the necessary practices of it, his experiences seemed to come "out of nowhere". Despite living in traditional circumstances, his experiences seem to defy the traditional way.

Modern mysticism is essentially relational, sometimes even communal. These aspects refer to its temporal and spatial determinedness. I have already elaborated on the relevant examples in Merton's case – how the specific time and place triggered his experience, and how the people and other elements of his circumstances were involved in shaping his experience and connected to its interpretation.[721] Therefore, modern mysticism is also irreproducible – not only

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[721] McCaslin also highlights the specific time and place of the Cuban experience. "The sacramental revelation through the children happens in full waking consciousness in a specific time and place." (McCaslin, 2012, p. 30)

in the traditional sense, as mystical experiences cannot be voluntarily induced or repeated, but also because of their contextual irreproducibility, which means that the circumstances which shape the experience cannot be repeated with the same people, scenery, or time. Therefore, the performative aspect of modern mysticism essentially involves characteristics of extrovertive mysticism but entails more than that. I argue that an outward focus and the sensory input shaping the mystical experience are central to modern mysticism. Nevertheless, this notion is more than a general openness towards one's circumstances. Often, the circumstances provide a fertile base for mystical experiences and aid the openness towards these events. In Merton's case, it is visible through the fact that all his experiences happened when he changed his 'regular scenery': during travels, and three out of four involved a communal and often busy space.

Finally, I want to highlight one specific and performative approach of modernity towards mystical experiences. A commemorative plaque stands at the intersection of Fourth and Walnut streets in Louisville, where Merton's mystical experience happened. It reads:

> "A revelation. Merton had a sudden insight at this corner Mar. 18. 1958. that led him to redefine his monastic identity with greater involvement in social justice issues. He was 'suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all these people[…]' He found them 'walking around shining like the sun'."[722]

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[722] (Jones D. B., 2022)

Conclusions

Following the threefold concept of mysticism, I started this chapter by discussing the historical, religious, and personal contexts of John of the Cross and Thomas Merton. In the first part of this chapter, I focused on the antecendents – all of the contextual elements prior to their mystical experiences. The primary and secondary literature provided resources that were useful to varying degrees. In John of the Cross's case, the secondary sources provided vague short references to his mystical experiences, while Thomas Merton's texts were straightforward. The contextual differences confirmed my hypotheses about the differences between traditional and modern mysticism: John of the Cross's context aligned with the idea of Church Civilization, while Thomas Merton's context had shown significant examples of plurality, despite his traditional settings as a monk.

The second part of this chapter explored the accounts of mystical experiences. The linguistic clues to these texts were the use of metaphors, concealing language, a peculiar sense of time, first person singular narratives, and any major or uncontrollable reactions or physical movements mentioned. These expressions led to four groups of words: opposites; time; depth and perception; and body, feelings, and actions. All these groups or dimensions were significant in Merton's four experiences and the three poems by John of the Cross. Since these texts point to the fact that the experiences carried all four dimensions in similar ways, it can be concluded that a change in the context of mysticism does not necessarily imply a change in experiences. This analysis shows that mystical experiences possibly remain similar regardless of the major historical, religious, and/or social differences.

Some of the sub-dimensions were used differently in John of the Cross's and Thomas Merton's texts. However, as I have pointed out, these differences are connected to contextual dissimilarities, not changes in the mystical experience. One of the significant contextual dissimilarities, which was visible in more than one dimension, was related to the focus on the transcendent in church civilization or the focus on the immanent in modernity. There was another significant difference between the involvement of elements of the context in the mystical accounts. I have explained this through the categories of extrovertive and introvertive experiences and pointed out that the differences are only between varieties of mystical experiences, which can be examined regardless of temporal differences.

There is another seeming difference I touched upon earlier but have not clearly expounded on. Merton's experiences seem to depict a process of development, while John of the Cross's teachings and mysticism show consistency.

Let us start with Merton's case now. An interesting pattern in his accounts is that all of them are depicted as turning points in his life and faith — the first from a sinful and non-religious state towards the conversion, while the second one, as McCaslin points out, was a turning point towards entering monastic life.[723] The Louisville experience opened him up to other religions and global issues, while the Sri Lankan experience led him even further in the process of opening up: it was a unitive experience in which he described a truth beyond religious and cultural differences. These impressions suggest a notion of development in Merton's experiences throughout his life, strongly connected to and affecting his personal development.

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[723] "It is also clear from its placement in his autobiography that this moment is pivotal in Merton's decision to enter monastic life." (McCaslin, 2012, p. 30)

This idea is supported by McCaslin's carefully elaborated concept of the 'widening circle' of Merton's experiences, which connects this development to the spiritual maturity or spiritual expansion of Merton.[724]

Based on the highlighted expressions, I described his first experience with Otto's concept of the experience of the Holy: it was both a tremendous and fascinating encounter of a completely different mystery. No shock appeared in the rest of his descriptions. However, the Cuban and the Louisville experiences still involve the word *overwhelming*. What is fascinating is that despite the suddenness, the Sri Lankan experience is very different. Instead of stressing how overwhelming the experience is, he uses words such as *evident*, *obvious*, *simple*, *straightforward*, *resolved*, and *clear*, and talks of a unitive realization of the clarity of truth. There are also no spontaneous bodily reactions mentioned in this account which one can find in the others. All of this suggests that the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* is an initial reaction to the encounter of the transcendent, and one can get familiar with it. Though, presumably, it never becomes familiar enough not to overwhelm or at least surprise the person.

Kavanaugh paints a slightly different picture of John of the Cross's mysticism. He describes his writings and teachings as constant, stating that "[n]o essential change of thought occurs in his teaching; there is no 'earlier John' to contrast with the 'later John'."[725] This statement refers not only to his poetic style but to the content of the texts. He mentions that the themes of mystical writings also remain unchanged.[726] It is important to note that he attaches this notion to the idea that John of the Cross had written the majority of his works in the last 14 years of his life when "his intellectual and spiritual growth had come to full flower, his extant works show a doctrinal synthesis of the spiritual life that was substantially complete in his mind once he began to write."[727] However, this does not necessarily mean constancy in the mystical experiences. I consider the *Ascent of Mount Carmel* to reveal that John of the Cross was familiar with the whole mystical journey, even though in this work he details the characteristics of the sensual and spiritual purgation, not the union. There is no reason to believe that mystical experiences were constant or unchanged in traditional mysticism, only that some of the mystical ways were less thoroughly documented. Once again, taking Teresa of Avila as an example: *The interior castle* elaborately discusses the entire mystical way, not only the purgation. It features several examples of visions and raptures happening in different chambers of the castle – or, to put it differently, at different levels of spiritual development. It is reasonable to assume that the constancy in the case of John of the Cross is attributable to what Kavanaugh highlights: by the time he started writing, he did come to a doctrinal synthesis.

Finally, in the third part of this chapter, I have touched upon the effects of the mystical experiences and the comparison of the two writers' mysticism based on the other characteristic of the category, namely, subject. While Merton's actions and the personal and communal effects of the experience are clear, not much is known of the case of John of the Cross. What is visibly

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[724] (McCaslin, 2012, pp. 23-36)
[725] (Kavanaugh, General Introduction, 1991, p. 33)
[726] "The themes he dwells on also remain constant: union with God, its trinitarian origins and final outcome in glory; Jesus Christ, Word and Beloved; faith, as both the content of the mystery and the obscure way to union; love, the going out from self to live in the other; the active and passive development of the theological life; the communication of God in silent prayer; the appetites, a dynamic of sin and destruction." (Kavanaugh, General Introduction, 1991, pp. 33-34)
[727] (Kavanaugh, General Introduction, 1991, p. 33)

different is that Merton's focus is primarily outwardly and revolving around the idea of the accessibility of the knowledge gained in the mystical experience. He accentuated that everyone should realize what he had experienced and what had changed him. He had been involved in global issues and interreligious dialogue. It is, however, crucial not to forget about the personal and less obvious effects of the experiences: his growing interest in other cultures and religious-contemplative traditions. John of the Cross probably also deemed it important to share the experiences and knowledge of the mystical way, but his focus was on his closer community. These differences and individual and performative characteristics can be traced back to the cultural differences between church civilization and modernity.

Therefore, based on the comparison of John of the Cross's and Thomas Merton's mysticism, I argue that the differences between traditional and modern mysticism lie in contextual differences and changes. These do not essentially affect the mystical experiences, which stay similar throughout time. Keeping these findings in mind, I explore modern mysticism further in the last chapter of my dissertation, where, most importantly, I aim to reflect on the theoretical and methodological issues around modern mysticism and the study of mysticism in general. I will also reflect on how the findings in this chapter might alter the scientific attitude toward modern mysticism.

Chapter 5. Pluralism and functional fluidity: Understanding modern mysticism beyond dichotomies

Introduction

So far, in Chapters 2 and 3, I discussed some classical and contemporary scientific takes on mysticism. In Chapters 3 and 4, first, I introduced a new typology of traditional and modern mysticism, and, second, I analyzed one typical example of each type, following the threefold concept of mysticism. Based on the comparison of John of the Cross's and Thomas Merton's mysticism, the supposed striking contextual differences were confirmed, as were the essentially similar characteristics of the mystical experiences. The hypothesis of modern mysticism being essentially similar to traditional mysticism points to the idea that modern mysticism is indeed mysticism, and, therefore, it could be treated in research with the same scientific methods and general attitudes as traditional mysticism.

However, as I pointed out in the beginning of Chapter 3, some contemporary researchers' perspectives show a different case and paint the picture of modern mysticism as a superficial, watered-down, or muddled version of traditional mysticism. I believe these call for a revision of the theoretical and methodological approaches to the scientific study of mysticism. By the end of the present chapter, I will briefly mention some guidelines along which this work could be done. However, the aim of this chapter and dissertation is not to provide a comprehensive revision but to lay down some guidelines for that. To do that, I tackle two main topics in this chapter.

First, I summarize the characteristics of modern mysticism beyond the elements of the typology I presented in the previous chapter. These characteristics will be examined through the discussion of a total of five concepts, of which four are already commonly mentioned elements in contemporary academic treatments of modern mysticism. These ideas are that (1) modern mysticism is muddled, (2) it presents an unmanageable variety, (3) it is not mysticism, and (4) it is understood as self-construction. The additional concept to these is based on the comparison in the previous chapter, notably, that modern mysticism is primarily extrovertive.

Second, I aim to examine three mostly implicit dichotomies that encumber the study of modern mysticism. The first of these is that I concentrate on the traditional vs. modern dichotomy, often featured in the theories aiming to diminish the importance of modern mysticism altogether. The second that I reflect on the idea of modern mysticism as one reduced to an intense experience mixed with cultural appropriation. In relation to this, I refer to three theories: orientalism, postcolonialism, and easternization. And the third is that some applications of the secularization paradigm will be examined, as it is a central concept in declarations about mysticism dying in modernity.

After each of the dichotomies, I discuss alternative theoretical approaches which might provide a more applicable basis for the study of modern mysticism. Related to the traditional vs. modern dichotomy, I propose using Thomas Tweed's theory of religion, which focuses on the functional fluidity of religion. Regarding the Easter vs. Western dichotomy, a global perspective needs to be adapted to fit contemporary religious processes. Lastly, the secularization paradigm will be substituted by Peter L. Berger's concept of pluralism, which

can reflect on the variety of religious and secular discourses and their institutional and individual application.

Contemporary perspectives on the study of modern mysticism

The study of traditional mysticism has its own challenges of the reliability of texts and of biographical data, and generally studying a phenomenon in a different cultural setting retrospectively. It has some advantages and disadvantages as well. On the one hand, the religious tradition filters out, so to speak, the mystical experiences. Finding many examples of traditional mysticism with a great variety is relatively easy. On the other hand, it means that everyday people's possible experiences are lost; indeed, the focus is on those who were usually working closer to religious authorities (for example, in monasteries).

The research of modern mysticism presents an entirely different perspective and some additional problems, such as merging concepts. There is no such thing as an all-encompassing authority to select and take care of mystical works. To put it bluntly, the situation of modern mysticism in scientific research is either 'nothing goes' or 'anything goes'. Jones's and Arjana's works have highlighted the former by applying the characteristics of traditional mysticism to modern mysticism – which obviously do not fit. Therefore, it is not surprising that Jones forecasts the slow but certain disappearance of mysticism altogether. The other perspective takes into consideration a variety of experiences. Here it is often not even a goal to study specific experiences, like mystical experiences, which in itself is not a problem. Instead, the problem is that scholars end up with a variety of experiences, which are however exciting, are not comparable to a significant level.

This is a broad and generalized idea of the current research perspectives, which are nuanced by research on specific experiences, such as examining children's religious experiences,[728] out-of-body experiences,[729] near-death experiences,[730] and, one of the most popular research topics probably, drug-induced experiences, specifically, ayahuasca-induced events.[731] These topics seem to be more interesting to contemporary researchers than mystical experiences. Instead of following this trend, this section sticks with intending to approach modern mysticism conceptually. Therefore, in this section, first, I consider the overwhelming variety in modern mysticism and the difficulty of theoretically treating experiences. Second, the idea of muddled mysticism, and the supposed cultural and religious appropriation attached to it in scholarly works will be examined. Third, the idea that modern mysticism is not mysticism will be explored, as well as, fourth, its centeredness around the individual and personal development. Finally, I will refer to the extrovertive and introvertive categories and whether modern or traditional mysticism prevails in one of these.

It is important to stress that here the concepts and definitions of spirituality and mysticism are considered valuable within a limit. They are certainly central for scientific

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[728] (Hay & Nye, The Spirit of The Child. Revised edition, 2006), (Tamminen, 1991), (Boyatzis, 2005), (Morgan, 2005, pp. 16-17)

[729] (Chen, Hood, Qi, & Watson, 2011), (Newberg, 2010, pp. 175-178)

[730] (d'Aquili & Newberg, 1994); Drugs blocking NMDA receptors and producing variety of experiences, such as near death- and out-of-body experiences: (Vollenweider, et al., 1997); (Newberg, 2010, pp. 180-182)

[731] (Shanon, 2002), On the relation of psychedelics and enthogens to religious experiences: (Hood, Spiritual, and Religious Experiences, 2005, pp. 353-356); Chemical Facilitation of Religious or Spiritual Experiences: (Hood & Belzen, Research Methods in the Psychology of Religion, 2005, pp. 63-65)

research, but much less essential for people having these experiences. However, I think that the everyday and scientific understandings overlap and influence each other to some extent. From a rather pragmatic perspective, it is important that scientific research attempts to give explanations for mysticism and the religious, social, and/or historical changes related to it and influencing it.

The overwhelming variety of modern mysticism

Overwhelming is not just a word that mystics seem to use regularly to describe their encounters with the ultimate reality, it is also a fitting adjective to showcase how contemporary scholarship regards modern mysticism. The few works which endure the extensive task of looking at the vastness of contemporary phenomena often get frightened away and conclude with the elusiveness of modern mysticism. As I have briefly shown in Chapter 3, this is particularly problematic because one can rarely find positive statements instead of just negations about modern mysticism. Because I discussed some examples from both Arjana's and Jones's work in Chapter 3, therefore, I only aim to point out the presumably underlying structure of their arguments here.

The elusiveness of modern mysticism is particularly prevailing in Richard H. Jones's work. He reluctantly acknowledges certain contemporary influences on religion, such as globalization and orientalism. He is aware of the changes and variety this brings with it. Nevertheless, for Jones, all of this is presented in relation to traditional mysticism. For Jones, the variety of modern mysticism equals deviances from traditional mysticism. These deviances provide the base for some negations, which give only second-hand descriptions of modern mysticism. While no positive statements are expressed in Jones's text, he implicitly understands today's mystical traditions and traditional mystical teachings as intermingling and changing on the individual level. This variety is of no interest to him, other than how far from its traditions society has come. Hence, the derogative terms he uses to describe contemporary phenomena as superficial spirituality (336), Buddhism Lite (336), watered-down spirituality (336), and naturalistic spirituality (337).[732] Even though he briefly dwells on a concept, he calls "A Thirst for Transcendence",[733], he fails to recognize how contemporary phenomena are connected to it. He ends up calling for the return to traditional values and practices in order to have "more meaningful and morally thoughtful"[734] life.

Sophia Rose Arjana shares a similar logic to Jones's. She explicitly acknowledges the variety of today's religious phenomena by talking about this variety. However, she cannot meaningfully deal with the consequences of this variety other than connecting them to orientalism and consumerism. Her examples include the movies, practices, and lifestyles related to religion which are viewed only as products of Western consumerism. This is questionable based on her criticism of the concept of mysticism being too broad and meaningless to be used adequately.[735] While one might agree with her arguments on the West centeredness of the

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[732] (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016)
[733] (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, pp. 345-346)
[734] "Certainly, contact with more of reality (if that is what in fact occurs in mystical experiences) would lead to being more fully human and to a more meaningful life with potentially a more positive, optimistic outlook. Mystical selflessness would also widen the application of whatever values one adopts, including compassion and a moral concern for others." (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, p. 345)
[735] (Arjana, 2020, p. 72)

concept of mysticism, she makes the same mistake of one-sidedness and creates a narrow and East centered concept of modern mysticism. It is perhaps evident now that ultimately, neither Jones's nor Arjana's arguments aimed to or could deal with the variety of modern mysticism. Jones is only able to reflect on changes related to it implicitly, while Arjana's text highlights conceptual defects in general.

Below, I discuss two other attempts, which I have not yet elaborated on. Both aim to reflect on contemporary, individual religious phenomena comprehensively. The first one of these approaches is Jeremy Carrette's and Richard King's, which mainly focuses on the theoretical and conceptual perspective by examining the "spiritual-religious-mystical"[736] concepts. Their approach eventually leads to giving up on the variety. The second perspective is connected to the works of Sir Alister Hardy and the Religious Experience Research Centre's Archive. The Archive's focus on spiritual experiences is the most applicable attempt of the four examples I am presenting here. It aims to discover what contemporary spiritual experiences are like. I argue that even this approach is relatively insufficient in terms of mysticism because it involves a certain shying away from the concept of mysticism.

The question of differences and boundaries between religion/spirituality and mysticism is a much broader subject in religious studies than my focus will suggest here.[737] There is no distinct and clearly established boundaries between these expressions.[738] They are often used as alternatives, synonyms, or they are conflated and confused with each other. Some confusions include using nonduality in terms of the Advaita Vedanta as a synonym for spirituality[739], or identifying mysticism with New Age, based on supposed similarities of preparatory techniques and effects of the experiences.[740]

A thorough examination of these relations could focus, first, on the relation between religion and mysticism (focusing on the directness of mystical experiences), and, second, on religion and spirituality (the former entailing a sense of connectedness to institutionalized religions, even in terms of experiences, while the latter focusing on the individual nature of experiences), and, lastly, on mysticism and spirituality (both relating to individual experiences, where spiritual experiences are understood in a much broader sense, and mystical experiences focus on the direct experiences of the ultimate reality, entailing the preparations and fruits of the experience as well). Here I concentrate on the understanding of spirituality and mysticism based on Carrette and King, regarding the variety of contemporary mystical phenomena and their theoretical conceptualization.

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[736] (Carrette & King, Selling Spirituality: The silent takeover of religion, 2005)

[737] Paul Heelas's work gives an excellent overview of the current debate related to examples from Europe and the USA. Moreover, it highlights the question's relation to secularization and sacralization. (Heelas, The spiritual revolution: from 'religion' to 'spirituality', 2009)

[738] There are excellent works on the subject, aiming to give an overall picture of spirituality. Emmons pinpoints it this way: "Most contemporary meanings of spirituality do distinguish between religious spirituality, natural spirituality, and humanistic spirituality. Elkins (2001), a vocal proponent of humanistic-oriented spirituality, offers six qualities of spirituality: Spirituality is universal; it is a human phenomenon; its common core is phenomenological; it is our capacity to respond to the numinous; it is characterized by a "mysterious energy" and its ultimate aim is compassion." Emmons 1999, 5. (Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003, p. 381)

[739] (Gibbons, 2019)

[740] "Through the use of certain techniques, either meditation or bodywork or some combination of the two, it is believed that one can achieve a personal transformation, resulting perhaps in a higher level of consciousness or the attainment of psychic powers." (Kisala, 2002, p. 142) Through this association, the following characteristics are connected to modern mysticism as well: 'eclectic, individualistic and result oriented'. (Kisala, 2002, p. 142)

Carrette and King argue that, starting from the 1950's, spirituality has been increasingly referred to as a tradition in world religions that focuses on the personal and experiential level.[741] Moreover, initially, it was closely associated with mysticism. From this point of departure, an intriguing concept of the notion of spirituality replacing the notion of mysticism is articulated. Carrette and King's reasoning is based on the varying characteristics of mysticism and spirituality, the latter more appealing in modern society. The "secular" market of modern society is more open to a de-traditionalized notion that has a this-worldly focus. At the same time, mysticism kept being associated with traditions and otherworldliness, and mysticism lost its relevance and appeal in modern society.[742] This view is similar to what Jones articulated years later in *Philosophy of mysticism*. He also refers to spirituality fitting the modern societal and individual needs with its superficial characteristics – meaning it is flexible for application and interpretation and has a this-worldly focus, often about personal development – while mysticism is firmly based on traditional techniques and a long-time commitment to different traditions, with an added focus on the transcendent. However, Jones does not reference this work. His idea is less sophisticated and elaborated – much less than Carrette and King's concept. The contexts of their arguments also differ. Richard H. Jones's idea heavily relies on the paradigm of secularization. I will not elaborate on this otherwise meaningful connection here but return to it in the next section.

The context of Carrette and King's reasoning is closely connected to western capitalism. They argue that spirituality overtaking the religious scene in modern society is part of a more extensive ideological process. It is a process of the privatization of religion and the psychologization of religion, and it results in favoring the "internal economy of the self" over the "external economy of social relations". Moreover, the authors argue that this process is essentially connected to the history of western capitalism.[743]

Once again, in a less complex and sophisticated way, Jones shares some elements of this reasoning: he also stresses (or blames) the focus on individual experiences as the reason for the decline of mysticism today. He pinpoints William James as being crucial in this process: "Only in the modern era has mysticism come to be seen as a matter of only special experiences. The modern reduction of mysticism to merely a matter of personal experiences was solidified by William James in 1902 (1958)."[744] Jones argues that this eventually led to a phenomenon where the experiences are cultivated outside of their traditional contexts. They are pursued without traditional techniques and outside of traditional settings for non-traditional aims, meaning that the transcendent is no longer in focus, but people use mystical experiences for personal development and other purposes.

Carrette and King paint a similar picture of the relationship between today's phenomena (spirituality) and tradition: "Spirituality is now a private, psychological event that refers to a whole range of experiences floating on the boundary of religious traditions."[745] In interpreting spirituality as related to western capitalism, these features have significance in the vitality of

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[741] I briefly linked this idea to Jones's concept before in (Szugyiczki, Secularization of/or Mysticism: Notes on Richard H. Jones's Philosophy of Mysticism, 2021)

[742] (Carrette & King, Selling Spirituality: The silent takeover of religion, 2005, pp. 42-44)

[743] (Carrette & King, Selling Spirituality: The silent takeover of religion, 2005, pp. 68-69)

[744] (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, p. 2)

[745] (Carrette & King, Selling Spirituality: The silent takeover of religion, 2005, p. 73)

spirituality over mysticism which is closely connected to traditions. Spirituality is more open to adaptation and easily accessible, therefore, it succeeds in the religious market better: "The lack of specificity allows it to be effective in the marketplace and reduces its concern for social ethics and cultural location."[746] The authors take this a step further, stating that spirituality is "a box without content, because the content has been thrown out and what is left is a set of psychological descriptions with no referent."[747]

The idea of spirituality connected to the privatization and psychologization of religion and to western capitalism is a relevant concept, and it is not questioned here. What is debatable, in my opinion, is the concept of mysticism connected to a specific understating of tradition, the idea of tradition along with mysticism eventually replacing mysticism, and the lack of reflection on contemporary forms of mysticism as a consequence.

Once again, in Carrette and King's work, mysticism is closely associated with tradition in a specific sense. This meaning in all three cases (Arjuna, Jones, and Carrette, and King) points towards a certain degree of rigidity of traditions, which I will elaborate on in the following section. What remains in the background here is that mystical experiences have always entailed a radical form of individuality. Indeed, this individuality is not equal to the processes in modernity that Carrette and King point out as the economy of self-interest.[748] It entails focusing on individual experiences and the person's spiritual development in relation to it. It was also present in the case of John of the Cross and Merton. It is not connected solely to modernity. However, I agree with the fact that the spiritual development of these authors entailed something much closer connected to religious teachings than the examples the three researchers are enlisting.

There are sociological connections to the individual characteristics of mysticism too. In the threefold sociological division of church, sect, and mysticism, Troeltsch characterizes mysticism as "radical individualism". With it, he refers to the indifference or opposition towards history and religious institutions, the relativization of the church's norms, the absence of the need to create an all-encompassing solid social ethic, decision-making based on experiences and impulses, and a certain universality to the phenomena.[749] In my opinion, these examples and this idea point to the fact that mysticism has always been an individual form of religiosity, often rebellious and destructive towards tradition. Naturally, mystical traditions are not neglected in Troeltsch's work, but certainly not treated in a way similar to Jones's and Carrette and King's, presuming it as a precondition or necessary circumstance for mysticism. They do provide literature, preparatory techniques, and thoroughly articulated ideas on interpretations. Questioning whether mysticism can exist outside of its relation to traditions seems off, notably because very little about mysticism outside of tradition has been recorded or included in theories – especially in terms of western medieval mysticism. The scholarly idea of mysticism and mystics fitting in traditions might indeed be comfortable for researchers. However, generally, mystics care very little about fitting in or disappearing from the map of scholarly pursuit. The demise of mysticism would not entail mystics wandering off the road of tradition but rather

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[746] (Carrette & King, Selling Spirituality: The silent takeover of religion, 2005, p. 73)
[747] (Carrette & King, Selling Spirituality: The silent takeover of religion, 2005, p. 73)
[748] (Carrette & King, Selling Spirituality: The silent takeover of religion, 2005, p. 69)
[749] (Troeltsch & Wyon, The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches, 1931)

rigorously fitting in. What King and Carrette, as well as Jones, explain as the disappearance or the death of mysticism is rather a flourishing basis for the phenomenon.

Following a similar logic, the central role of mystical experiences within mysticism is also apparent. I do not share Jones's general idea about uprooted mystical experiences in contemporary society. Even though many experiences allegedly happen without preparation or expectation, they generally include a search for meaning and interpretation of the experience, often lasting for a lifetime. These experiences also have a profound effects on the person: the intense feelings and sensations accompanying the experience are not only feelings and sensations in most cases. They are interpreted as long-awaited divine liberations, deep and meaningful connections with the ultimate reality, and so on. Experiences are central to mysticism. In mystical traditions, the contextual aspects of mysticism (preparation and the fruits) have been emphasized in support of it. In church civilization, this religious interpretation often meant a very specific meaning, often closely associated with religious teachings: for example, in the case of John of the Cross, the vision of the illuminating divine light as darkness. The religious meaning today varies – just as the available religious and secular explanations one could utilize. The emphasis here should not be placed on whether such an interpretation and experience fit into specific ideas of tradition, but instead if they are interpreted with religious meaning. In the latter instance, by 'religious' I refer to the understanding of religious studies, which can research phenomena functioning religiously without the need to belong to a particular religious tradition. To put it more simply: if the person interprets the experience as an "unmediated experience of oneness with the ultimate reality",[750] it could be considered as a mystical experience. This approach does not require proof of the worth of the experience by demonstrating its conformity to the rules of a religious or mystical tradition.

Indeed, the question here is not whether traditional religiosity is changing or disappearing but its close dependence of mysticism on tradition. Based on the arguments mentioned above, I do not think their close association is justified. Based on this false connection, the disappearance or irrelevance of mysticism as an element of religious traditions is also questionable. This leaves the concept of spirituality replacing mysticism as an unsubstantiated idea. Even without that, the idea of spirituality as a sole concept of an individual, experience-centered religious phenomenon in modernity was highly debatable. It forces mysticism into the same empty box, referring to everything and meaning nothing, and, eventually, resulting in not being referred to at all or not being taken seriously in academic research.

I argue that despite the obvious contextual changes, the "box of mysticism" is not empty and meaningless in contemporary society. There is much content in it, which might not be 'traditional' or conceptualized yet. Alternatively, it is not conceptualized because it is not traditional – as it does not resemble previous well-known concepts and categories. Understandably, the overwhelming variety of contemporary religious phenomena is not the most alluring invitation for research, especially in an era when all-encompassing ideas or single concepts are treated with heightened suspicion. However, merging the different notions and disregarding them altogether does not lead forward either.

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[750] King's definition, mentioned in the first chapter. (King, Mysticism and spirituality, 2005, p. 306)

In relation to the polarization of religion and spirituality, Emmons highlights that neither narrow nor too broad definitions are helpful: "Also cautioning against the use of restrictive, narrow definitions or overly broad definitions that can rob either construct of its distinctive characteristics, the authors propose a set of criteria that recognizes the constructs' conceptual similarities and dissimilarities."[751] In this case, the question does not dwell on religion and spirituality. However, the restrictive association of mysticism and tradition and the overly broad concept of spirituality referring to contemporary individual religious phenomena are both relevant.

In contrast with these approaches, Sir Alister Hardy's is a positive one in the sense that understanding contemporary "spiritual experiences" is the aim of the research. In that sense, it is a unique and grand undertaking. However, from the perspective of studying mysticism, it is also too general. Nonetheless, Hardy's is a forward-looking attitude that dives into the variety of modern phenomena instead of ignoring it or being frightened of it. The thousands of accounts gathered and paired with their categorizations and analyses lead much further in the understanding of contemporary experiences than any of the approaches mentioned above, which look at them in relation to their traditional forms.

In his book titled *The spiritual nature of man*, Hardy summarizes the first years of research. He recalls the different phrases used to name the research subject: spiritual awareness, religious awareness, religious experience, the experience of the transcendent, etc. Hardy mainly sticks to the term *spiritual awareness* when he discusses the main idea of the human species universally sharing an awareness of the divine. Even though Hardy's aim was much broader than mystical experiences, another question arises: why were mystical experiences not included in those expressions? Is there any reason for that?

I want to refer to Thomas Merton again to highlight this issue through an example. He is known as a monk, and as a writer of a best-selling autobiography, based on these two he is also considered an inspiration for the monastic lifestyle for many people in modernity. Mainly in academic circles, he is also known for being an important figure of interreligious dialogue, and, related to that, for his connection to D.T. Suzuki, as well as as a contemplative. Even though his Louisville experience is publicly commemorated, he is not widely considered a mystic. As McCaslin notes, many scholars talk about Merton as a contemplative. She attributes this to the negative connotations of mysticism in contemporary society, namely: "its associations with affective (emotional) piety, raptures and out of body flights – in short, with forms of ecstatic experience"[752] Though I am not attempting to dwell on this topic any further, it would be beneficial to explore further whether spiritual experiences and other synonyms are used to refer to mystical experiences and, if yes, why.

On the other hand, McCaslin also points out that Merton preferred to talk about himself as a contemplative, and he often interchangeably used the word "contemplative" and "mystic" in his works.[753] According to McCaslin, there are two explanations for this. One of those is the aforementioned negative connotations of the words *mystic* and *mysticism*. The other refers to one of Merton's journal entries which points to the idea that Merton simply did not care much about theoretical accuracy and technical terms: "Gone are the days when 'mysticism' was for

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[751] Based on Hill et al. 2000, in (Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003, p. 382)
[752] (McCaslin, 2012, p. 26)
[753] (McCaslin, 2012, p. 26)

me a matter of eager and speculative interest. Now, because it is my life, it is torment to think about. Like being in the pangs of childbirth and reading an essay on mother love written by a spinster."[754] However, as McCaslin points out, Merton "retains the term 'mysticism' and devotes much effort in his writings to distinguish carefully between genuine and false forms of it."[755]

Jones's work attempts to present current issues in the research of mysticism, but only in the epilogue does he write about modern mystical phenomena – in a pejorative way. Carrette and King respond to contemporary religious phenomena but conflate them as spirituality. Hardy focuses on spiritual experiences/awareness, opening the doors wide open. The above examples show that the lack of a conceptual framework makes the range of phenomena seem impenetrable and indescribable; many researchers conflate, misunderstand, trivialize or do not even mention modern mysticism.

Modern mysticism is *muddled*

The use of Arjana's term *muddled* in this title is not a mere coincidence. The idea of cultural and religious appropriation attached to modern mystical phenomena is extensively explained in her work. Related to that, the influence of orientalism, colonialism and western capitalism on the changes of the modern religious landscape is undoubted. The idea of categories and concepts of mysticism based on "Protestant dominance" and forced on Eastern traditions is also a valid concern. An approach in the study of religion that strictly sticks to the Western- and Protestantism-based ideas of religion and tradition is most likely doomed to struggle and failure simply because of religious pluralism. However, a theory and methodology with the same blind spots, just as Arjana's, are equally misleading. I find it essential to discuss an alternative approach to the underlying questions Arjana's work is concerned with, as a step in the process of finding a more comprehensive understanding of modern mysticism.

Therefore, the reduction of modern mysticism to "muddled mysticism" is questioned here. In Arjana's work, modern mysticism primarily refers to the experiences, practices, and teachings that have been taken out of their traditional ("Eastern") context and are used and marketed as people wish (particularly in "the West"). The idea is based on two debatable concepts: first, the idea that consumerism and religious appropriation influences Eastern traditions only, and, second, a particular concept of tradition that is unchangeable and retrievable.

The first idea singles out a process of "the West" appropriating "the East". Religious and cultural appropriation is a real and sensitive issue, often heightening ignorance of its origins. Without questioning this, I want to point out a process that is related to the contemporary changes in religion. The religious landscape has recently become a melting pot of religious teachings, ideas, and practices. This does not entail that Eastern traditions are entirely ignored

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[754] Thomas Merton, journal entry February 24, 1953, in *A Search for Solitude: The Journals of Thomas Merton*. Volume Three: 1952-1960, In: (McCaslin, 2012, p. 24)

[755] (McCaslin, 2012, p. 26) The genuineness of mysticism has meant this: "For Merton, a genuine mystic was not merely someone who has such numinous encounters, but one who trod a spiritual path toward lessening egotism, greater service to the divine and to the world, and ultimately, intimate union with what some call God or the unnameable unity within and beyond all things." (McCaslin, 2012, p. 23)

in general. However, this process is overarching in the sense that it is not restricted to consuming the great Eastern religious traditions, teachings, and techniques by/in the West.

The second idea ultimately revolves around the change and loss of tradition. Richard H. Jones also tackles this question in a similar sense to Arjana's. For him, the change of tradition is also understood in the sense of appropriation of traditional techniques and teachings. Mindfulness meditation is mentioned as an example – as it is becoming increasingly common in the West, popular, and leaning far from traditional teachings. This is understood as tradition getting out of focus through people who ignore traditional religious metaphysics, teachings, rituals, etc. It is not entirely clear which prospect is more frightening for the authors: the eventual discontinuation or the total change of those traditions. I will respond substantively to these ideas in the following section. There, I will return to the rigid dichotomy of traditional and modern as related to the study of mysticism. I also aim to point out that the fluidity and the capacity for change of religions are severely overlooked and underrated features.

"Modern mysticism is not mysticism"

Jones fundamentally argues that mysticism is what he calls 'serious mysticism'. It is perceived as embedded in a well-defined tradition and entails a fully dedicated life towards the changes induced by the mystical experience. Today this phenomenon is allegedly dying out. Instead, a 'naturalistic spirituality' or superficial spirituality is replacing it. This idea is closely connected to the survival of religions and mysticism in their true form. Superficial spirituality is more alluring than 'serious mysticism', requires less dedication from the person, and therefore seems to dominate the religious landscape and replace traditional forms of religiosity.

Superficial spirituality allegedly has some elements of mysticism but lacks the most important ones: those connected to the rigorous practices and a long-term dedication towards changing one's lifestyle based on the experience. The elements they might share are the most appealing ones within modern society – for people to be able to pick, choose and change fast enough to stay satisfied. Jones implicitly understands almost every experience-based religious phenomenon today under this category. No wonder that he argues that mysticism, in the 'real' sense, is dying. Therefore, even what we could consider modern (forms of) mysticism are thought of as watered-down versions of the real phenomenon, and not taken into consideration. Modern forms of mysticism are not considered mysticism, because they are not similar to traditional forms of it. This also means that in Jones's sense they are unworthy of scientific research.

According to Jones, the process of superficial spirituality replacing serious mysticism results in a trend he calls the *secularization of mystical experiences.*[756] This trend purportedly

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[756] The phrase and, to some extent, the idea behind it seems to be Jones' innovation. (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016). As I mentioned earlier, at the beginning of the 20th century, Theodore Schroeder (1921) published an article titled *Secularized mystics*, in which Schroeder differentiated religious mystics and their counterparts, secular mystics. It aimed to highlight the purported psychological reasons behind wars and the emergence of omnipotent leaders. He uses the words secular and anti-mystical as synonyms, with a positive overtone – as mysticism and mystical experiences are related to an early, immature stage of human intellectual and psychological development. (Schroeder, 1921). Walter Stace talks about the secular or non-theological mysticism of Plotinus. (Stace, Mysticism and Philosophy, 1961, pp. 105-112) "And first we take Plotinus as representing the classical pagan world. Plotinus was not an adherent of any organized religious system but a believer in the metaphysics of Plato, which he sought to develop and advance." (Stace, Mysticism and

started with the separation of the mystical experience from mysticism.[757] Jones perceives this as a twofold process: absorbing mystical experiences into modern culture and abandoning a fully transformed lifestyle based on the mystical experience. This, in his view, eventually resulted in naturalistic spirituality replacing "classical mysticism".[758]

Jones suggests that classical mysticism today is untenable for a number of reasons.[759] It seems as though almost all the conditions of mysticism (at least classical mysticism) are gone with modernity. Following Jones's logic, one could ask the following – more forward-looking –questions. Do the cultural, historical, and religious changes of the past centuries entail that mysticism is not possible anymore? If any forms of mysticism are still possible despite these changes, how can one characterize these phenomena? Which methods and theories could be used to understand the changes in mysticism and modern forms of mysticism?

Modern mysticism is self-construction

The idea of modern mysticism being mainly focused on the immanent and pursued primarily for personal development is called self-construction here. Following this logic, mystics are called self-constructors. The phrase refers to Cupitt's concept of mystics being deconstructors, suggesting the fact that mystics have always questioned teachings of religious orthodoxy. The term *self-construction* was meant to describe Richard H. Jones's criticism of modern mysticism. Based on this idea, modern mysticism entails experiences that contribute to constructing an ideal version of the self. The experiences are pursued primarily for this reason. Therefore, mysticism here is not about deconstruction but consciously consumed experiences, teachings, and practices to construct the self.

First I will look at Jones's concept and then at some critical approaches. Self-centeredness and an immanent focus of modern mysticism are two arguments in Richard H. Jones's text against the relevance and seriousness of the subject. On the one hand, the immanent focus entails the irrelevance and neglect of the transcendent dimension of these experiences. Even if there is such a dimension, people purportedly set it aside and focus on themselves and their personal development. On the other hand, people pursue these mystical techniques and experiences to better themselves or to seek validation. Jones argues that people use these

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Philosophy, 1961, p. 105) In this sense, whether mysticism is secular is decided by the religious affiliation or non-affiliation of the mystic. The idea behind it relies on constructivism: the interpretation of the experience and purportedly the experience itself is essentially influenced by the mystic's religious, personal, and historical context.

[757] As mentioned above, Jones argues that mysticism is more than mystical experiences. Mystical experiences are vital parts of mysticism, but we should not forget about mystical traditions along with their teachings, techniques, metaphysics etc., and the transformation of lifestyle. (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, p. 2) Based on this concept, later in this paper I argue that the term secularization of mysticism would be a more suitable expression for Jones' concept. "The history of psychology and religion since the 1890s has been one where religious 'experience' has become an individual event and where the boundaries of the self have been reinforced. Building on Protestant notions of the self in relation to God – and thus continuing longer historical processes of individualization from the Reformation – the early psychologists of religion located the significance of religion within individual experience. […] mysticism could be reconfigured as the pursuit of 'altered states of consciousness' and religious practices became represented as manifestations of inner psychical processes rather than as social forms of expression." (Carrette & King, Selling Spirituality: The silent takeover of religion, 2005, p. 68)

[758] (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, p. 337)

[759] (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, pp. 338-340)

mystical experiences and traditional techniques to benefit from them psychologically and physiologically. He argues that "The superficial spirituality of the New Age is more about validating how one currently leads one's life than about any serious change in a mystical direction — a watered-down spirituality of a 'Buddhism Lite,' as it were."[760] Some aspects of a "watered-down" version of traditional teachings might be adopted by them temporarily, and they do not engage in a complete mystical way of life following the experience.[761] He mentions mindfulness meditation as an example.[762] The latter idea is closely connected to the argument which focuses on how far modern phenomena are from their traditional roots. In order to be able to pursue their own goals, people uproot a version of traditional practices and teachings. Jones further argues that today's "antimystical climate"[763] does not support the traditional mystical way either. Asceticism, selflessness, thorough and long-lasting practices, and dedication toward a total transformation seems irrational in today's society. There is a change in one's life after the experience, but, according to Jones, it is a pursued and swiftly fading one.

Troeltsch's ideas of church civilization and modernity highlight the relevant socio-cultural changes. Troeltsch argues that modernity's view of the world is essentially positive towards progress. With it, the goal of life becomes immanent – bettering one's life as much as possible. The focus on the transcendent shifts towards personal convictions, and instead of authority, people rely on autonomous cultural notions. From this perspective, the modern phenomena described by Jones do not seem out of place. On the contrary, they reflect all of the characteristics of modernity: its immanent focus and the pursuit of progress.

Moreover, the absence of the transcendent focus of modern mysticism does not necessarily mean that mystical experiences and mysticism do not have a religious dimension. There are examples of mystical experiences which involve a connection with the ultimate reality – conceived as an immanent form, and these experiences have similar characteristics and significance as the ones Jones prefers. Following King's definition, which involves the term ultimate reality, allows more inclusivity towards a variety of contemporary mystical experiences.

The self-centeredness or the focus on *personal* development is not entirely explained within the framework of Troeltsch's theory. Let us look at this idea, starting with the concept of mystics as deconstructors. The idea of mystics questioning social and religious order based on the mystical knowledge gained during their experiences is not new. In Chapter 3, I have already touched upon Don Cupitt's concept which is connected to that, and he perceives mystics as being deconstructors of religious orthodoxy. He argues that mystics had to question

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[760] (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, p. 336)

[761] Instead of a total inner transformation (which Jones considers a vital aspect of mysticism), the focus is more on the psychological and physiological well-being these experiences might contribute to. Most people who practice these techniques aim to calm the mind or focus on the present, increase their happiness, overcome problems, and function better in society. (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, p. 337)

[762] Mindfulness meditation seems to have a distinguished place for Jones as it is highlighted not only here but in the main chapters as well: it is one of the three subcategories of extrovertive mystical experiences. Nature mysticism and cosmic consciousness seem to cover the range of focus for extrovertive experiences. What seems to be an added level in mindfulness meditation is that it is free of conceptualizations. "But one state of consciousness may be free of all conceptualizations: a 'pure' mindfulness involving sensory differentiation but not any conceptualizations." (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, p. 13)

[763] (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, pp. 333-337)

orthodoxy to achieve "personal religious happiness".[764] He also stresses that the idea of mystics affirming tradition is a modern concept, just as their rehabilitation and canonization is a modern achievement.[765] Once again, this idea shines a different light on the self-centeredness of mysticism. Supplementing that is one of Maslow's interpretations of the peak experience as visiting a 'personally defined heaven'. This idea is different from the theological views on heaven and the afterlife, and Maslow defines it as a place always there for a person to visit. "The conception of heaven that emerges from the peak-experiences is one which exists all the time all around us, always available to step into for a little while at least."[766] While Maslow's general idea might help understand the personal nature of mystical experiences, I argue that Cupitt's concept of "personal religious happiness" is somewhat anachronistic. Assuming that the pursuit of personal religious happiness was the focus of traditional mystics seems out of place. Troeltsch's idea of other-worldly focus and ascetic worldview seems more balanced from a historical-cultural perspective.

However, Cupitt does grasp a crucial idea of the individual nature of mysticism. In traditional mysticism, as I pointed out, reflecting on the works of John of the Cross, the focus was on the personal mystical journey. *The two dark nights* are not only purifications in a figurative sense, but the person also changes along with it. The mystical transformation is also highlighted in the paradoxical language of apophatic mysticism. Based on St. Paul, John of the Cross refers to a new and old self.[767] Kavanaugh talks about the results of the *Dark night* as "The point of arrival to which the night leads are the 'new self,' divinized in being and operation, living now a life of faith, hope, and love, fortified and pure."[768] This concept and these characteristics make the transformational aspect of traditional mysticism visible. Even McGinn highlights it in a broader sense – in terms of Christian mysticism.[769] The idea is further supported by James's concept of the fruits of the experiences, and the understanding of mysticism from the perspective of pragmatism.[770] Therefore, Jones's idea cannot be supported by referring to traditional mysticism in which the transformation of the self was not highly important.

However, even in light of Cupitt's arguments, the idea of self-centeredness entails more than a personally focused mystical journey and transformation; it also implicitly entails pursuing these experiences just for their transformational effects. To explore how self-centeredness might differ from the concept of transformation of traditional mysticism, let us take a brief look at Merton's writings. The *New seeds of contemplation*[771] provides many examples related to this concept, first, starting with his idea of sanctity. Merton starts as follows: "It is true to say that for me sanctity consists in being myself and for you sanctity consists in being your self"[772] Without context, this idea could easily be cited to confirm self-centeredness.

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[764] (Cupitt, 1998, p. 4)
[765] (Cupitt, 1998, p. 4)
[766] (Maslow, 1994, p. Appendix A/16)
[767] (John, Kavanaugh, & Rodriguez, The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross. Revised edition, 1991, p. 355)
[768] (John, Kavanaugh, & Rodriguez, The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross. Revised edition, 1991, p. 356)
[769] (McGinn, The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism, 2006, p. xvii)
[770] I presented this idea in Chapter 2.
[771] (Merton, New Seeds of Contemplation, 1972)
[772] (Merton, New Seeds of Contemplation, 1972, p. 31)

However, the explanation follows as: "and that, in the last analysis, your sanctity will never be mine and mine will never be yours, except in the communism of charity and grace. For me to be a saint means to be myself. Therefore, the problem of sanctity and salvation is in fact the problem of finding out who I am and of discovering my true self."[773] In the end, Merton connects the call for self-discovery to God's will: "The seeds that are planted in my liberty at every moment, by God's will, are the seeds of my own identity, my own reality, my own happiness, my own sanctity."[774] Putting the context and the theological roots aside for a moment, phrases like "discovering my true self" and "for me sanctity consists in being myself" definitely seem modern. Other than the use of words, Merton's case does not seem to confirm Jones's idea. Moreover, his experiences were followed by significant transformations in his life – an aspect of traditional mysticism which Jones also misses in modernity. Indeed, more comprehensive and varied research should be conducted about the concept of self-centeredness in modern mysticism, perhaps focusing on the fruits of mystical experiences and the allegedly increased interest and need form them.

Modern mysticism is primarily extrovertive

The analysis of John of the Cross's and Thomas Merton's mysticism shows that there is a clear difference in terms of extrovertive and introvertive mysticism. Three of the four of Merton's experiences were extrovertive, and all of John of the Cross's poems seemed to describe introvertive experiences. This led to the idea that the extrovertive experiences of modern mysticism are more prevalent. Indeed, no firm conclusions can be drawn from just two examples. However, it is a hypothesis that might be worth further theoretical exploration and analysis.

The differences between John of the Cross's and Thomas Merton's examples might be connected to the fact that there is a variety of experiences not only in different eras but regarding one mystic's experiences throughout their lifetime. This is Walter Stace's idea of, which I have previously discussed. Following this logic, Merton's experiences would simply showcase the variety Stace refers to: Merton had one introvertive experience and three extrovertive ones. However, Stace questionably connects this variety to the amount of preparation that proceeds the experiences: introvertive experiences require long and intense preparation to attain complete unity, while extrovertive ones are only incomplete unions. The same logic, with a different emphasis, appears in Robert K. C. Forman's work: extrovertive experiences require more training precisely because the attainment of the mystical union happens within everyday circumstances when there is much disturbance. Stace briefly refers to the idea that more examples of introvertive mysticism can be found in medieval mysticism. Based on my research, I find Stace's latter idea plausible. Without sharing the author's idea of a hierarchy of extrovertive and introvertive mysticism, the question of their frequency in relation to the cultural-historical context arises.

Further research on the topic should explore two questions. First, if there is indeed a significant difference between the frequency of extrovertive and introvertive experiences within

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[773] (Merton, New Seeds of Contemplation, 1972, p. 31)
[774] (Merton, New Seeds of Contemplation, 1972, p. 31)

contemporary examples. Second, if the prevalence of extrovertive mysticism in modernity appears significantly, it would be beneficial to explore theoretical concepts which would provide a framework for their interpretation. As I pointed out in Chapter 3, Stace's and Forman's arguments are rooted in their view of and, ultimately, preferences either introvertive or extrovertive mysticism. Therefore, I would not start to base the ideas of the research on their concepts but outline a new – and possibly more complex – one based on mystical accounts. These explorations could include any specific preparation for the mystical experiences, spatial and temporal context, and their interpretations and significance. This analysis could possibly provide insight into whether introvertive and extrovertive experiences correlate with the amount of preparation and intense focus. Further along this path, as far as cultural-religious explanations go, it would be worth exploring whether the rapid flow of information contributes to the fragmentation of attention and, in the end, to shorter or "shallower" mystical experiences.

The four criticisms of modern mysticism mentioned here were mainly based on comparing it to an image of traditional mysticism. While these ideas entail a rigid form of traditional mysticism, I do not assume it to be exclusive and unchanging. These concepts pointed out the dissimilarities of modern mysticism in comparison with traditional mysticism; its overwhelming variety; its rootedness in personal choices and preferences rather than adherence to tradition; its deviance from traditional teachings and practices; its self-centered tradition-exploiting nature; its alleged shallowness, outward and this-worldly fixation; a disregard for thorough transformation in exchange to temporary and immediate changes and gratification; its complete disregard for the transcendent; its focus on experiences only; and the missing dedication towards the whole mystical journey. These ideas are heavily based on the specific concept of tradition I have just described. Therefore, responding to these points will be a more complex process than what the present work could aim to include. Nonetheless, in the following section, I will return to exploring the underlying theories, dichotomies, and assumptions of these perspectives and offer some alternatives to them.

Reaching beyond dichotomies of contemporary scholarship

In this section, I aim to highlight three dichotomies that mostly implicitly shape current discussions about modern mystical phenomena. I also aim to highlight how these concepts are connected to some of the previously mentioned assumptions about modern mysticism: such as that modern mysticism is muddled or that it is not mysticism at all. I will look at, first, one of the most widespread ideas, namely, contrasting modern mysticism with a traditional version; second, at the perception of modern mysticism as a deviance from traditional teachings, particularly in terms of orientalism and colonialism; and third, at how the secularization paradigm is analyzed, as it is often used as a framework to explain the regression of mysticism in modern society.

Along with the three theoretical bases which dominate the dialogue on modern mysticism, I aim to show an alternative to these notions. My aim is not to add to the ranks of critics of the original theories (such as secularization) but to provide already existing theoretical alternatives that better fit the complexity and plurality of modern mysticism. First, the traditional vs. modern dichotomy of religions is to be substituted with a concept of religions that focuses on their functional adaptability. Second, adopting a global perspective will highlight the wider context fitting the religiously pluralistic landscape of today's society, instead of focusing on the orientalist and consumerist approaches of limited relevance. Third, in place of the paradigm of secularization, an approach focusing on today's religious phenomena will be taken into consideration.

Traditional vs. modern

In a dichotomic understanding of traditional and modern mysticism, the latter entails both change and loss of tradition. On the one hand, a change of tradition points to some elements of traditional forms of mysticism that are presently accessible, yet they are not used in their original or authentic forms. Change of tradition is understood in the sense that modern mysticism appropriates traditional techniques and teachings. While Arjana highlights this process on an institutional and social level, Jones concentrates on the individual level. On the social level, this entails processes of changing traditional techniques and teachings to adapt to different audiences. An example is the dissolution of the mystical depth of Rumi's poems by uprooting them from their context in Sufism and marketing them as love poems. On the individual level, Jones's example is mindfulness meditation, as it is common, popular, and far from traditional teachings in the way it is used for personal developmental purposes.[775] On the other hand, the idea of tradition being lost in modern mysticism entails a more drastic narrative: traditional forms of mysticism are disappearing, often due to modern mysticism gaining ground. Tradition is getting lost and out of focus through people ignoring traditional religious metaphysics, traditional religious goals, and mystical and monastic ethical codes, eventually discontinuing them.[776]

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[775] Buddhist teachings of selflessness transformed in psychotherapy to enhance the sense of self. (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, p. 336)

[776] "Traditional religious metaphysics and transcendent goals are ignored; traditional mystical ethical codes are at best watered down. For example, one can adopt aspects of a Buddhist way of life while being agnostic about its

Both narratives (change and loss) are understood as diversions from tradition and are interpreted in a negative light. In this sense, modern mysticism is an insufficient version or alteration of traditional mysticism. In light of this dichotomic understanding, modern mysticism can only be examined in contrast to and parallel with traditional mysticism and by pointing out its deficiencies. According to these narratives, modern mysticism does not have its *raison d'etre*. Looking at the core of these argumentations, all there is left of mysticism in modernity is based on forgetting, loss, or defiance of tradition. This approach does not make any claims about modern religious phenomena but merely assumes them to be deviance of their traditional versions. Today's mysticism is described in opposition to classical/traditional forms of mysticism: an incomplete, temporary, superficial, experience-based, and self-centered phenomenon, which focuses on the natural realm, and even if there are any claims of the transcendent experienced, those claims are ignored. This new kind of mysticism seems to flourish and replace traditional mysticism.

It might be assumed that this rigid dichotomy of modernity and tradition is often based on a lack of information about modernity and religion in modernity. Failing to examine its present distinct characteristics goes hand in hand with the grievance of the loss of its previous forms, and it entails certain blindness toward modern mysticism (or modernity in general). However, for this rigid dichotomy to work, similar blindness is required towards understanding traditional mysticism (and tradition in general). In this opposition, tradition has to mark a phenomenon that is set and exclusive. Such an understanding of tradition enables the interpretation of its opposite form as deviance in the sense that it is open to constant and free individual appropriation. This suggests that not only traditional mysticism shapes the understanding of modern mysticism but vice versa; modern mysticism entails a specific view of traditional mysticism. I do not argue that the problem is necessarily related to understanding a particular phenomenon in opposition to another one. (In this work, I attempt the very same thing.) However, the restriction and simplification which goes hand in hand with rigid dichotomies do not favor the understanding of any of the phenomena in question.

Now, let us look at the problems of the opposition between traditional and modern mysticism from a broader, theoretical, and methodological perspective. First, Woodhead argues that certain processes, described as detraditionalization, entail people distancing themselves from religion and tradition. This is primarily related to religion 'in the West'.[777] Therefore, she argues, "[a]n exclusively tradition-based approach to the study of religion is ill-equipped to deal with such developments."[778] I agree that tradition-based approaches are not entirely sufficient to deal with the characteristics of modern religious phenomena.

Second, Woodhead argues that modernity is corrosive of tradition in terms of secular and religious authority, involving a transcendent deity.[779] She also states that

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factual claims about rebirth and karma (Batchelor 1997). A total inner transformation is not always the goal. Teachers of complicated metaphysical doctrines are no longer needed, nor is adherence to difficult monastic ethical codes. Traditional meditative techniques may be adopted to calm the mind or to focus attention fully on the present […]" (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, pp. 336-337)

[777] Woodhead mentions New Age as one of the examples. "For example, the New Age movement tends not to fit the model of a religious tradition, since it is not a discrete entity with identifiable 'external' authorities such as scriptures, a clear set of structures, and/or an identifiable hierarchy of leadership." (Woodhead, 2002, p. 3)

[778] (Woodhead, 2002, p. 3)

[779] (Woodhead, 2002, p. 10)

detraditionalization entails a turn to the self. The idea is in line with Troeltsch's concept of modernity based on individualism and modern authorities based on autonomous notions. This is a challenging notion for traditional forms of religion based on a different form of authority. The challenge is met in two ways: on the one hand, by adaptation,[780] and, on the other hand, by strengthening traditional authority, and in extreme cases, fundamentalism. "Yet few conservative/ traditional forms of religion in the modern world have been untouched by a turn to the self."[781] Berger argues similarly to Woodhead from the perspective of pluralism. In Berger's understanding, religious pluralism entails individual choice and voluntary association: "The two great effects of pluralism thus go together – faith as based on individual choice rather than on fate or the accident of birth. and faith as institutionalized in the form of the voluntary association."[782] Indeed, this notion is threatening to traditional forms of religiosity. Berger argues that, today, a homogeneity of notions or exclusivity of traditional religious forms can only be maintained through extreme political, social, and/or religious control.[783] Furthermore, Berger argues that religions function well as 'zones of freedom' in modern societies. "Absent vast oil wealth to pacify subjects of totalitarian tyranny to terrify them, it is more practical to allow them certain zones of freedom. Religion is an obvious choice for this."[784]

Third, Woodhead argues that the whole problem and tradition centeredness might be based on the Western and particularly Protestant notion of religion.[785] Lastly, she further argues that modernity and religion should be studied together to understand both notions better.[786] The critiques of the secularization theory confirm this notion. Secularization theory originally linked modernity and the loss of religion together. Since then, many theories and studies have pointed to the opposite. I will shortly return to elaborating on one of them: Berger's concept of pluralism.

Dealing with similar questions, and based on a similar opposition, Charles Taylor provides an elaborate and simplifying concept: the immanent frame.[787] The immanent frame is a set of self-sufficient, impersonal, and immanent orders in modernity, covering cosmic, social, and moral grounds. It emerges as opposed to a transcendent one, but it does not necessarily "slough off" the transcendent. "Some of us want to live it as open to something beyond; some live it as closed. It is something which permits closure, without demanding it."[788]

Cupitt draws the dichotomy between traditional and postmodern, yet he considers mysticism to be not a victim but a beneficiary of postmodernity.[789] Postmodernity is described as a transitional period when the old is not here anymore, and the new is not here yet. It is considered pragmatic, free-floating, and characterized by *bricolage*[790] and improvisation on the

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[780] The authors refer to Buddhist monasticism (chapter 2) and the role of the papacy (chapter 7). (Woodhead, 2002)
[781] (Woodhead, 2002, p. 11)
[782] (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, p. 49)
[783] The two countries mentioned: are Saudi Arabia and North Korea. (p. 48). "Unless the regime has successfully suppressed all channels of dissident communication, and unless it can cut itself off from the world economy, which depends on a high degree of open communication, it is difficult to impose on a modern society a culture that is, essentially, archaic." (p. 65) (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014)
[784] (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, p. 48)
[785] (Woodhead, 2002, pp. 12-14)
[786] (Woodhead, 2002, p. 4)
[787] (Taylor C. , A Secular Age, 2007, pp. 539-593)
[788] (Taylor C. , A Secular Age, 2007, pp. 543-544)
[789] (Cupitt, 1998, pp. 1-12)
[790] Original concept by Thomas Luckmann

religious landscape. Its chaotic nature entails: "the end therefore of all forms of realism and supernaturalism; the end of objective Truth, and off all forms of faith in some future and hoped-for totalization of the human world."[791] Cupitt suggests that this does not work against mysticism, as, for example, Jones and Arjana suggest. On the contrary, this religious landscape provides a breeding ground for mysticism to flourish.

From the examples mentioned above, it is quite clear that the hindering dichotomy of traditional vs. modern is not the most efficient way of studying mysticism and religion in general. Based on contemporary religious examples, Woodhead points out the process of detraditionalization – it is said to undermine any solely and rigidly tradition-based concepts of religion. Taylor's opposition, despite its similarity, remains fruitful because it describes the connections between the two concepts without dragging one of them down. Cupitt outright applauds postmodernity for providing a fertile ground for mysticism to flourish. Next, I aim to describe a concept of religion that focuses on the functional fluidity and adaptability of religions. This concept enables us to regard religion not only in a narrow understanding, associating it with its traditional forms, but to reflect on the concept of religion through broader processes of religious and social change.

Functional Fluidity – Thomas Tweed

Rigid dichotomies of traditional and modern mysticism suggest a narrow understanding of tradition. It paints a picture of set and exclusive mystical traditions regarding teachings, practices, and rituals. It suggests continuity which almost leans towards unchangingness. It assumes a clearly defined origin from which deviances occur. These concepts sometimes refer to tangible 'traditional' elements such as sacred texts and clearly defined mystical practices. Here, I do not aim to empty the meaning behind tradition and traditionality. I only aim to point out that these are narrow concepts, and religion is not best defined by rigidity and uniformity. To highlight this, I apply Thomas Tweed's concept of the fluidity of religions to understand the changes from traditional to modern mysticism better. As I have pointed out before, mysticism is a highly individualistic form of religiosity. As long as one assumes that mysticism represents a concept, which might be applicable over religious, social, and/or cultural changes throughout time, the change of mystical traditions and phenomena becomes a relevant question. I consider Tweed's approach applicable to the subject in this sense.

In his book, titled *Crossing and dwelling*, Thomas Tweed elaborates on a functional concept of religion.[792] He distinguishes two main functions. One of them he calls *dwelling,* which refers to the stabilizing norm-generating function of religions.[793] It refers to religions defining norms for people by employing various prescriptions and prohibitions. To follow Tweed's metaphors, they originate people in different spaces, such as the body, the home, homeland, and cosmos. However, religions do not provide a definitive map but modify its outlines when necessary.

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[791] (Cupitt, 1998, p. 2)
[792] The concept is based on the following definition: Tweed's definition of religion is as follows: "Religions are confluences of organic cultural flows that intensify joy and confront suffering by drawing on human and suprahuman forces to make homes and cross boundaries." (Tweed, 2006, p. 54)
[793] (Tweed, 2006, pp. 80-122)

This leads to the other function called *crossing*, which refers to the ability of religions to cross previously established boundaries.[794] It refers to religious functions related to destabilization and norm-breaking. Religions not only mark people's place in the world through teachings and prohibitions but also point to their previously established boundaries. Moreover, they show possible ways of crossing boundaries and encourage norm-breaking through different rites and teachings.[795]

Both of these functions are equally emphasized and considered necessary regarding the vitality of religion in society. Both are understood as individual and group processes, and Tweed stresses that both activities are dynamic and imagined as spatial activities.[796] Dwelling is described as settling, making homes, creating rules, etc. Crossing is moving through borders that were initially drawn up in relation to symbolic spaces such as the body, the home, homeland, and the cosmos. It means that the scope and limits of teachings and rules are questioned, crossed, and expanded. This leads to a less essential but equally fitting approach of Tweed's.

To illustrate his concept and theory of religion, he uses metaphors of movement, travel and water. On the one hand, this emphasizes the constant change and adaptation of religions, whereby they orient people in space and time. Tweed compares religions here to clocks and compasses, which help one to find their way in symbolic space and time. On the other hand, he compares theory-making and the theorist's work to a journey. In connection with the metaphor of the journey, he notes that theories of religion do not provide an all-embracing picture – a map – of religion, which is made by a static observer.[797] He argues that neither the theorist nor the phenomenon he observes is static, and the theorist is not a static observer but a theory maker who provides a view of an ever-changing map of the observed phenomenon.[798] Furthermore, a theory does not paint a closed picture but leads to the next journey/theory.

The application of Tweed's theory to modern mysticism

One of the strengths of Tweed's theory is that it describes religions as constantly changing systems that can respond to challenges. This goes directly against rigid concepts of religion and many contemporary theories, which equated its change in modernity with its loss. Therefore, it makes it a sufficient alternative for understanding religion in modernity. At the same time, the theory also provides an opportunity to see the changes in modern mysticism in a different light. Tweed's concept of religion is applicable to modern mysticism in terms of the change in its contextual elements: the shifts of the antecedents and aftermath of mystical experiences. In this light, the changes are not to be interpreted as the loss of the whole phenomenon but as signs of its adaptability. This means that the 'deviance' from traditional preparatory techniques, the application of techniques from other cultural-religious contexts, as well as the supposed changes in terms of a dedicated lifestyle are all part of the change of the phenomenon and show its vitality in a global and plural religious landscape. The latter

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[794] (Tweed, 2006, pp. 123-163)

[795] (Tweed, 2006, p. 76) In a previous work, I analyzed three examples of this function related to gender, one of which was connected to Bernard of Clairvaux's mysticism (Szugyiczki, Nemek relativitása a vallási hagyományokban, 2017).

[796] (Tweed, 2006, pp. 73-74)

[797] About the supralocal approach, see (Tweed, 2006, p. 16)

[798] This is called the locative approach: (Tweed, 2006, pp. 16-17)

characteristic – the global and plural religious landscape – is essential to this understanding. In this sense, religiosity in modernity is understood as widely available, interconnected, and, therefore, constantly changing. On the other hand, if one interprets modernity as an environment hostile to religions and, in line with that, understands religions only as they adhere to distinct traditions, this concept – relying on functional adaptability – becomes almost entirely irrelevant.

The second important element is that Tweed equally emphasizes the norm-creating and norm-breaking functions of religion. Therefore, religions are not only understood in their functions of adhering to traditional teachings and prescribing certain techniques but also in their capacity to renew themselves. Following this idea, concepts of modern mysticism are often one-sided, and they focus on the norm-creating side of the concept. More precisely, they decide what mysticism is based on, whether the modern phenomena adhere to the "traditional" norms or how well it adheres to them. This notion attaches a high level of exclusivity and rigidity to the phenomenon. It would be reasonable to argue that traditional mysticism entailed exclusivity to a certain extent because techniques and teachings were not widely available. However, they were indeed available for the seekers and the initiated. Many of the prose works of John of the Cross testify to this notion by introducing readers to the nuances of the mystical way. Thomas Merton also emphasizes the "accessibility" of mysticism.[799] Once again, understanding modernity as a global and pluralistic religious landscape alters this picture by pointing to the wide accessibility of religious and mystical teachings and techniques, together with an increasing interest from the "seekers". Therefore, the one-sided view focusing on the norm-creating functions of mysticism is insufficient.

Third, and most important, the crossing is not simply understood as a reaction to situations that threaten people with chaos, or the integration of boundary questioning issues, like in Clifford Geertz's argumentation.[800] It is also understood as actively seeking to expand the explanatory scope of religions. I want to add two notions to this. First, the idea that mysticism essentially represents change and renewing power within religions. Focusing on a set and exclusive version of mysticism is anachronistic and intrinsically problematic regarding the Weberian concept of charisma. The charisma of mystics is a power that subverts and recreates. What some of the quoted authors, such as Jones and Arjana, attempted mirrors the routinization of charisma. This shows that their ideas are rooted not in the understanding of mysticism but in a specific (tradition-based) view of religions. Second, even such classical mystics as Rumí and Kabír were allegedly not adhering to the orthodox ways of religions, or others, like Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, were reformers, of the Carmelite order. Therefore, the critical question is not whether mystics adhere to traditions the way researchers would like to see but why it is more convenient to understand mysticism in terms of adherence to a tradition.

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[799] "[…] it was a light (and this most of all was what took my breath away) that was offered to all, to everybody, and there was nothing fancy or strange about it." (Merton, The Seven Storey Mountain, 1999, p. 321) "I have the immense joy of being man, a member of a race in which God Himself became incarnate. As if the sorrows and stupidities of the human condition could overwhelm me, now I realize what we all are. And if only everybody could realize this!" (Merton, Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander, 1989, p. 157)

[800] According to Geertz, religions strive to integrate experiences that do not fit into their explanatory framework at first sight; therefore, they expand and transform models of reality; or to maintain the conviction that it can be reckoned with. All this is in order to avoid chaos and move towards order. (Geertz, 2001, pp. 75-116)

I argue that it is essential to realize that change and adaptability are intrinsic to mysticism, just as they are to religion. It is not only a feature of modern mysticism, but modern mysticism certainly draws attention to it, as it is changing swiftly in a pluralistic environment. Indeed, the availability and plurality of today's religious and mystical supplies are not comparable to religiosity and mysticism centuries ago. I want to point out that Tweed's concept of religion emphasizes the functional adaptability of religions. This notion is increasingly true to mysticism; therefore, any concept focusing on a set version of it and the adherence to norms diverges from its essential features. In short, this means that for the present work, it is vital to attempt to understand not only the traditional phenomena but its contemporary changes as well.

Eastern vs. Western

In academic discussions, mysticism in modernity is often associated with traditions and practices which originate in or draw on 'Eastern' religions. According to these narratives, the widespread availability and popularity of techniques and teachings related to Buddhism and Hinduism are paired with a thirst for experiencing the transcendent among 'Western' people who live in 'secularized societies'. The theoretical origin for this comparison is often associated with Edward Said's influential work, *Orientalism*.[801] Indeed, Arjana's above mentioned work builds upon this book as well as Richard King's works.[802] Some of Said's ideas that Arjana applies include the important role of essentialism and the connection between knowledge and power. Essentialism is mentioned as the basis for romanticizing the East and for perceiving it as a center of 'mystical energy' capable of renewing mind and body.[803]

Applying the postcolonialist concept of Carrette and King is taking this a step further: the abstract image of the East, created by essentialism, is sold today under the disguise of spirituality, promising instant enlightenment and pleasure.[804] Similarly to Said, Arjana also asserts the idea that the Western knowledge, concepts, and narratives on the East are related to dominating it. Said views it as part of an imperialist project, and Arjana stresses that academic discourses are not neutral.[805] Related to King's works, similar ideas are employed. Arjana quotes him regarding the application of Christian terms to Eastern concepts related to the early stages of studying Hinduism and Buddhism. She mentions an eighteenth-century study that talks about Buddha as a "heavenly spirit", and the goal of Buddhism as "union with God".[806] Although it is unclear how Arjana imagines this could have alternatively been done in the 18th century, keeping in mind that religious studies have not yet been able to provide ample phrases and concepts to do so.

At this point, I would like to clarify that I do not argue against orientalist or postcolonialist understandings of cultural and religious processes. However, I argue that these narratives might not be sufficient in understanding the concept of modern mysticism in

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[801] (Said, 1979)
[802] (King, Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial theory, India and 'the mystic East', 1999), (Carrette & King, Selling Spirituality: The silent takeover of religion, 2005)
[803] (Arjana, 2020, pp. 44-45) Essentialism is also mentioned on page 162, related to Stephen Russel's example. (Arjana, 2020)
[804] (Carrette & King, Selling Spirituality: The silent takeover of religion, 2005, p. 87), (Arjana, 2020, pp. 28-29)
[805] (Said, 1979, pp. 31-49), (Arjana, 2020, p. 139)
[806] (Arjana, 2020, p. 28)

general.[807] Moreover, I argue that these approaches often include strict dichotomies such as the primary opposition of East and West, traditional and muddled religiosity, and capitalist exploitation of the untouched, original Eastern teachings by the West. The historical relevance and value of these approaches are immense in understanding how cultural and religious changes occurred when "the West" rediscovered and started appropriating "the East". They are also invaluable in the collective processing of the related traumas. Today, in some cases, like in Arjana's work, these attempts turn into a mission to reclaim traditional practices, teachings, and values – as if these scholarly attempts could return time and make these traditions untouched by the social and religious changes of the past centuries, destructing or horrible as they are from the perspective of the victims. Once again this view heavily builds on a specific, rigid understanding of religious traditions. Applying these dichotomies seems unfit in terms of the interpretation of pluralist contemporary religious phenomena, and the global religious landscape seems to resist the scholarly need to reduce it to East versus West. Let us take a look at some of the issues of Orientalist and Postcolonialist approaches in terms of contemporary religious phenomena.

The most fundamental issue is the dichotomic contrasting of East and West. Said's work revolves around this opposition. It builds upon the concept that orientalism helped to define Europe in contrast with "others". Said was primarily focused on the knowledge collected, or, more specifically, created in the Middle East. As I mentioned earlier, he argues against the neutrality of this knowledge and stresses that it is dominated by an agency. Another relevant aspect is the binary oppositions, such as rational vs. irrational, mind vs. body, and order vs. chaos, which characterizes Europe and the others opposed to it, which "manage and displace European anxieties".[808] Ibn Warraq criticizes the characteristics on which Said's argumentation was based.[809] He argues that the West is not racist, xenophobic, or self-conceited, as Said suggests, but can be characterized by rationalism, universalism, and self-criticism. He relies on classical authors such as Homer, Aristotle, and Cicero and attempts to show how their ideas were present throughout the history of Europe.[810] Colin Campbell shares an idea of the West similar to Said's. His overview of contemporary processes of orientalism includes a chapter titled "How the West was lost".[811] Related ideas include talking about the East and West dichotomy through the perspective of the colonialist narrative: the assertion of dominance through collecting, organizing, and articulating knowledge about the East. The need for enchantment, or as Arjana puts it, the Western need for the Eastern 'mystical energy' also frequently appears.

Before arriving at the relevance of mysticism in this process, let us look at how the Western treatment of Eastern religiosity is perceived. In Arjana's work the need for enchantment is associated with the capitalist attempts to exploit the East in terms of material goods and the 'mystical energy' as well. The postcolonial narrative is updated to explain these processes: what is lost in the West due to secularization and other social and cultural changes is substituted by

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[807] As I have pointed out earlier, some theoretical works do not promote a general, overarching concept of mysticism, but rather an understanding which focuses on its connectedness to one specific era or religion.
[808] (Kohn & Reddy, 2017, pp. Post-colonial theory)
[809] (Warraq, 2007)
[810] (Croydon, 2012)
[811] (Campbell, 2016, pp. 319-339)

the exploitation and appropriation of the East. In this dichotomy, the East appears as the beholder of some original and unchanged religious resources, which are or were charged with the ever-so-needed 'mystical energy'. Hence, it is obvious why the terms *appropriation*, *exploitation*, and *muddled* are frequently used in this narrative. While this narrative seems specifically targeted to explain the modern capitalist exploitation of the East, the confluence of religions and religious appropriation is not exclusive to this era and the relation based on exploitation. One example could be the expansion of the Roman Empire, which not only resulted in the spread of its own religious, social, and political system but the transformation of it through the cultures it encountered. By conquering Hellas, Hellenistic traditions and religiosity started to spread around the empire, causing many more changes in its form and religiosity. This well-known example points to the idea that contact between different peoples and their cultures results in cultural and religious merges and appropriations. While this process is deemed intentional from a postcolonialist perspective, I argue that other narratives might be worth exploring to explain it as well. I do not aim to question the importance of the postcolonial narratives or the idea that capitalism has multiple destructive effects, but it is important to note that religious processes and confluences similar to today's have existed before. Therefore, relying solely on ideas based on globalization, western capitalist exploitation, and the East–West dichotomy might not explain everything.

How is mysticism related to the narratives mentioned above based on orientalism and postcolonialism? First, it fits the religious marketplace well and offers easy, fast, well-marketable, experience-based alternatives for Western needs. Arjana further argues that through practices such as yoga and 'mystical tourism', the so-called mystical marketplace provides experiential and instant solutions to the needs originating in the frustration and apathy of westerners.[812] King and Carrette regard spirituality similarly – fitting the fragmentation on the side of the consumers. "This fragmentation becomes a key part of the marketing strategy for contemporary forms of 'spirituality'. Historically rich and complex traditions are exploited by a selective re-packaging of the tradition, which is then sold as the 'real thing'."[813] Arjana takes the argument further by merging three concepts and stating that the inclusivity of spirituality, modern mysticism, and New Age is intentionally radical. Inclusivity defines their approach and use of language and fits into the program of attracting consumers without regard to its muddling effect.[814]

Second, the concept itself provides a good basis for exploitation. Arjana argues that mysticism is particularly applicable to these purposes, as its concept is west-centered and wide enough to fit several different notions. It is not only capable of handling a wide variety of supply and demand, but to disguise religious practices. She argues that "people living in modernity do religion while calling it something else—mysticism or spirituality"[815] as it fits the needs for instant solutions better. Furthermore, this contributes to the exploitation by detaching certainly well-marketable elements of traditional teachings and selling them. A similar complaint was presented earlier related to Jones's argument about modern mysticism. People seek experiences

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[812] (Arjana, 2020, p. 18)
[813] (Carrette & King, Selling Spirituality: The silent takeover of religion, 2005, p. 87)
[814] (Arjana, 2020, p. 41)
[815] (Arjana, 2020, p. 7)

and exotic techniques, while they are not interested in a long-term commitment to practicing those or gaining thorough knowledge about the subject.

What keeps the association between mysticism and the theories mentioned above alive? I argue that it is, at least partially, the strict dichotomies I am exploring in this chapter: traditional vs. modern, East vs. West, and religious vs. non-religious. Arjana acknowledges that these dichotomies (involving orthodox vs. mystical) are the products of orientalism,[816] yet her theory and many others building on orientalism and postcolonialism strengthen these bifurcations. While the processes and phenomena they mention (New Age, the mystical marketplace, etc.) have already overwritten these dichotomies, scholars are visibly wishing back the vision of original and intact religiosity. They presume a long-withstanding, original and foundational version of religiosity, which was unadulterated until the corruption of Western capitalism touched it.[817] As Hartmann points out, Arjana "contrasts modern mysticism with 'the real thing' (81), how these religions are 'at their core' (139), or 'in reality' (174)."[818], and refers to modern mysticism as "'muddled' (69), 'misappropriations' (161), 'incorrect' (160), a 'grossly mutated version' of these traditions (181), a 'problematic reduction' (245), as having 'sloppy' way (189)".[819] Hartmann further points out that "[w]hile arguing against the essentialist endeavors of Orientalism, Arjana "inadvertently essentializes the religious traditions it discusses".[820]

At the same time, these dichotomies prevent Arjana from painting a more nuanced picture. She fails to refer to any "insider" appropriations, uses of religion for money-making and marketing purposes, and resurgence of mysticism within its 'original' religious milieu.[821] Through the lenses of dichotomies she also fails to see that there are not many 'traditions left intact'.

"There may be some (usually isolated) communities untouched by pluralism, but the number of these is rapidly shrinking as they are invaded by capitalist entrepreneurs, missionaries, and tourists in search of intact cultures. Thus we have Hindu worship services in the Bible Belt, mosques all over Europe, and Protestant missionaries from South Korea braving death in Afghanistan. Why is this?"[822]

Berger's simple question at the end shifts the attention to beyond dichotomies. It refers to the religious plurality that Arjana, just like Carrette and King, recognize but reduce to a simpler theoretical explanation. Berger points to two other relevant and vital ideas: he is nuancing the idea of uprooted eastern religions, points to pluralism as a global phenomenon, and refers to the radical change in modern religiosity. On the one hand, he points to the association of some popular practices such as yoga and martial arts with their religious-philosophical roots.[823] He argues that they might not be practiced entirely originally, but they

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[816] (Arjana, 2020, p. 21)
[817] (Arjana, 2020, p. 19)
[818] (Hartmann, 2021)
[819] (Hartmann, 2021)
[820] (Hartmann, 2021)
[821] "Modern mysticism is linked both with the practices associated with the East and the resurgence of Christian mysticism in North America. This resurgence is seen in everything from the popularity of Celtic spiritual music to the numerous reports of visions of Mary. In recent years, the dedication of American Catholics to Mary has often included venturing on the Internet." (Arjana, 2020, p. 45)
[822] (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, p. 31)
[823] (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, p. 28)

are not wholly uprooted. On the other hand, he points to the fact that religious pluralism is not restricted to westerners anymore. Practices and teachings are widely available due to globalization, changes in the methods of communication, and religious pluralism.[824] Berger's concept of pluralism is elaborated on in the following section related to the secularization of mysticism. While pluralism can overwrite many of the hindering elements of the application of orientalism and postcolonialism on mysticism, concepts focusing on the East and West dichotomy will be examined in the following pages.

Beyond East and West

As I pointed out earlier, dichotomies hinder meaningful discussions of contemporary mystical phenomena. Arjana's approach relies on multiple dichotomies and theories. Unlike the two other subjects I tackle in this section (secularization and the traditional vs. modern dichotomy), in this instance, not one but three theories are discussed here as a substitution for the East-West dichotomy.

Arjana mainly understands the strict dichotomy between Eastern and Western religiosity through the lenses of Orientalist and postcolonialist approaches. While Arjana does not refer to Colin Campbell's work on Easternization, this work entails a similar dichotomy but emphasizes a different interpretation of it. While Campbell keeps the strict differences between East and West, as I will shortly mention, he does not necessarily use the exploiting and exploited narrative. He points to how Eastern religious teachings and practices influence the West. Campbell's work is worth more attention, first, because it thematizes the problem much better than Arjana's.[825] Campbell relies on Gilgen and Cho's[826] and Krus and Blackman's[827] typification as he characterizes Eastern and Western cultures as opposites. Furthermore, Western culture is understood as one searching for substitution of its lost characteristics in Eastern traditions. As Sander and Cavallin put it, "[a]ccording to Campbell's East–West dichotomy, these marginalized heterodox Western traditions incorporate the typically Eastern element of metaphysical monism, which stands in direct contrast to Western materialistic dualism, whether in its religious (Christian) or its secular (Enlightenment) dress."[828] Second, Campbell's theory is mentioned here primarily because of its critical reviews of the East vs. West dichotomy. These reviews suggest that beyond Easternization, much more diverse and general processes such as globalization can be discovered. Some of these reviews will be examined here to resolve the East vs. West dichotomy.

Globalization seems to provide a relevant framework for the processes Arjana reflects on. Even though the term itself is complex or, on the contrary, quite vague, it is applicable as it highlights processes similar to Easternization. It points to the idea that Easternization might not be the most applicable, and certainly not the only applicable explanation for the merging of Eastern and Western religiosity in the global marketplace. First, I want to discuss some

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[824] (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, p. 28)
[825] (Campbell, 2016)
[826] (Gilgen & Cho, 1979)
[827] (Krus & Blackman, 1980)
[828] (Sander & Cavallin, 2015, p. 1754). Hamilton shares a similar view: "[…] indigenous developments within Western culture point to the demise of the traditional dualistic religious conception of divinity as personal, transcendental and beyond worldly reality and its replacement with a monistic conception characterised by impersonality and immanence." (Hamilton, 2002, p. 243)

approaches to globalization that are relevant to the topic. Second, I want to refer to the concept called "two-way traffic",[829] or the easternization of the West and the westernization of the East. Third, processes beyond "two-way traffic" such as hybridization, particularistic and universalistic approaches will be mentioned.

Many critics of Easternization theory resolve the tension between the exploiting West or Western capitalism and the East by referring to global processes of change in terms of religiosity. Besides referring to technological, social, political, and economic changes, enabling "one interconnected interdependent interactive community",[830] globalization entails religious changes as well. Some of these changes are relativization, personalization, subjectivization, and privatization of religion. Moreover, it entails the awareness of vast religious pluralism.[831] Besides these overall processes, Sander and Cavallin point to three main changes in religiosity due to globalization and interactions of religiosity and globalization:

"(1) globalization has enabled the spread of religions, which in their very act of spreading have themselves enabled the process of globalization; (2) globalization has enabled religions to recruit, mobilize and induce participants to act on behalf of various social and political agendas; and (3) religions have enabled individuals to cope with and react to the stress that comes with highly transformational cultural change."[832]

Within this framework, examples such as practicing yoga in the 'West' for its physical benefits without its traditional values, would be understood not necessarily as the West exploiting these Eastern practices but as the spreading of originally Hindu practices and the change of those practices in reaction to people's needs to cope with the anxiety of modernity.

At this point, it is crucial to stop for a brief detour. Narratives of Western exploitation, primarily based on postcolonialism, fail to account for the substantial and impactful cases in which Eastern traditions introduced themselves to the West on their own initiatives and their own terms. Some of these examples are Swami Vivekananda's presence at the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893, where he presented "a modern form of Advaita Vedantic non-dualism that stressed the monistic oneness of all things and presented Hinduism as a tolerant, ecumenical and universalist tradition that accepted the truth of all religions and had no interest in the making of converts."[833] Moreover, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness founded by A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada in 1966, and Transcendental Meditation, developed and popularized by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi starting in the 1960s, are prime examples.

Returning to the argumentation, second, Sander and Cavallin, based on Esposito, talk about the interactions of East and West as a highway with two-way traffic. They argue that globalization entails both the easternization of the West and the westernization of the east.[834]

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[829] "(...) according to John Esposito (2001), the current directionality of exchange between the Western and Islamic worlds is best portrayed as a "multi-lane super highway with two-way traffic." Likewise, when it comes to exchanges between India and the West, it is undeniable that since the 1960s (...)." (Sander & Cavallin, 2015, p. 1747)

[830] (Sander & Cavallin, 2015, p. 1745)

[831] (Sander & Cavallin, 2015, p. 1745)

[832] (Sander & Cavallin, 2015, p. 1746)

[833] (Sander & Cavallin, 2015, p. 1755)

[834] (Sander & Cavallin, 2015, p. 1757). Dawson argues that the westernization of eastern themes provides a basis for the reinterpretation of "counter-cultural" aspects of Western movements. "The hermeneutics of suspicion detailed in the article thereby raises doubts concerning the extent to which purportedly eastern-looking 'counter

As Hamilton puts it, these processes are two sides of the same coin.[835] Moreover, Sander and Cavallin point to similar examples of historical Eastern religious influences,[836] while Hamilton argues that these processes have been around for a long time, and they only accelerated due to the developments of modernization and globalization. In this sense, globalization contributes not to a qualitative but a quantitative change.[837]

Third, both of these arguments indicate similar directions for further research. Hamilton opens the discussion to include other processes such as paganization (the resurgence of pagan concepts) and re-traditionalization.[838] In this sense, Easternization is but one process among many on today's religious landscape. Sander and Cavallin point to examining the result of Eastern and Western interactions through hybridization[839] as well as particularistic and universalistic[840] approaches. The latter two refer to responses to the challenges of globalization, the "vast and deep global interconnectedness".[841] Particularism entails "(1) the strategy of affirming one's local, particularistic religious identity"[842] – it is connected to a specific form of religiosity in a specific place – while universalism refers to "(2) the strategy of reformulating one's religious tradition so that it strikes a more universal and inclusive tone."[843] It entails constantly reshaping religion to fit different needs in different places.

To sum up, the Orientalist, postcolonial, and easternization theories might help understand the historical origins of these processes and contribute in a major way to processing collective traumas. However, global references should not be missed in terms of contemporary religious phenomena, such as the "mystical marketplace" that Arjana mentions. This way, topics, such as the resurgence of interest in other "mystical" traditions outside of the context of East and West or the growing interest in the mystical tradition of one's own religion, could be explained better. These ideas point to overarching processes which require a fitting framework. Casanova defines these processes well. He argues that the general and widespread availability of religious options are presented to modern people – "from the most 'primitive' to the most 'modern,' often detached from their temporal and spatial contexts, ready for flexible or fundamentalist individual appropriation."[844] The detached nature of modern phenomena is a

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cultural' movements such as theosophy, the new age, and contemporary mysticisms/spiritualities actually run "counter" to the Western culture they purport to reject." (Dawson, 2006, p. 1)

[835] "In another sense, globalisation can refer to the global extension of forms of communication leading to the global spread of ideas, practices and cultural elements. In this latter sense, religious and spiritual ideas might travel in all directions; Western ideas to the East and Eastern ideas to the West. Easternisation is, in this respect, simply the other side of the coin of Westernisation." (Hamilton, 2002, pp. 253-254)

[836] "Interestingly, and in fact, the Eastern influence has been an integral part of Western religious and intellectual life from the very beginnings of Western civilization, dating all the way back to the ancient Greek Pythagoreans followed by the early Christian gnostics and up to the New Age movements of today, all broadly corresponding with what is generally described as Western Esotericism (Faivre 1994)." (Sander & Cavallin, 2015, p. 1754)

[837] "Globalisation is a new phenomenon is simply this qualitative change through diffusion at a pace whereby it can be perceived to make an appreciable difference within the average life-time." (Hamilton, 2002, p. 254)

[838] (Hamilton, 2002, p. 249)

[839] "Referred to as the 'hybridization of a tradition' (Brubaker 2005; Knott and McLoughlin 2010; Nederveen 2009), it is a process whereby persons located in the receiving context select those elements of the incoming tradition that they consider to be most valuable and useful, and then reshape them such that they become applicable to their own environments." (Sander & Cavallin, 2015, p. 1753)

[840] (Sander & Cavallin, 2015, pp. 1757-1759)

[841] (Sander & Cavallin, 2015, p. 1758)

[842] (Sander & Cavallin, 2015, p. 1758)

[843] (Sander & Cavallin, 2015, p. 1758)

[844] (Casanova, 2006, p. 18)

more nuanced idea of the notion than it first seems. It is not simply a partial lack of traditional elements and deviance from traditions that could be understood within the traditional vs. modern or Eastern vs. Western dichotomy framework. The consequences of modernization and globalization challenge world religions to radically change. While changes are not novel to religions, modernity and globalization present their own challenges. "Under conditions of globalization, world religions do not only draw upon their own traditions but also increasingly upon one another. Inter-civilizational encounters, cultural imitations and borrowings, diasporic diffusions, hybridity, creolization, and transcultural hyphenations are all part and parcel of the global present."[845] These complex processes which are theorized in religious studies could be applied to the study of mysticism as well.

Implications on modern mysticism

So far, in this part, mysticism, as well as spirituality and New Age, have been mentioned only as quoted by authors. There were references to religious appropriation and exploitation of traditional Eastern teachings. But where is the place of modern mysticism in all of this? Arjana proposes the following question: "How did we arrive at this place, where mysticism is viewed as an easy path and the antithesis to the post-Enlightenment's disenchantment with religion?"[846] Sticking to the idea of the mystical marketplace, the answer to this question might be proposed from two perspectives, that of the consumer or the supplier. Assuming that one can understand the vaguely described perspective of the consumer, the answer seems straightforward. Some people, who might actually seek fast, exotic, and experience-centered supplies in the religious market, find many alternatives, indeed often originating in Eastern religions. From their perspective, 'mystical' or 'mysticism' might simply refer to the idea that these practices are mysterious, exotic, and involve an intense and transformative experience. From the suppliers' perspective, 'mystical' or 'mysticism' is a perfect expression for branding and marketing. It can be understood as a vague, mysterious, but suggestive term that refers to depths and answers that may not at first appear but reveal themselves after some searching. Furthermore, for the knowledgeable consumers, a few well-known names can be cited as 'well-known faces representing the brand': Rumí, Teresa of Avila, and Dógen Zen. One can continue this list to fit the audience's interest the best.[847] While the past few sentences might sound as though they were intended as a joke, my point is to highlight that these terms are open for varied use and interpretation in everyday life, whether scholars like this or not.

Therefore, replacing Arjana's question, the more pressing issue is the following. Why does contemporary academic discourse equate modern mysticism with religious practices and teachings which foster "an easy path and the antithesis to the post-Enlightenment's disenchantment with religion"? After all, scholars have the theoretical basis and methodological tools to talk about religiosity and mysticism in a more nuanced way. Mysticism might not only

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[845] (Casanova, 2006, p. 17)
[846] (Arjana, 2020, p. 21)
[847] Berger also argues that the laity gains power over the clergy in the contemporary, pluralist religious landscape. Laity needs to be persuaded to join, remain and support. In order to do that, brand identity needs to be built. "[…] if your product is to survive in the market at all, it must have some features that distinguish it from other brands, that is, brand identity." (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, p. 49) References to mysticism and famous mystics could be understood within this concept.

be a modern, vague[848] vessel fitting a lot of empty promises with clever marketing. I argue that mysticism has also become a vessel for academic discourses. In this capacity, it is used as a tool to make sense of the intrinsically chaotic religious landscape. Spirituality, theosophy, New Age, and 'contemporary mysticisms' are easily mentioned as similar examples to build an argument. It is vaguely used not only in terms of postcolonialist appropriation but in theoretical works as well: it is used as a device to invoke the elusive concepts in a variety of circumstances, referring to the "mystical energy of the East" and the "mystical marketplace" without actually applying the concepts of market theory or making sure that its subject was indeed mysticism, not only inspired by historical examples of mysticism. In this sense, academic works have not moved much, further away from the everyday concepts and prejudices connected to mysticism as presented by James.

Moving past this vague use in academic discourse and the hindering of modern mysticism as a chaotic concept without examination would require the research of not only what claims to be mysticism but referring to changes of mysticism in modernity. It would mean examining not (only) the obvious choices but also the ones which are not (yet) considered mystical because they do not fit existing categories. Eventually, this inquiry would lead to the revision of the concept.

Finally, let me list three other theories I find applicable to this topic for further research. First, religious market theory is based on rational choice theory and market economy has been applied to religious processes before, and it could be applied to mysticism as well.[849] Though the original concept is highly dependent upon a pluralist religious scene of the US, it would be worth exploring it in terms of the revision of orientalism and postcolonialism, with the possibility of pointing to processes beyond the West consuming Eastern religious ideas. Moreover, its relevance to mysticism is also worthy of further research.[850] Second, related to the religious market theory Gerhard Schulze's concept of *experience society* could be worth exploring.[851] While it initially examined data collected in German society in the 1990s, it is considered relevant in terms of explaining other processes such as the upsurge of Evangelical charismatic movements.[852] In terms of discussions of mysticism, it might serve as a general approach, reflecting on the pleasure factor of the religious choices that Arjana and King have pointed out. Third, Croce's concept of the democratization of mysticism would be relevant. Croce argues that James's approach is democratization of religion instead of elitism. Based on *Varieties*, Croce emphasizes the spiritual potential in all humanity, the "inscendent". Together with the widespread availability of religious options in modernity, these two ideas contribute to

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[848] "Today 'mysticism' has become a notoriously vague term. In popular culture, 'mystical' refers to everything from all occult and paranormal phenomena (e.g., speaking in tongues or alleged miracles) to everyday things such as childbirth or viewing a beautiful sunset." Jones 2.

[849] (Iannaccone, 1992), (Iannaccone, Finke, & Stark, 1996), (Stark & Finke, Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion, 2000)

[850] Stark and Finke apply a narrow definition of mystical experiences. "Later in this chapter, we discuss mystical experiences—incidents of perceived direct contact with a god. These do seem to be uniquely religious in form, but the emotions and feelings involved are those of ordinary experience. Put another way, it is the object of emotions and feelings that determines whether an episode is religious or secular." (Stark & Finke, Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion, 2000, p. 104). Carl L. Bankston's paper explores individual religiosity, particularly choosing what one believes in, expanding the limits of the original theory. (Bankston, 2002)

[851] (Schulze, 2005)

[852] (Máté-Tóth, Vallásnézet: A kelet-közép európai átmenet vallástudományi értelmezése, 2014)

the concept of the democratization of mysticism and understanding the allegedly large number of mystical cases appearing today.[853]

Secularization

Since the 1960s, secularization has undoubtedly been one of the most influential and debated theories of religion.[854] While perhaps not the most up-to-date term to describe contemporary religious phenomena and social change, 'secularization' and the idea that religion is on the decline in modern societies still lingers in some areas of academia. Some fields of science, not primarily concerned with religion, are yet to adopt the notion that the theory of secularization is wanting.[855] The idea of secularization is widely used outside of academia in the sense of the decline of religiosity in today's society.

The concept explicitly or implicitly appears in the background of argumentations of several authors, such as Carrette and King, as well as Jones and Arjana. As I have pointed out earlier, their arguments reference the decline of religiosity and mysticism. On the one hand, this concept is closely connected to the traditional vs. modern dichotomy. On the other hand, it refers to various ideas related to globalization, capitalism, and the supposed difference between Eastern and Western religiosity. Ultimately, they all arrive at a similar conclusion: a traditional version of religiosity or mysticism is slowly dying out. They also refer to the phenomenon replacing it: spirituality, in the case of Carrette and King, a muddled and capitalized mysticism in Arjana's, and superficial spirituality in Jones's. These phenomena seem similar enough to compare with its unadulterated and original version. It is worthy of understanding only in this sense, and the conclusion remains: what truly matters is fading away, and this variety of religious phenomena is replacing it with its superficiality, temporary nature, and wide availability.

Although it is worth discussing these concepts in Carrette and King's, as well as Arjana's argumentation, in detail, I will concentrate on Jones's work in this section. There is a twofold reason for this choice. On the one hand, Jones's idea highlights some typical misconceptions related to applying secularization theory. On the other hand, secularization is central to the concept of his treatment of modern mystical phenomena and the future of mysticism. While secularization is an essential factor in understanding Carrette and King's as well as Arjana's work, it is not the central, or at least not the only theory one could apply. Jones has a noteworthy view on the process, which he calls the "secularization of mystical experiences" described in the epilogue ("The demise of mysticism today").[856]

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[853] (Croce, 2013)

[854] Among the first theorists were Bryan Wilson (1966) and Peter L. Berger (1967), while Thomas Luckmann (1967) criticized it.

[855] It is widely accepted in academic circles that the original thesis does not work theoretically or practically. Nonetheless, it may be necessary that works focusing on religious phenomena in modern societies still touch on this theory, primarily because of its aforementioned impact inside and outside academia. (Máté-Tóth, Vallásnézet: A kelet-közép európai átmenet vallástudományi értelmezése, 2014)

[856] (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, pp. 331-346) In a previous paper, I analyzed the content of the epilogue in detail, concentrating on five aspects: secularization, modernity, the concept of classical mysticism, today's mystical phenomena, and the future of mysticism. In this part, I am referring to some of these findings. (Szugyiczki, Secularization of/or Mysticism: Notes on Richard H. Jones's Philosophy of Mysticism, 2021)

Before I refer to this concept in detail, I want to briefly mention that the term secularization of mystical experiences appears imprecise for the concept described by Jones. As he highlights in parts of the afterword, mystical experiences are common and widespread.[857] They may be understood as changed because of the consequences of modernity, but they certainly do not seem to be on the decline (which is the overall meaning of secularization as he uses it). However, he argues that "serious mysticism is in a general decline in the West."[858] What might he mean, if not mystical experiences? He refers primarily to the decrease in the interest in traditional mysticism[859] – mysticism as we know it from previous centuries, with its commitment, depth, fully transformed mystical way of life, focus on the transcendent, selflessness, and following traditional techniques, etc. What is in decline and Jones generally seems to lament is the long-term engagement with traditions. This engagement refers to both the commitment before the experience (preparatory techniques and teachings) and after it (interpretation, dedication towards a total transformation of life).

Based on this notion, the term secularization of mysticism would be a more appropriate description of this concept. Moreover, it is important to note that the phrase "secularization of mystical experiences" is incorrect, as it refers generally to the decline of mystical experiences (or mysticism). Jones's idea stands only if one specifies it to limit it to the secularization of traditional mysticism. However, in this instance, the implications of the argument are not as vast as Jones suggests it. This idea reflects an ongoing and widespread change in religiosity.

However, besides the explicitly appearing meaning of secularization as the decline of traditional mysticism, another meaning is worth noting. Secularization of mysticism is implicitly understood as a change of traditional practices and teachings – so much so that they are no longer considered mysticism or any phenomena worthy of serious attention. Jones blames this process on the fact that there is an increased interest in New Age spirituality – as people search for ways to improve their emotional and mental well-being.[860] The "nones", the religiously unaffiliated group of society (also referred to as non-believers) in the United States, are mentioned as a typical example of people who 'consume' mysticism without the intention of 'serious' practice and dedicated lifestyle.[861]

Furthermore, Jones does not use the concept of secularization precisely, does not define what he means by it in the epilogue, and does not address the theory in the main text of the handbook either. Based on Dobbelaere's distinction of secularization, I attempt to understand Jones's implicit meanings of the term better. Dobbelaere's idea involves understanding secularization at different levels of society – macro (societal), meso (organizational), and micro (individual) – as interconnected.[862] I follow his division while pointing to what processes Jones might refer to regarding secularization. While summarizing a wide range of ideas about secularization, particularly the secularization of mystical experiences, he identifies two simultaneously happening processes at the individual level I mentioned before: the decline of

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[857] (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, pp. 336, 338)
[858] (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, p. 334)
[859] Jones uses the phrase classical mysticism and superficial spirituality. While, in contrast to this work, he establishes a hierarchy between the two phenomena, the similarity in the primary differentiation behind the concepts allows me to stick to traditional and modern mysticism in using terms to avoid confusion.
[860] (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, p. 336)
[861] (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, p. 345)
[862] (Dobbelaere, 1999)

mysticism and the increase of interest in mysticism. On the one hand, the decline of mysticism is deeply rooted in his concept of classical mysticism, which entails an immersive, time-consuming, and deep engagement related to traditional teachings and techniques, based on an experience that provides insight into the ultimate reality and results in a fully transformed lifestyle.[863] On the other hand, people seek out the currently available forms of mysticism as tools helping them in their quest for a happier, more fulfilled, and productive life in society, providing certainty and connection with people.[864] This type of mysticism is described as temporary and said to focus on the experience rather than the two other contextual aspects mentioned above. In summary, in terms of the individual level, Jones observes a simultaneous decrease and increase in mysticism and a change in the practice of mysticism. The decrease is related to traditional mysticism, while the increase is related to today's emerging mysticism. The change in the practice of mysticism is described with the idea of watered-down or superficial spirituality – picking and choosing mystical practices. Related to the group level, he argues that mysticism is in decline in major religions.[865] Contrarily, he views mysticism as vital in terms of the future of religions.[866] Jones describes the social level of secularization with the ideas of a loss of faith in transcendence, an antimystical climate, and the tendency that the cultivation of mystical experience comes to be incorporated into parts of modern culture.[867]

Besides the imprecision in the use of terms, Jones makes a common mistake by juxtaposing modernity and secularization when talking about the decline of mysticism in today's society. More generally, Jones defines modernity primarily in opposition to premodernity, as it entails a loss of the transcendent dimension. The opposition itself is not questioned here, as Troeltsch's work was based on a similar opposition and proved to be a sufficient theoretical basis. However, in Jones's work it also entails a hierarchical relationship of historical periods. Jones describes contemporary culture in a wholly negative light, closely related to the idea that it is unfavorable to traditional mysticism. The characteristics of this era include uncertainty, distraction, a culture of material values, affluence and comfort, and a promotion of self-assertion. Jones describes this as a civilizational crisis apparent in a spiritual

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[863] (Szugyiczki, Secularization of/or Mysticism: Notes on Richard H. Jones's Philosophy of Mysticism, 2021, p. 43)

[864] (Szugyiczki, Secularization of/or Mysticism: Notes on Richard H. Jones's Philosophy of Mysticism, 2021, p. 43). Moreover: "Today there may be a spike in interest in mysticism as people search for a sense of certainty and reassurance of the rightness of things in a time of uncertainty and search for a way to feel experientially grounded in the world and connected to other people […]" (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, p. 336)

[865] Jones talks about the decline of Sufism and the limitedness of Jewish mystical traditions because of the fear of antinomianism. The authoritarian nature of monastic training poorly influences how Buddhist monks commit to meditation/spirituality. In Christianity, he considers the split between spirituality and theology in the early modern period the reason for the decreased interest in mysticism. For him, rigid conformity to rules seems to be why there is less emphasis on meditation in Eastern and Western monasteries. Liberal churches discourage mystical experiences and mysticism as unnecessary. In conservative churches, my mystical knowledge of God has been seen as blasphemous, and other religious experiences related to personal salvation are emphasized. (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, pp. 334-335)

[866] Jones links the vitality and success of religion – and in his perception, the lack of it in today's society – to religious experiences and especially to mysticism. He argues that the survival – a reawakening – in religion could depend on mysticism which provides empirical facts about what religions teach. However, mysticism needs to adapt to the changes in society and science's advancement in the past century. (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016, pp. 343-346)

[867] About a loss of faith in transcendence and the lack of all-encompassing myth: (pp. 335-336.) About the antimystical climate. (pp. 333-337) (Jones R. H., Philosophy of Mysticism - Raids on the Ineffable, 2016)

malaise and calls for a religious reawakening.[868] Such linking of modernity and secularization together is one of the main criticisms against the original version of secularization theory.[869] According to the original theory, secularization is closely linked to modernity. On the one hand, for religion, this entails a loss of plausibility, a loss of status as an all-encompassing world-explanation, and consequently, the world loses its religious legitimation.[870] However, "[i]t is the postulated intrinsic correlation between modernization and secularization that is highly problematic."[871] Furthermore, Casanova points to the fact that some modern, secular societies might still be deeply religious and, on the contrary, some pre-modern societies might be secular and irreligious.[872] Overall, according to Casanova, linking modernity and secularization is the source of an impasse in the theoretical debate. He directs attention to a different aspect: the fusion and dissolution of religious, political, and societal communities.[873]

In sum, it appears that the use of the term secularization in the epilogue is not based on an academic theoretical framework but on a general idea that articulates an overall religious decline. Such a general use of the word helps Jones express what seems to be an impression of the contemporary mystical landscape rather than a scientific endeavor.

Stepping back and looking at it from a sociological perspective, these trends do not seem to support what Jones means by secularization, i.e., the decline of religious (particularly mystical) beliefs and practices in modernity. The type of secularization that Jones primarily talks about understands mysticism as a form of individual religiosity, which is said to expand at the expense of communal level religiosity. Carrette and King argue similarly in relation to spirituality. They argue based on the concept of the idea that the privatization of religion "has removed the social dimension of religion and created a spirituality of the self – of the consuming self."[874] Some argue against this notion, stating that instead of a loss of religiosity at the group level, we can discuss the construction of voluntary associations and new types of religious communities.[875] In the following pages, I will look at another theoretical perspective, namely, Peter L. Berger's concept of pluralism as an alternative to the secularization paradigm.

Pluralism: Peter L. Berger

Berger's work accompanied the development of the paradigm of secularization. He was not only an essential figure in its establishment but also in its revision with the concept of desecularization.[876] Towards the end of his life, his concept evolved into an attitude that could be summed up as "anything but secularization".[877] On the one hand, this is due to the realization that the close link of secularization to modernity was false. On the other hand, it is connected to the fact that empirical evidence suggests that secularization can no longer be maintained in a general sense. The latter notion, first, refers to the empirical data that contradicted the theory:

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[868] (Szugyiczki, Secularization of/or Mysticism: Notes on Richard H. Jones's Philosophy of Mysticism, 2021, p. 51)
[869] (Casanova, 2006)
[870] (Máté-Tóth, Vallásnézet: A kelet-közép európai átmenet vallástudományi értelmezése, 2014)
[871] (Casanova, 2006, p. 13)
[872] (Casanova, 2006, p. 13)
[873] (Casanova, 2006, p. 15)
[874] (Carrette & King, Selling Spirituality: The silent takeover of religion, 2005, p. 68)
[875] (Casanova, 2006, p. 18)
[876] (Berger, The desecularization of the world: Resurgent religion and world politics, 1999)
[877] (Berger, Dr. Peter Berger on Religion & Modernity, 2011)

the 'third world's' pervasive religiosity; United States and European counterculture, namely, religion in the Age of Aquarius, and Evangelicals.[878] "With some exceptions, notably Europe and an international intelligentsia, our world is anything but secular; it is as religious as ever, and in places more so."[879] Second, it is connected to the misinterpreted facts that the paradigm was based on. This aspect is the basis of the concept of pluralism which he set forth in *The many altars of modernity*.[880] Berger argues that the main change in modernity is not secularization but pluralism.

> "Our main mistake was that we misunderstood pluralism as just one factor supporting secularization; in fact, pluralism, the co-existence of different worldviews and value systems in the same society, is the major change brought about by modernity."[881]

However, it is crucial to note that Berger does not consider pluralism to eliminate the theory of secularization entirely, or more precisely, the effects of secularization. He argues that modernity has produced a secular discourse, which provides people with explanations without any reference to the transcendent: *Etsi Deus non daretur*.[882] The two discourses (religious and secular) are not mutually exclusive; they are not set in a strict dichotomy from the individual's point of view. This also means that not all religious discourse is replaced by secular ones, but secular ones appear crucial in the plurality of the religious landscape. The secular and religious discourses are managed and distinguished[883] well by individuals depending on their current relevance. Berger even mentions that this careful management is one of the essential traits of modern people.[884] The concept is also not mutually exclusive in terms of institutions and society. Berger points to how secular discourses shaped religions and religious discourses. Here he mainly refers to the discourses related to technology, bureaucracy, and capitalist market economy, exerting pressure on religion entering religious discourses and shaping them.[885]

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[878] (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, p. 19)

[879] (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, p. x)

[880] The title includes a reference to Nietzsche's vision of religiosity and its contradiction. "In his book The Joyful Wisdom (1882), Nietzsche proclaimed the death of God. On the cusp of the twentieth century, he evoked a vision of empty, deserted altars. This is not what in fact occurred. Instead, the last century saw an enormous proliferation of altars. The proliferation continues." (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, p. 15)

[881] (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, p. ix)

[882] Berger refers to Hugo Grotius' idea – 'as if God did not exist'. (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, p. 57)

[883] An exciting example mentioned by Berger based on Tanya Luhrmann's work (Luhrmann, 2012) is the management of tension between secular and religious discourses among Evangelicals' prayers. In these prayers, they distinguish between their own thoughts and God's responses. (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, p. 54)

[884] "For most religious believers faith and secularity are not mutually exclusive modes of attending to reality; it is not a matter of either/or, but rather of both/and. The ability to handle different discourses (to use Alfred Schutz's term, different relevance structures) is an essential trait of a modern person." (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, p. 53). This trait is also called the "cognitive balancing act". (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, p. xii)

[885] "Thus religious organizations will modernize themselves by instituting bureaucratic structures, which often modify or even replace the original religious principles of churches; denominational headquarters may look much like those of government or corporate offices, with their functionaries thinking in terms of the productivity and efficient deployment of 'human resources.' And the secular logic of capitalism may invade the way people think about religion, in terms of costs and benefits, returns on investment, and the like […] ." (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, p. 72)

What are the characteristics of pluralism? As it is already quite prevailing, it was meant as a paradigmatic shift and/or replacement for secularization. It is not understood in a philosophical sense, as an ideology, but as "an empirical fact in society experienced by ordinary people".[886] This empirical fact is "the coexistence of different religions and the coexistence of religious and secular discourses".[887] It is important to stress this again: pluralism refers not only to the variety of religious narratives and phenomena but the variety of religious and secular narratives. The coexistence is perceived apparently as a social phenomenon, but it also has individual aspects, what Berger calls "a pluralism in the mind".[888] It is an essential concept, as he draws a parallel between social and individual processes in every aspect of this paradigm.[889]

On both levels pluralism presents challenges, and these challenges are different from the ones that secularization theory proposed, namely, that religion becomes irrelevant or disappears from society altogether. Pluralism brings about the coexistence of worldviews, values, and religious and secular options. The coexistence is understood not in terms of relative isolation, but, on the contrary, as "permanent contamination". Through certain peaceful and amicable interactions like dinner conversations and pillow talk, people influence each other and realize the variety of explanations and ways life can be lived.[890]

Berger argues that the main effect of this variety and the permanent contamination coming with it is the ongoing relativization and undermining of certainties.[891] On the communal/social level, relativization brings about an important issue, namely, the management of doubt. On the individual level, the management of doubt is equally important, and, in addition, I look at one result of relativization, namely, religion not being taken for granted but as a matter of opinion. Let us take a look at the management of doubt first.

As Berger argues, the main issue of modernity and pluralism is not unbelief, as secularization theory suggests, but doubt. Berger stresses on multiple occasions how important it is for religious traditions to face this challenge.[892] There are two primary responses to doubt: "certainties come in two versions: relativism, which makes a creed out of the uncertainty, and fundamentalism, which purports to restore the sense of certainty."[893] Relativism embraces the chaotic and unsettling experience of relativity, which fundamentalists seek to escape. It "becomes an insight to be proud of and to apply to the practice of living."[894] Fundamentalism can be understood as "an attempt to restore, under modern conditions, the taken-for-granted certainty of a pre-modern society."[895]

On the individual level, first and foremost, pluralism brings about the central aspect of choice. The basis for this is the multiplicity of options. Simply realizing the many secular and

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[886] (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, p. 1)

[887] (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, p. ix)

[888] (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, p. 28)

[889] "If it is to function in society, every institution must have a correlate in consciousness. Therefore, if a differentiation has occurred between religious and other institutions in society, this differentiation must also be manifested in the consciousness of individuals." (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, p. x)

[890] (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, p. 1)

[891] (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, pp. 1-3, 9)

[892] (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, pp. 15-32)

[893] (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, p. 64)

[894] (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, p. 11)

[895] (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, p. 32)

religious possibilities, "individuals can no longer take for granted the worldview into which they happened to be born."[896] Deliberate choices replace the taken-for-grantedness. Based on Alfred Schutz's distinction, Berger connects this to the three levels of the mind in terms of degrees of certainty.[897] The deepest level is connected to the statements in which certainty is not questioned. The middle level includes cognitive and normative definitions that are widely accepted and involve a certain level of security; therefore, they are not likely to change. Finally, the third level is that of preferences and opinions. These might be changed due to a good argument or a new experience. While religiosity lies on different levels of certainty for individuals, Berger argues that, due to pluralism, religion moves upwards on this scale towards the level of opinions, and it is extremely unlikely to maintain religiosity on the level of taken-for-grantedness.

It is also essential to add that pluralism deinstitutionalizes religion or, in other words, subjectivizes it. Using Gehlen's terms, Berger argues that the objectivity of religious institutions is undermined due to pluralism. Keeping to the strict sense of this terminology, they might not even be considered institutions as they lack certainty or taken-for-grantedness.[898] This puts immense pressure on the individual to make sense of the world. Some might experience it as an exciting adventure, while others might take it as a burden. Help is at least welcome if not needed in both cases. Therefore, the so-called secondary or "weak" institutions might fill some gaps in the uncertainty of worldview by providing individuals immediate help in this. Some elements of modern society, such as organizations, support groups, professions like psychiatrists, psychotherapists, coaches, certain websites, and books, are mentioned as examples.[899]

Last but not least, I want to summarize the most critical aspects of the paradigm in terms of this work. First, pluralism can reflect on the fluid construction and existence of contemporary religious phenomena instead of focusing on rigid dichotomies such as the religious vs. the secular, traditional vs. modern, and the presence or the disappearance of religion. It reflects the coexistence of multiple religious discourses and the coexistence of religious and secular discourses. Second, Berger points out on multiple occasions that these discourses are not sharply separated and do not necessarily contradict each other in the individuals' lives. People manage to properly apply and, if necessary, distinguish between different discourses in different situations.[900] By doing this, Berger implicitly reflects on the sometimes forgotten distance between scientific theories, concepts and lived religiosity. Third and most important, it is not only an acknowledgment of the variety of phenomena that exists in today's societies; it also refers to the consequences of this variety. Berger argues that it motivates people to make choices between the available choices and narratives, be they different religious variants or religious and secular options. "[P]luralism enables, indeed compels the individual to make choices between different religious and non-religious possibilities."[901] The variety of religious and

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[896] (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, p. 29)
[897] (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, p. 29)
[898] (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, p. 37)
[899] (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, p. 14)
[900] "In the experience of most individuals, secularity and religion are not mutually contradictory. Rather, they co-exist, each pertaining to a specific form of attention to reality." (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, p. 53)
[901] (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, p. 37)

secular phenomena is not only a painting of a delicious basket of exotic and well-known fruits that we observe from a distance but a tempting and inviting reality that tickles our curious minds and calls our senses for a feast.

The application of Berger's concept to modern mysticism

Berger's concept places pluralism not as a factor in explaining contemporary religious phenomena but as the central concept. I aim to point out that pluralism is more applicable and capable of referring to a variety of religious and mystical phenomena than the previously critiqued concepts, as it is not in denial of their variety and volume. However, while Berger dedicated *The many altars of modernity* to explaining pluralism as a new paradigm, it was not among his goals to provide a detailed and thorough basis for it, only the basic theoretical approach to it. He dives into specific topics highlighting the relevance of pluralism in today's society, such as the pressing social and political questions of religious fundamentalism, or the modernizing effects of Pentecostal churches. Theories and concepts are also brought in to support and serve as examples such as Eisenstadt's multiple modernities[902] or Taylor's immanent frame. While their relevance is clear, Berger does not clearly explain how these concepts advance or complement the theory of pluralism. The general relevance of the paradigm and its possibilities of application for explaining contemporary processes is also evident. However, it does not provide thorough guidance and ideas in applying the theoretical assumptions beyond the political management of religious freedom. Therefore, the application of pluralism to the understanding of modern mysticism, based solely on Berger's work and examples, are not substantiated yet. Nonetheless, in this work the concept of pluralism is considered applicable for understanding the contextual changes and elements of modern mysticism for the following reasons.

Berger mentions topics somewhat related to mysticism only a handful of times, and none of these are straightforward guidelines for applying the paradigm in this work. The most apparent mention is related to Weber's concept of and the routinization of charisma.[903] For Berger's argumentation, the extraordinary nature of the experience of the *virtuosi* is stressed in contrast with the process of institutionalization. Religious institutions recall and domesticate the experiences of ordinary followers. Then, he proceeds to talk about deinstitutionalization, subjectivization, and secondary institutions, which have been mentioned above. Related to the experiences of the *virtuosi*, there is only one conclusion driven. Religious institutions, formerly holding monopoly positions in society and losing the certainty of explanatory power today due to pluralism, face difficulties. These issues are especially relevant regarding religious freedom as well as the claims of revealing divine truths.[904] Berger mentions the Roman Catholic Church as an example. He continues with the subject, but not regarding the institutional treatment of claims (based on these experiences) generally related to religious freedom.[905] While the subject of religious freedom and its historical and theological treatment are vital, here Berger fails to reflect on other relevant contemporary issues. Some of the pressing questions might be the following. Beyond the management of doubt, how do religious institutions treat the increasing

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[902] (Eisenstadt, Multiple Modernities , 2000)
[903] (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, pp. 35-36).
[904] (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, p. 38)
[905] (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, pp. 38-41)

religious subjectivization regarding their teachings? Does the process of deinstitutionalization open the space up for individual religiosity and, at the same time, enhance individual religious experiences?[906] Where do individuals turn for guidance regarding the interpretation of their mystical and/or religious experiences? Or, in other words, is the interpretation of mystical and religious experiences a subject of subjectivization as well?

Secular discourse is the second area where mysticism is relevant in terms of pluralism. On multiple occasions, Berger explores how individuals manage religious and secular narratives. He mentions Teresa of Avila as a pre-modern example: even she had to deal with mundane tasks after her ecstatic experiences.[907] The difference between pre-modern and modern cases is that Teresa's faith was taken for granted not only in terms of mystical experiences[908] but of everyday tasks, while in modernity religiosity moves towards the level of opinions. I have mentioned this aspect before, and let me point to its possible relevance regarding modern mysticism. While the significance and depth of mystical experiences are most likely not questioned during the mystical experience, this certainty is not evident in the contextual elements of mysticism — neither the occurrent preparations nor, especially, its interpretation and effects. However meaningful and transformative these experiences might be, after them, the variety of pluralism "kicks in", along with the many options of explanations. Therefore, contrary to Teresa of Avila's context, the taken-for-grantedness of faith might fade away.[909] Berger argues that today "even great mystics may have difficulty being ecstatic in the midst of a marketplace".[910]

In other places, he further argues that mystical experiences prevent focusing on everyday tasks[911] and a large number of them would make living together in society extremely complicated.[912] These arguments can be interpreted as an explanation for Jones's problem with superficial spirituality. Based on Berger, one could support Jones's argument saying that the contextual conditions are not ideal for a long commitment to one way of life and fulfilling the transformative aspects of mystical experiences. Furthermore, the widespread availability and importance of secular discourse seem to be unfavorable to mysticism in general. This also corresponds somewhat to Jones's idea of the antimystical climate today.

However, some of Berger's other perceptions paint a more nuanced picture of the subject. He deals in great detail with the examples of Evangelical and Pentecostal churches, not

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[906] Assuming that the subjectivization of religions draws more attention to individual religiosity and less to communal gatherings and rites.

[907] (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, pp. 56, 63)

[908] Berger calls it ecstatic experience and ecstasy (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, pp. 56, 63)

[909] "In the latter situation, even passionately asserted convictions have an undertone of doubt. There is always the lingering recollection that one had to decide to affirm the alleged certainties and that other options are in principle available." (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, p. 64)

[910] (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, p. 56)

[911] "All the activities that keep a society going would come to seem utterly trivial, as one wants to do nothing except wait for the next angelic visitation. Nobody would want to do the necessary chores of working, raising the kids, voting, policing, or making war." (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, p. 35)

[912] "[…] if the original experience were replicated in full by large numbers of people, it would make the ordinary business of society impossible." (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, p. 35)

only in terms of religious revival but also in terms of managing religious and secular discourses. The experiences fostered by these two churches are brought here as examples not necessarily because of their concurrency with mystical experiences, as that would require a separate work. Nonetheless, they are considered because they are characterized by intensity and an alleged direct connection with God. The first of these examples is Berger's reference to Tanya Luhrmann's work,[913] on a specific type of prayer cultivated by Evangelicals. During their prayers, the followers distinguish between their own thoughts and God's responses to their prayer. While it creates tension between secular and religious discourses, Berger argues that they are conscious of this operation. This act is not only an example of the constant coexistence and management of religious and secular discourses but also the management of the pressure they create. As Berger says, "[t]hus the faith of these contemporary Americans lacks the calm certainty of pre-modern consciousness and is always tinged with an element of doubt."[914] Based on this example, it might be possible that mysticism and having mystical experiences do not automatically exclude the management of secular discourse when living one's life.

While Evangelical prayers were mentioned here mainly in terms of individuals' responses, Pentecostalism[915] highlights its communal and social aspects. While fostering the "gifts of the Spirit", highly emotional worship, glossolalia, and miracles of healing, exorcisms, and prophecy, Pentecostalism manages to promote modernization and secular endeavors.[916] Berger mentions that the Bible belt overlaps with the Sun belt in the USA, pointing to the idea that the most religiously conservative areas of the country are some of the economically most flourishing ones at the same time.[917] While the historical and theological reasons for this are interesting,[918] Berger mentions another assumption which is far more intriguing. He argues that the religious practices and experiences fostered by Pentecostals – supposedly – help people reach their economic, personal, etc., goals. "The immediate point here is that speaking in tongues and (supposedly) being miraculously healed does not prevent an individual from being a highly rational businessman; indeed, it may help an individual in this endeavor."[919] This argument might change the one-sided and judgmental understanding of modern mysticism as self-construction. Beyond the blame of self-construction, the motives for pursuing mystical experiences and their fruits might be explored further.

At this point, it is essential to briefly raise the question of what Berger's concept of mysticism might be in this work? Based on the quoted authors (Max Weber and Rudolf Otto) and the mentioned cases (Teresa of Avila, and the Prophet Muhammad), the "Western" focus is assumable. The involvement of the "Eastern" perspective on the experiences of

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[913] (Luhrmann, 2012)

[914] (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, p. 54)

[915] "Pentecostalism began around 1900 CE, a key event being the so-called Azusa Street Revival in 1906, when a black Baptist preacher by the name of William Seymour came from Kansas to Los Angeles and started preaching in an abandoned stable." (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, p. 24). "Most importantly, Charismatic Christianity has been spilling out of its original Evangelical base into officially non-Pentecostal churches, including mainline Protestant as well as Roman Catholic and even Eastern Orthodox congregations. The term 'Pentecostalization' has been applied to this intriguing phenomenon." (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, p. 24)

[916] (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, p. 23)

[917] (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, p. 62)

[918] (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, p. 25)

[919] (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, p. 62)

Enlightenment and their implication in everyday life could question the mutual exclusivity of the mystical and the ordinary (secular) life.

Based on the above, I argue that mysticism should be understood within the concept of pluralism. It is reasonable to assume that people learn to deal with the effects and intensity of mystical experiences while living their lives embedded in the plurality of religious and secular discourses. In Berger's terms, they can distinguish and manage such an intense and transformative religious discourse from their secular one, which affect other areas of their lives. This does not necessarily mean that mystical experiences are reduced to ordinary experiences, during which one can comfortably cook and maintain other ongoing activities. I agree with Berger: those experiences which are very demanding on the person force them to stop or reduce these actions.[920] Moreover, it can be argued that this happens not only in places with an institutional explanation for the subject and a communal background fostering it, like in the case of Evangelicals and Pentecostals. Further research is needed to explore these assumptions, since Thomas Merton's mysticism is not entirely applicable to them. While I would argue that Merton managed mysticism and everyday life astonishingly, he did have an institutional background as a support system.

Third, the religious and secular choices present due to pluralism need to be mentioned. Modern mysticism is often condemned for its variety and the way it mixes elements of different traditions. From Berger's point of view, this variety is seen not as deviance from 'traditional' religiosity but as a specific characteristic of pluralism and, therefore, religiosity in modernity. This concept of the variety of religious and secular options in modernity is threefold. On the one hand, Berger stresses the variety of not only religious but secular discourses. These options co-exist, and as I have pointed out earlier, people manage to use them according to the present requirements. While they might consider themselves religious and practice their religiosity, if it requires them to apply their knowledge *etsi deus non daretur'* at their workplace, they will rely on secular discourses. On the other hand, Berger points out that the choices present are not rigid and finite: cognitive contamination is an ongoing process.[921] Through the interactions of people (pillow talk and dinner conversations), the variety grows. Finally, pluralism is not simply a recognition of the currently available religious and secular options and those being created as we speak, but also entails the effects of this variety. Berger argues that these choices tempt individuals to make them. "[P]luralism enables, indeed compels the individual to make choices between different religious and non-religious possibilities"[922] The latter argument shines a different light on the narratives related to the exploitation of Eastern traditions and the 'aimless' religious consumption.

To sum up the application of Berger's theory: its most significant advantage is that it understands contemporary religious phenomena based on a paradigm that takes its characteristics from the present era. Moreover, pluralism takes the religious and secular variety and their chaotic interference not as condemnable features but as this era's inherent characteristics.

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[920] "However, I daresay he would not want the pilot to practice Zen meditation in the cockpit, or, for that matter, to have an authentically Catholic mystic experience." (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, p. 72)

[921] (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, pp. 1-2)

[922] (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, p. 37)

In this work, three elements of Berger's theory have been applied to the contextual changes of mysticism. First, the concept of deinstitutionalization and subjectivization is understood as rich breeding grounds for mysticism. While the topic needs further investigation, promoting individual religiosity seems obvious. Second, contradictory examples were found in *The many altars of modernity* related to the management of religious and secular discourses. I argue that mystics, too, learn to manage secular (and other religious) discourses before and after the mystical experience. Alternatively, as pointed out by Berger, they might wait for the angel's visitation while living their everyday life.[923] It is essential to clarify that I do not argue that mystical experiences happen without interrupting one's life and are manageable perfectly well while one does one's shopping and parenting. In this sense, mystical experiences are different from the above mentioned evangelical prayers. However, the management of religious and secular discourses might very well be acquired in terms of its contextual elements (the antecedents and aftermath). Finally, Berger's theory highlights that the interest in and application of different mystical techniques and narratives are not deviances from traditions set in stone but characteristics of an inherently pluralistic era. The concept of pluralism provides the context of a picture in which modern mysticism is not portrayed with the colors of traditional mysticism but with its own – allowing it to appear in its own form with its own characteristics.

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[923] (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, p. 35)

Conclusion

This chapter has been dedicated to the theoretical understanding of the contextual characteristics of modern mysticism. The differences between what I call modern and traditional phenomena are much too striking to miss. All of the quoted works refer to it in one way or another, and they point to changes and differences, often in a hindering way. To unravel these often chaotic narratives, in the first section, I highlighted some of the main existing concepts about modern mysticism.

First, I have written about the overwhelming variety of contemporary phenomena, which makes its conceptualization and understanding increasingly difficult. Many of the attempts result either in confusing concepts that are initially difficult to pinpoint: spirituality, New Age, mysticism, or their complete neglect. Second, I have mentioned the idea of muddled mysticism, which understands the phenomenon as deviance from its supposed original and traditional roots. Third, the idea of modern mysticism not being mysticism at all has been explored. As modern mysticism indeed has changed, no wonder that the mentioned approaches find it unsatisfactory or challenging to treat it by the standards of traditional mysticism. Fourth, modern mysticism as self-construction has been examined. This idea suggests that mystical experiences are pursued mainly for personal and developmental purposes today. The concept associates mysticism with self-improvement techniques. Lastly, based on the comparison in the previous chapter, I have added one assumption to these four. Modern mysticism seems primarily extrovertive in contrast with traditional mysticism based on the comparison of the two authors analyzed, John of the Cross and Thomas Merton. However, in contrast to the previous three concepts, which offer definitive statements about modern mysticism, I suggest this one as a possible and provocative direction for future research.

The second part of the chapter has focused on three dichotomies implicitly governing the three assumptions mentioned above: traditional vs. modern, Eastern vs. Western, and religious vs. non-religious. All three of these dichotomies lead to a similar pattern of argumentation. Mysticism is implicitly divided into a thriving, traditional, well-known, and established past version versus a regressing, scattered, uprooted, yet widely cultivated phenomenon which barely resembles its predecessor. The division itself should not necessarily be negative. As I have pointed out throughout this work, categorization can be an applicable method in highlighting differences yet pointing to similarities within the same concepts. However, these comparisons are problematic, as they often automatically attach a value-based hierarchy to the two versions of mysticism. Moreover, they are not particularly useful in understanding modern mystical phenomena as they mainly involve negations, not statements, about the subject. Modern mysticism is not considered worth defining because of its substantial differences from traditional forms. Adding to the lack of data and information, modern mysticism is also reduced to or associated with other social or religious phenomena. As I have pointed out in the previous chapter, it is understood as a Western consumerist appropriation of Eastern traditions or similar to "superficial spirituality". The overwhelming variety of religious phenomena, especially regarding their individual expression, presents challenges that academic research has not fully embraced yet.

With each of these dichotomies, I have aimed to provide a theoretical alternative that fits the contemporary religious landscape better. First, regarding the traditional vs. modern

opposition, Thomas Tweed's concept of functional fluidity has been considered. Tweed's idea overrides this dichotomy by pointing to the fact that religions do not only establish boundaries (make "homes", rules, provide teachings, etc.), but they also cross the very same boundaries. This function is not merely something that religions tolerate but what they encourage. They change, adapt, and meet the challenges of the present era. This fluidity is the key to their vitality. Moreover, studies point to the fact that religions are as vital as they have ever been – in a different form than in centuries past.[924]

Second, regarding the Eastern vs. Western dichotomy, I have pointed to overarching processes in religiosity related to globalization. Not only the easternization of the West and the westernization of the East, but other similar concepts could be examined with a similar significance such as paganization and re-traditionalization. However, beyond these particular processes, Casanova points to overarching religious changes: "[i]nter-civilizational encounters, cultural imitations and borrowings, diasporic diffusions, hybridity, creolization, and transcultural hyphenations".[925]

Third, the paradigm of secularization has been examined in its relevance to mysticism. Connected to this, Berger's alternative approach to pluralism has been taken into consideration. This paradigm, in itself, could provide the basis for revising theoretical approaches to mysticism. Even though Berger intended it not as a comprehensive overview of the paradigm but rather a proposal which is visible in its occasional generality, it is well applicable for the study of mysticism. Berger perceives pluralism as a twofold concept: referring to the coexistence of different religious vs. religious and secular discourses – on the social and individual levels. He says that the main change regarding religiosity is not in terms of the "what" but the "how". It is not taken for granted but chosen. People are compelled to choose from the different options. These choices are not restricted to westerners anymore as pluralism is understood as a global phenomenon. The many forms of explanations and choices also present challenges on the individual and the institutional levels. The management of doubt becomes one of the most critical tasks for religious institutions. Relativization and fundamentalism are understood as the two primary responses to that. The latter involves referrals to traditions, but in a certain sense. While religious traditions, as I have pointed out in my discussion of Tweed, are adaptable, in neo-traditionalists' view are not. "Neo-traditionalists cannot afford such tolerance. For them the tradition is not simply given, they have chosen it – and they cannot forget this."[926] Furthermore, I have mentioned that, on the individual level, religiosity moves towards the level of opinions from the level of convictions. This entails the compelling power

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[924] "Far from being straightforwardly secular or atheistic such evidence — together, more importantly, with that of the chapters which follow — suggests that the modern world may often be as vibrantly religious as ever, even if in some places the sacred is becoming partially detached from traditional containers and retainers." (Woodhead, 2002, p. 14). "Religion is like the weather. It is always there, at times beautiful, at times horrifying or ugly, but in all cases inevitable, because, as Alister Hardy never tired of arguing, that is the way Homo sapiens has evolved, because our spirituality is necessary for our survival. The current astonishing surge in reports of religious or spiritual experience right across the Western world is in contradiction to the process of secularization of so many parts of the West, and suggests that something as primordial as spiritual awareness is indestructible, and will well up again and again in spite of attempts to explain it away." (Hay, Religion under Siege: A Scientific Response. A Lecture given to the Alister Hardy Society meeting at Oxford, December 1, 2007, 2008, pp. 149-150)

[925] (Casanova, 2006, p. 17)

[926] (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, p. 10)

of choices, and along with it, a simultaneous pressure that burdens the individual. Therefore, individuals might often turn to secondary institutions which offer instant relief.

To sum up, in this chapter, I have examined the basis of the theoretical explanations of the contextual changes of mysticism. The characteristics of mysticism (similarly to religion) in modernity point to the need for a more fitting theoretical framework that can reflect on the fluidity, plurality, and global interactions of contemporary phenomena. This framework should move beyond the stark dichotomies of academic narratives, which are not necessarily relevant from the perspective of the practitioners.[927]

I have presented three theoretical approaches for further research from religious studies and sociology of religion, which provide ample theoretical basis for understanding modern mysticism. A study of modern mysticism based on the approaches mentioned above would take a step beyond the dichotomic comparison of mysticism and the obsession over the decline or deviance of it, and it would move towards understanding the contextual changes and the social, religious, and historical processes behind them. It would enable the study of modern examples on their own terms, yet still within the concept of mysticism.

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[927] "Put differently, for most believers there is not a stark either/or dichotomy between faith and secularity but rather a fluid construction of both/and." (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, p. x)

Chapter 6. Conclusion

The inquiry in this work started with the following questions. Does mysticism lean above time? Is mysticism the same throughout the ages? If yes, then what is our definition of it? If not, then how can we explain the changes? What criteria do we have to decide what does and does not count as a mystical experience? Do we need more than one definition when discussing the mysticism of different eras? Throughout the preceding chapters, I have presented four main elements of argumentation. Let me refer to the most important findings and conclusions while briefly summarizing these arguments.

In Chapter 2 a threefold concept of mysticism was presented: antecedents, mystical experience, and aftermath. Within this context, mystical experiences are central – not only literally speaking, in terms of their central place between the two other elements, but also as they provide the differentiating characteristics for the whole concept. Furthermore, another important distinction was made in this chapter: two elements of the concept (antecedents and aftermath) were called contextual elements. This attribute refers to their dependency on the person's personal, religious, historical, social, etc., context. While, based on an essentialist understanding, the contextual independence of mystical experiences was established.

Chapter 3 followed up on the theoretical and methodological basis laid down in Chapter 2. In this chapter, the examination of traditional and modern mystical phenomena started with some of the contemporary academic discourses. The hindering approaches were striking in two of the three works quoted, and among other adjectives, 'muddled' and 'superficial' were the most used. Besides the hindering approaches, I observed several theoretical and conceptual problems. First, the argumentations avoided meaningfully discussing mystical experiences. Second, when they referred to the contextual elements of mysticism, they were still not consistent and exact. This either manifested as a total avoidance of modern mysticism, merging of the concept with other similar ones such as spirituality, or even using mysticism vaguely as a concept to support arguments about secularization or postcolonialism.

Furthermore, one of the typical methods of these arguments was comparison, with modern phenomena being compared to the traditional, original versions of them. In this relation, the differences from traditional mysticism were shown, and then the inferiority and lacking modern phenomena were stressed. None of these examinations, not even the comparison, were revealed to be done systematically, but, instead, implicitly.

Nonetheless, based on contemporary academic narratives, a differentiation was made between traditional and modern mysticism. As these differences were not articulated systematically or precisely in the mentioned works, the aim of Chapters 3 and 4 was to understand the similarities and differences between traditional and modern mysticism. I further aimed to provide a conception utilizing the complexity of the comparative approach. Based on the initially established essentialist approach, the contextual elements and mystical experience were examined. First, the contextual elements were taken into consideration. Contextual aspects entail a variety of different elements such as preparatory techniques, teachings, mystical literature, interpretation of the experience, actions inspired by the experience, etc. Therefore, in order to systematically study them, two concepts were introduced. 'Culture' refers to the overarching historical, religious, and social changes in the phenomena, namely, an era and a specific form of religiosity. 'Subject', in turn, refers to contextual elements more closely related

to the person and the way mystical experiences happen. In terms of 'culture', traditional mysticism is characterized by church civilization and the Middle Ages, and modern mysticism is characterized by modernity and plurality. In other words, traditional mysticism was primarily but not exclusively associated with the Middle Ages, and an all-encompassing form of a religious worldview, called "church civilization" by Troeltsch. In contrast, modern mysticism was seen as associated exclusively with modernity and, furthermore, with pluralism. The latter entails the opposite of church civilization in the sense that it does not refer to one main version of a religious worldview but to many coexistent (secular and religious) options.

In terms of 'subject', traditional mysticism is considered private and individual, while modern mysticism is characterized as public and performative. The former refers to mystical experiences happening primarily in solitude, and the focus is on the union between the individual and ultimate reality. The latter describes the modern phenomenon, which is understood as primarily taking place in public, communal settings and bearing performative characteristics in the sense that time and space have particular relevance to them. At the end of Chapter 3, these contextual differences were introduced.

It is important to note that the differentiation (or, in other words, the categorization) is established to examine modern mysticism in contrast with traditional mysticism – as many contemporary academic works already suggest. This is precisely the scope of this categorization: to understand the two phenomena better and reflect on their relationship. Hence, while I was discussing traditional and modern mysticism and aiming to conceptualize their differences and point to their similarities, the endeavor itself was meant to be limited and eventually transcended. In short, the categorization of mysticism into traditional and modern mysticism was a tool in the revision of the concept of mysticism.

In Chapter 4, I compared Thomas Merton's and John of the Cross's mysticism, first, by summarizing the context of their mystical experiences, antecedents, and aftermaths. Both almost entirely coincided with the characteristics mentioned earlier: culture and subject. Thomas Merton's case is slightly different from the characteristics of modern mysticism in the sense of his vocation and background, since Merton was a Trappist monk. Only based on his life in the monastery and its religious context his mysticism could be considered traditional. But, his interpretation of the experiences shows a mix of traditional and modern elements, referring to both theological concepts and the plurality of religious and secular discourses. However, in terms of the contextual elements of his mystical experiences, the place and other circumstances of these experiences, as well as their performative characteristics, Merton's mysticism seems typically modern. In this sense, Merton's mysticism is considered primarily modern, exhibiting traditional elements.

The second part of the chapter focused on the descriptions of mystical experiences. Finding Merton's texts and referring to four mystical experiences was relatively straightforward because of his own references and the guidance of the secondary literature. Beyond that, it is relatively easy to pinpoint the exact passages which supposedly refer to the experiences due to the consequent use of terms such as 'suddenly' and 'overwhelming'. In contrast, in the case of John of the Cross, the same basic task proves to be a significant challenge. The most prestigious secondary sources deal with his well-known works, such as the *Ascent to Mount Carmel*, *The dark night of the soul, The living flame of love*, and so on. However, these works primarily refer to his preparation for the mystical experience or his longing for ecstasy. While they ooze

mystical knowledge and use metaphors and concealing language, they do not describe the experiences themselves. This cannot entirely be explained by John of the Cross's historical and religious context, in the same way as Teresa of Avila describes her experiences very straightforwardly within very similar circumstances. Two possible explanations are worth exploring for further research: the influences of cataphatic and apophatic mysticism, and other elements of John of the Cross's context: persecution and imprisonment. However, it is still puzzling why Kavanaugh or McGinn do not deal with the subject at all. Even in his collected works in English, not much attention is given to John of the Cross's minor poems, some of which have eventually proved to be the most important sources in referring to mystical experiences. Eventually, the *Stanzas concerning an ecstasy experienced in high contemplation* and some parts of *A gloss (with spiritual meaning)* and *Stanzas given spiritual meaning* have been chosen for analysis.

The analysis was based on expressions that show typical characteristics of mystical language. The initial guidelines for these characteristics were quite vague: the use of raw and direct language, occasional difficulty in putting the experience into words, an overall sense of vulnerability, and uncontrollable emotional or bodily reactions. After examining Merton's texts, I eventually identified four categories based on the key expressions: opposites; time; depth; and bodily reactions, actions, and feelings. Opposites are used for two main purposes in the case of both authors: illuminating mystical knowledge and marking the difference between sacred and profane or mystical and ordinary. Expressions of time exhibit minor differences. Merton's interpretations are full of references to sudden, immediate changes, while the very few expressions in John of the Cross's texts refer to the concept of long(er)-lasting events and, at the same time, swift changes. Expressions of depth and perception are used similarly to describe the direct nature of the experience; they both refer to the intensity and other effects of the mystical experience. Finally, bodily reactions, actions, and feelings are relevant in Merton's texts while only briefly mentioned in those of John of the Cross's. From what was found, their use points to openness, vulnerability, and its immediate, uncontrollable bodily consequences.

All in all, the comparison does not suggest any significant difference in the authors' mystical experiences. The differences are either the consequence of contextual alterations (such as the general shift of focus from the transcendent to the immanent) or simply point to the variety of mystical experiences, for example, in terms of their duration. All four dimensions mentioned above are present in the texts; moreover, they are used very similarly in many cases. These findings yield the conclusion that modern mysticism is essentially similar to traditional mysticism. This essential similarity relates to what can be understood about mystical experiences on the basis of the sources currently available. Consequently, mysticism in modernity must also be considered to be valuable and worthy of scientific study.

Further research on the subject would need to examine whether these four dimensions apply to other contemporary and historical examples. The issue of the relationship between these four dimensions should also be tackled. Along that line, whether any of these dimensions are missing in (contemporary) examples should be explored. Beyond these dimensions and their applications, I suggest that Thomas Merton's mysticism is cataphatic rather than apophatic, first, because Thomas Merton's mystical knowledge of God is regularly described as "light" or as "illumination". Second, he uses straightforward and not concealing language or negations in

terms of perception, such as "understanding", "realization", and "illumination". The idea of cataphatic mysticism in Mertons's case should be explored in further examinations.

In Chapter 5, two main aims were pursued. First, I explored existing theoretical approaches to the contextual changes of mysticism. Second, raveling out of existing theoretical approaches of modern mysticism, I attempted to revise them where it seemed necessary. Upon considering the comparison of traditional and modern mysticism in the previous chapter, I concluded that mystical experiences, the core of the phenomena, seemed similar, while there were significant changes in terms of contextual elements. However, the quoted contemporary academic discussions do not reflect these contextual changes systematically, let alone refer to the similarity of the phenomena in comparison. Comparisons are carried out by scholars using three different approaches.

Most comparisons are degrading in nature. An example like this is the comparison of modern mystical phenomena to the supposedly original version of it, therefore deeming modern mysticism as a "muddled" version of the original. Modern mysticism is also strongly associated with popular tendencies such as self-development. In this sense, modern mysticism is primarily and close-mindedly seen as a tool of self-construction. Furthermore, some scholars avoid discussing modern mysticism altogether, or merge it with similar concepts such as spirituality or New Age. The reason for this is the overwhelming variety and confluence of contemporary religious phenomena.

In the second part of the chapter, I aimed to unravel the narratives behind the concepts mentioned above. As mysticism and mystical experiences are often used as a handy tool to support other theoretical arguments, they are perceived in a very narrow and contrasting sense or contrarily in a too broad understanding. Dichotomies include talking about traditional vs. modern, Eastern vs. Western mysticism, and the complete decline of mysticism related to the secularization paradigm.

Based on these dichotomies, mysticism is divided into a thriving, traditional, unchanged, stable, and well-known part that is associated with the past (traditional mysticism), while, in contrast, the modern version is seen as widely cultivated but not representing any real value as it is an uprooted and regressing version of the original. Both Richard H. Jones and Sophie Rose Arjana took this comparison a step further and blamed modern mysticism (or at least their particular understanding of the phenomenon) for the demise of the traditional version. Jones understands this change of guards in terms of secularization and blames 'superficial spirituality' for stealing the attention from 'serious mysticism'. Arjana's postcolonial approach works strikingly similarly because, according to her, the capitalist West exploits the East with its originality and richness in 'mystical energy'. The uprooted and widely marketed versions of mysticism serve as a tool in this process. Both Arjana and Jones contribute to the demise of their outline of the serious, original, traditional, stable, unchanged versions of mysticism.

As I pointed out throughout this work, categorization and comparison can be applicable methods in highlighting differences yet pointing out similarities within the same concepts. However, these approaches apply strict dichotomies and, along with those, an added value hierarchy. In this sense, modern mysticism is not considered worth defining because of its substantial differences from traditional forms. Moreover, these specific approaches are not informative. They offer negations, not statements about modern mysticism. They tell us what modern mysticism lacks, not what it is like. I argue that modern mysticism (at least in these

instances) was approached through outdated concepts. These concepts can no longer reflect on the complexity, global nature, and plurality of contemporary religious and mystical phenomena. In this light, modern mysticism is deemed to look undeserving of scientific attention.

Therefore, I argued for theoretical substitutes for each of the three dichotomies. First, the traditional and modern opposition was substituted with Thomas Tweed's concept of functional fluidity. Tweed's theory can bridge the gap between traditional and modern religiosity by focusing on the adaptability and vitality of religions. Second, regarding the Eastern vs. Western dichotomy, I pointed out overarching processes in religiosity related to globalization, such as hybridity and inter-civilizational encounters. Third, the paradigm of secularization was substituted by Berger's paradigm of pluralism. The latter theory is widely applicable to modern mysticism, first, because of its recognition of not only the different religious discourses but religious and secular discourses alike. Second, related to the discourses, the theory can reflect on the constant interactions and cross-influences of these narratives. Third, it enables researchers to understand modern religiosity not as taken for granted but as a matter of choices.

Most of our concepts of mysticism are based on traditional mysticism. Some use traditional mysticism as a basis, while others use it as a limit in deciding what mysticism is. I argue that a revision of the theoretical, conceptual basis for the study of mysticism is needed based on theories that reflect the characteristics of the contemporary religious landscape: fluidity, global nature, and plurality. Berger's concept of pluralism is applicable to modern mysticism as it aims to understand the religiosity of the era in itself, not as a degradation of a previous one. Based on the revised framework, understanding the contextual elements of modern mysticism on its own terms, still within the concept of mysticism, may begin.

Beyond the three characteristics – fluidity, global nature, and plurality – a revised theoretical basis of modern mysticism should be able to reflect on the following aspects. The profound religious, social, technological, and political changes have not left mysticism as a social phenomenon untouched. Its theoretical approaches should reflect the present religious and social landscape too. Based on contemporary cases, the revision of the overall concept – at least the revision of its contextual elements – is necessary.

Once again, Berger's framework could be taken into consideration as the basis of the revision. First, the idea that the coexistence of multiple religious and religious/secular discourses does not entail a fixed set of options. Berger argues that, due to the permanent cognitive contamination (meaningful human interactions), options are continually being created. These options do not leave people untouched, instead, they compel them to choose.

Second, it is important to remember Berger's notion that religion in modernity is not taken for granted but chosen, moving from the level of certainties to the level of opinions. People today choose more easily and more often. Therefore, expecting mysticism to include following one specific set of traditional practices and dedicating one's entire life to them seems out of place. Adding to the latter aspect in the 'age of doubt' certainty is only produced artificially by keeping relativity out of the system through political and economic tools. Then again, the dedication of one's life towards one tradition, be it mystical or any other religious one, can hardly be expected. Therefore, the contextual 'requirements' of the theoretical approaches should be updated to accommodate the central role of choices in a pluralistic

landscape. This way, concepts such as religious revivals as well as increasing interest in (multiple) mystical traditions could be tackled – topics that were formerly left out of discussions based on secularization.

Third, Berger's framework changes the narratives of individuals. Secularization theory and postcolonialism entail an implicit narrative of people being somewhat victims of modernity. They feel lost in modernity and are forced to pick and choose from all sorts of empty and uprooted religious choices in search of the religious truth that was previously untouched, whole, and original in the traditions. The sense of being lost is undoubted due to the consequences of deinstitutionalization. The availability of many options and their difference from religious options a couple of centuries or just a few years ago is also apparent. However, based on Berger's framework, it can be argued that people manage these religious and secular discourses relatively well. They are not as lost as secularization and postcolonialism entail. In the forms of secondary institutions and by mixing and applying different religious and secular choices in different circumstances, they find their way in the world. Highlighting this capability to manage multiple narratives and religious options, Pentecostalism and Evangelical prayers were mentioned. On the one hand, the concept of Evangelical prayers highlights the discernment of religious and secular discourses on the individual level. On the other hand, the example of Pentecostalism reflects not only on the individual but also on the social level. Peter Berger argues that speaking in tongues and other fostered religious experiences do not hinder but, on the contrary, support people in their highly rational goals.[928]

Lastly, changes in the language of mystical interpretations can also be expected. Once again, I refer to the shift of religiosity from the level of certainties to the level of opinions. Berger lists typical contemporary examples of expressing religious affiliation, such as talking about religious 'preferences', or statements like "I happen to be Catholic" and "I am into Buddhism right now".[929] Though in terms of the levels of religiosity mysticism might not showcase such a striking (in)difference as other forms of religiosity. Mystical experiences remain, at least supposedly, intense, meaningful, and transformative for the individual. However, the framework in which they are understood in modernity does not entail a strong affiliation to one specific tradition. In this sense, the use of language does not necessarily entail the fact that mystical experiences have changed – that they are not meaningful and transformative anymore.

Once the framework is revised, other important questions might be raised about modern mysticism. First, the supposed connections between mysticism and personal development could be examined. Beyond the oversimplifying connection of using mysticism as a self-help tool, two aspects should be mentioned. On the one hand, mystical experiences do have transformative power, and they are ecstatic and might be unsettling in their effects. I do not mean to argue that they are readily or easily available tools to feel good, only to point out the idea that mysticism, prior to modernity, was appreciated for its fruits too. The two differences are that in traditional mysticism, these transformations were viewed as long-term processes, often pointing to the ultimate reality and goals beyond the individual's immediate change. In

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[928] (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, p. 62)
[929] (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, p. 30)

some traditions, the experiences (and, consequently, the transformation) were perceived as coming from other sources beyond the person, such as by the grace of God. On the other hand, there is a definite need for some stable points and definitions, for the following reason:

> "All of life becomes an interminable process of redefining who the individual is in the context of the seemingly endless possibilities presented by modernity. This endless array of choices is reinforced by the structures of capitalist systems, with their enormous market for services, products, and even identities, all protected by a democratic state which legitimates these choices, not least the choice of religion. All of these areas of an individual's life were once taken for granted, were fated. They now become an arena of almost endless choices."[930]

Due to the weakening of institutions, the responsibility of making sense of the world lies on the individual. One of the main functions of religions is to 'make homes', as Tweed puts it, or, in other words, to provide an explanation for the fundamental questions of life. In the past, these explanations were provided, changed, or reinforced successfully by religious institutions. The question is how these explanations can be provided through the highly subjectivized form of religiosity today. These processes might point toward the increasing relevance of individual forms of religiosity, such as mysticism. The example of Pentecostalism supporting modernization processes on the group/social level and supposedly individual rational endeavors too, gives some sort of guidance in examining the relation of mysticism and personal development and the destabilizing effects of deinstitutionalization.

Second, the question of how pluralism affects mysticism should be examined. Tendencies such as deinstitutionalization and subjectivization point to the idea that modernity provides a friendly, un-supportive environment for mysticism. Casanova considers the predictions of Troeltsch and James about the central role of mysticism as an individual form of religiosity to be accurate, and the so-called invisible religion to be gaining global prominence. Moreover, Casanova argues that this is a novelty only from a Western perspective, as mysticism has always been an important option for the religious virtuosi and elites of Hinduism, Taoism, and Buddhism.[931] Croce's idea of the democratization of mysticism and the concept of "inscendent" based on James's work shares a similar view. It highlights the spiritual potential in all humanity, meeting the multiple religious options in modernity.[932] Similarly, on the basis of Hardy's evolutionary biological concept Hay argues that 'spiritual awareness' is primordial and indestructible and 'part of our natural human competence'.[933]

Nonetheless, there is a wide variety of religious (and mystical) phenomena on all three levels of society today, not only from the perspective of the "seekers", but also from the point of view of scholars. This variety provides an enormous challenge for today's scholars. Methods and theories that used to work no longer do; well-rounded categories do not seem to cover this never-before-seen variety. In the present dissertation, I have argued that instead of generally ignoring or degrading these phenomena, we need to take a more nuanced approach and raise some questions.

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[930] (Berger, The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age, 2014, pp. 5-6)
[931] (Casanova, 2006, p. 18)
[932] (Croce, 2013, pp. 7-12)
[933] (Hay, Religion under Siege: A Scientific Response. A Lecture given to the Alister Hardy Society meeting at Oxford, December 1, 2007, 2008, pp. 149-150)

How could we define mysticism (today)? How could we categorize the never-before-seen variety and quantity of experiences? What are the criteria for considering an experience mystical? What explanations does science offer for present-day mystical experiences and those who call themselves mystics?

The approach of religious studies toward the concept of religion reminds us that asking such questions is essential. What religion is and what mysticism is needs to be the subject of permanent discussion based on contemporary examples. Treating religion and mysticism as conceptual and methodological challenges keeps reality a colorful business. It grants an openness toward the sometimes messy, chaotic, and overwhelming reality of pluralism with its constantly emerging, new, religious, and mystical phenomena. These phenomena are relevant and worthy of scientific attention not only because of their sheer number and variety but because of their personal and social values, which transcend the limitations of time.

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