

Theoretical Fruits from the Empirical Study of Mysticism: A Jamesian Perspective

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Summary

The study of mysticism is hampered by the existence of discreet literatures that remain largely ignorant of one another. This is further exacerbated by the fact that these literatures converge toward a consensus on the existence and characteristic of introvertive mysticism using a variety of empirical methods. Tracing the efforts of William James to confine psychology within the limits of natural science assumptions it is argued that James' ever expanding definition of empiricism led him to abandon what amounts to a reductionistic view of mysticism, something the discreet literatures on mysticism have also reached as a consensus position. Furthermore, with respect to at least introvertive mysticism, language and culture cannot be considered as exhaustive explanations of its fundamental empirical reality.

Key words: mysticism, William James, introvertive, phenomenology

Zusammenfassung

Theoretische Konzepte aus der empirischen Mystikforschung: Eine Jamesische Perspektive

Die Forschung im Bereich des Mystizismus wird erschwert durch zahlreiche Ansätze, die sich gegenseitig auf weiten Strecken ignorieren. Dieser Umstand wird noch bestärkt dadurch, dass diese unterschiedlichen Ansätze alle die Existenz introvertierter Mystik akzeptieren und ähnlich charakterisieren. Dabei greifen sie auf eine große Bandbreite empirischer Ansätze zurück. Im Folgenden wird nun unter Rückgriff auf William James' Anstrengungen, Psychologie innerhalb der Grenzen der Wissenschaft zu verorten, argumentiert, dass James unter Einfluss seines sich ständig erweiternden Konzept von Empirizismus, ein reduktionistisches Konzept der Mystik ablehnte. Dies ist ebenfalls Konsens in der aktuellen Mystikforschung. Außerdem wird gezeigt, dass zur Erforschung eines introvertierten Mystizismus Sprache und Kultur nicht als alleinige Konzepte zur Erklärung herangezogen werden können, sondern vielmehr ein empirischer Ansatz benötigt wird.

Schlagwörter: Mystizismus/Mystik, William James, introvertiert, Phenomenologie

The contemporary study of mysticism is stymied by the existence of separate and discrete literatures that continue to remain largely ignorant of each other. McGinn (1994) has noted that this results in an "unrealized conversation" (p. 343). McGinn's threefold classification of these distinct literatures combines comparativist/psychological as one literature distinct from theological and philosophical literatures (McGinn, 1994, pp. 265-343). He ignores other distinct literatures on mysticism, including measurement based studies of mysticism and experimental and quasi-experimental elicitation of mystical experiences in both laboratory and natural life conditions (Hood, 1995a; 1997). Thus, McGinn's unrealized conversation involves more literatures than the three he reviews. One noted scholar of mysticism argues that we do not need more studies of mysticism but rather conceptual clarification concerning the data on mysticism we already have (Almond, 1982), scattered it is among diverse literatures.

In this light, I want to note that significant figures in the contemporary psychology of religion have called for changes in the psychology of religion. Perhaps most critical is Wulff's identification of

psychology of religion as a field in crisis and the suggestion that perhaps we should start over (Wulff, 2003). Emmons and Paloutzian (2003) have called for a new multilevel interdisciplinary paradigm for the psychology of religion, one that is applauded by many of the authors in the recent *Handbook of the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* (Paloutzian & Parks, 2005). The call for a new paradigm is presented in a hopeful and positive fashion in opposition to Wulff's more pessimistic assessment of the field. However, even the call for a new paradigm can be read as including a subtext that the psychology of religion has the same unrealized conversation that has characterized the discrete literatures on mysticism. Hood & Williamson (2008) have presented what they suggest could be an exemplar of the multilevel interdisciplinary paradigm based upon many years of research on Christian serpent handlers. Belzen has offered another exemplar in his study of the conversion among the "bevindelijken" (Belzen 1999; Belzen & Hood, 2006, pp. 23-24). The Hood and Williamson exemplar includes qualitative and quantitative methods while Belzen's exemplar is purely qualitative. However, the issue is not simply whether one employs qualitative or quantitative methods but simply that psychologists committed to the multilevel interdisciplinary paradigm will have to be pluralistic and not simply champion advanced statistical methods that in fact advance the older measurement paradigm in the psychology of religion identified with Gorsuch, (1984). Recently, Kohls, Hack, & Walach (2008) have demonstrated the benefits of mixing qualitative and quantitative methods in the assessment of spiritual experiences, including mystical experiences.

These introductory remarks are to place my recommendation that a reconsideration of the work of William James might be a place to gain insights into what characterizes the unrealized conversations in psychology of religion and in the study of mysticism. Much of what I have to say is based upon my presidential address to Division 36 of the APA which was also an invited paper in the initial issue of a new journal in the psychology of religion that unfortunately stalled almost as soon as it was launched (Hood, 1992). I use the frame of my earlier address and to flesh out a major concern I have with the study of mysticism. So while I will begin with James, I will end with a focus upon the empirical study of mysticism and what I see as a rich harvest that can be gathered from the fruits we already have that are ripe. The bringing together of these literatures is in what I take to be the spirit of the *interdisciplinary* in the call for a new paradigm in the psychology of religion and the beginning of a *realized* conversation among scholars employing diverse methodologies who have created discrete literatures, largely ignorant of one another but nevertheless converging to a significant degree on several crucial issues in the study of mysticism.

Elsewhere I have argued that despite the deserved reputation of James' *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902/1981, hereafter VRE) it is wise to read it as partly a response to issues that he alluded to in his monumentally influential *Principles of Psychology* (1890/1981, hereafter PP) but refused to address (Hood, 1995b; 2002). James effort in the PP was to restrict himself to the assumptions of natural science, an appeal that continues to influence many psychologist of religion today. Yet as other commentators have noted, James failed in his attempt. The PP quickly becomes philosophical, even metaphysical (Wild, 1969). In one of the earliest reviews of the PP, Ladd noted the extensive engagement with metaphysical speculations in the PP. He titled his review, "Psychology as So-Called 'Natural Science'" (Ladd, 1892). In it he insisted that a psychology without metaphysical considerations is too constrictive. He astutely took James to task for attempting to admit only one metaphysical position as explanatory for psychology - that of the correlation between thoughts and brain states. James and others quickly responded to Ladd's review. A debate was started that continues to trouble psychology today (see Belzen & Hood, 2006 Giorgi, 1990; Wulff, 2003).

Deconstructionist readings of James suggest that James knew what he was doing and who his audience was to be so that reading James requires placing James' writings in the context of the audiences to which many were initially delivered as lectures (Seigfried, 1990). James' efforts to separate psychology from philosophy (metaphysics) in the PP can be seen as an effort to show the limits of a natural science perspective, not to exclude psychological consideration of what is outside those limits (Barnard, 1997; Hood, 1994, 1995b; Seigfried, 1990). In this sense, after writing the PP

James' *oeuvre* can be seen as an effort to start over given the metaphysical limits that psychology must transcend if it is to appropriately confront the totality of experienced reality. As we shall see residual issues left unexplained by methodologies of the natural sciences could be reintroduced by a psychology in the VRE that is more sensitive to metaphysical alternatives. The almost exclusive reliance upon testimonies as the basic data for in the VRE led Wundt to deny that it was a psychological work (Belzen, 2006, p. 53). Similar criticism were leveled against the PP, however Royce, James' friend and adversary in what Perry (1935, vol. 1, xxxi) has aptly phrased, "The battle of the absolute," applauded James' refusal to ignore philosophical issues in the PP: He does not try, as many nowadays do, to hide the fact that every psychologist who is more than an elementary student or a Philistine must really formulate philosophical hypotheses, whether or not one is man enough to confess the fact and take responsibility for it (in Seigfried, 1990:402).

Royce's recognition of the relevance of James' philosophical discussion in the PP can be contrasted to the avoidance of philosophical commentary in the contemporary psychology of religion (Belzen & Hood, 2006, pp. 11-12). In James' abridgement of the PP, much of the reduction was accomplished by the exclusion of philosophical material. Royce's comments proved prophetic. James concludes the greatly abridged PP, *Psychology: The Briefer Course* as follows: ... at present psychology is in the condition of physics before Galileo and the laws of motion, of chemistry before Lavoisier and the notion that mass is preserved in all reactions. The Galileo and the Lavoisier of psychology will be famous men indeed when they come, as come they some day surely will, or past successes are no index to the future. When they do come, however, the necessities of the case will make them 'metaphysical.' Meanwhile the best way in which we can facilitate their advent is to understand how great is the darkness in which we grope, and never to forget that *the natural science assumptions with which we started are provisional and reversible things* (James, 1892, 468, emphasis mine).

The "metaphysical leaks" (James, 1892:467) in a purely natural science approach to psychology are nowhere more obvious than in two threads that can be traced throughout the entire corpus of James' writings: issues of self and of mysticism (Barnard, 1997, Dainton, 2000; Fontinell, 1986; Levinson, 1981; Myers, 1982; Richardson, 2006). In discussing these issues we shall expand a bit our reading of James to include material that helps illuminate the relationship between the psychology of the PP and that of the VRE.

James had much to say about being *radically* empirical as opposed to simply adopting natural science assumptions uncritically asserted to be empirical. To do so is to follow what Coon (1992, p. 143) has identified tongue in cheek as a form of psychological adolescent "physics envy". James demands empiricism, but one that is radical. It transcends the natural science limits and is compatible with the assumption that the fundamental reality of nature may not at all be a concatenation of impersonal forces (Barnard, 1991, p. 47).

In the PP many of the metaphysical issues raised that suggest different options for interpreting psychological data were to be more fully developed by James as the doctrine of radical empiricism (Myers, 1986; Richardson, 2006). James would articulate radical empiricism first as a postulate, that the only things debatable are those drawn from experience; second as a statement of fact, both disjunctive and conjunctive relations between things are as much matters of direct experience as the things themselves; and third as a generalized conclusion, that "the directly apprehended universe needs, in short, no extraneous trans-empirical connective support, but possess in its own right a concatenated or continuous structure" (in McDermott, 1968, p. 136).

While James philosophy and his psychology in the VRE is often described as functionalism (the postulational nature of radical empiricism is the basis for extolling James' method in both the PP and VRE as, if not anticipating phenomenology, than at least being proto-phenomenological (Edie, 1987; Fontinell, 1986; Hood, 2002; Wild, 1970; Wilshire, 1968). What James' method is called is less my concern here that that experience be the basis for psychology of religion in general and mysticism in particular. In his second presidential address to the APA James presented the principle of pure experience as a methodological postulate:

Nothing shall be admitted as fact, it says, except what can be experienced at some definite time by some experient; and for every feature of fact ever so experienced, a definite place must be found somewhere in the final system of reality. In other worlds: Everything real must be experienceable somewhere and every kind of thing experienced must somewhere be real (James, 1912/1976, p. 81).

James' theory of radical empiricism is intended to be a form of scientific positivism. However, as Perry has noted:

But the positivism of James was almost the precise opposite of the doctrine which now passes by that name. Contemporary positivism closes all the doors but one, while James' positivism *opened all the doors* and kept them opened (Perry, 1958, p. 79, emphasis mine).

Similarly Perry notes that James responded in a letter to the positivist psychologist, Ribot, that the ordinary positivist "simply has a muddled metaphysic which he refuses to criticize or discuss" (1958, p. 58). With this we have come back to Belzen & Hood (2006, pp. 11-12) who argue that psychologists must be sensitive to various philosophical assumption, (none of which are non-problematic) that undergird various psychological methodologies. Likewise, Dainton (2000, p. iv) has noted that the phenomenological study of consciousness refuses to allow consciousness to be explained in terms of something else and thus requires that long neglected metaphysical options must be taken seriously once again.

If we now return to James' treatment of mysticism in the VRE it is to focus on two basic points. First, the VRE provides at least a partial refutation to the treatment of the self in the PP from a purely natural science psychology. Second, James' resolution of the discrepancy between the self of the PP and of the VRE is decidedly mixed and can be clarified by the empirical fruits culled from a multilevel interdisciplinary study of mysticism. We shall address each of these claims in turn.

The Self in the PP and in the VRE

As I have developed more fully elsewhere, James' treatment of the self in the PP was simply an empirical claim that neither the skepticism of Hume nor the appeal of Kant to a purely formal principle (the synthetic unity of apperception) were needed to account for the lack of sense of self in consciousness (Hood, 1995b, 2002). For our purposes here we need but note that James applauds Hume's phenomenological or introspective perspective in failing to find a personal sense of self within or behind consciousness. I quote from Hume's original, appealed to by James:

For my part when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always tumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never catch myself at any time without a perception, and never can observe any 'thing' but the perception. When my perception are removed for any time, as by sound sleep; so long as I am insensible of myself, and may truly be said not to exist (Hume, 1886, p. 534, emphasis in original).

James applauds Hume for his "good piece of introspective work" (James, 1880//1991, p. 333) but goes on to reject Hume's inability to note conjunctive as well as disjunctive relationships in terms of the principle of radical empiricism noted above. James's critique of the associationist theories in the PP applies here to Hume's incomplete introspection (finding disjunctive but not conjunctive relationships). Given that disjunctive and conjunctive relationships are both revealed in experience, the refusal to acknowledge conjunctive relationships is a defect of Hume's incomplete introspection led James to claim that "Hume is at bottom as much a metaphysician as Thomas Aquinas" (James, 1890/1991, p. 334).

James is equally condemning of Kant's (1787/1956) solution to Hume's inadequate introspection. Kant postulated a purely logical principle, the transcendental synthetic unity of apperception. James rejected this as but a "'cheap and nasty' edition of the soul." (James, 1890/1991, p. 345). He found it to be neither logically nor empirically necessary. He quipped, "Although Kant's name it is so long, our consciousness of about it, is, according to him, short enough" (James, 1880/1991, p. 342). What was James solution to the sense of identity reflected in consciousness? The purely empirical answer in the PP was that none was needed!

The Thought is a vehicle of choice as well as of cognition; and among choices it makes are these appropriations, or repudiations of its "own." But the Thought never is an object in its own hands; it never appropriates or disowns itself (James, 1890/1991, p. 323).

James' purely empirical resolution in the PP is that we need not speak of a *consciousness*, thinking its existence along with all else it thinks thus assuring a sense of personal identity.

Instead, of the state of thought being one of con-consciousness It might better be called a stream of *Sciousness* pure and simple, thinking objects of some of which it makes what it calls a "Me" and unaware of its "pure" self in an abstract of hypothetic, or conceptual ways (James, 1890/1981, pp. 290-291).

I will leave James' *Sciousness* here as all that is required from the viewpoint of psychology as a natural science. The philosophical issues raised by thought appropriating past thoughts without the necessity of a personal I or *consciousness* continues to intrigue contemporary philosophers concerned with the unity and continuity in consciousness experience (Dainton, 2000; Zahvi, 2005). It also continues to dominate discussion by those who defend a nonmaterial view of the self (Foster, 1996). However, the real issue of *Sciousness* cannot be fully evaluated outside the issues of the nature of mystical experience. Here, as we shall see, the James of the *Varieties* favors a consciousness aware of itself as a self.

Mystical Experience in the VRE

Elsewhere I have argued for reading James' treatment of mysticism in the *Varieties* as an example of the unity thesis in mysticism (Hood, 2003). The unity thesis is the view that both within and outside of the great faith traditions, is an experience that is essentially identical, regardless of interpretation. James put the issue thusly:

In Hinduism, in Neoplatonism, in Sufism, in Christian Mysticism, in Whitmanism, we find the same recurring note, so that there is about mystical utterances an eternal unanimity which ought to make a critic stop and think, and which brings it about that the mystical classics have, as has been said, neither birthday nor native land. Perpetually telling of the unity of man with God, their speech antedate language, and they do not grow old (James, 1902/1985, p. 332, emphasis mine)

The above quote clearly hints at two of the basic assumptions of those who support the unity thesis. First, it implies that a distinction can be made between experience and its interpretation. Second, it suggests that for at least some linguistic descriptions, an underlying uniform experience cuts across language differences (Hood, 2003, 2006). This position has been most systematically developed by Stace (1961) under the rubric of the common core thesis and is the basis of the most commonly used empirical measure of mysticism, the Mysticism Scale which has been used in numerous studies for more than a quarter of a century (Hood, 1975, 1997).

Of particular relevance for my discussion of James' *Sciousness* is what Stace refers to as

introvertive mysticism, an experience of union in which there is simply an ineffable awareness of pure consciousness. The *report* of this experience can be measured and is found in many cultures to be ineffably the same.

To identify an experience as ineffably the same raises a variety of conceptual issues that have occupied the concerns of scholars of mysticism. As Barnard states:

There has been such a stress on the linguistic nature of experience in recent philosophical thought that lay claims to immediacy or to a knowledge that is not structured linguistically are instantly suspect (Barnard, 1997, p. 120).

Likewise, Rorty (1999 p. 24) has noted that the linguistic turn in philosophy corresponded with contemporary philosophers not having their students read James. However, critical phenomenologists have begun to re-assert the relevance of James whose PP is characterized by Dainton (2000, p. xv) as "that great source of phenomenological insights and descriptions. "

Rorty's statement readily identifies the two major contending schools in the contemporary empirical study of mysticism in the West. One championed by Proudfoot (1985) and several scholars who have rallied around Katz in a series of edited books (Katz, 1977, 1983, 1985) denies the distinction between experience and interpretation. Basically, the crucial claim is that there can be no unmediated experiences, an assumption that continues to affirm the dominance of Kant's philosophy in contemporary psychology (Robinson, 1976, p. 219-226) and among the first generation of postmodern philosophers (Benedikter, 2007, part 2, p. 7).

The other school of mysticism is championed by Parsons (1999) and those who have rallied around Forman in a series of edited books (Forman, 1990, 1998). This camp does not accept neo-Kantian thought uncritically and is heavily influenced by Eastern philosophy. It also refuses to accept reductionist explanations of mysticism once common in classical psychoanalysis (Simonds, 2006). They refuse in Barnard's phrasing, to privilege Kant over Dōgen (1991, p. 116) and argue for the reality of ineffable experiences of union for which, as Stace (1961, p. 203) has noted, there is no *principium individuationis*. In Barnard's (2000, p. 269) phrasing such experiences are "nondiscursive intimations of direct experience" and in a similar phrasing Benedikter (2007) refers to a "pre-conceptual life stream" (part 2, p. 12) or a "pre-conceptual self-awareness of consciousness" (part IV, p. 1). Such experiences are neither linguistically constructed nor, as we shall see below, capable of being deconstructed. They offer evidence in favor of a direct, unmediated experience of reality acceptable in many Eastern philosophical systems (Coward, 1990) and in forms of Western apophatic mysticism (Benedikter, 2007; Cupitt, 1998).

Given my own treatment of James' as an exemplar of the unity or common core thesis (Hood, 2003, 2006) it might sound contradictory to reference Barnard (1997, p. 135) who argues that James is not an advocate of the common core or unity thesis. However, the contradiction between my view and Barnard's is more apparent than real if we but remember that James always spoke and wrote with a particular audience in mind (Seigfried, 1990; Richardson, 2006).

Barnard has identified an issue that allows a different reading of the VRE in light of contemporary studies of mysticism. It is to an overview of these studies that we begin to identify the fruits of a Jamesian perspective on a variety of mysticisms viewed in a pluralist perspective. To do so we will distinguish between trait and state mysticism as first suggested by (Forman, 1999).

It is widely accepted by biographers of James that he approached his Gifford lectures with an eye toward refuting absolute idealisms, especially as championed by his friend and colleague at Harvard, Josiah Royce (Levinson, 1981; Myers 1986; Perry, 1958; Richardson, 2006). James' own widely quoted definition of mysticism in the VRE must be put in context, it was less a definition than an

effort to mark off a territory for discussion for *the purposes of the present lectures* (James, 1902/1985, p. 302, emphasis mine). He knew that despite his own emerging commitment to pluralism, the understanding of mysticism was often in terms of philosophical monism.

The practical unanimous tradition of 'regular' mysticism has been unquestionable monistic; and inasmuch as it is the characteristic of mystics to speak, not as scribes, but as men who have 'been there' and seen with their own eyes, I think this sovereign manner must have made some pluralistic-minded students hesitate, as I confess it has often given pause to me (in Barnard, p. 30).

James' four markers of mystical experience include as second criteria passivity and transiency. While I think passivity emphasizes James' bias toward Protestant spontaneous experiences as opposed to practices long cultivated in Catholicism (to cite but one example) this marker does serve to insist that mystical experiences are facilitated by various practices, but cannot be produced assuredly by them (Hood, 1995a). We will return to this latter but for now cultural practices can be viewed as distal set and setting factors to facilitate or inhibit mystical experiences that as I will argue below can nevertheless transcend a culture that facilitates them (Also, Hood, in 2008).

James' second marker is also secondary. It simply notes that mystical experience is transient. Forman (1999) has recently identified transient mystical experiences as state mysticism, a useful distinction when we return to James *Sciousness* of the PP. Here we but note that if not all mystical experiences are transient, then the possibility of state mysticism emerges that has consequences for James' treatment of personal identity in the PP.

The two primary markers of mystical experience that James' employs for his Gifford lectures are that these experiences are noetic and ineffable. His insistence on noetic is crucial, especially when combined with the other primary marker of mysticism, ineffability. Here is the strongest claim to situate James with the common core or unity school of mysticism. Ironically, it is first expressed in a curious quote given James' intent to battle with monism. "In mystic states we both become one with the Absolute and we become aware of our oneness"(James, 1890/1985, p. 332). James reference to the Absolute is partly sleight of hand, for he readily admits in the written lectures that his preference is for God since God is (a) a medium of communion and (b) a causal agent (James, 1902/1985, p. 402, footnote 32). Furthermore, that consciousness is not obliterated is crucial for James, for he insists in the written lectures that, "Consciousness of illumination is of us the essential mark of 'mystical states'" (James, 1902/1985, p. 323-324, footnote 28). The continual referenced to mystical *states* would seem to remove James from the common core or unity school which argues for a commonality across interpretation and cultures for a singular mystical state.

The trouble with any one reading of James is that if his work is taken as a whole, a more complete representation of his divergent stands on many issues can be identified (Barnard, 1997; Seigfried, 1990; Richardson, 2006). While in parts of the VRE James does write as if his focus is on introvertive mysticism, he also places mysticism in a context of numerous experiences (his "mystical ladder") that clearly are not instances of introvertive mysticism. Barnard (1991, p. 63) has noted that ultimate James equates mystical experience with any submarginal or subliminal state none of which are clearly pure consciousness experiences. Including in these submarginal experiences are James's diabolical mysticism, a "sort of religious mysticism turned upside down" (James, 1902/1985, p. 337). In this sense, the measure of transliminality developed by Thalbourne, (1998) is the most Jamesian measure of mysticism we have. It is a single factor scale measuring essentially subliminal states of consciousness. Thalbourne & Delin (1994, p. 25) coined the term transliminal to refer to a common underlying factor that is largely an involuntary susceptibility to inwardly generated psychological phenomena of an ideational and affective kind. However, transliminality is also related to a hypersensitivity to external stimulation (Thalbourne, 1998, p. 403) such that transliminaltiy becomes a Jamesian measure of the sub marginal region where as noted above where "'seraph and snake' abide there side by side (James, 1902/1985, p. 338). While this sub marginal region includes mystical phenomena of a wide variety, this transliminal domain is more than simply introvertive mysticism and insofar as it is contentless excludes introvertive mysticism as noted

above. Lange & Thalbourne (1999) have also developed a single factor measure of mysticism that is more restricted than simply what I have called the transliminal domain, but is similar to James' treatment of mysticism in the VRE as it allows for interval scaling of intensity of experiences, as an empirical mystical ladder of sorts.

Even in the VRE James quickly retreats from a focus upon only introvertive mysticism. He admits to focusing primarily on classical mysticism. On the fringes where a wide variety of mystical experiences exists the unanimity evaporates.

The fact is that mystical feeling of enlargement, union, and emancipation has no specific intellectual content of its own. It is capable of forming matrimonial alliances with material furnished by the most diverse philosophies and theologies provided only that they can find a place in their framework for its particular emotional mood" (James, 1902/1985, p. 337).

These remarks need not disturb the common core or unity theorists as they already accept the ineffability of the introvertive mystical state. Insofar as the limiting case of the experience of enlargement or union is a pure consciousness event. The role of language and culture in interpreting the state is not challenged but their role in determining the state (experience) is.

With respect to introvertive mysticism, James' sub marginal thesis argues that the self becomes aware of what he James' simply identified as "MORE of the same quality" (1902/1985, p. 401, emphasis in original)." He also notes that, "It is when we treat of the experience of 'union' with it that their [mystics] differences appear most clearly" (p. 401). Thus, James can accept an aspect of the constructionist position which was articulated at the time of James' VRE by Rufus Jones, "The most refined mysticism, the most exalted spiritual experience is *partly* a product of the social and intellectual environment in which the personal life of the mystic has formed and matured (1909, p. xxxiv, italics in original). Jones' emphasis on is crucial, for it allows what James allows, that portions of experience escape cultural influences. Stace (1961, pp. 153-154) notes that self transcendence (James "MORE") is part of the experience and *not* of the interpretation of experience.

Recently Forman has coined the *term pure consciousness experience* (PCE) for Stace's introvertive mysticism. He is part of what I call confessional scholars of mysticism, those who include their own mystical experiences as part of their scholarly treatment of mysticism (Barnard, 1997, Forman, 1999, Roberts, 1984). These scholars acknowledge the identity of introvertive states. Barnard goes too far as to identify PCE "knowledge by identity" (1999, p. 109-127) which perhaps is less an explanation than a re-affirmation of James' "MORE." However, the value of confessional mystics who study mysticism cannot be underestimated both for the methodological value of their insights (Staal, 1975) and of the value of returning psychology to the researcher as subject that characterized psychological research at its inception as a laboratory science (Danzinger, 1994).

While knowledge by identity may not be an explanation, it does appear to be an adequate description of a limiting case. We can identify this limiting case empirically by calculating a ratio between James' well-known distinction between knowledge about and knowledge by acquaintance or knowledge of explored throughout the PP. For my purpose here it is sufficient to note that there is a subject/object distinction in knowledge about. Hence it is linguistically and culturally constructed knowledge. Therefore, it can also be deconstructed. Knowledge of is experience gained by participation, and can be prior to language. The ratio between knowledge of and knowledge about approaches the limiting case of a PCE or introvertive mysticism. That this state may only be approximated in many is not to assume that linguistic and cultural factors alone explain it nor that in the limiting case these factors play a significant explanatory role.

The closest approximation to the attainment of this limiting case is addressed by Stace . His comment is based upon Pratt's discussion (1920, pp. 128-131) of the well-known case of Madeleine, a mystic kept under observation in Salpêtrière by Janet. Pratt noted that she recognized objects placed in her hand when hypnotized. However, the issue for Stace is an empirical one:

whether she was *consciously aware* of this. Acknowledging that hypnosis can trigger mystical states, he goes on to argue

Suppose that he [Pratt] is mistaken to the extent that there is on the otherwise undifferentiated glassy surface of the One some faint smudge of impurity, some wisp of gossamer imagery; or that at the centre of the Void, or perhaps at its edges, there is a little sport of something or other which we will call the nonvoid? Whatever we may think of what is supposed to be the mystical vision, it surely cannot be reasonably maintained that it is *nothing but* a very faint visual; image, a tiny sound, a spot of dim and almost invisible light? (Stace, 1961, pp. 130-131).

One of the most critical treatments of PCE is by Almond (1982). Not limited to neo-Kantian assumptions that fuel the social constructionists, he reminds us that "There is nothing logically inherent about the notion of a contentless experience (Almond, 1982, p. 174). Furthermore, he makes once more the case that is an empirical possibility that such experiences can transcend linguistic (hence cultural) constructions:

Now in the mystical case, and taking a theistic mystical experience as our example, what remains as the basic datum of mystical experience if the content of the experience, the experience of the self in union with God, is abstracted? The residue is a contentless experience, one in which there is neither awareness of the self (of normal consciousness) nor of 'anything' standing over against the self a state in which, unlike the waking and the dream-state, there is no subject-object polarity. It is, furthermore, a state in which there is neither incorporated paradigmatic beliefs or symbols, nor, ergo reflexive interpretation, for there are no beliefs, thoughts, symbols, or dual awareness therein. In other words, it is a state in which the distinctions between the knower, the act of knowing, and what is known are obliterated (Almond, 1982, p. 174).

Enough examples have been provided to support the claim that both conceptually and empirically reports of pure consciousness events of trait introvertive mystical experience occur across many contexts and situations. Scholars of mysticism who have focused heavily upon mystical text and reports of mystical experiences have not surprisingly documented the immense effects of language and culture on the description of PCE's. However, the confessional scholars of mysticism have noted the ability to talk to other mystics and confirm that across traditions, identical experiences occur (Forman, 1999, pp. 21-27). Likewise, the scholars who support the unity thesis have concluded that conceptually, "In so far as we are speaking of contentless mystical experiences, there is a unanimity and a universality which transcends the cultural content in which they occur" (Almond, 1982, p. 176).

In terms of my concern for a truly interdisciplinary study of mysticism we have three empirical convergences from radically different methodological stances that strongly suggest that there is at least one form of mystical experience that transcends linguistic and cultural constructionism. I want to briefly emphasize each of these convergent strains of empirical support for the unity thesis.

First, there is a series of empirical measurement based studies employing the Mysticism scale that has operationalized Stace's common core theory that itself was phenomenologically derived. In this sense it is an empirical approach that is Seigfried refers to as James' radical reconstruction in philosophy (and I add psychology): "the empirical validation of phenomenologically derived classifications" (Seigfried, 1990, p. 12). For my present purposes, it is sufficient to note that introvertive mysticism emerges as a distinct factor not only in exploratory factor analytic studies (Hood & Williamson, 2000) but also in confirmatory factor analyses in such diverse cultures as the United States and Iran (Hood, Ghornbani, Watson, Ghramaleki, Bing, Davison, Morris, & Williamson. (2001).

Second, as noted above, among the confessional scholars who incorporate their own introvertive experiences into critical discussion of the unity thesis, interviews with mystics in other traditions about the nature of their introvertive mystical experiences reveal that difference in the linguistic and cultural expression of these experiences are mutually recognized to be essentially the same experience. Forman, who has practiced a Neo-Advaitan form of meditation twice a day since 1969 noted that his experience of PCE was acknowledged as identical to a Zen abbot's account of the same experience and to a Siddha Yoga's novice's account of her experience (Forman, 1999, pp. 20-30).

Third, independent scholars who have sought a common phenomenology between various traditions have been able to find it. This includes scholars whose work had not been cross-referenced and hence reached their conclusions independently. For instance, Brainaird (2000) found this commonality in the mystical traditions as culturally diverse as Advaita-Vedānta Hinduism, Mādhyamika Buddhism, and Nicene Christianity supporting previous independent conclusions of (Loy, 1988, 1990) with respect to Advaita-Vedānta Hinduism and Mādhyamika Buddhism.

One should not underestimate the evidential force when diverse empirical methods converge toward one conclusion. Methods that are rooted ultimately in a neo-Kantian epistemology are inappropriate for the recognition of a possible transcendent unity to diverse faith and cultural traditions that may have in common not simply the diversity that is well documented, but a common mystical core that whether called introvertive or pure consciousness experience is nevertheless the essence of what I have termed the unity thesis. Religious studies scholars, psychoanalysts, and mystics have all argued for an epistemology that is not rooted in Kantian or neo-Kantian philosophical assumptions (Dupré, 1980; Barnard, 1997, Forman, 1999; Smith, 1983). The crucial empirical point is simply that any claim to an empirical method involves philosophical assumptions that must be acknowledged at least a hidden and hence unexamined epistemology drive an agenda that may be unfair to the object of investigation (Belzen & Hood, 2006). In studies of mysticism, the empirical fruits are largely unavailable to those who become in the face of introvertive mystical claims a priori committed linguistic and cultural reductionists.

The purely empirical evidence for the unity thesis has support from what at first might seem a curious source. A major debate within the contemporary psychology of religion centers on the conceptual and empirical distinctions between religion and spirituality. The literature is immense and controversial (Hood, 2003; Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2005). However, independently of these literatures, post-modern philosophers have begun the same debate. Cupitt (1998) notes that human beings have been led by meditation or contemplative prayer into "an experience of non-dual, undifferentiated unity" (1998, p. 41). Like the major first generation of deconstructionists, Cupitt emphasizes that the mystics were to true forerunners of deconstruction (1998, pp. 93-122). In a similar vein, Benedikter (2000) has argued for a proto-spirituality largely rooted in an interest in apophatic mysticism in the first generation of deconstructionists such as Lyotard, Derrida, and Foucault. These figures all feared the return of a Renaissance of religion (largely religious fundamentalism) and championed an alternative that Benedikter (2007, part 1, p. 2) sums up in his own self-identification as "I am spiritual but not religious." He notes that Derrida, Foucault and Lyotard all supported a form of knowledge that must remain an absolute secret least not be violated by language. Benedikter (2007, Part 3, p. 8) notes, "the universe is a paradoxical structure in itself, which concentrates its very structural predisposition in the structural constitution of the individual, singular 'I' of every singular 'I' that exists."

Benedikter concludes from a radically different literature, what Barnard has suggested would and should have been James' own conclusion had he followed through with his own epistemological assumptions. From the results of the first generation of deconstructionists Benedikter (2007, Part 3, p. 2) concludes:

I must be, as my own clear logic teaches me, something like a double being, a

double "I": a normal ego that is an illusion, but also a secret witness, that becomes aware of this illusion. There must be behind the normal ego an "I" which I cannot deconstruct."

This is the same conclusion a more critical reading of James' PP in light of his VRE also supports. In the PP we have seen that James only needed Sciousness.

Foucault spoke of "The thinking that is thinking itself" (in Benedikter, 2007, Part 1, p. 11).

However, both in the VRE and in critiques of an absolutist deconstruction (the counterpart to absolutist social constructionism), epistemological critiques combined with phenomenology reach a consensus. As Branard notes,

I suggest that if James had remained faithful to his epistemology, what he could have said, and indeed, should have said, is that we all have an immediate awareness of "I-ness." Furthermore, subtle introspection reveals that the most accurate description of this "I" is of a contentless awareness that is continually present beneath the constantly changing stream of consciousness that I know to be mine (p. 160).

In the VRE there is both an introvertive mystical experience (being one with the absolute) and also varied ranges of experiences whether they are called mystical or not, that are clearly not introvertive experiences or PCE. Thus, as Barnard (1997, p. 63) rightly notes, James was never committed to a single definition of mysticism and his wider definitions of mysticism tend to merge the mystical with a variety parapsychical phenomena (Barnard, 1997 p. 200). In this sense, as already noted, the mysticism scale proposed by Lange & Thalbourne, (2007) is much more Jamesian than Hood's mysticism scale in which introvertive or PCE emerges as a clear factor, which captures only one of James' definition of mysticism in the VRE. The Lange & Thalbourne (2007) scale also has an advantage for those who favor a wider definition of mysticism as identifying what is clearly an empirical fact, that reports of mystical experience are associated with reports of paranormal experiences (Hood, 1989, 2008b). However, the most Jamesian measure of mysticism is transliminality that includes a variety of states, only some of which are mystical in terms of the limited definition of mysticism used in the *Varieties*.

The focus on mystical experience as a state implies that such experiences, whether spontaneously occurring or cultivated cannot be maintained over time. Yet the epistemological critique of James noted above, phenomenological studies, and critiques of an absolutist deconstruction all suggest that there can also be state mysticism.

State mysticism can be interpreted as a mystical duality where one has the continual experience of what Roberts (1984) has called the experience of no-self. Forman (1999, p. 140-146) also notes his own experience of no-self. While space prohibits a complete development of this mystical state of selfless persons, there are critical treatments of this state especially in Eastern religious and philosophical traditions (Collins, 1982; Nishitani, 1982). Likewise, it characterizes the first generation of deconstructionists as noted above. For example Lyotard allowed for an Ego or a self that can be socially deconstructed, but also quasi-I that always is absent in the presence of what remains written Ego has a proper name, can be situated within dated time and locales, participates in activities and the commerce of phrases, in the human community, in all that perishes and is born again, all that repeats itself. Ego lends its name to the written that *this* does not write, that "I" quasi-writes (Lyotard, 2001, p. 44, emphasis in original).

Coward (1990) has drawn extensive parallels between Derrida's deconstructionism and Indian philosophy. However, most significant here is Benedikter's (2007) recognition of the emergence of a postern modern spirituality whose foundation has been laid, partly unwittingly, by the first generation

of postmodern deconstructionists or post-structuralist philosophers whose influence in the contemporary psychology of religion is not simply silent, but silenced by metaphysical assumptions implicit in mainstream methodologies. Here I simply indicate that while we have no empirical measure yet of state mysticism, we do have empirical reports that individuals can experience an "I" located in awareness itself, detached from any contents of consciousness (Deikman, 1982). Here a *limited* social constructionism and a *limited* deconstruction meet. The contents of consciousness necessarily reveal cultural and linguistic shaping and hence can also be deconstructed. They are most associated with religion, not spirituality. The experience of the no-self, or "I" and its relationship to introvertive mysticism is both a conceptual and empirical issue worthy of further investigation. I suggest that this experience is likely to follow introvertive mystical experiences conceived as trait mysticisms. This empirical proposition can be tested and is consistent with both Almond (1982) and Hood (19989) who argue that extrovertive mysticism is likely to *follow* introvertive mystical experiences and not proceed them as suggested by Stace. However, while both introvertive and extrovertive are trait mysticisms, the experience of the "I" as a conscious witness is a state mysticism.

In conclusion, I want to emphasize that scholars working in a single vineyard cannot gather the ranges of fruits already ripened. Nor can they be collected using one empirical methodology. However, the fruits waiting to be gathered are worth acknowledging. I will end by summarizing them for both state and trait mysticisms.

For state mysticism one cannot simply declare a contentless awareness or PCE to be impossible on Kantian or neo-Kantian grounds. Persons do experience introvertive mystical states; they can be facilitated under experimental and quasi-experimental conditions; their report can be reliably measured; widely differing faith traditions in differing cultural contexts provide contemplative paths to facilitate this state; and finally, these states also occur and are common outside faith traditions, especially among those who identify themselves as spiritual but not religions (Hood, 2003; Spilka et al., 2003, Ch. 10)). Such states are acknowledged by psychoanalysts, religious studies scholars, empirical psychologists, and confessional scholars as I have noted above. Finally, as emphasized by Almond (1982 p. 176) "In so far as we are speaking of contentless mystical experiences, there is unanimity and a universality which transcends the cultural content in which they occur."

For trait mysticism the conclusions are a bit more tentative. We need measures of the report of trait mysticism. But insofar as we have phenomenological reports of this experience from a variety of traditions and from individuals who concur in their experience of no-self, we have evidence that if psychology refuses to empirically investigate the conditions that facilitate this experience, it cannot rest complacent with the hidden philosophical assumption that such experiences cannot exist. The study of such experiences would allow social constructionists, deconstructionists, and cultural psychologists to test the limits of their perspectives against claims to experience that would seem to allow constructionist (and thus deconstructionist) explanations for what is witnessed in consciousness but not for that which witnesses. In this sense, both state and trait mysticism might be linked in ways that would be empirically worth noting and conceptually profound. Are these not the true fruits to be harvested from the conceptual clarification of what is already empirically known about mysticism?

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