



*Tattva*

JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY

## Editorial: Mysticism without Bounds

Indeed Christ University has the unique privilege of bringing out a special edition of *Tattva*, Journal of Philosophy, on the occasion of the International Conference, *Mysticism without Bounds*, jointly organized by Christ University (CU) and Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram (DVK), in collaboration with 'Event Partners' and under the aegis of Dharmaram College (Bangalore, Karnataka, India), from January 05-08, 2011!

'Mysticism' (from the Greek *μυστικός*, *mystikos*) is the pursuit of communion with, identity with, or conscious awareness of an ultimate reality, divinity, spiritual truth, or God, through direct experience, intuition or insight. In fact, there is no one single definition or common description of mysticism, for mysticism is a trans-cultural phenomenon, found in all different religions. Strictly speaking, mysticism is not to be connected with religions *per se*, for its scope is very wide, embracing all realms of human thought. Hence in '*Mysticism without Bounds*' (MwB2011), an attempt is made to explore the "mystical consciousness" from different disciplines, like *religions* (Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Taoism, etc), *sciences* (biology, new physics, neuroscience, and logic), *humanities* (philosophy, theology, spirituality, psychology, etc.), and *art forms* (poetry, music, dance, visual arts, rituals, and occultism).

### Part I

Some of the philosophical questions concerning mystical experiences are: (i) What is their cognitive value, their potential reality-revealing function, if they have one? (ii) Are these experiences only for the person/s, who has/have them, or maybe for us as well? (iii) How to evaluate mystical experiences 'within' a tradition? (iv) How to evaluate mystical experiences independent of ('without') a particular tradition?

It is fairly clear that mystic quests, as traditionally conceived, are 'salvation' trips rather than 'truth' trips. The last thing a mystic himself/herself would want to do is to prove his/her faith/experience, in the sense a philosopher or scientist would understand the word 'prove'. The well-known epithet of Kierkegaard - "Let all the proofs go!" - probably alludes to this conviction of mystics. Mysticism doesn't just

happen inside a (religious) tradition; rather it tries to bring a tradition to perfection in the interior dimension of people and in their lives as a whole. As Gimello points out, the function of Buddhist meditation is to induce an experiential realization of the truths of Buddhism: this enlightenment, liberation, or Nirvāṇa (*An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, 1934, 154). The mystical quest, thus, functions as a privileged test of valuational and empirical adequacy of a (religious) tradition in which it takes place. Mystics 'prove' a religious tradition, not with logical and empirical arguments, but by showing what happens when it is put into practice in a radical way in the inner person. According to Carl Albrecht, genuine mysticism often is accompanied by gratuitous love, which is the goal of all knowledge. This love serves as the only unmistakable criterion for the authenticity of mystical experiences (Cf. H.M.E. Lassalle, *Zen Meditation for Christians*, 1974, 51).

Such criteria do work well 'within' the religious traditions and they would help us to establish the validity of such mystical experiences. But it seems that the determination of the evidential value of mystical experiences requires some ways of evaluating the complex phenomenon of mysticism independent of ('without') religious traditions. Perhaps the most straightforward and the most common way of positing the question is: Can the mystical experience be justified, or grounded? We can approach this question from different perspectives.

First of all, there are philosophers, like Huxley and Clifford, who hold the view that the 'ethics of belief' compels one to withhold acceptance of belief, unless all the evidence points to its truth. For example, Clifford, in his book *Lectures and Essays*, states that "it is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone to believe anything upon insufficient evidence" (1901, 176). Although scientific methodology requires objectivity, we do not apply Clifford's 'ethics of belief' to every aspect of our own lives. There are times in our lives when we allow what we hope and fear to influence what we choose to believe rather than insisting on rigorous proofs. Moreover, it seems meaningless to evaluate mystical experience on the plain of rationality. As William Alston suggests, people who fail to acknowledge the difference between religious experience and sense perception are guilty of "epistemic chauvinism" -- treating criteria developed in one practice as relevant for another different practice ("The autonomy of religious experience," *IJPR*, 1992,67).

Secondly, there are other theologians and philosophers, like Schleiermacher and Pascal, who argue that religion is purely an affair of the 'heart' and not of the 'mind'. Schleiermacher, for instance, holds the view that God is reached through the experience, or "feeling of absolute dependence" (*The Christian Faith*, 1928, 18), which is not at all an aspect of reason. The consciousness of being absolutely dependent, for him, is the same as "being in relation with God," which, he believes,

is an absolute irreducible feature of religion. In fact Schleiermacher has had great influence on the philosophy of religion. More and more people have become convinced that religion has nothing to do with reason, but only with experiences. Such an attitude is devastating and dangerous for various reasons. (i) It bifurcates reason from other human faculties, which otherwise cannot be conceived as watertight compartments; rather any human response (such as mystic experience) should be a total response, involving the cognitive, conative and affective aspects/dimensions of human person. (ii) Religion becomes a totally subjective affair, in which 'anything goes'; that is to say, religion becomes 'a matter of taste', not different from liking or disliking, for instance, a person or thing.

Thirdly, there are scientists, philosophers and theologians, who like to shun both 'epistemic chauvinism' and 'religious subjectivism' as extreme views, and emphasize complementarity between science and religion. Science and religion are conceived as two faces of one project: "Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind" (Albert Einstein, *Out of My Later Years*, 51). As two faces of one project, science and religion are indeed complementary, and both are necessary and dependent on each other in many ways. Religion depends on science in order to know the ever changing factual scenario of which it has to make sense; whereas science depends on the conceptual models of religion or view of life in order to determine its own meaning. The necessity of interdependence and complementarity is amply brought out by Galileo: "The Bible shows the way to go to Heaven, not the way the heavens go" (Cf. Rogers, *Aspects of Western Civilization*, 1998, 44), and Bruegger: "Science shows us the way the heavens go, but not the way to go to Heaven" ("Science, Religion and Agency of God," 1999, 19). "*Mysticism without Bounds*" thus explores this *interdisciplinarity* - as a way of crossing-over boundaries - that mysticism makes possible and concrete; and helps us to discover those points of convergence that exist among the various forms of consciousness, scattered among the world's religions, theologies, sciences, philosophies, and various art forms.

In fact, differing *religious and theological traditions* have described this fundamental mystical experience in different ways. However, at the core of all the major religions and theologies, there exists a current of mystical teachings which, when compared to one another, exhibit a startling degree of cross-cultural agreement. Consider some of the mystical utterances: *Puruṣa eva idam sarvam* (Rg-Veda); "*Sarvam khalu idam Brahma*" (Ch. Upanishad); "Flight of the Alone to the Alone" (Plotinus); "*Nos totaliter convertimur in Deum*" (Meister Eckhart); "It is the vision of the One" (Henry Suso). All these mystical hymns/songs express the intuitive vision or direct experience of the 'One' as the inner reality of all – an ego-transcending and world-transcending experience.

Sciences and mysticism appear antithetical, but we find in mysticism a type of spirituality which has close epistemological parallels to science. Studies in several areas of science address the same issues that concern the mystics, and while science, like quantum physics, does not 'prove' mystical teachings, the fundamental reality which it describes is not incompatible with the fundamental reality testified to by the mystics. Apart from some branches of science, various *philosophical disciplines*, such as ontology (which is concerned with the nature of reality), epistemology (which deals with the nature, acquisition and limitations of knowledge) and phenomenology (which insists on the first-person, experiential stance that mystics try to achieve) would appear to relate to various aspects of mystical consciousness, although they have not yet been correlated in a systematic way.

Many *art forms* not only can be ways for mystics to communicate what they are trying to teach, but they have also helped shape the minds and imaginations of the mystics. Poetry, music, dance, visual arts and rituals have emerged as fascinating ways to connect the undifferentiated states of oneness, non-duality, and the differentiated states of diversity and multiplicity. Cohen, for instance, explains how the act of *poïesis* – especially music – helps us overcome all boundaries. Similarly, art's function to represent reality as matter-spirit continuum, human icons as sacred stories, music as an agent of transcendence, poetry as symbolic and suggestive method of communication and communion with the divine, and sacraments as ways of uniting humanity with God are some of the major themes in the New Age Spirituality.

The discovery of such points of convergence among religions, sciences, philosophies and arts on 'mysticism' is intellectually very exciting; and it holds out the possibility of creating a *new worldview* in which these disciplines would be seen as distinct yet complementary ways of exploring the same underlying reality. This new world view can create an awareness of the essential *unity of humanity*, and work for the welfare of all, irrespective of social, political and religious differences.

## Part II

True to the spirit of interdisciplinarity, which the phenomenon of mysticism makes possible, this volume of *Tattva, Journal of Philosophy*, contains seven original and scholarly papers from different streams of thought. Dr. Bernard McGinn, in his "*Mysticism: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow*" highlights the way in which mysticism both as a phenomenon *within* religion and as an aspect of religion always has had a temporal dimension, and has served to revitalize tradition - to challenge and renew rather than reject. With regard to history, the essay investigates how mysticism as an aspect of religion has enjoyed a surprising historical development - a before,

a now, and a future. Even as a phenomenon *within* religion, some forms of mysticism may aim for an escape from time, but, as Dr. McGinn argues, the realization of this goal is itself realized only *through* time, that is to say, it is a temporal process, involving a long period of preparation, a moment of realization, and finally an often lifelong commitment to make the encounter(s) with God effective in the life of the mystic and those whom he or she encounters.

In the paper "*The Mystical Strategies of St. Teresa of Avila*," Dr. Peter Tyler argues that in Teresa's dialectic between saying and showing, she moves from the intellectual book-learning of the *letrados* (literally: 'learned men of letters') to the 'vision' of 'what the Lord presents' 'in His love'. In his view, the context of Teresa's circumstances, especially inquisitorial pressure as a result of traces of *alumbradismo*, her status as a woman and her interest in mystical prayer would mean that her texts have to employ a particular 'mystical strategy' which is termed as *theologia mystica*, and he concentrates on six 'strategies of unknowing': direction of locution, contradiction, humility, disorientation, humour and ordinary speech.

Dr. Una Agnew, in her "*The Sacred in Creation and the God-intoxicated Celt*" examines the phenomenon of what Macquarrie calls 'the God-intoxication' of the Celt and investigates something of its mystical influence in some aspects of Celtic Christianity. Inspired by a foundational Creation Myth, Sean Ó Duinn refers to *ner*, a primordial sacredness that invades the universe with fecundity and dynamic energy. Beginning in time as an initial undifferentiated source of power, this energy becomes personalized in the form of gods and goddesses, and these gods or goddesses become Christianized so that their kingdoms persist as 'thin places' permeable to transcendent deity. A Christian prayer to the One true God of all the elements demonstrates a conversion from a deep rooted reverence of pagan energy to a fully personalized Christian God. Since similar prayer formulae are found in Hindu Scriptures and the Celtic *lorica*, she draws an interesting parallel, which would form the basis for challenging Hindu/Celtic discussion.

"*Contemporary Sciences offer Insights for 'Cosmo-theandric' Mysticism*" is indeed a grand 'offer' of late Dr. Thomas Manikkam to the MwB2011 International Conference. Based on the scientific observations of Edwin Hubble and supported by Albert Einstein, Stephen Hawking and others, Dr. Manikkam welcomes the scientific cosmology of the "Expanding Universe" and interprets this expanse of the universe as set in motion by a 'designer' God who governs it with immanently interacting laws of rhythmic motions, and as such this universe indicates intrinsic values for all subsystems, including our planet Earth together with all its living and non-living components. This interpretation of the universe is also corroborated, on the one hand, by the findings of biological and ecological world views emerging

from *Quantum physics* and, on the other, by psychologists like G. Bateson, who read our mental process as always a sequence of interactions between the various elements of reflection and awareness, what is generally called "Human Consciousness," leading to the Upanishadic understanding of Energy, as Consciousness of God, or the unbroken Ultimate Reality; from that One is born life, mind and the worlds.

The main objectives of Dr. Jonathan Weidenbaum's paper "*Between Mysticism and Medical Materialism*" are (i) to outline the relevance of James and Dewey for the increasingly popular strategy of identifying the numinous with the neurological; and (ii) to examine a more far-reaching question: 'If mystical experiences cannot be fully accounted for through brain science, can they be employed as further evidence for the existence of God, or some other version of the divine'? In his paper Dr. Weidenbaum seeks to demonstrate that a re-discovery of the reflections of James and Dewey on these topics not only contributes to one of the most vital and contemporary debates in the philosophy of religion, but serves to illuminate the very nature of spirituality.

In "*Mystics are beyond Religions*," His Holiness Swami Paramananda captures the very essence of 'mysticism'. Mysticism, for Swamiji, is the experience of the mystic and a mystic is an individual whose being has merged into the truth that he calls 'the Mystery'. Enlightenment or consciousness of 'the Mystery' is attained by using certain means, which later evolve into religions. All the methods, parables, stories, koans and scriptures used by prophets and enlightened beings are only means to help the seeker; and in fact different masters use different devices according to the evolution of the people, time, circumstances and environment where they incarnate. The paths may be different but the destination, Swamiji argues, is one – merging with the Whole.

In his paper, "*William Blake's Mystical Visions and the Science of Psychology*," Dr. Patrick Menneteau presents the components of the mystical visions of the eighteenth-century English poet William Blake as they can be empirically observed in his poetry and illustrations, in the light of Carl Gustav Jung's hypothesis of the collective subconscious, which is characterized as interdisciplinary: empiricism, phenomenology, mythology, occultism, mysticism, and alchemy as parts of his psychological research. Dr Menneteau takes up this study and research along the following lines: (i) some parallels between Jung and mysticism, (ii) mysticism without bounds: a possibility or a danger: the psychological dimension of mysticism and (iii) the mystical dimension of psychology, 'mysticism unbound'.

Let these scholarly and challenging papers from different streams of thought create an awareness among the inquisitive readers of the need of overcoming the 'bounds' of individuation and discovering the 'unity' of self, which the international conference 'Mysticism without Bounds' aims at: "One who knows only the differentiated experience [...] comes to know an undifferentiated experience," the experience of "the primal self, *das Urself*" (Martin Buber, 1909). The unity of self is often conceived and interpreted in terms of 'God-experience' with its basis within non-phenomenal self, and a unity that promises the unity of all experiences within the phenomenal world.

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