

## CROSSING THE THRESHOLD OF REASON

Kurian Perumpallikunnel\*

### 1. Introduction

Among the many definitions through which human beings tried to assess themselves, "*homo animal rationale est*" (man is a rational animal) stands out prominently. The rationale behind naming the currently thriving human race, *homo sapiens*,<sup>1</sup> may also be the same, i.e., our pride in being rational. If it is the reasoning capability that singles out our human race from the rest of the animal kingdom, then the absence of it, or a refusal to keep it operational, may have a degenerative effect on our human nature and essence. Being 'rational', human beings show an innate tendency to search for reasons behind everything they happen to experience. That may be why followers of every religion and "ism" are trying to prove the rationality behind their stance. However, we know that reasoning comes only after experiencing. Without experience, there is no room for reasoning. Mystics often try to explain their experiences logically and scientifically, while lamenting that their experiences are incommunicable. acclamation

### 2. Some Radical Questions Concerning Scientific Rationality

This naturally gives rise to a few logical questions: Should everything be proved rationally and scientifically in order to be acceptable? What is it

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\*Dr. Kurian Perumpallikunnel cmi, the dean of studies at St. Peter's Seminary, Pretoria, S.A., holds a Ph.D. in Spiritual Theology from Teresianum, Rome. He is the author of many books and articles, among which his *Ascent to Nothingness* (London: St. Paul's) has received critics' acclaim.

<sup>1</sup>*Homo sapiens*, "man the wise," is the only currently existing species of the genus *Homo*. They are distinguished from other animals and from earlier hominid species by characteristics such as bipedal stance and gait, brain capacity averaging about 1,350 cubic cm (82 cubic inches), high forehead, small teeth and jaw, defined chin, construction and use of tools, and ability to make use of symbols such as language and writing. Their immediate ancestor, *Homo erectus*, possessed some of these features but taken together they are characteristic only of *Homo sapiens*.

that makes science rational? Do the intellectual procedures that scientists employ to investigate and explain natural phenomena, and the tools they use, have definite and objective intellectual merits that make their adoption rationally prudent, wise, and obligatory? In answering these questions, some hold the view that the rationality of scientific procedures depends solely on the formal validity or logicity of scientific arguments, which is validated by the final outcome. Then another question arises: What about the roles played by intuition, guesswork, and chance in scientific investigation? It is obvious that such things often contributed significantly towards scientists' intellectual creativity other than mere rationality. People like Michael Polanyi,<sup>2</sup> a Hungarian scientist and philosopher, argue that scientists are sleepwalkers whose creative insight guides them to intellectual destinations that they could never clearly see or state beforehand. An overemphasis on logic and rationality, they claim, would take away the freedom and destroy the creative fertility of a scientist. An excessive preoccupation with the rationality of scientific procedures may clip the wings of imagination and would confine scientists to stereotyped procedures. According to this view, rather than subjecting one's scientific intuition to the barren intellectual accountancy one should embrace a romantic anti-rationalism. However, these procedures of intellectual investigation in science and mathematics are not essentially non-rational. Chance, for instance, may help to bring relevant material to a scientist's attention. Yet, one should be aware that chances are nothing but favours received by a prepared mind. Similarly, only a person with a well trained mind can afford to give free rein to his intellectual imagination because he will be best qualified to appraise the rational context of his current problems and to recognize significant clues, promising new lines of analysis, or possible answers to his questions, as they come to mind.

### 2.1. A Paradigm Shift

Attitudes toward mysticism have been considerably modified since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a result of the awareness of subliminal consciousness, extrasensory perceptions, and, above all, of an evolutionary

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<sup>2</sup>Michael Polanyi's theory of personal knowledge, with its levels of being and of knowing, holds the opinion that none of those levels of knowledge is wholly intelligible to those that they describe. M. Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post Critical Philosophy*, Chicago: University of Chicago, 1974, 7.

perspective. Taking the lead from Darwin, Teilhard de Chardin<sup>3</sup> proposed that evolution does have a definite direction – from less to more organised forms of life and consciousness. He assumed that if evolution had been directed by blind chance only, then life would not have been able to develop in one direction of highly organised growth. There must be something more than “blind” chance. Consciousness would not have been able to ‘appear’ if it had not already been present in previous “animate” and “inanimate” forms of reality. Therefore, according to Chardin, it is reasonable to presume that consciousness directs the whole process of evolution from the very beginning. Subsequently, Chardin projected the process of evolution into the future. He predicted that all the evolutionary processes would meet in an omega-point – God, where the entire creation could find unity and oneness. This makes God the ultimate (the first and the last) reason of evolution, not simply to be an active reason or alpha-point. Thus, according to Chardin, *Homo sapiens* resemble caterpillars on the eve of their turning into butterflies – into beings of totally different nature or “consciousness” (*cosmic consciousness*).<sup>4</sup>

The 20<sup>th</sup> century crises and the mass media suggest the possibility of a mysticism, brought up-to-date, which would serve ‘the Creative Intention’ that past ages called God. Thus, we notice a renewed interest in mysticism and even a mood of expectancy similar to that, which marked its role in previous eras. Such a mood stems in part from the feeling of alienation that many individuals experience in the modern world. Put down as a religion of the elite, mysticism is said by many to belong to everybody, though few use it. Among the proponents of New Age spirituality, mysticism turned out to be one of the most important topics of concern. “The Christian of the future will be a mystic or he/she will not exist at all... By mysticism we mean a genuine experience of God emerging from the very heart of our existence.” This quotation, ascribed to

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<sup>3</sup>Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), French philosopher and palaeontologist is known for his theory that man is evolving, mentally and socially. See T. de Chardin, *Christianity and Evolution*, New York: Harvest Books, 1974, 173ff.

<sup>4</sup>Teilhard wrote his two major works in this area, *Le Milieu divin* (1957; *The Divine Milieu*) and *Le Phénomène humain* (1955; *The Phenomenon of Man*), in the 1920s and 1930s, but their publication was forbidden by the Jesuit order during his lifetime. Among his other writings are collections of philosophical essays, such as *L'Apparition de l'homme* (1956; *The Appearance of Man*), *La Vision du passé* (1957; *The Vision of the Past*), and *Science et Christ* (1965; *Science and Christ*).

an eminent Catholic theologian, Karl Rahner, has also played a part in arousing a renewed desire among Christians to rediscover mysticism and to keep up with the signs of the times.

However, in contrast to this growing trend, there exists another group among scientific rationalists, which tends to discard mysticism, religion, and even philosophy as outdated vestigial appendages of the evolutionary past. They divide human history broadly into three periods based on the levels of human understanding and intellectual maturity. The first phase, age of religions and mystics, was that of superstitions and beliefs. The second, age of philosophy, was a period of scholarly inquisitiveness and rational investigation. The third and the final phase of human developmental history – age of science – is that of painstaking analysis and conclusive discoveries. Those diehard rationalists who elevated reason to an idolatrous supreme authority refused to validate the claims of human experience and its encounter with extrasensory realities unless and until a scientific rational process verified and endorsed them. There was also a belief among the general public that mysticism was associated with parapsychology, spiritualism, clairvoyance, and mumbo jumbo. The conservative rationalists, who brand mysticism as inimical to reason and anti-progressive, insist that mystical experience should meet scientific standards in order to rid society of enthusiasm and excess. However, there is a real danger that this obsessive attitude of the defenders of scientific rightness could seriously hamper human creativity, freedom, and intuition. This article is an attempt to examine whether, or to what extent, we are entitled to cross the threshold of reason.

In the process, we shall examine the standpoints of mystics as well as the merits and the limits of reason, and see how secure we are to cross the threshold of reason to tread the fairytale land of mystics. It is evident that experience cannot be self-authenticating. As it is prone to error and misunderstanding, experience ought to have a socially validating dimension. A sincere effort to give an account of all the data of experience without regulating or distorting it results in an ongoing process of communication, which results in interaction and comparison of judgements.<sup>5</sup> Reasoning in a scientific sense is the search for the premises of the demonstration that will prove and, thus, explain a certain 'fact'.

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<sup>5</sup>E. T. Long, "Quest for Transcendence," *The Review of Metaphysics* 205: 52, 1 (September 1998), 6.

Scientific analysis is the progression from the knowledge of a 'mere fact' to the knowledge of the 'reasoned fact'.

## 2.2. Potentials of Human Brain

Modern brain research has disclosed astonishing new facts about the functioning of human brain.<sup>6</sup> The two cerebral hemispheres, though linked to each other in normal people by a thin strand of tissues, pursue markedly different specializations in their modes of cognition. Though oversimplified, it is roughly correct to say that one hemisphere is predominantly analytical and the other "synthetical" (holistic, intuitive). These and other modern findings in brain research have made untenable the claim of some philosophical ultra-rationalists who deny that a thing is not worth knowing unless it can be known through analysis. Scientific progress is now understood to depend partly upon those spontaneous flashes of insight that bestow a whole vision of reality upon the well-prepared mind. Einstein himself is known for having, in his most creative moments, resorted to mental images rather than Aristotelian logic. Taking into account such, not just convincing but overwhelming, examples can we still maintain that the analytical is the only valid mode of cognition? Can we still assert that mathematics and scientific theory exclude paradoxical descriptions of the world and the mind?

Human reason is a faculty of the mind that cannot help but strive to attain access to something unconditional and absolute that is inaccessible to the modern, critical intellect. The human quest for answers is not satisfied with learning the real cause of things within the world. The search continues for the real cause of the world as a whole, not just what it is, but even more so, why is it at all?<sup>7</sup> In other words, mind has a tendency to extend its search beyond physics. As Kant points out, "in all men ... there has always existed and will *always* continue to exist some kind of

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<sup>6</sup>J. Shreeve, "Beyond the Brain," *National Geographic Magazine*, March 2005, 2-31.

<sup>7</sup>Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. R. McKeon, New York: Random House, 1941, 1.1.980a1-1.3.983b1; Plato, *Symposium*, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. E. Hamilton and H. Cairns, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961, 211d and following; Plato, *Republic*, trans. A. Bloom, New York: Basic Books, 1969, 485b and following.

metaphysics.”<sup>8</sup> For Kant, every question raised by a human being implies that person’s tacit longing to unlock the secrets of the universe in its totality. In other words, Kant maintains that man’s occupation with physics is, in fact, triggered by his preoccupation with metaphysics. However, he concludes that since all the objects available to our reason are within the conditioned world, humanity has to endure a life of paradox – on the one hand, assuming that we will one day be able to grasp the essence of the universe in its unconditional totality and, on the other, never be able to reach that goal, i.e., we are destined to live a life of make-believe! In other words, we have to learn to live a life of *fürwahrhalten* (holding-to-be-true),<sup>9</sup> a life subjectively grounded on faith and hope. This subjective theology of Kant made him say, “every human being makes a God for himself ... in order to honour Him *the one who created him*.”<sup>10</sup> Not surprisingly, this solution found few adherents. His disciple Schelling alternatively tried to promote the concept of a primordial, prereflective, and unconditional “absolute I” which was gradually and progressively self-disclosing in the course of history. This ‘I’ exposed the possibility of a purely intuitive knowledge, besides the knowledge acquired by means of the discursive intellect.<sup>11</sup> Hegel, in his turn, tried to quench the human thirst for reason by proposing and promoting a kind of metaphysical amnesia. His was an attempt to confine human reason to the concerns of the immanent world. However, his philosophy was ill-equipped to answer the ultimate question, “why is there anything at all, why is there not nothing?”

### 2.3. Head versus Heart

Is it rationally possible to explain and comprehend mysticism? Is “Rationality of Mysticism” a logical concept? Is it necessary to maintain an opposition between the rational way of thinking and intuitive experience culminating in what the mystics have tried to express? Can

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<sup>8</sup>Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. N. K. Smith, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1965, B21.

<sup>9</sup>Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A820/B848 and following.

<sup>10</sup>Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason and Other Writings*, ed. A. Wood and G. di Giovanni, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 165.

<sup>11</sup>F. W. J. Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, trans. A. Bowie Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, 152-3.

they both have their place and coexist? Is the sharp dichotomy between scientific and mystical knowledge real? Does it in anyway enhance and augment human progress? These questions could be addressed from a philosopher's/scientist's point of view or from that of a mystic. From the point of view of a philosopher/scientist, any experience, which is not reflected upon or proved, is worthless and subhuman. From the viewpoint of mystics, philosophers/scientists are like chemists who have never tasted honey but go on analysing it in their laboratory to understand it! According to mystics, a librarian may be capable of categorizing and systematically displaying the books of an author, yet he may not have any idea of the agony and the ecstasy the author experienced during their creation.

Obviously, in this setting, making an effort to explain the rationality of mysticism is almost like trying to solve the impossible riddle of "Which comes first, chicken or egg?" The response will correspond to the predisposition of the respondent. Reason or rationality often reminds us of systematic intellectual activity and logical inference, which, as noted earlier, is one of the essential faculties that makes us truly human, and is often associated with our head. Feelings, emotions, experiences, sensations, perceptions, etc., are all attributed to the heart, which connects us to realities, both seen and unseen, and enables us to apprehend intuitively the fundamental truths regarding reality. In both secular and religious senses reason is often in opposition to sensations and feelings. There is a belief that the 'reasoning head' often fails to understand the 'experiencing heart' – a basic inner conflict! 'Head' has a tendency to shun everything that lacks logic as 'irrational,' while 'heart' has its own feeling and conclusions based on experiences and intuitions, which transcend intellectual reasoning that is merely based on known premises. Now, let us examine how far we can support and sustain this conflict and duality within ourselves if such a situation truly exists.

### **3. What is Mysticism and Is It Probable?**

The word mystic is from the Greek *mysis*, meaning, closing of the eyes. To define is to limit, and no single definition will cover every aspect of mysticism. Some object to the word itself and hold that 'enlightenment', 'illumination', or 'awakening' might be better. Dictionaries define mysticism as follows: (1) The doctrine or belief that direct knowledge of God, of spiritual truth, etc., is attainable through immediate intuition or

insight and in a way differing from ordinary sense perception or the use of logical reason; as, nature *mysticism*. (2) Any type of theory asserting the possibility of attaining knowledge or power through faith or spiritual insight. (3) Vague speculation. These definitions suggest that there is a kind of knowledge that is derived from *experiential* awareness of a transcendental reality. Mysticism is, thus, a belief in a third kind of knowledge, the other two being sense knowledge and knowledge by inference.<sup>12</sup>

An urge for transcendence seems to be innate to human nature.<sup>13</sup> The word transcendence means to go beyond or above a limit of some kind, to surpass or excel. Our experience of ourselves as beings-in-the-world is very much interrelated to other beings and things. We are aware of ourselves not as fixed essences, but as unfinished, in the process of becoming. As Heidegger portrays, we human beings are both fact and possibility. Our being is something to be achieved; it is something to be gained or lost. We are beings on the way, transcending boundaries, moving towards new possibilities.<sup>14</sup> In that case, where does mysticism fit in? Is it opening new horizons for the human potential?

### 3.1. Mysticism: A Search into the Unknown

Though mysticism may be associated with religion, it need not be. Mysticism has been the core of Hinduism and Buddhism; however, it has been little more than a minor strand, and frequently, a disturbing element, in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Though it validates religion, mysticism also tends to escape the fetters of organized religion. Mysticism shares a common world with magic, prayer, worship, religion, metaphysics, and even science. It may not always be easy to distinguish mysticism from these, but for its different approach and emphasis. Elements of magic, psychism, voices and visions, and powers of the occult (*siddhis*) are not of interest to genuine mystics, who often warn against the dangers associated with them. Prayer and worship may form part of mysticism, but they are viewed as means and not as essence. In a religious

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<sup>12</sup>See, [www.thefreedictionary.com/mysticism](http://www.thefreedictionary.com/mysticism) and <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mysticism>.

<sup>13</sup>J. Chu, B. Liston, *et al.*, "The God Gene," *Time*, November 29, 2004, 48-56.

<sup>14</sup>Long, "Quest for Transcendence," 7.



sense, mysticism is the result of aspiration for or encounter with the unknown that lies beyond appearances.

We have already noted that the goal of mysticism is either union with the divine or liberation from *avidya* (ignorance of the true nature of reality). The apparent tendency of mystics for self-negation is explained as part of a psychological process or strategy that does not really deny the person but opens one's eyes towards a wider perspective of reality. In spite of a lunatic fringe, more advanced proponents of mysticism claim that it can satisfy rationality. There is obviously something non-mental, non-logical, paradoxical, and unpredictable about mystical phenomena, but it is not, therefore, irrational or antirational. If there is a mystery about mystical experience, it is something it shares with life and consciousness. Mysticism is, in fact, a deep search into the unknown. It indicates that man is a complex reality.

### 3.2. Characteristic Features of Mystical Experience

Mystical experience does exist. It has to do with a shift in the state of consciousness, evidently not just in the emotional but also in the cognitive dimension, like a shift from sleep to wakefulness (which is, in fact, a frequent metaphor in mystical literature). Mystics in different places, times, or traditions could be broadly divided into two groups based on their interpretation of their own mystical experiences. They have attributed the *source* of their mystical experience to either God, or the self, and similarly, claim to have achieved *knowledge* of either God, or the self. William James in his classic 1902 work *The Varieties of Religious Experience* defines mysticism as an experience that meets four criteria: *It is ineffable*, that is, difficult or impossible to convey in ordinary language. *It is noetic*, meaning that it seems to reveal deep, profound truth. *It is transient*, rarely lasting for more than an hour or so. Moreover, *it is a passive state*, in which one feels gripped by a force much greater than oneself. Two qualities that James did not include in his formal list but mentioned elsewhere by him are *blissfulness* and *Cosmic Consciousness*.<sup>15</sup> Mystical experiences are not just transient flashes of insight but are capable of causing a permanent shift in the consciousness of an individual. As a result, such a person may feel not passive but powerful, and the

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<sup>15</sup>W. James. "The Varieties of Religious Experience," Elibron Classics Series, New York: Adamant Media Corporation, 2005, 60ff.

power seems to come from inside rather than outside. While some mystics feel a blissful unity with all things, others perceive absolute reality as terrifyingly alien. Certain mystics describe their experience as a form of ecstatic forgetfulness or self-dissolution rather than of knowing. The following are the chief characteristics of mystical experience: experience of unity, intense affective experience, time/space distortion, noetic quality, ineffability, and a sense of holiness or sacredness. In addition, the mystics sometimes include the concept of universality in their descriptions.

### 3.3. Traditional Stages along the Mystical Path

Mysticism can refer to a way of life in which this knowledge is found. As such, it has classically been described as having various stages. The first of these was frequently called the 'purgative' way, i.e., one characterized by persons' turning away from undesirable passions in repentance and by active practice of virtues and asceticism. By asceticism here is meant effort to act counter to the roots of enslaving attachments and, thus, to be more in control of such desires or passions that lead to bondage. The second was called the 'illuminative' way, a stage in which person's practice of the virtues was more prominent than the turning away from addictions; their prayer was characterized by a greater simplicity and affectivity and the beginnings of mystical prayer, and they experienced what John of the Cross calls "the night of the senses,"<sup>16</sup> that is, a passive purification of the heart operating beyond that which they were able to achieve, under grace, by their active efforts. The third stage was called the 'unitive' way and was characterized by the experience of profounder purifications, both internal and external, "the night of the spirit," a prayer that was more passive or subject to God's presence, even though experienced in the darkness of faith. The union experienced by such mystics was described at times as 'mystical marriage'.

### 3.4. Various Types of Mystical Experiences

There are at least three major forms of mystical experience that cannot be identified with one another: The first is 'cosmic consciousness', found preeminently in Hinduism. According to this type of mysticism, the absolute is not only transcendent but also immanent, all in one. To come to this realization means to come to a living awareness that *Ātman* (the

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<sup>16</sup>A. Kurian, *Ascent to Nothingness*, London: St. Paul's, 2000, 115-177.

individual self) is *Brahman* (cosmic self). As rivers merge into the ocean, leaving behind their *nāma rūpa* (name and form), *ātman* has to reach its home. What is intended here is not a *personal* union in which both the individual self and the Absolute retain their own identities. Another type of mysticism is a 'personal union' mysticism, characteristic of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. The third type is the 'mysticism of nothingness' or 'silence', primarily found in Buddhism. This releases a person from the possibility of an endless series of deaths and rebirths through obstructing the cause and, thus, cancelling the effect. It is called *nirvāṇa*, the 'extinguishing' of the flame of desire.

Certain other types of mysticism, however, would seem to strive toward a naked encounter with the 'Whole', without and beyond symbols. Of this kind of direct apprehension of the absolute, introvertive mysticism offers examples from different times and traditions. Instead of looking out, the gaze turns inward, toward the unchanging, the undifferentiated *advaita* – one without a second. The process by which this state is attained is through a blotting out or suppression of all physical sensations – indeed, of the entire empirical content of consciousness. *Cittavṛttinirōdha* (stopping of mind fluctuation) was how Patañjali described it. The model of introvertive mysticism comes from the Maṇḍokya Upaniṣad, which insists on the existence of a fourth state of mind (*tūrya*), which can receive knowledge that "is not the knowledge of the senses, nor is it relative knowledge, nor yet inferential knowledge. Beyond the senses, beyond the understanding, beyond all expression is the *Fourth*. It is pure unitary consciousness wherein [all] awareness of the world and of multiplicity is completely obliterated. It is ineffable peace. It is the supreme good. It is One without a second. It is the Self" (Ma. Up. 7).

Mysticism, which seeks unity, though admits wide variations, falls into recognizable categories: mild and extreme, extrovertive and introvertive, and theistic and non-theistic, etc. Another well-known category – corresponding to the faculties of thinking, feeling, and willing – employs the Indian formula, the respective ways of knowledge (*jñāna*, head), devotion (*bhakti*, heart), and works (*karma*, hand). Claims have been made on behalf of each, though advanced mystics have tried to accord to each its place and to arrive at a synthesis as can be seen in the *Bhagavadgīta*. Depending on the attraction the intellectual/contemplative type tries to reach the Highest, the One, or the Godhead behind God. In

their approach toward the supreme identity, there is a tendency to be cautious of multiplicity. For the emotional type of person, there is the mysticism of love and devotion. The theistic attitude, or devotional mysticism, depends upon mutual attraction. The path of devotion includes the rituals of prayer, worship, and adoration.

Christianity has produced an array of great mystics like Gregory of Nyssa (d. 395), Augustine (d. 430), Bernard of Clairvaux (d. 1153), Meister Eckhart (d. 1329), Teresa of Avila (d. 1582), John of the Cross (d. 1591), and others. Two distinct trends or traditions can be distinguished in their writings: the *kataphatic* and the *apophatic*. These two traditions are represented by Augustine and Gregory, respectively, though this distinction is not absolute, but only a matter of emphasis. The one describes this knowledge more in terms of light, while the latter describes it more in terms of darkness and 'not-knowing'. The word 'darkness' is among the commonest of all metaphors used by mystics.<sup>17</sup> This was the symbol by which they contrived to express the human inability to know God neither by sight nor by any other cognitive faculty. Dionysius the Areopagite, in his *Mystical Theology*, writes: "I pray we could come to this darkness so far above light! If only we lacked sight and knowledge so as to see, so as to know, unseeing and unknowing, that which lies beyond all vision and knowledge."<sup>18</sup> According to Dionysius, all beliefs about God are empty. With respect to God, there is neither knowledge, nor belief, nor description. However, the metaphor of 'darkness' does not refer to God but to mystical experience. It is a knowledge that is more the fruit of desire and love than intellectual study.

The proponents of non-theistic mysticism do not even admit the existence of a Supreme Being. According to them, verbal descriptions and analyses must all be tested against direct experience. Much of Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophy is made up of a closely reasoned criticism of the ways in which unaided reason can mislead us. The position which is finally taken denies that even Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophy (or, the Buddha, for that matter) can make any statements that are true in an absolute sense, that is, without regard to the context of the discussion or presuppositions of the speaker. The Absolute is for *experiencing* and *living*

<sup>17</sup>W. T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, London: Macmillan, 1960, 300.

<sup>18</sup>Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid, New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1987, 138.

an order of reality prior to talking, analyzing, and making interpretations. Reason has its proper place and, rightly used, it is a magnificent tool. But each mystical practitioner must understand that to *talk about* is not the same as to *be*, and that the analytical, discriminating function of the mind may actually inhibit his/her direct experience of the source of existence deep within him/herself. We find in non-theistic mysticism a deep respect for reason, coupled with a refusal to acknowledge it as omnipotent. Non-theistic mystics seem to agree that there is some realm of human experience, which transcends or underlies rationality.

### 3.5. Mystics and Their Viewpoints

Thomas Aquinas, the author of *Summa theologica*, after experiencing a supernatural vision by the end of his extraordinary intellectual career, is reported to have said: "All I have written is naught."<sup>19</sup> Even if it is difficult to describe visions and systematize them into a format, the direction in which mysticism points is clear: *relational transcendence*. There are numerous experiences that cannot be subjected to the present yardsticks of scientific scrutiny. In fact, science is lacking not only the proper scale to measure but also the method to detect the presence of such experiences because they are subjective and do not yield to objective inspection. Love, pain, feelings of awe, reverence, experiences of visions, voices, messages, guidance, as though from external or supernatural sources, experiences of events that seem miraculous or paranormal, experiences of supernatural influences, out-of-body experiences, mystical experiences of absolute unity, or nothingness, or non-duality, transpersonal experiences, experiences of awakening to the inner light, etc., are some such cases.

This prompts a logical question: Why is science pushing for impersonalism? Does everything have to be objective to be scientifically true? Do subjective experiences have any scientific value? Where does the problem lie? Is it with the subjective experiences or with the inability of science to measure subjective experience? Should we deny the existence of something just because we do not possess the proper scale to measure it? Suppose, at a later stage, science acquires the ability to measure the cerebral activities accurately and based on that data manages to decipher and reconstruct the feelings, emotions, and experiences that are going on

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<sup>19</sup>Cited in Boyle, Marjorie O'Rourke "Chaff: Thomas Aquinas's Repudiation of His *Opera omnia*," *New Literary History* 28, 2 (Spring 1997), 383-399.

within an individual's mind, what will happen to all the present denials of the scientists?

#### **4. Scientific Rationality: Recent Approaches**

##### **4.1. The New Age Theory of Reality as 'Chaotic'**

Much has been written in recent years to the effect that science, in its upper reaches, merges into mysticism. It is often said, by certain New Age physicists and astronomers, that the traditional premises about order in nature, and the goal of objectivity in knowledge, are no longer justified. Proponents of this view argue that twentieth century advances in physics have demonstrated reality as 'chaotic' in its ultimate 'essence'. According to them, this supports the conclusion of arbitrariness at the very core of existence: a scientifically unpredictable interference by some transcendental 'holistic' force or Mind. Moreover, they would have us believe that the principle of indeterminacy necessarily implies a human species reflecting just such irrationality in its being. Moreover, they now add, the new chaos theory confirms what the mystics have been saying all along. Nature, at all levels, is without internal order. All is mystery, it seems, and we must seek new, more appropriate ways of tapping into the Creative Oneness above and beyond the chaos of 'knowable' experience. We are told that we must learn to *believe* in the 'unknowable', even though we can never know it in any scientifically predictable sense. Moreover, we must accept the 'fact' that observation and analysis are but crude and limited tools in our search for the mystical truth of transcendent chaos.

The foregoing has profound implications for the way we think about reality and about our existence within it. Perhaps, say many ordinary people, we should be listening to the mystics in our midst, if we want to understand our surroundings, and ourselves, rather than to those who profess to rely on reason and evidence. At the very least, according to this argument, we should be prepared to grant equal status to *both* the mystical and the scientific, especially in the life sciences. To do less is to reveal an arrogance and intolerance totally out of keeping with ideals of freedom and pluralism in the arena of ideas. The findings of the scientists are an indication of the possible limitations of the current paradigm of physics, of the conceptual and technical tools that, until now, have proven so successful in measuring relations in inorganic nature. They are not indications of the limitation of science itself!

#### 4.2. Rationality and the Points of View of Philosophers and Scientists

Philosophers hold the view that the world is fully intelligible in its own terms. Scientists believe that everything is, in principle, conceptualizable and has no direct reference or concern for human welfare. However, they believe that humanity can solve its problems on its own. Among the philosophers themselves, we notice two groups of opposing points of view: the empiricists and the rationalists. Empiricists hold the view that sense experience is the sole source of knowledge, while rationalists hold the view that reason is the source of true knowledge. Scientists draw from both these views and base themselves on objective proofs that can be verified and repeated.

If the claims to extrasensory knowledge were true, from where would it have originated? Is it of internal origin, or is it from an external source? Are there any things such as innate ideas? The human brain is predisposed to acquire knowledge far beyond the ability of other animals. The human brain develops physically to contain many of the structural features that enable it to accommodate 'knowledge' in anticipation. This would lead us to assume that the brain encodes 'innate knowledge' of the world that was never learned through contact with the world. Does this open the door for mystical views? Even if such 'innate knowledge' exists (and there is as yet little proof that it does), it would only be yet another indirect way in which humans learn about the physical world. There is nothing exceptionally remarkable about that. Collecting information from people, referring to books, etc., are such indirect ways already in practice. In this case, the indirect path would be through our human (and pre-human!) evolutionary heritage from millions of years of interacting with the rest of the world. Even if some 'innate ideas' do exist, there is, therefore, no reason whatsoever to believe that we can discover the true nature of the universe through pure introspection (or intuition).

Moreover, even in the bizarre circumstance that the cells of our brains did in some way encode various 'theories of physics', we would be totally unjustified in accepting these theories as necessarily true. It would be anti-scientific to do so. At the very most, these 'innate theories' could only be accepted as hypotheses, to be tested and rationalized scientifically. As for the hypotheses that do 'pop into our minds', there are far more plausible explanations for their origins than to assume they are encoded in our genes! The very fact that one finds at every step in science a complete welter of *contrary* and *conflicting* hypotheses is sufficient to virtually rule

out notions that any such definite hypotheses are hiding within us from birth, just waiting to be uncovered!

### 4.3. Attitudes and Their Socio-cultural Context

People conditioned to be comforted and satisfied by the apparent certainty of non-contestable beliefs feel distressed when confronted by a demand for evidence. Those who have learned early to expect the world to be a mysterious and confusing place feel no curiosity when confronted by contradiction. Without curiosity, there is no urge to look for better explanations, or to solve the problems thrown up by experience. Such people often justify their worldview by appealing to certain so-called mystical feelings, which they claim are prevalent everywhere. These feelings are of three kinds: (1) a sensation of awe or wonder at the marvels of existence; (2) an awareness of being part of something larger than oneself; and (3) an overpowering egocentrism which can readily persuade the ego in question that such perfection as is revealed in one's own complexity and felt purpose could not have come about by accident. But these are general *human* sensations, not merely *mystical* ones! It is wonder that drives the scientist to ask "how come?" and to seek an intellectually satisfying answer. The curiosity engendered by awe and wonder has fuelled the scientific progress at least since human beings discovered fire. The experience of being part of some larger entity – far from being uniquely mystical – is a scientifically predictable reflection within human consciousness of the evolutionary history, religious tradition, and socio-cultural context of the individual. The same is true of the egocentrism that renders us liable to view our own 'selves' as the consciously designed, ultimate products and central concerns of the universe. How could we *not* feel thus, given the natural origin of our species and its integral relationship to all aspects of its physical surroundings and to the organic web of life? Given our millennia-long legacy of the anthropocentrically oriented culture reflected in current society which, in turn, has shaped these 'selves' as surely as inherited genes have formed our organic building blocks. With such a background, how can we not think of ourselves as the centre?

New Age mystics claim to possess an understanding of science superior to that of the person operating within what they dismiss as the traditional positivist scientific perspective. They distinguish sharply between 'cold' rationality and their own emotionally motivated, intuitive



search for the true 'meaning' of that 'holistic' reality beyond the merely phenomenal. They would limit cause-and-effect thinking (all of which they label as mechanistic and reductionist) to readily observable inorganic phenomena. Meaning, on the other hand, is supposedly derived from the mysterious 'essence' of reality and for the magical thinker the principle of cause-and-effect does not operate here. These New Age mystics often seem to believe that this 'essential' nature of existence is, at the same time, *both* chaotic and arbitrary and, therefore, inaccessible to the human instruments of reason and senses.

#### 4.4. The Essential Characteristics of Scientific Rationality

There are certain basic principles on which scientific rationality is established. Undermining those principles would destroy the reliability of scientific rationality itself. They are: 1) the principle of hierarchy in nature; 2) the universality of cause and effect; 3) seeking regularities in experience through a rigorous objective testing; 4) a sceptical, agnostic stance toward those explanations of events that are not supported by evidence; 5) an inability to live comfortably with contradiction; 6) a belief in the communicability of knowledge; and 7) an awareness of the complexity of the human causal connections that makes life to *appear* at random.<sup>20</sup>

Primarily, scientific rationality recognizes a hierarchical ordering of systems of relations as we move from the sub-atomic particles studied by physics to the atoms of chemistry; then to the genes ordering organic life and, finally, to the subjects of the social sciences: instincts, conditioned reflexes or habits, social norms and cultural institutions. This means that it is the mystic's interpretations, which are simplistic, and reductionist in the correct sense of the words. Secondly, scientific rationality also recognizes a different kind of causality operating at the organic level from the mechanical push-pull governing cause and effect among inorganic relations. Ever since Darwin, we have come to understand more and more about how organic life has been shaped both by random mutations and the *consequences* of the organism's forays into its environment – consequences which then feed back to affect the species' future by determining which individuals live to reproduce. This is a *contingent*, or

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<sup>20</sup>P. D. Hutcheon, "Science and Mysticism: Are They Compatible?" *Humanist in Canada* (Winter 1996/97), 20-24.

after-the-fact, kind of causality, which applies at the psychological and socio-cultural levels as well. A third crucial aspect of scientific rationality is its objectivity. Those scientists, true to their calling, are not looking for absolute truth nor is their overriding goal the *verification* of hypotheses. Science seeks to identify regularities in human experience by means of a *public* or objective process of testing hypotheses. For the scientist, there is no knowledge without regularities, and regularities claimed but undocumented by objective tests are not sufficiently reliable to be worthwhile or not safe as guides to further action. Fourthly, a personal commitment to scientific explanation is characterized by an uncompromising insistence on verifiable evidences and proofs. A fifth defining characteristic is an inability to live easily with contradiction. Like the feeling of wonder, this tension in humans in the face of the illogical has motivated scientists in knowledge-building throughout human history. A sixth characteristic of the scientific rationality is an acceptance of the defining function of symbols and concepts in human self-consciousness. Language was our great advantage in evolution by making knowledge communicable. Finally, the scientific rationality is based on the premise that much in life is *apparently* random; that is, it occurs because of complex chains of fortuitous circumstances far beyond our current means of observation and comprehension. On all these counts, the magical explanation of the mystic is the exact opposite, and it is fraught with internal contradictions as well.

## 5. Scientific Rationality vis-à-vis Mysticism

### 5.1. Limitations of Science

Science has already identified the possibility of a virtual life. With the help of powerful computers, real life situations can now be simulated. A recent science-fiction movie, *The Matrix* was pointing towards the possibility of such a situation, in which people caught up in the matrix, living virtual lives, believed that their lives were real. However, this is not at all a brand new concept. Hinduism and Buddhism have suggested such a possibility even before millennia. The concept of *māya* is conceiving our universe as a mental projection either of the *self* (with a lowercase 's') or of the *Self* (with an uppercase 'S'). However, there is a danger. This would give rise to a never-ending series of questions like: Are we imagining things? Are we truly awake? On the one hand, whose dream are we? Is our 'real' really real? On the other hand, are we hooked up to a computer, which interfaces

beautifully with the afferent and efferent nerves of our brain, creating a virtual universe, where we live virtual lives? This kind of reasoning would take us back to the philosophising of Buddha and Śāṅkara. Science cannot exist without a ground, whereas philosophy and mysticism can survive even in a vacuum, as long as there is a thinking mind.

How can we say that something does not exist just because we do not have any knowledge of it? We recognise the reality of things from their effects even when we do not experience their presence by means of our five senses. The x-rays, the ultra sonic sounds, the infrared rays, are all beyond our sense perception. However, we know their presence from their effects. Science authenticates their presence through repeated experiments. A blind person may not be able to recognize colour. Nevertheless, that does not mean that he could never know the presence of colours. By presenting various objects before those who have sight, and comparing their testimony, he can verify the probability of the presence of colours. If their testimonies correspond then he can infer that their claims have objective foundation. If the mystics had some extrasensory, out-of-the-world experiences, the effects of those experiences would be evident in their lives, even if they fail to communicate those verbally. These effects ought to be repeatable and universal. What science lacks at present is the 'tools' to access the realm of subjectivity. We need 'tools' to access and assess both the realms of rationality and intuition, tools that could describe the seemingly polar facets of consciousness, the rational and intuitive modes of operation.

## **5.2. Limitations of Mystics**

A simple but devastatingly sceptical epistemological question is: how do mystics know they are right? How can we be sure that the deep, revelatory, sometimes even shattering experience of mystical union refers to anything in the world outside the person undergoing it? Part of the pull of mysticism is the noetic intuition of the mystic, during such an experience, which puts him/her in touch with some deep truth about the universe. However, how can this intuition be validated? Hallucinations, after all, are routinely mistaken for reality. There is an intimate connection between our experience and our physical brain. Our experiences can be altered by modifying the neural states responsible for consciousness, either by traditional non-invasive routes such as meditation and chant, or by drugs and newfangled electronic devices. Are mystical experiences the product

of intentionally or unintentionally altered mental states of consciousness such as those produced in modern day experiments on the brain? Like dreams and hallucinations, are they not the result of human desires and fears, manias and phobias? Are they not coping mechanisms of the brain to contain the stress, strains, frustrations, and sufferings forced upon it by the day-to-day life? Is it an illusion created by the brain to avoid an imminent breakdown? Is it possible to confirm the veracity of the claims of mystical experience by any means? Mystics say that going through a mystical experience is the only way to prove it. Though the mystics lament their inability to express their experience in human language, they have left enough descriptions of their out-of-the-world experiences. Through comparing and contrasting these signs and symbols they have left for us, could we not determine their reality?

However, just because we *cannot say* where an idea came from or *cannot trace the steps*, which led us to a particular bit of knowledge, it does not necessarily follow that there were no steps. The mind works by applying its various computing processes, based on various architectures, to the data it receives from outside itself, i.e., from the world, via our various sense organs. Another point of concern is the source or origin of the mystical revelations, which mystics claim to have. Should we conclude that they are of external origin simply because we fail to trace their internal steps? Sometimes there may be subtle hints in a situation or circumstance that lead us unconsciously to an idea or result. Other times it may be that there is nothing suggestive in the *immediate* circumstances, but there may have been all sorts of relevant information gathered and stored (remembered) on prior occasions.

### **5.3. Is the Dichotomy between Rationality and Mysticism Real?**

In discussions about mysticism and other forms of spiritual development several pairs of opposites are often mentioned. Examples of such pairs are rationalism-mysticism, reductionism-holism, and determinism-free will. In these discussions it is often assumed that there are two ways to view the world: the rational, reductionist, and deterministic view versus the mystic, holist, and intuitive one. Also other pairs are added: Western-Eastern, masculine-feminine, materialistic-spiritual, etc. However, a closer look will reveal that these pairs are only superficially opposed. We artificially split our awareness into compartments such as subject versus object, life versus death, mind versus body, inside versus outside, reason versus

instinct, male versus female, etc. These compartmentalization and drawing of boundaries generate conflict and division.

The New Age mystics often exhibit a tendency to mystify people to an extent that their readers are discouraged from reasoning and questioning their propositions so much so that they are kept under perpetual confusion. One may wonder: Why is it that those magical mystics so often feel compelled to use language to explain what they maintain cannot be expressed with language? Why do they use arguments to prove what they themselves maintain cannot be proven by argument? Why do they try to enlighten others through rationality when their own theory asserts that this is not the way to accomplish it? A typical mystic would say, "I have a body but I am not my body, I have desires but I am not desires, I have emotions but I am not emotions, I have thoughts but I am not my thoughts." This kind of dichotomy can easily mystify and confuse a layperson. To avoid such confusion, it is prudent to interpret and understand everything in this world rationally or, in other words, to investigate and understand everything scientifically.

Fundamentally, rationality and mysticism are not opposites.<sup>21</sup> A rationalist makes statements only if these are based on logical thought. In mysticism, this is not the case; sometimes even some contradictory statements are made. Nevertheless, this pair is only apparently in opposition. Mysticism consists of experience. As such, it is neither rational nor irrational; but this experience can be studied in a rational way. Genuine mystics will not be against reason. What they would oppose is the tendency of certain sceptical rationalists, who deny the possibility of a deeper plunge than their measuring scale, can reach. Mystics are explorers while rationalists are analysts. Every new claim of discovery should be challenged and tested in the light of reason. Those that fail to withstand the test of reason are worthless. Those spiritualists who refuse to submit their findings to a thorough scrutiny do not commit themselves to accuracy. It is equally wrong to deny merit to things simply because they do not yield to the light of reason or do not fall under any known category. It may happen that the light is not bright enough to appraise the substance under scrutiny or may belong to another category that remains hitherto unknown. A rationalist may object that even if the statements of a mystic may not be

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<sup>21</sup>H. Barendregt, "Mysticism and Beyond Buddhist Phenomenology," *The Eastern Buddhist*, 29 (1996), 262-287.

impossible, there is no logical ground for them. The supporters of mysticism refute this objection by pointing out that the statements of mystics are *empirical*, based on the experience of a transformed consciousness. The only way out is to develop 'tools' to measure the mystical claims. This indicates that mysticism and rationality are not incompatible. Both are based on a refinement of the human mind, albeit in somewhat different direction. At this stage, it is important to be cautious not to confuse rationality with ratiocination and mysticism with mystification.

## **6. Towards an Integral Outlook**

### **6.1. The Middle Way**

Mystics are often denounced as hostile to reason and enemies of logic. However, most mystics, like most artists and musicians, have no particular hostility to the rational. Rather they choose to focus upon the realm of the non-rational, the intuitive, in order to sink more fully into the realm of what they are trying to experience directly. Like artists, poets, and musicians (and great scientists), mystics are at their best when they are able to employ their practical and analytical skills to formulate symbols that will convey to others at least some sense of what they have been experiencing. Hence, one is, sometimes, warned against the influence of rational thinking.

For most scientists a person is a mass of glimmering interactive molecules. This mass is both a product of a physical process and can be aware that it is a product of a physical process. According to them, this mass has no powers of divination. Rather it acts upon the stimuli made available to it through the five senses. Human beings share certain essential qualities with other members of the animal kingdom like sense perception. However, what make them unique are their superior intellectual powers, which provide them with the capacity for rational thought. The well-known definition of human being as a 'rational animal' bears witness to the value attached to the rationality of human beings. For studying this rationality and self-awareness, we require tools that are different from those we presently use in the realm of science. All living organisms and human beings, in particular, are more than the sum of their parts. Yet, they are wholly dependent upon their parts for their organic unity and activity. However, they are not identical with their body and, thus, not reducible to it. In the case of human beings, we observe that they

are composed of two distinct things, an organic body with a specific genetic structure and a mind capable of rational, self-reflective thought. Is the human mind reducible to the functioning of the human brain? Is the cognitive functioning of a mind merely the firing of neurons in a cerebral cortex? Is it possible to explain self-reflective consciousness, intellectual understanding of abstract concepts, etc., in neuro-physical terms alone? Is it possible to reduce the properties displayed by human thought to the properties of matter? It is evident that cognitive functions depend upon sense perception and are often found localized in the brain. Yet, if the human mind is a *tabula rasa*, a clean slate, at its creation and is totally dependent on sensory experience of the surrounding environment, we will find it very difficult to explain many of the extraordinary phenomena that are evident among human beings. Many of our feelings, instincts, dreams, insights, intuitions, revelations, and enlightenments do not yield to the conclusion that they are all the result of discursive reasoning. This opens up the possibility of obtaining knowledge through other means. For example, innate knowledge passed on from generation to generation, containing senses other than the five commonly acknowledged ones, intervention of external sources that can infuse knowledge into a person sans sense mediation, etc. The Near-Death Experience (NDE) of people who recovered from clinical death,<sup>22</sup> and Extra Sensory Perceptions (ESP) like telepathy, point towards the possibility of obtaining knowledge through ways and means other than the conventional means of information. However, whatever may be the source, until and unless such knowledge is deciphered, verified, and validated by the mind's natural intellectual processes through reasoning it does not belong to conventional human knowledge.

## 6.2. Intuitions and Human Brain

The human brain is the result of millions of years of evolution. The beneficial mutations and modifications acquired in each generation were passed on to form instincts and similar natural inclinations, which often baffle scientists. Human intuition could be understood and explained from this point of view. The human brain is the depository of much information and experience acquired by the past generations. Being a 'super-

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<sup>22</sup>T. Bushby, *Glimpses of Life Beyond Death*, Queensland: Joshua Books, 2004, 25.

computer', it is capable of doing much more than what is demanded of it. Sakundala Devi, known as a 'human computer', *intuitively* knows the answers to complicated mathematical problems which even advanced computers, with their incredible computing power, require time to solve.<sup>23</sup> The term '*intuitively*' could be misleading if someone had the impression that the solution is coming from nowhere. In this context, '*intuitive*' means that Sakundala Devi is not consciously making her brain calculate. Her brain does the work, without her active involvement. Similar '*intuitive*' abilities were reported as present even among certain types of mental patients. Now-a-days even though the computers are capable of giving us solutions to complicated problems within seconds, none of us considers them as having intuitive or instinctive knowledge.

Where science and scientists have gone wrong is in their underestimation of human potential as well as the absence of the right scale and measuring instruments to assess the field of human experience. If somebody denies the existence of atoms, since under his magnifying glass no atom appears, he should be advised to change his glass. Science has its limits and limitations. For example, does science have any grounds for its basic premises? To prove something precisely (i.e., mathematically, formally, or logically) means to derive it from original postulates. Original postulates and choices of observed data are always taken *a priori* (i.e., axioms as self-evident facts). Therefore, it is impossible to "prove" precisely their hypotheses even within the boundaries of science. They do not prove anything absolutely in science, but prove only in a certain limited or relative meaning. Openness to various possibilities is the most essential quality required of a scientist.

Reason is undoubtedly man's most valued quality. Our argument is intended to show merely that it is not all-powerful. The belief that it can become its own master and control its own development may destroy it. In order to use our reason intelligently, we must preserve that indispensable matrix of the uncontrolled and non-rational which is the only environment wherein reason can grow and operate effectively.

### **6.3. Signs and Symbols: Languages of Mysticism**

Science needs proofs. However, at present the evidences that are available to us are merely signs and symbols (languages) offered by those who

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<sup>23</sup> [www.webindia123.com/personal/scientist/devi.htm](http://www.webindia123.com/personal/scientist/devi.htm)



claim experience. It is obvious that the experience of a reality can be communicated only through signs and symbols. Disappointingly, those signs and symbols can only point towards the experience. Therefore, mysticism should be approached both as an art and a science. Science has not yet developed instruments to measure and interpret the experiences a person may be undergoing. The lack of experience often results in misinterpretation of the signs and symbols made available. The daring statements of Buddha, for example, are noteworthy in this regard. He is said to have instructed his disciples as follows:

Do not believe in anything simply because you have heard it. Do not believe in traditions because they have been handed down for many generations. Do not believe in anything because it is spoken and rumoured by many. Do not believe in anything simply because it is found written in your religious books. Do not believe in anything merely on the authority of your teachers or elders. But after observation and analysis, when you find that anything agrees with reason, and is conducive to the good and benefit of one and all, then accept it and live up to it. Rely not on the teacher, but on the teaching. Rely not on the words of the teaching, but on the spirit of the words. Rely not on the theory, but on the experience. Seek truth in meditation, not in mouldy books. Look in the sky to find the moon, not in the pond. Do not accept my words out of reverence, analyse them as goldsmith analyses gold by cutting, melting, scraping, and rubbing it.<sup>24</sup>

With tremendous confidence, he invited people to try his eightfold path in order to ensure enlightenment. It is said that many of his immediate followers really managed to acquire the experience that the Buddha envisaged. However, an unsettling suspicion soon emerges: if Buddhahood and *nirvāna* are universal possibilities why is it that millions of people who are ardently seeking after it fail to be enlightened?

## 7. Conclusion

Mysticism may follow from or lead towards rationalization, but they are not the same. Mysticism, like poetry, depends on paradoxes and an unusual use of language. Nature mysticism is another prominent variation found among poets and artists. This has often been described or dismissed

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<sup>24</sup> [www.members.tripod.com/TarotCanada/BuddhasCrazyQuilt.html](http://www.members.tripod.com/TarotCanada/BuddhasCrazyQuilt.html)

as pantheism (the divine in all), though perhaps it is more than a simple assertion of identity. Science is analytic and discursive and expresses its findings in precise and abstract formulae. Knowledge whether it is spiritual or material is nothing but "justified true belief." Somebody's belief is scientifically justified when it meets the public, *rational* standards. In addition, the question of what is *true* in any sphere of belief is a scientific question. There are not two kinds of knowledge, the rational, and the 'non-rational' (or intuitive); there is only rational knowledge. If it is not rational, it is not knowledge, but merely a belief unsupported by verifiable facts.

A rational mysticism consistent with science would not demand, impossibly, that the organism relinquish its self, nor would it suppose that consciousness is pitted against the void. It would seek out mystical experience – the temporary suspension of selfhood – while acknowledging that such experience may not be a direct cognitive apprehension of reality. Rather, the mystical state could be understood as a result of an intentionally altered brain, and as such can be welcomed as a reinvigorating, non-cognitive experiential *affirmation* of what scientific theories show to be unquestionably the case: our essential and complete naturalistic connection to the universe. The organism, its self, its consciousness, and all its works arise out of the physical world, so the mystical intuition of unity, albeit non-cognitive, reflects this empirical truth about us. This sort of understanding of mysticism would drop the disdainful dismissal of the physical as 'mere' matter typical of many old fashioned mystics who think categorically that spiritual exists on a higher, more exalted plane than matter.

However, we are still going to face certain radical questions like: Do we really need a goal or purpose for living? Should there be a reason for everything? Is life worth living sans a goal to achieve (whether it is union with God, *nirvāṇa*, heaven, or enlightenment)? If a goal is indispensable for a meaningful existence, then what about the animals, plants, planets? Are they worthless since they do not consciously strive to achieve goals? Science cannot tackle these and similar questions. Certainly, we need the answers of science to our "how" questions, but just as surely many will find that only religion and mystics can answer our "why" questions. Therefore, would not "both-and" be a more reasonable choice than "either-or"? Yet, being *animal rationale* we have an obligation to put every bit of knowledge we acquire to a thorough rational analysis to make it fully and

truly human. Because, there is every possibility that those who dare to cross the threshold of reason may end up in the quagmire of hallucinations and make believe instead of attaining illumination and enlightenment.