

## **Psychoanalytic Contributions on the Mystical**

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The existence of clinical psychoanalysts who were or are mystics has largely escaped academic notice. Neither are their views well understood within the profession, where mystics are rare and mystical ways of thinking have generally been scorned and ignored. Previous scholarship on my topic is confined to a literature review in Michael Eigen's (1998) major statement of his own position, a few pages and a scholarly article by Jones (2001, 2002), and several chapters in Sayers' (2003) introductory survey of psychoanalysis, religion, and mysticism. The roster of psychoanalytic mystics nevertheless includes many eminent analysts from several major schools within psychoanalysis: Otto Rank (1884-1939), Erich Fromm (1900-1980), Marion Milner (1900-1998), D. W. Winnicott (1896-1971), Heinz Kohut (1913-1981), Hans W. Loewald (1906-1993), Wilfred R. Bion (1897-1979), and, among living writers, James S. Grotstein, Neville Symington, and Michael Eigen.

Mysticism is, of course, an enormous and poorly defined topic among both scholars and clinicians. Until the 1970s, it was widely but erroneously assumed that all mystical experiences were one and the same (for example, Heiler, 1932). The current consensus instead recognizes the diversity of mystical experiences (Almond, 1982). For social scientific purposes, I have elsewhere reflected recent textbooks in comparative mysticism by suggesting that "mysticism may be defined for contemporary purposes as a practice of religious ecstasies (that is, of religious experiences during alternate states of consciousness), together with whatever ideologies, ethics, rites, myths, legends, magics, and so forth, are related to the ecstasies" (Merkur, 2002, p. 10270). None of the psychoanalytic mystics were consistent with older definitions of mysticism that typically concerned introverted, solipsistic states and devaluations of the world of sense perception. The psychoanalytic mystics have instead been unanimous in following the "Outward Way" (Otto, 1932) of "extrovertive mysticism" (Stace, 1960), which apperceives the world of physical reality in any of a variety of unitive ways.

The psychoanalytic mystics were none of them theologians or philosophers of religion. None had expertise in the psychology of religion. Neither did they adhere to a strict, academically defensible definition of mysticism. Most of what they discussed concerned the vicissitudes of unitive experience and thinking; but some also addressed the undifferentiated, the numinous, and/or the transcendent. For convenience, I use the historian Michel de Certeau's term *la mystique*, "the mystical," which de Certeau contrasted with *le mysticisme*, "mysticism." De Certeau's translator proposed the noun "mystics" in parallel with physics, mathematics, ethics, and aesthetics (de Certeau, 1992); but Kripal (2007) suggests that we refer instead to *la mystique*, "the mystical." My suggestion that "the mystical" be employed as an imprecise umbrella term is intended to reflect common usage. Psychoanalytic patients are similarly unschooled and imprecise in their uses of such terms as religious, spiritual, mystical, transcendent, and so forth. It is consequently appropriate for clinical purposes to be inclusive of the views of the psychoanalytic mystics, rather than to fuss academically about definitions and categories.

Only Milner, Grotstein, Symington, and Eigen openly called themselves mystics. Fromm discussed his practice of meditation, praised mysticism, but did not label himself a mystic. Winnicott (1971, p. 123) wrote that his views were like those of mystics except that he applied his interiorism to the world of sense perception. Rank, Kohut, and Bion were silent regarding their private convictions, but they wrote in praise of mysticism so very knowingly that their allegiances are transparent. Lastly, Loewald discussed the proximity of his views to existentialism but would have been surprised to hear the term "mystical" applied to his views (Ana-Maria Rizzuto, personal communication, 2007). From the standpoint of the academic study of comparative mysticism, all ten theoreticians may nevertheless be regarded as mystics. Historically, they can be seen as a distinctive movement or trend within the history of mysticism that compares, for example, with American Transcendentalism. Highly individual voices that bear a family resemblance among themselves, they differed in common manners from previous trends in the history of mysticism. None conformed with an existing religious institution and its

historical mysticism. All were extrovertive mystics, for whom the unification of all things proceeds in the world of sense perception, and not as an introverted withdrawal from the world. Most privileged interpersonal relations--the unions of love and fellowship--as the most mature and desirable types of union. As analysts, all practiced “evenly hovering attention” while listening to their patients, which Fromm, Bion, Grotstein, Symington, and Eigen explicitly regarded as a type of meditation. None of the psychoanalytic mystics advocated the kinds of “concentrative meditation” (Goleman, 1977) that intravertive mystics employ. Neither did the psychoanalytic mystics privilege dissociative states with their consequences for derealization and depersonalization (Ostow & Scharfstein, 1954; Furst et al., 1976).

The psychoanalytic mystics were divided in their opinions regarding the relation of psychoanalysis to mysticism. Commenting on his study, *The Future of an Illusion* (1927), Freud had recommended: “He who occupies himself with science arrives at agnosticism” (Sterba, 1978, p. 178). Although Rank endorsed Nietzsche’s metaphysics and Fromm described himself as an atheist, Milner, Winnicott, Kohut, and Loewald conformed with Freud’s example and limited themselves to agnostic discussions of the mystical. Bion, Grotstein, Symington, and Eigen have instead espoused panentheism--all things are in and of God--and they have conceptualized clinical psychoanalysis as a mystical practice. Leavy (1995) argued, however, for the continuing importance of separating psychological work from mystical faith-claims.

It think it is important to pursue this examination in a literally agnostic way, neither presuming nor excluding the divine origins of the mystics’ experiences. If the religious believer cannot allow this bracketing of faith, i.e. a suspension of judgement on its “reality,” then he would do well to avoid any psychoanalytic consideration at all. And if the skeptical psychoanalyst cannot allow that the faith of the mystics be taken seriously enough to bracket it, he might also better abandon the quest. (p. 354).

Where methodological agnosticism permits psychoanalysts of all persuasions to aspire to a consensus, the accommodation of faith-claims within psychoanalysis leads rapidly to the divisiveness of religious dogmatism. We have already seen, for example, an Orthodox Jewish

psychoanalysis (Spero, 1992) and a Protestant Christian psychoanalysis (Sorenson, 2004) that are necessarily unacceptable to analysts and patients whose faith-claims are otherwise. The axiomatic presuppositions of Bion, Grotstein, Symington, and Eigen present similar problems.

In the space of this article, it will not be possible to offer more than a rapid survey of literature that fills two metres of shelf space. The theoretical views reflect differences in data, in ideas of what mysticism is, and in approaches to formulation. The approaches converge in many respects, but a thorough-going synthesis is not to be expected.

### **Mystical Experience as a Transient Anomaly**

The modern study of mysticism had its origin with Catholic and Anglican responses to Charcot's claim that the hysterics of the Saltpetrière could produce all of the miracles of the saints (Knowles, 1967); but apologetics were soon followed by psychological studies (James, 1902; Underhill, 1910) and a revival of interest in the practice of mysticism among lay people. As late as 1914, it was still possible for a psychoanalyst to use the term "mysticism" when referring to spiritual alchemy (Silberer, 1914); but the *Zeitgeist* was already in process of change. The publication in 1913 of Karl Jaspers's *Allgemeine Psychopathologie* (1963) brought international attention to Søren Kierkegaard's theory that every child's psychological development replicates the fall of Adam. Kierkegaard suggested that Adam was created in natural union with animal life, but his acquisition of the knowledge of good and evil provided him with moral responsibility, selfhood, and transcendence of nature, including his body. In a conference paper in 1913, the American psychoanalyst Trigant Burrow (1914, 1917, 1917-18) advanced an analytic variant of Kierkegaard's theory that replaced Kierkegaard's idea of union in the sense of community or fellowship with animal life, with the different idea of mystical union. Burrow characterized neonatal mentality as an unthinking, precognitive process that he named "primary identification." After Burrow lectured but before he went to press, Freud (1914) published his own ideas about neonatal experience. Freud similarly proposed a developmental

progression in infancy from mystical to rational thinking, but his concepts of primary and secondary narcissism located both phases within consciousness.

In 1919 (English translation, 1933), Sandor Ferenczi proposed the theory that genitality, the adult drive to coitus, is symbolically a return to the condition of the foetus in the womb. The concept of intrauterine regression was promptly taken up by psychoanalytic writers on mysticism, most famously by Alexander (1931) in a 1922 congress paper (see also Moxon, 1920; Schroeder, 1922; Carver, 1924; Rank, 1929). In 1927, after Rank's ideas about the trauma of separation from the mother had been attacked as a threat to the hegemony of Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex, Helene Deutsch (1989) interpreted mystical union as a fusion of the ego with the superego. Three years later, in a discussion of the "oceanic feeling," Freud (1930) reasserted his interpretation of mysticism as a persistence of the neonatal state of the ego. Little further was added for over two decades. In the 1950s, the analysis of the symbolism in mystical experiences that occur spontaneously in mania led to theories of regressions to falling asleep after satiated nursing (Lewin, 1951; Greenacre, 1958; Linn & Schwarz, 1958). When direct infant observation established that newborns communicate with their mothers (Gaensbauer, 1982; Lichtenberg, 1983; Stern, 1983, 1985), the theory of neonatal solipsism was abandoned (Kernberg, 1991), and mystical experiences were interpreted as regressions to wishful fantasies of mother-child fusion that compensate for the disappointment of separation during the second year of life (Pine, 1981; 1986; 1990; Meissner, 1992). Mystical experiences have generally been considered pathological (Ostow & Scharfstein, 1954; Furst et al. 1976); but formulations since the 1960s have tended increasingly to diagnose regression in the service of the ego (Deikman, 1966a, 1966b; Prince & Savage, 1966; Allison, 1968; Fauteux, 1994, 1997; Meissner, 1999).

The psychoanalytic mainstream has regularly assumed that mystical ecstasies are anomalous experiences. The common assumption has been unaffected by differences of opinion as to whether the infantile solipsism underlying mystical experiences are intrauterine, neonatal, a fantasy of fusion with the breast, pathological, or in the service of the ego. The shared assumption unwittingly perpetuates the Christian belief that mystical union is discontinuous with

the rest of life. Whether mystical experience is seen as supernatural grace intervening within the soul's nature, or infantile solipsism interrupting a more mature psychic organization, it has been treated as an anomaly, as something apart from the rest of psychology that can safely be ignored for most practical purposes.

### **The Mystical as a Developmental Line**

The psychoanalytic mystics have consistently taken the fundamentally different position that mystical experiences are not anomalous and unimportant, but are part of something much more central to human psychology. Paul Federn (1926, 1932, 1952), who linked mental ego-feeling to ecstasies and suggested that it antedates body ego-feeling, also suggested that primary narcissism persists unconsciously, changing and developing throughout life. Federn's conceptualization of the legacy of primary narcissism as a developmental line, a biologically driven trajectory of healthy growth and maturation, constituted a paradigm shift not only for the psychoanalytic theory of mysticism, but in the general history of mysticism. The world's major mystical traditions often discuss mystical development as progress in achieving mystical experiences of the type or types that particular traditions privilege. Development in this context consists of the acquisition of a cognitive skill set, a learning to have mystical experiences (Bharati, 1976; Brown & Engler, 1984). The psychoanalytic mystics have instead conceptualized mystical development in terms of epigenetic maturation. For example, my own previous efforts (Merkur, 1998, 1999), written in ignorance of most of the publications that I review in this article, conceptualized different varieties of mystical experiences with reference to the Freud-Abraham stages of psychosexual development, as the latter have been refined and extended into adulthood by ego psychologists.

**Otto Rank.** The first extensive contributions on the mystical in psychoanalysis were offered by two analysts who were expelled from the psychoanalytic establishment, Otto Rank and Erich Fromm. After two decades of close collaboration with Freud, Rank struck an independent course when, in *The Trauma of Birth* (1929), he rejected Freud's (1920) theory of

the death instinct and accounted for its clinical evidence by postulating that birth is traumatic. On first publication in 1924 Rank attributed the trauma to the infant's physical separation from the mother at birth, but he was speaking of psychological separation, as we today think, by the late 1920s. Although Freud, who was then newly diagnosed with cancer, initially liked the book, Karl Abraham and Ernest Jones spin-doctored its emphasis on the mother trauma as an abandonment of the Oedipus complex; and Freud, fearful for the Oedipus theory after his death, supported their reading. In the sequel, Freud lived another fifteen years, but Rank, deeply wounded, left the psychoanalytic movement. Rank's post-psychoanalytic writings went unmentioned in "orthodox" Freudian publications, but his original ideas contributed to the interpersonal, existential, and relational approaches to psychoanalysis.

Rank's (1932a, 1932b, 1941, 1968, 1996, 1998) post-Freudian practice, which he called "will therapy," inaugurated a paradigm shift in the understanding of the mystical. Mysticism was not a question of rare, transient experiences that were unconnected with the major trends of psychic life. The psyche was mystical from birth to adulthood. Rank started with Nietzsche's model of a Dionysian, mystical unconsciousness and an Apollinian, rational consciousness or ego. For Rank, the process of "individualization" from primal unity was the central human dilemma. The solipsism of the unconscious was the same for everyone. Individuality was a matter of the ego. Will, which was located in the ego, originated as a counter-force, a repression of primal unity, and only secondarily became a positive force, a will that was not engaged in repression but was free to progress upon its own. The ego's establishment of an ego ideal provided direction for its further growth, as well as both fear and guilt. Each emotion was paradoxical. There was fear to individuate, but fear also pertained to the failure to achieve and individuate. There were both guilt over having individuated and guilt over the failure to individuate. Rank's "will therapy" used the psychoanalytic situation to promote regression to and resolution of the birth trauma, as means to reduce inhibition by fear and guilt. Once will was firmly individuated, it had access to the vitalism of the unconscious in the form of mystical experiences and, more importantly, artistic and other creativity. Artistry was an applied

mysticism, a unity of artist and artwork or artifact that imposes the artist's individuated will on external reality. In Rank's understanding of the human, there is no not being mystical. There is only being mystical inefficiently; and therapy's address of psychopathology seeks to correct morbid forms of the mystical.

**Erich Fromm.** Where Rank believed that creativity was mystical and "beyond psychology," Fromm regarded psychoanalysis as a therapy of repressedness that could additionally be practiced to "transtherapeutic" and mystical ends. Fromm (1941) asserted that individuation from neonatal oneness is fearful and leads to "mechanisms of escape from freedom" that are pathological vicissitudes of union. Authoritarianism depends on a sado-masochistic symbiosis of leader and follower. Conformism find union in the group; while destructiveness destroys the object that is unavailable for union. Fromm (1947) argued that ethics have a mystical basis in the personality, in that self-love and love for others coincide, as do self-hate and hate for others. He then contrasted rational and irrational authority, rational and irrational ethics, and the psychic processes of conscience and the superego, respectively. Rational ethics are exclusively concerned with human welfare, which involves a "productive orientation" of the personality toward both love and work. Fromm (1950) next contrasted humanistic and authoritarian religion, treated the negative theology and/or metaphysics of the mystics as humanistic, and described the mystical in terms of wonderment, concern for relatedness, and oneness in self, others, and the all. He argued that psychoanalysis was a humanistic religion, a path of individuation that pursued the goals of the mystics. In a study of dreams, Fromm (1951, p. 33) suggested that "we are not only less reasonable and less decent in our dreams but...we are also more intelligent, wiser, and capable of better judgment." To the Freudian understanding of dream symbolism he added a new category, the universal symbol, which was an unconscious evaluation whose projection transformed phenomena into symbols. For example, people in a desert tend to evaluate the sun one way, in an Arctic climate another, so that meaning does not inhere in the sun (as phenomenologists and Jungians maintain), but in the universal values that are unconsciously projected onto the sun. The capacity to manifest

universal symbols imparts a higher wisdom to dreams. Fromm's (1955) use of existential terms and concepts increased markedly after he articulated his theory of universal symbols, presumably because he saw self, reason, love, life, death, and other "transcendental" quiddities not existentially as inherently meaningful phenomena, but psychoanalytically as universal symbols. Taking up the problem of capitalism, Fromm (1955) proposed that the investment of part of oneself in an external thing, which then rules over oneself, is a form of symbiosis, a pathological type of oneness. In Marxist terms, it is an alienation not only of the worker from the work, but of the person from anything that may healthfully be done productively. In prophetic terms, it is an idolatry; and in clinical psychoanalysis, it is the transference. Fromm (1956) maintained that mature loving union between two people was the optimal form of oneness that is possible for human beings; immature love, consisting of a symbiotic fusion, was again a pathological vicissitude of the mystical.

Fromm's (1962) therapeutic procedures placed the cultivation of a reciprocal I-Thou relationship at the center of the analysis and interpreted any deviation from a wholesome rapport as a transference. He regarded the analyst not as a participant observer, but as an observant participant. Fromm (1980, 1991, 1992, 1994a) privileged the interpretation of dreams and the patient's coming to awareness of his or her suffering. He discouraged the daydreaming and infantilization that ego psychologists promoted in their handling of free association. An analysis was completed when the patient had learned to self-analyze properly. Fromm (1960, 1994a, 1994b) recommended Zen meditation and Buddhist mindfulness meditation as valuable, optional adjuncts to psychoanalysis for both analysts and patients. He considered reality to be ultimately paradoxical in a dialectical (Hegelian) fashion. He compared satori with psychoanalytic insight-- implicitly, with his sort of mystical psychoanalytic insight. He also recognized that biblical monotheism served paradoxically to promote individuation. "Obedience to God is also the negation of submission to man" (Fromm, 1966, p. 73). In passing remarks on psychedelic mysticism, Fromm (1973, pp. 247-48; 1994b, pp. 78-79) noted that genuine mystical experiences do not of themselves produce mystical character transformations. Neither do they avoid

narcissistic appropriations of mystical experience. Where Rank was a Romantic, imagining the mystical creative personality as a rare individual, Fromm was a Utopian who saw the mystical in all manner of common, everyday experiences that were readily accessed by all of humanity.

**Marion Milner.** Marion Milner was a mystically inclined amateur painter who published two books about her artistic process, under the pseudonym Joanna Field, before her work as an education psychologist led to her training as a psychoanalyst. Her first book reported her discovery that “an internal gesture of standing back and watching” (Field, 1934, p. 101) might bring on more valuable creativity than she could produce through an effort of will. There was something more at work in her, something unconscious, than she had realized. After book reviews remarked that her self-reports included mystical experiences, she embraced the term. In her second book (Field, 1937), she developed the idea that creativity could endow objects, both those she happened to see and those that she created as an artist, with meanings that originated in “the inner attitudes and movements of the spirit” (p. 167). She set herself the task of learning to know “the mysterious force by which one is lived, the ‘not-self’, which was yet also in me” (p. 179). She knew that psychoanalysis worked with “storm-giving images, and others...that brought panics and confusions,” but she was equally concerned with “peace-giving images, which seemed to be no less powerful” (p. 192). She recognized that access to her unconscious creativity required an “internal gesture of submission” (p. 207). At this time, she began analysis with Sylvia Paine and befriended D. W. Winnicott. Her third book (Field, 1950), was published after her qualification as a psychoanalyst and years of exchanging ideas with Winnicott. The book discussed artistic creativity as a union of the artist and the artwork, during which “the imaginative realities of the inner world” are imparted to “the tangible realities of the external world” (p. 9). The integrity of a successful artwork, and its seeming autonomy from the artist who created it, attested to “a rhythm and pattern and integrated wholeness” (p. 80) that Milner attributed to the unconscious. She concluded that creativity originates in “moments when there is a temporary fusion of inner and outer, an undoing of the split between self and not-self, seer and seen” (p. 190). In a foreword to the second edition of the book, Anna Freud noted parallels

between the creative and psychoanalytic processes. Milner's (1987) collected psychoanalytic articles include technical elaborations of her views on the mystical.

**D. W. Winnicott.** Winnicott's (1945, 1948) ideas about babies fantasizing the breast before discovering it, which results in the illusion that they have created it, had inspired Milner's thesis that creativity in the arts and also in science and technology, proceeds by imposing an illusion on external reality. Winnicott (1951, 1953, 1971), in his turn, extended Milner's thesis into a general theory that culture in its entirety, including our most scientific knowledge of reality, is precisely the same sort of creative illusion--and has its paradigmatic example in a child's Teddy bear. It is an objective, inanimate thing that paradoxically has living, subjective meaning, and there is no knowledge of reality that is not equally paradoxical, equally an illusion born of the coincidence of subjectivity and objective reality.

**Anton Ehrenzweig.** Another friend of Milner, Anton Ehrenzweig, was a university level art teacher who was deeply engaged in Kleinian object relations theory. He published two books on the theory of creative illusion. Ehrenzweig's (1953) first book argued that Gestalt psychologists' division of consciousness into the figure and ground of attention had implications for depth psychology. He suggested that the vagueness of the conscious ground was consistent with unconscious perception in being less differentiated, as is consistent with the demonstrable perceptions of children. Creativity accesses comparatively undifferentiated perceptions that are made unconsciously while consciousness is occupied with the figure of attention. In his second book, Ehrenzweig (1967) recognized that artists and musicians routinely cultivate the ability to attend to both the figure and the ground simultaneously. This partial de-differentiation of attention is also practiced by psychoanalysts as "evenly hovering attention." The creative surrender to conscious de-differentiation enables unconscious perceptions to manifest despite their comparative undifferentiation. Ehrenzweig postulated a stratification within the unconscious that reflected a developmental sequence of increasing differentiation that is laid down during the child's passage from primary narcissism through the (Kleinian) stages of

psychosexual development. All art is ultimately mystical; mysticism is the undifferentiated core of creativity.

Both Ehrenzweig and most writers who have cited his ideas failed to appreciate that the de-differentiation of consciousness to become comparatively undifferentiated differs from unitive experiences. Where de-differentiation suspends use of Gestalts, allowing simpler and more basic Gestalts to come into play, unitive experiences involve discrete ideas or abstract concepts of unity that function apperceptually as Gestalts that unify sense data. Undifferentiation is a watchful, uncritical state, lacking many ideas of normal consciousness. For example, a visual field may be reduced to areas of color, devoid of ideas that identify the objects that have the colors. Union is a state that involves ideas of unity or unification, for example, the concept that a variety of perceptible objects are united in having color. De-differentiation and union can coincide, but vary independently.

**More on Winnicott.** Winnicott's (1965, 1971, 1975) theories of early ego development may be understood as further contributions to the psychoanalysis of the mystical. Like Rank and Fromm, Winnicott saw individuation from neonatal solipsism as a major developmental challenge. Winnicott's theorizing began with the clinical fact that analysis of aggression will arrive a patient at the guilt, remorse, and wish to make reparation that Melanie Klein termed the depressive position. Winnicott described it as a "capacity for concern" and agreed with Klein regarding its onset in health around age 8 months. He also cited it as evidence that children are innately good. Winnicott then proceeded to coordinate Freud's and Klein's ideas about early ego development. The realistic awareness of self and other that Freud had named secondary narcissism was the condition of relations, in Klein's terms, between whole objects. Winnicott spoke of the achievement of "unit status" as the condition for the capacity for concern. Addressing Freud's concept of primary narcissism, Winnicott famously maintained that "there is no such thing as a baby." There is always both the baby and a caretaker. Infantile solipsism consists of the infant plus the environment, including the maternal care that the infant experiences as part of its self. Primary narcissism is paradoxically an object relation, a

solipsistic experience of self that resolves analytically into the baby and its “environmental mother.” Dovetailing with Ehrenzweig’s ideas of undifferentiated perception, Winnicott suggested that the baby begins with an “unintegrated” sense of self and incrementally builds up memories of different experiences that gradually coalesce into a coherent sense of bodily self. The achievement of an integrated sense of self coincides with the capacity to become anxious at the prospect of disintegration.

In between the “environment-individual set-up” of the neonate and “unit status” of the capacity for concern was a “transitional stage” of development. Transitional phenomena were exemplified by the Teddy bear and included creative illusions as a class. All were experienced solipsistically as subjectively perceived objects. They were subject to “object-relating” that involved an unconcern that was pre-ruth rather than ruthless. When objects had unit status and were perceived objectively, Winnicott referred instead to “object usage” that manifested a capacity for concern. Pathogenic development during the solipsistic developmental stages produced pathology of the self. People experienced inauthenticity or meaninglessness or otherwise felt that their self was unreal or false. A true self, by contrast, found meaning through creativity. The therapeutic shift from a false self to a true self was conceptualized by existentialism as self-actualization, but was seen by Winnicott as an unconscious object relation between the infant and environmental mother components within the sense of self. A lifelong legacy of infantile solipsism was an incommunicado element at the core of the personality, which manifested, among other manners, in the mental orgasms of mystical ecstasies. Also related to the infant-mother dyad were the capacities to be alone and to believe-in whatever might be the object of belief. Winnicott followed Michael Balint (1952, 1969) in postulating a naturally occurring healing process that could be facilitated clinically by promoting a regression to the developmental stage prior to the occurrence of trauma. Winnicott regarded the therapeutic process as a regression prior to the onset of the false self, in order to gain access to the primary creativity at the core of the true self.

**Heinz Kohut.** Kohut (1971, 1977, 1978a, b, 1984, 1990, 1991) founded his system of self psychology on a redefinition of narcissism. Where Freud had discussed the devotion of psychosexual desire toward objects that could include the self, Kohut discussed the devotion of self-love (“narcissistic cathexis”) toward both the self and other objects, in parallel with object-love (“object cathexis”) toward others. In this way, he postulated that narcissism formed a developmental line that paralleled the line that led from primary to secondary narcissism. The narcissistic developmental line led from “archaic narcissism” to “mature narcissism” without interruption of its narcissism. Developmentally prior to archaic narcissism was a state of disintegration that was to be avoided. The ever-present threat of its recurrence provoked anxiety and rage. Archaic narcissism was Kohut’s term for infantile solipsism. Narcissism then divided into the “grandiose self” and idealized objects. Other people were experienced as “selfobjects” whose existence was appreciated only in so far as it was meaningful to the self. In Winnicott’s terms, they were subjectively perceived objects. In 1966, Kohut remarked that mature narcissism involved awareness of both the finitude of the self and its participation within a greater infinity. At the end of his life, Kohut (1985) explicitly suggested that “the transformation of narcissism into the spirit of religiosity” might give rise to “a new rational religion....an as yet uncreated system of mystical rationality” and he called for psychoanalysis’s “amalgamation with mystical modes of thinking” (pp. 70-71). Kohut designed self psychology to promote the developmental shift from the naive assumption of being the One into a realistic awareness of being one of the Many that participate in the One. It was a therapy of the mystical, but it had no aspiration to reduce repression. It was a question, in Winnicott’s terms, of modifying the false self to become less socially maladaptive.

**Hans W. Loewald.** Marjorie Brierley (1947, 1951) introduced the concept of psychic integration when she suggested that the Christian mystical life aims at an integration of the ego and the superego, whereas psychoanalysis promotes the integration of the id together with the ego and the superego. Loewald (1978, 1980, 1988) placed integration at the center of his understanding of both human development and psychoanalysis. He ordinarily referred to

integration and avoided the term “mysticism.” However, Loewald (1978) included himself in his discussion of the quality of timelessness that mystical experiences share with commonplace experiences that “all of us know” (p. 64) and he traced timelessness to condensation. In recognizing that condensation can represent all time as the one eternal now, Loewald traced mystical experiences to the id. He interpreted ecstasy as a fusion of instincts, hence as regressions to the id in the service of the ego. Noting the dedifferentiation in mystical experiences, he traced their developmental origin to early infancy, but abandoned the term “primary narcissism” as an inaccurate means to discuss “the absence of subject-object differentiation.” In this way, Loewald conceptualized the undifferentiation of the neonatal psyche and its use of condensation to achieve integration through unitive thinking--implicitly, two different aspects of the mystical.

Loewald cited Freud on the tendency of Eros to “bind together,” accomplishing integration. He saw the ego’s synthetic function as its contribution to integration. The synthetic function accomplishes a compromise between its attraction to unity and its dread of engulfment in the non-differentiation of the womb. The result is a unity that coincides with progression, a tendency to synthesize at ever more differentiated levels of organization. Oscillations between de-differentiating regression and differentiating progression proceed constantly as the means by which the psyche accomplishes integration. In representing the past from the perspective of the future, the superego integrates the temporal dimension of psychic experience. Preoedipal identifications contribute structure to the ego; oedipal identifications are internalized as the superego. Preoedipal mechanisms, such as introjection, projective identification, and splitting promote differentiation, as also do the classical defenses of neurotics. Sublimation carries instinct forward to the highest levels of differentiation, accomplishing a union of the psychic levels involved. The psyche’s capacity to move back and forth among its divisions and levels, the fluidity of its access to its constituent parts, is the index of its health. Psychoanalysis promotes integration. Interpretations rid the psyche of stagnation and promote synthesis by reflecting the patient’s state from the higher level of organization that belongs to the analyst. In

this respect, the analyst performs a parental function, empathizing with the patient from a more mature perspective whose internalization by the patient promotes the integrative process. The parental function made psychoanalysis an asymmetrical two-person psychology.

The theory of the mystical as a developmental line reached critical mass with Loewald. Rank had located the mystical “beyond psychology,” Fromm called it “transtherapeutic.” Milner, Ehrenzweig, Winnicott, and Kohut connected the mystical with earliest childhood and occasional repercussions in later life. Loewald instead argued that both psychic development and psychoanalysis were integrative from top to bottom. The therapeutic process was not to be contrasted with integration. The psyche’s natural healing process was the particular type of integration to which the psyche resorts when dealing with repression.

Loewald further maintained that psychoanalysis is a moral enterprise. In making the unconscious conscious, psychoanalysis calls every patient to become accountable for his or her unconscious. The call to self-knowledge is a call to responsibility for one’s actions. In this connection, even guilt is an integrative force in the psyche. Morality and religiosity are normative in health; their repression, which Loewald called as severe in our time as the repression of sexuality was in Freud’s era, is pathological. “Superpersonal and transcendental aspects of human existence and of unconscious and instinctual life...can be experienced and integrated convincingly--without escapist embellishments, otherworldly consolations, and going off into the clouds--only in the concreteness of one’s own personal life, including the ugliness, trivialities, and sham that go with it” (Loewald, 1980, p. 416). In his final publication, Loewald (1988) offered an implicitly mystical conception of nature. He suggested that psychoanalysis is a science that makes an objective study of subjectivity. Because subjectivity exists in nature, it necessarily belongs to nature, even if it manifests in individual consciousnesses alone.

### **Clinical Psychoanalysis as a Two-Person Practice of Mysticism**

Loewald (1960) was responsible for persuading American ego psychologists that the image of the analyst as a neutral mirror was mistaken, and that clinical psychoanalysis is a two-

way interaction between the analyst and the analysand (Bergmann, 2000, p. 61). He did not suggest, however, that the psychoanalytic process is integrative for the analyst as well as the analysand. It was Bion who first conceptualized clinical psychoanalysis not only as a therapy of the pathological vicissitudes of the mystical, but also as a two-person practice of mysticism. Unfortunately, Bion abandoned methodological agnosticism at the same time. Bion has since been followed by several writers who have similarly mixed metaphysics with their psychology. Because each has advanced a different metaphysical position, the possibility of a consensus has been precluded. Even if a school of mysticism were to emerge, scientific and humanistic perspectives can appreciate metaphysical faith-claims only as speculations.

**Wilfred R. Bion.** Precisely because he was familiar with pagan and Christian Neoplatonism and the kabbalah, Bion (1962, 1963, 1965, 1967, 1970, 1989, 1994) brought both a doctrinal precision and a dogmatic bias to his metaphysics. He began with the fact that the latent contents of psychotic hallucinations and delusions are often transparent to external observers. According to Freud's theory of the dreamwork, the preconscious ego devises the latent content of the dream. All that the unconscious contributes is the conversion of the latent content into symbolism. If Freud's theory were correct, the latent content of psychotic productions should be as disordered as the rest of their ego functions. The latent contents are nevertheless as coherent as anyone's dreams. To account for the coherence of latent thoughts that psychotics are incapable of thinking, Bion took recourse to Plato's World of Forms. He suggested that psychotic productions are "thoughts without a thinker." They are Platonic Forms that inform psychotics' sense perceptions without their knowledge. The analytic task is to enable the patient to transform unthought Forms within their psyches into thoughts that they think. Bion invented the term "beta-elements" to designate unthought Forms in sense perceptions and emotions; and the terms "alpha-function" and "alpha-elements" to designate thinking and thoughts, respectively. Alpha-function included a great many cognitive activities. The most important were the dreamwork, which converts beta-elements into images than can be thought with, and abstract conceptual thinking, which converts imagery into higher order mentation.

Bion suggested that the analytic situation replicates the infant-mother dyad, in which the baby presents beta-elements to the mother, for the mother to contain and transform into alpha-elements by means of her alpha-function. Once the mother, in her state of reverie, produces the alpha-elements, she communicates them to the baby, who gradually builds up his own alpha-function on their basis. Because beta-elements are Forms that cannot be thought, their communication must always proceed unconsciously, from the unconscious of the baby or patient to the unconscious of the mother or analyst. If the communication is conscious, the elements must already have been converted to alpha-elements before they were communicated, and there is no need for the analyst to alpha-function for the patient. The type of unconscious communication that conveys Forms that are not being thought is called “projective identification” in Kleinian object relations theory. Feelings and ideas are evacuated out of a person through their placement in another person. For example, hatred that is intolerable to the patient may be felt by the analyst as the analyst’s hatred of the patient. Close observation will discover that the patient unconsciously manipulated the analyst into hating the patient. Bion recommended that an analyst entertain neither memory, desire, nor understanding while listening to patients, in order to detect the unconscious effects in herself of the patient’s projective identifications. Bion described the analyst’s state of consciousness as a reverie.

In transforming beta-elements into alpha-elements, the analyst’s alpha-function transforms unconscious sense data and emotions into knowledge and deploys knowledge in the pursuit of truth. To complete the ascension from the Many to the One, Bion proposed the term “O,” abbreviating the word “origin” (Bion, 1965, p. 15), to designate the ineffable God of negative theology.

I shall use the sign O to denote that which is the ultimate reality represented by terms such as ultimate reality, absolute truth, the godhead, the infinite, the thing-in-itself. O does not fall in the domain of knowledge or learning save incidentally; it can be ‘become’, but it cannot be ‘known’. It is darkness and formlessness but it enters the domain K[nnowledge] when it has evolved to a point where it can be known, through

knowledge gained by experience, and formulated in terms derived from sensuous experience; its existence is conjectured phenomenologically. (Bion, 1970, p. 26)

For Bion, O was the unknowable essence of God; and an analyst with neither memory, desire, nor understanding is engaged in faith in O, while listening to detect the patient's beta-elements in the form of the analyst's own countertransferences. Bion's O was not exclusively transcendent, however. O was simultaneously immanent as the unknowable thing-in-itself of each beta-element. O is both no-thing and all things, because all is in and of God. The process of mystical ascension, from sense data to knowledge to faith and the ineffable, in which the analyst serves as the patient's spiritual guide, is a process that transpires within O, who is God.

With his postulate of O, Bion, and those who have followed him, routinely transgressed the methodological boundaries of psychoanalysis. Bion's concept of O conflated the transcendent with the manifest, no-thing with all things, that of which we know and can say nothing with everything that we sense perceive and know. Bion's panentheism may be regarded as a simplistic metaphysics that was equal and opposite to the materialistic reductionism of mainstream psychoanalysis. Bion responded to secularism by claiming everything to be mystical. The methodologically agnostic psychoanalytic mystics had instead moved the boundary line between psychology and metaphysics, by claiming large parts of the mystical as psychological. Their work could accommodate a negative theology, an O that was no-thing; but they avoided, presumably as an idolatry or impiety, the option of additionally deifying all that we sense perceive and know.

Bion's Neoplatonic psychoanalysis was dogmatic. He wrote of transformations in and of O and did not write of interpreting anything other than projective identifications. His description of both psychotic productions and sense data as beta-elements implied that sense data may be a type of hallucination. Bion (1994) was agnostic regarding the existence of physical matter. He wrote: "The classic psycho-analytic view supposed the mind or personality to be identical with the physical identity of a person. The object of my proposal is to do away with such a limitation and to regard the relationship between body and mind (or personality, or psyche) as one that is

subject to investigation” (p. 314). He affirmed the existence of a “noösphere,” a term that he took from Teilhard de Chardin (p. 313), but the existence of a material stratum to the cosmos remained an open question. “The breast, the thing in itself, is indistinguishable from an idea in the mind. The idea of a breast in the mind is, reciprocally, indistinguishable from the thing itself in the mouth....The realization and the representation of it in the mind have not been differentiated” (Bion, 1962, pp. 57-58). It is possible that Bion held to the view, anciently maintained by the Christian Neoplatonists St Basil of Caesarea and St Gregory of Nyssa (Armstrong, 1955), that perceptible phenomena are thoughts that exist in the mind of God and have no physical existence.

Bion had no use for Milner’s, Winnicott’s, and Ehrenzweig’s ideas about the conjunction of subjectivity and objective reality in generating the paradoxes of creative illusions. Bion’s mysticism was of the exclusively inward type from which Fromm, Winnicott, Kohut, and Loewald explicitly distanced themselves. Bion was a panentheist for whom all things, including individual human psyches, exist in and of O. Continual mystical union is the invariable nature of all existence; there is no not being at one with O. We are all O, everything we do is O. The mystical project is not to achieve union, but to become aware of the divine nature of all that is. Bion’s mystical practice was consequently focussed exclusively on ascending the “great chain of being” (Lovejoy, 1936) which he conceptualized in Neoplatonic fashion as a hierarchy of types of mentation: sense data, dream images and fantasies, knowledge, faith. Bion’s mysticism had only limited points of contact with earlier psychoanalytic contributions on the mystical. He showed no interest in the oceanic feeling, the vicissitudes of individuation, the processes of integration, freedom of will, moral responsibility, or creativity.

Bion’s concept of alpha-function may nevertheless be counted as a major contribution to psychoanalytic theory, to which his interest in the mystical had sensitized him. Bion was attempting to formulate much the same phenomena that led Fromm to conceptualize conscience and the unconscious production of universal symbolism, Milner and Ehrenzweig to revise the theory of primary process, and Winnicott to treat the internalization of both the environmental

mother and the unit status mother at the foundation of the capacity for concern. On the clinical side, Bion's advice that an analyst seek a state of reverie by listening to patients without memory, desire, or understanding, may be compared with Ehrenzweig's observation that the analyst's "evenly hovering attention" opens consciousness to de-differentiation by attending simultaneously to the figure and the ground. Both are ways of speaking of the analyst's "creative surrender" to the task of analysis.

**James S. Grotstein.** A Los Angeles analyst who was re-analyzed by Bion, Grotstein (1981, 1996, 1997, 2000) recognized that the coherent creativity that is sometimes apparent in the manifest content of dreams is inconsistent with Freud's theory of dreamwork. Elaborating Bion's theory of alpha-function, Grotstein speculated that dreams are intrapsychic communications between functions that he personified as the Dreamer Who Dreams the Dream and the Dreamer Who Understands the Dream. He later referred to the two personifications--in Kleinian terms, "internal objects"--as the Ineffable and Phenomenal Subjects. The Ineffable Subject creates the dream; the Phenomenal Subject receives it, much as a patient receives alpha-elements through her analyst's interpretations of her beta-elements. Grotstein further identified the Ineffable and Phenomenal Subjects as the id and the ego, respectively.

Grotstein conceptualized the Ineffable Subject as a numinous, preternatural, psychic presence whose union with the Phenomenal Subject constitutes the "transcendent position." "Psychic presences are the phenomena that Klein and Bion regarded as internal objects, but Grotstein maintained that they do not have subjectivity, do not think, and do not have autonomy. They are recurring characters that are portrayed as autonomous, thinking subjects in the manifest contents of dreams, symptoms, and other derivatives of unconscious phantasies; but the only subjectivity in the psyche is the one subjectivity of the psyche as a whole. The Ineffable and Phenomenal Subjects are each a presence with a distinct orientation and line of development. The Ineffable Subject reasons in a mathematical fashion that Ignacio Matte-Blanco (1959) termed "symmetrical." It produces what Fromm called the paradoxical logic of mysticism. The Phenomenal Subject accomplishes asymmetrical thinking, in keeping with Aristotelian logic.

The two types of thinking produce different types of content. The Ineffable Subject is solipsistic, synchronistic, and “autochthonous”--a term that Grotstein employs to refer to Winnicott’s concept of creative illusion. The Phenomenal Subject engages in “alterity,” the construction of an external world, with reality-testing and object relations. The two subjectivities are responsible for the paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions and proceed simultaneously as a “dual track” function.

The integration of autochthony and alterity takes form as “the transcendent position,” a “state of serenity that accompanies one who...is able to become reconciled to the experience of pure, unadulterated Being and Happening” (Grotstein, 2000, pp. 281-82). It is an extrovertive mystical experience.

The concept of a transcendent position does not constitute a whimsical journey into lofty, ethereal abandon, nor does it necessarily validate religion, spirituality, or the belief in God, except as a need by humans whereby they attempt to close the maw of the ineffable with an all-encompassing name. It is not in the oeuvre of W. Somerset Maugham’s Larry Darrell, the protagonist in *The Razor’s Edge* who sought “enlightenment” atop the Himalayas. In other words, it is not a blissful, “autistic enclave.” O is one’s reality without pretense or distortion. This reality can be a symptom, the pain of viewing beautiful autumn leaves, gazing on the mystique of Mona Lisa de la Gioconda, contemplating the horror of Ypres (for Bion), trying to remember Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Auschwitz, or Viet Nam, or resting comfortably beside one’s mate trying to contemplate the exquisiteness and ineffability of the moment. (Grotstein, 2000, pp. 300-301)

Grotstein agreed with Bion that the therapeutic process involves a transformation of beta-elements by means of alpha-function into alpha-elements, but he innovated that the transformation is incomplete until the patient attains the transcendent position. Grotstein recognized that mystical experiences may be either ecstatic or horrific, depending on the attitude and maturity of the individual. Even dread at the numinous constituted a progress beyond the

depressive position, however, toward mystical awareness. Grotstein generally replaced Bion's pantheism with a negative theology. "Since God is ineffable and inscrutable (never an object of contemplation), then the only way He can be known is through the projective attribution of some essence within us that is proximate, that is, through the ineffability of our unconscious (or, more specifically, of the Ineffable Subject of the Unconscious)" (Grotstein, 2000, p. 139). In characterizing presences as "numinous," Grotstein included Rudolf Otto's (1950) concept of the numinous within the scope of the mystical. Otto's designation of God as "something more" and "wholly other" dovetails with Grotstein's concern with ineffability. At the same time, Grotstein's prose is often poetic, and he sometimes follows Bion more closely, which results in inconsistent phrasing. Grotstein (1996) acknowledged, for example, "an inherent circularity in the concept of 'O,' i.e., it is within us, around us, and beyond us...yet we also temporarily proceed from it, through it, and toward it" (p. 118).

**Neville Symington.** At one time a Catholic priest, but subsequently Tavistock trained and currently resident in Sydney, Australia, Symington (1993, 1994, 2001, 2002, 2004) placed a mystical spin on Fairbairn's view of the auto-erotism of orality and anality as products of inhibited object relations. In Symington's view, all pathologies involve a retreat from object love into narcissism. The narcissistic rejection of object love is a denial not only of whomever happens to be in the narcissist's vicinity at any moment, but more generally of the concept of personhood, a "psychic object" that Symington initially termed "the lifegiver." Holding to the general view among object relations theorists that self is a construction of self-with-other, Symington (1993) maintained that "this turning away from the lifegiver is a turning against the self" (p. 41), a refusal or abandonment of part of the self. Symington argued that narcissism invariably incurs unconscious guilt over its denial of the lifegiver. The refusal affects the self even when another person happens not to be involved at the moment. The denial is a choice or, as Symington preferred to state, an "intentionality" for which the narcissist is responsible. Trauma may motivate the choice, but it nevertheless remains a choice at a very deep level of the personality.

In later writings, Symington mingled metaphysical faith-claims with his psychology of the mystical. He dispensed with the term “lifegiver” and wrote instead of “the infinite,” which he identified with the god of the Hindu Upanishads: “the Absolute, the Truth, or just Reality” (Symington, 2002, p. 103). Although Symington equated the infinite with Bion’s O, he had no use for Bion’s causal determinism within O. Symington regarded reality as a personal God, a Thou, from which the self differentiates by virtue of its intentionality. Conscience is an intrapsychic process that represents the infinite to the self. Like Fromm, Symington contrasted conscience with the superego. Conscience invites the self to make choices. The superego, by contrast, coerces and bullies and is integral to the pathology of narcissism. Symington regarded the psychoanalytic process, with its therapeutic arrival at the depressive position, as a process of moral education--indeed, as the most refined, sophisticated, and nuanced moral education that humanity has yet devised.

Symington advocated meditation and contemplation, which he understood as sober, intellectual thinking. Contemplatives engage in rational reflection, remain in control of their own intentionality, and arrive at truths that, owing to the nature of reality, happen to be mystical. Symington contrasted contemplation with ecstasy, which involves “a cultic outside God with whom the individual self has an ecstatic encounter” (Symington, 1994, p. 95). The oceanic feeling was an instance of ecstasy, a temporary madness (p. 109). An ecstatic god is a split-off part of the personality, a projective identification of the superego, and part of the syndrome of narcissism. In keeping with this contrast of contemplation and ecstasy, Symington categorized religions as “mature” or “primitive,” “natural” or “revealed,” respectively. “Psychoanalysis is a natural religion but not a revealed one” (Symington, 2004, p. 161). Symington’s major technical innovation was to phrase interpretations in manners that avoided the superego while inviting conscience to manifest. “Any interpretation that is really effective has to bring conscience into play....conscience then starts to invite the person to do something” (Symington, 2001, p. 31). Because conscience manifests the infinite, the patient’s therapeutic attainment of the depressive

position was simultaneously a spiritual “awakening” and a “vital realization” of the mystical character of reality. It was a religious conversion.

Symington’s categorical contrasts of health and pathology resulted in a series of mutual exclusions: sanity or narcissism, conscience or the superego, contemplation or ecstasy, natural religion or revealed religion. His model lacks the nuance of Bion’s theory that everyone continually goes back and forth between the paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions, on which Grotstein built his dual-track function. Symington’s dualism also has no place for a concern with psychic integration.

**Michael Eigen.** Although trained in New York during the heyday of ego psychology, Eigen found the British Independents more to his liking and appropriates “whatever hits me” (Eigen, 1998, p. 163). “If I had to situate my writings, I think I see myself as part of a budding subculture of psychoanalytic mystics” (Eigen, 1992, p. xx). Eigen is disinterested in the debate whether psychoanalysis is or ought to be mystical. “There is no reason to place artificial limits on where or how far therapy should go” (Eigen, 1998, p. 41). Eigen sees O, the numinous, the presence of God, aliveness, Light, ecstasy, *jouissance*, and non-being everywhere, all the time.

Eigen’s views on the mystical are scattered throughout his writings (1986, 1992, 1993, 1995, 1996, 1998, 1999, 2001a, 2001b, 2002, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007). His book on the topic, *The Psychoanalytic Mystic* (1998), aspires toward a systematic presentation; but he confesses, “I believe in lack of definition” (Eigen, 2007, p. 106). Finding mysticity wherever he looks, he insists on the diversity of mysticisms and ecstasies. He deplores psychoanalysts’ preoccupation with the oceanic feeling, as though it exhausted the topic of mystical experiencing. He rejects the theory of primary narcissism and cautions that undifferentiation can only be relative or comparative. He endorses the theory of his major analyst, Henry Elkin (1957, 1972), on the development of the self in early infancy. The newborn commences without an identity, or sense of unity, but instead experiences consciousness of a collective environment that includes the mother. When self and mother are first distinguished, they are experienced as a dual unity, an I-yet-not-I; and dual unity subsequently manifests in a host of different ways. Dual unity is the

primary content of mystical experiencing, whether an impersonal union with all existence, or a personal I-Thou encounter and dialogue with God. Dual unity may also be recognized in the double perception, partly ego-centered and individualistic, and partly mystical and collective, that Fromm called a dialectic of Aristotelian and paradoxical logic, and Grotstein called a “dual track” of alterity and autochthony.

In early development, dual unity is at work when the infant first distinguishes matter and mind, as exemplified by bodily and mental ego-feelings, respectively. For Eigen’s clinical purposes, the most important aspect of mind is the ideal. Where Rank, Fromm, and Winnicott were much concerned with failed individuation, Eigen’s postulation of inborn relationality leads him to see pathology extensively through the lens of ideality. Infants experience omniscience of mind and the creative illusion of omnipotence of body. Splitting of materiality and ideality is, in Eigen’s view, the dominant pathology of our age. The application of ideality to the dual-unity of self and other generates a divine self and a divine other around age six months. Disappointment by the divine other, with its traumatic hurt, rage, and despair, becomes prototypical of all traumas; and consolation by the divine other, with its return to favor and joy, becomes prototypical of all ecstasies. This death-and-rebirth pattern is the basic theme of psychotherapeutic change. It has a history in religion because it exists in nature. Like Winnicott, Eigen (1993, p. 31; 2004, p. 75) maintains that a patient should be allowed to regress or to manifest a negative transference until reflexive awareness sets in. Only as the negative transference becomes ego-dystonic and recovery begins to occur spontaneously does Eigen recommend intervening with transference interpretations.

The infinity of God is the prototypical instance of ideality. Omniscience and omnipotence apply infinity to mind and body, respectively. All mental representations or imagos are ideal images. Idolatry, as discussed by Fromm, is a pathology of ideality; but there are developmentally earlier syndromes. In some cases, “one’s O, one’s very sense of aliveness, is off--poisoned, warped, traumatized malformed” (Eigen, 2002, p. 120). In other cases, mystical

experiencing is intact but remains unintegrated within people's lives. Omniscience forecloses learning and creativity. It may also encourage intolerance, hate, and contempt.

Influenced by both Buddhist meditation and kabbalah, Eigen entertains paradoxical ideas about God. Eigen's God is firstly the biblical God, a Creator, who acts through providence and grace, and converses verbally in mystics' minds during their ecstasies (Eigen, 1998, pp. 11, 193; 2002, p. 140). Intrapsychic dialogues have sometimes been associated with prophetism and contrasted with mysticism (Heschel, 1962); but Scholem (1950, 1954) established that experiences of "communion" have been the rule rather than the exception throughout the history of Jewish mysticism. At the same time, Eigen's God is an appropriation of Bion's O, manifest everywhere, the very stuff of the creation. Mystical experiencing includes peak experiences but is more importantly a way of appreciating all experience, regardless of one's state of consciousness. Because the sense of presence is variable despite God's omnipresence, Eigen suggests that God is "more highly concentrated" in some places than in others (Eigen, 2007, p. 18). "There may be no end to God, but there are different God zones" (Eigen, 2001a, pp. 22). The ecstasy of non-being, of Lacanian lack, is ghastly and horrific; its therapeutic transformation into a euphoric ecstasy of aliveness, of Lacanian *jouissance*, is beatific. The whole of the psychoanalytic process is a transformation of O, a journey of God, with God, through God.

Rephrasing Fairbairn's (1943, p. 60) claim that "libido is essentially orientated towards objects," Eigen (1979) asserts that "instincts seek an ideal imago" (p. 102). The reintegration of instinct and ideality, body and mind, is the goal of therapy. The goal can be achieved neither by reducing ideality to the body, as Freud and mainstream psychoanalysis attempted, nor by ignoring the body while addressing ideality, as both existentialism and Kohut's self psychology have done. Many of Eigen's clinical strategies aim to promote mystical experiencing--a sense of the numinous--through the psychoanalytic dialogue. Where Grotstein's conceptualizes the transcendent position as a transient achievement, Eigen aspires to a transformed personality that has ready access to *jouissance* and numinous experiences. The divergence between Grotstein and Eigen is analogous, perhaps, to aesthetic experiences that depend on occasional visits to art

museums, and the continuous aesthetic experiencing of an artist at work and play. Interestingly, although most analysts refer to transient experiences when they mention the oceanic feeling, Freud (1930) introduced the term in reference to continuous mystical experiencing (Parsons, 1999).

One of Eigen's (1998) case reports concerns a mystic who was so taken with mystical experiences that she neglected the remainder of her life, going from mystic state to mystic state, while suffering desolation in the intervals between them. Another patient had an abusive temper which he was able to calm by practicing meditation. However, he could not transport his experience of renewal into the remainder of his life. In both cases, Eigen addressed the dissociation of ideality without undermining the ideality itself. Eigen has developed a similar strategy for a variety of other cases. Winnicott (1963) had remarked that the psychopathic "child knows in his bones that it is *hope* that is locked up in the wicked behaviour, and that *despair* is linked with compliance and false socialization" (p. 104). Applying the insight to psychopathy in adults, Eigen (1993) asserted: "It is both crude and subtly oppressive to try to undercut the patient's pathology without helping to bring to light and assimilate the capacities and tendencies that the pathology embodies" (p. 12). Eigen subsequently generalized the pattern of liberating *jouissance* from negativity and made the mystical character of the pattern explicit (p. 103).

One of life's cruel tantalization is that there are black hole ecstasies, mutilated ecstasies, damaged and damaging ecstasies, including evil imaginings, evil dreams. Ecstasy plays in damaged keys. One keeps aiming at the ecstasy in the warp, pressing buttons to heighten it. There is a sense one can undo the warp by feeding on ecstatic twists. Can warp continue after bliss? (Eigen, 2001b, p. 17)

Eigen (2004, p. 88) is aware that his clinical strategy conforms with the pattern of the kabbalistic practice of *tikkun*, "healing," which proceeds by liberating sparks of holiness from the material shards in which they have been since the primordial, cosmogonic catastrophe.

### **Concluding Reflections**

The psychoanalytic mainstream has treated mystical ecstasies as anomalous experiences that are transient and unimportant for most practical purposes. Working with the theory of infantile solipsism, analysts regarded mysticism as a matter of making the unconscious conscious. Because the psychoanalytic mystics credited the experiences with long-lasting importance, they studied them more closely. Their first and most basic contribution was the recognition that the mystical involves a complete line of development. Because Rank, Fromm, Winnicott, and Loewald assumed that the deepest layer of the unconscious was solipsistic, they placed the infantile sources of mystical experience at the beginning of human development. They interpreted individuation as the primary goal of both maturation and therapeutic change, and they identified failed individuation with psychopathology. Extending the same line of reasoning beyond early infancy, Kohut postulated a narcissistic line of development, which Grotstein located within a Kleinian model under the term “autochthony.” However, the theory of infantile solipsism collapsed in the early 1980s, leaving psychoanalytic theories of mysticism in disarray (Harrison, 1986). What may we salvage from the wreckage?

Psychoanalytic discussions of the mystical have addressed five different phenomena.

(a) In their discussions of O, Bion, Grotstein, Symington, and Eigen have presented mystical theologies. They have conceptualized God in a variety of ways: panentheistic, transcendent, and/or immanent. These discussions are speculations, inconsistent with each other, and unhelpful departures from methodological agnosticism.

(b) Milner, Winnicott, Ehrenzweig, Grotstein, and Eigen discussed creative illusion, the infant’s fantasizing the mother prior to discovering her in reality, the infant’s similar endowment of the Teddy bear with personhood, and more generally all perception, all culture, and all scientific knowledge. Limited by the universality of the illusions that we project, we cannot know the real. Where Bion was uncertain whether realism was to be preferred to idealism, and limited his faith to O, it is more common to place faith in the real, whether or not one additionally places faith in the transcendent. Whether faith or, in Winnicott’s term, “belief-in,” is to be counted precisely as mystical, it is presupposed by all reality-testing.

(c) Grotstein and Eigen have invoked Otto's concept of "numinous" experience. Otto explicitly equated numinous experiences with religious experiences in general, and treated mystical experiences as a subcategory. For Otto, all mystical experiences are numinous; but not all numinous experiences are mystical. Grotstein and Eigen instead reflect popular usage, which extends the term "mystical" to numinous experience in general. The merits and disadvantages of both approaches await further research. There is considerable merit, however, to Grotstein's and Eigen's view that clinical psychoanalysis should routinely inculcate the achievement of a sense of the numinous, the distinctive experience of wonderment, awe, fascination, humility, immediacy, and tranquility in the face of life's mysteries (see Merkur, 1996, 2006).

(d) Ehrenzweig, Winnicott, Loewald, Bion, and Eigen have addressed the concept of undifferentiation. The organization of sense impressions into coherent perceptions involves a great deal of learning, for example, that differently colored areas within the visual field are individual objects, located at specific distances from the viewer, and so forth. Undifferentiation implies a comparative absence of ideas concerning sense impressions. Writing in advance of Ehrenzweig, Fromm did not use the term "undifferentiation," but he recommended its achievement when he advocated Zen Buddhist meditation and the "bare attending" procedure of Buddhist mindfulness meditation.

(e) All of the psychoanalytic mystics have taken concern with unitive experiences, which are many and varied in their contents (Merkur, 1998, 1999). Rather than to think in terms of unitive experiences, it is more useful to reflect on unitive thinking processes that are consistent with Loewald's emphasis on integration. Psychoanalysts have detected a series of unitive trends in the psyche, including: the synthetic function of the ego (Freud, 1919; Nunberg, 1931); the over-determination and multiple function of single mental representations (Walder, 1936); therapeutic conflict resolution through the psychic integration of the id, ego, and superego (Brierley, 1951); the developmental integration of neonatal ego nuclei into a coherent ego structure (Glover, 1968); the developmental process of separation-individuation (Mahler & Furer, 1968; Mahler, Pine, & Bergman, 1975; Mahler, 1979a, 1979b); and, I would add, the

resolution of the Oedipus complex through the introjection of the father representation within the superego (Freud, 1923a).

We may assume, I suggest, that the psyche commences with undifferentiated sense perceptions and gradually learns to organize them. The process of organization involves reality-testing, which has differentiation as its corollary. Organization also involves an integration of sense data into meaningful wholes. Integration is a unitive function that possibly has its basis in a discrete process of thinking. Freud's (1900) concept of "condensation," to which Loewald attributed the mystical sense of timelessness, is a sufficient hypothesis.

Freud traced the psyche's unitive trend to Eros, but Eros is itself shaped by the unitive trend. Lacan (1982, p. 138) remarked: "*There is something of One....*in the discourse of Freud, it is set forth in the concept of Eros, defined as a fusion making one out of two, that is, of Eros seen as the gradual tendency to make one out of a vast multitude." Freud (1915) claimed that there is no conflict in the unconscious. "When two wishful impulses whose aims must appear to us incompatible become simultaneously active, the two impulses do not diminish each other or cancel each other out, but combine to form an intermediate aim, a compromise" (p. 186). Freud's suggestion will account in an exclusively psychological manner for the clinical evidence that is consistent with Freud's (1905) extension of the concept of sexuality. Whether or not all instincts are sexual physiologically, all mental representations of instincts become psychosexual through the compromise function. This distinction permits us to abandon reified abstractions such as drive, psychic energy, and libido while retaining the psychological concepts of Eros and extended sexuality. The unconscious compromise formation is, as Lacan (1982, pp. 138-39) recognized, a metaphor. It is produced, as Freud implied, through condensation. The organization of sense impressions of the body, proprioceptions and emotions and sensory observations of instinctive bodily motions, into a teleologically oriented concept of general motivation, such as the extended concept of sexuality, is the product of a considerable task of integration, symbol-formation, and thinking. A capacity for love is inborn, but its flourishing is an achievement of its integration in every stage of human development. Love is integrative not

only interpersonally, but also intrapsychically. It falls under the scope of the mystical, as Fromm rightly recognized.

Development as a whole involves lifelong processes of increasing differentiation and increasing integration. We optimally become both more knowledgeable and more wise. The successful resolution of the Oedipus complex, the achievement of universalized morality is unitive both interpersonally and intrapsychically. Moral development, including capacities for guilt, atonement, and restitution, is spontaneous, natural, and healthy. There is a discrete part of the psyche, a psychic process, that is responsible for conscience, universal symbols, sublimations, and the rationality of dreams. The ego experiences this process as another self, an internal object. The internal object's view of the ego accomplishes reflexive awareness, the function that is generally but wrongly called "self-consciousness" or "self-observation." As Eigen suggests, the self is a product of reflexive thinking, a construction. The function of reflexive awareness operates prior to its construction of a self-representation or self-image, and should be distinguished from it. Condensation, identification, and mystical timelessness, may be further applications of reflexive thinking, or perhaps owe to a separate symbol-forming process. Therapy that successfully addresses aggression, which is to say, inhibitions of moral development, produce moral transformations; but neither therapy nor the unitive consists of morality alone.

Narcissism is not a discrete line of development. Neither is autochthony. Subjectively perceived objects and selfobjects are symptoms of a wounded self, an unconscious denial of relationality; and they incur unconscious guilt. Other pathologies of the unitive include idolatry, one-sided ideality, nightmarish ecstasies, rampant materialism, and a host of other syndromes. Trauma, and the repression to which it gives rise, inhibits both differentiation and integration. The psyche's natural healing process works to integrate trauma, so that both differentiation and further integration can be resumed. When the natural healing process is unequal to its task, therapeutic intervention is appropriate. All effective therapies are integrative. Therapy is

intrinsically unitive. The unitive includes much more than the therapeutic, but the therapeutic cannot be pursued apart from the unitive.

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