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For my family,
and especially for Sandra

Preface and Acknowledgements

Mystics are a class, or perhaps one of several like classes, of individuals who single-mindedly devote their lives to the pursuit of what they regard as the most important thing in all reality. Some may assume that for theistic mystics, those who identify God as this topmost important item, life is simplified a hundredfold when every nitty-gritty molecule of human existence is collapsed into a singular orientation to God. Fortunately or unfortunately, the mystical life is far from simple, and neither is it easily condensable into a sagely descriptive statement. Incidentally, even amongst this community of theistic mystics, diversity of beliefs, systems, and practices prevails. As deserving as it is to cast an analytical eye over a broad set of expressions of theistic mysticism, I have decided to narrow my gaze and transfix it on the mysticism of the Christian tradition. Even though Christian mysticism is not a homogenous, monolithic entity, it does lend itself to an investigation based on a range of its modalities as formulated by key representatives of this tradition. It is with this consideration in mind that I turn to Evelyn Underhill's *Mysticism: The Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness*, which I feel provides a helpful coverage of the thoughts of Christian mystics. Their writings hold two extraordinary features ─ the use of paradoxes in describing the many constitutive elements of mysticism, and the claim of the uniqueness of mystical experiences. This book represents my attempt to inquire into these two features in mysticism.

I am grateful to a number of people, for without their help the whole study encapsulated here would have been just a collection of vague notions floating in my head. My doctoral dissertation forms the basis of this book. I am truly indebted to my principal academic supervisor, Andrew Ng, and my associate supervisor, Gil-Soo Han, for their untiring efforts in ensuring that my regular drafts and corrections eventually culminate in a final product that is up to scratch. My dissertation underwent further improvements, owing to the perceptive comments and suggestions of my examiners, Brian Scarlett and Jove Aguas, and for this I am grateful. I am equally grateful for the helpful feedback given by Peter Wong after he had meticulously perused virtually all the chapters of my work. I would be remiss if I did not

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I have gained tremendously from the support of and exchange of ideas with my fellow philosophy specialists. Amongst them are Lok Chong Hoe, Zailan Moris, Burhanuddin Baki, and Maybelle Padua. My interest in mysticism was initially nurtured by Rudy Wong, a spiritual director whose devotion to matters of ultimate concern is truly inspiring. I cherish our many conversations, particularly those that revolved around spirituality and psychology. I am also fortunate to have been a beneficiary of the Fundamental Research Grant Scheme from Malaysia's Ministry of Higher Education and a recipient of Monash University's Research Scholarship awarded to part-time PhD candidates.

There are never enough words to express my profound gratitude to my family for all their love and support. Last, but definitely not least, I thank my wife, Sandra, for her constant love and gentle encouragement throughout the process of my research.

Penang, Malaysia Peter Chong-Beng Gan

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Chapter 1
Introduction

Scholarly interest in mysticism may wax and wane along with transitions of global metanarratives, even if committed individuals remain steadfastly faithful to their chosen spiritual disciplines. In a philosophical climate of postmodernism and its trend of overturning virtually all dogmatic appeals to definitive and universal truths, a reorientation to the mysterious has prompted an interest in the unknown at the heart of the mystical pursuit. By way of Evelyn Underhill, this book tries to give voice to renowned as well as lesser-known mystics of the Christian tradition in order to enable them to resound through two synthesizing instruments: dialecticism gives form to the structure of the mystical journey, while sublimity preserves the formlessness of the mysterious goal of that journey.

In this chapter, after a general introduction to Underhill and an overall description of her text around which this study revolves, I work towards defining the concept of mysticism and speak briefly about the origins of Christian mysticism. From written reports of mystics, two interesting and important questions surface, and these questions help initiate this study's investigation. I also plan to outline my reasons for choosing Underhill's text as my principal reference source. Following this is a succinct enumeration of some writings on and by Underhill. The bulk of this present chapter consists of a presentation of the objective and method navigating this study as well as an introduction to the themes of dialecticism and sublimity, which constitute the hermeneutical framework for investigating mysticism. Placed in the final section are previews of the chapters that unfold after this introduction.

1.1 Evelyn Underhill and Her Foundational Text on Mysticism

Evelyn Underhill was born in Wolverhampton, England, on 6 December 1875. Well acclaimed for her writings on mysticism, in 1921, she lectured on the philosophy of religion at Manchester College, Oxford, and later became the first woman to deliver

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a series of lectures on theology at Oxford (Bangley 2004, p. ix). Interestingly, her religious quest took her through agnosticism and Neo-Platonism, to settle eventually at Anglicanism with a strong leaning towards Catholicism (Cropper 1958/2003, pp. 29ff., 88, 175; Francis 2011, pp. 283–287). Underhill embodied in her life the ideal combination of contemplation and action. Not only was she a person devoted to the life of prayer and study, she was also committed to helping the poor and fulfilling the role of spiritual director to numerous persons (Brame 1990b). After living a full life vivified by her passion for intimate communion with divine reality, she passed away at Hampstead on 15 June 1941.

Underhill's text, *Mysticism: The Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness* (henceforth *M*), is a comprehensive examination of the subtleties of the mystical life. Originally published in 1911, it underwent further editions. The current twelfth edition was published in 1930. *M* is one of the author's myriad writings on mysticism, a phenomenon that is tersely described by her as being "in love with the Absolute" (*M* back cover).[1] A quick thumb-through of the massive text of *M* informs the reader of its bipartite structure. The first part, "The Mystic Fact", unravels mysticism in terms of its definition, patent characteristics, and its associations with or distinctions from psychology, theology, symbolism, and magic. It is the second part, "The Mystic Way", which propelled Underhill to notoriety. Here, the author painstakingly proceeds to map out the distinct milestones of the mystics' journey. She guides the reader through an exposition and discussion of the five stages of the mystic way: awakening, purgation, illumination, purification, and finally, union.

When reading *M* we will be impressed with the breadth of Underhill's familiarity with the field, notwithstanding some places in *M* where analysis could be improved. Her writing style possesses a refreshing blend of the academic with the poetic. Underhill is careful to steer clear from any manner of arcane doublespeak. Her work is peppered with references that constitute the provenance of some of her leading theses. She quotes liberally from the works of Christian mystics like John of the Cross, Meister Eckhart, and Teresa of Avila. Furthermore, Underhill does display some knowledge of Jewish and Islamic mysticisms, and this is illustrated in her quotes from several kabbalists and sufis (e.g., see *M* pp. 63, 108, 127, 131–134). Her elucidation and discussion of their respective mystical treatises lend support to some of her own assertions about the content of the mystical life. *M* is a vigorous and lively piece of writing, accessible to someone approaching the field for the first time as well as to specialists looking for a more concentrated engagement with mysticism. It is one of Underhill's most important early works on mysticism. While her later writings may indicate some alterations in her theoretical orientation, interest, and focus, this in no way reduces the importance *M* serves for this current study. My study is not directed at charting the evolution of Underhill's thought. Rather, it unravels the essential elements subsisting within *M* that are amenable to a creative research geared towards an appreciation of mysticism as, perhaps, a universal feature of human culture.

[1] Underhill has also published numerous creative writings of fiction and poetry.

Was Underhill a mystic? She never claimed herself to be one.[2] For that matter, it is not in the disposition of a true mystic to openly declare her "mystic" status.[3] Dana Greene (1988, p. 22) tells us that Underhill "never considered herself a theologian". And, Harvey Egan (2012, p. 38), while profoundly respecting Underhill's superb ability to synthesize and exposit the thoughts of mystics, thinks that she cannot be regarded as a mystical theologian, especially when her ability is compared with the calibre possessed by mystical theologians such as Karl Rahner and Thomas Aquinas. There is a lot of expository material in *M*, and, as stated above, Underhill relies quite heavily upon the writings of Christian mystics. Nevertheless, the gems of uniqueness do lie hidden in *M*, which I plan to uncover to help develop an alternative approach to mysticism. Underhill's ideas will be read contiguously with the ideas of mystics and mystical theologians that she quotes. It is my belief that ideas and treatises ought to be evaluated on their own merits and that it is best to leave aside appeals to putative authoritative standings of their authors.

1.2 Mysticism: Concept, Approaches, and the Thrust of This Study

The concept of mysticism does not lend itself to a precise definition. William Ralph Inge (1899, p. 3) laments:

> No word in our language – not even "Socialism" – has been employed more loosely than "Mysticism". Sometimes it is used as an equivalent for symbolism or allegorism, sometimes for theosophy or occult science; and sometimes it merely suggests the mental state of a dreamer or vague and fantastic opinions about God and the world.

Inge (1899, pp. 3–4) proceeds to trace the term mysticism to the Greek mystery cults wherein an initiate is inducted into the cults' hidden knowledge of divine things. Etymologically, "mysticism" originates from the Greek "*mystikos*" and Latin "*mysticus*" that relate to the English "mystery" (see Louth 1981/2007, pp. 204 and 207). In ancient Greek culture, the mystical was frequently associated with secret religious rituals. It was only much later that mystical theology emerged as a system of thought that includes the examination of a profound encounter with divine reality.[4] It is

[2] In *M* (p. 49), Underhill places herself on the side of nonmystics trying to glimpse, from the outside, the inner stirrings of mystics through their writings.

[3] Interestingly, in *Practical Mysticism*, we see Underhill (1915/1943, p. 3) offering a less stringent definition of a mystic when she says: "Mysticism is the art of union with Reality. The mystic is a person who has attained that union in greater or lesser degree; or who aims at and believes in such attainment." Going by this definition, it would not be wrong to call Underhill a mystic.

[4] The employment of the word "mystical theology" in Christianity has its roots in a text of that same name, authored by Dionysius the Areopagite (a pseudonym, and sometimes known as the Pseudo-Denis). Quite likely, Dionysius was a Christian theologian who lived in Syria at the end of the fifth and beginning of the sixth century (Rolt 1920, p. 1). However, most medieval authors right up to the sixteenth century, rarely, if ever, used the term "mysticism" or "mystic". Instead, the words "spiritual" or "contemplation" were employed in reference to matters pertaining to the inner dimension of profound desires and ultimate quests in religion, as opposed to religions' external or institutional dimension (see de Certeau 1982/1992, pp. 94–96).

important to note that mystical experience is actually a component of "mysticism" that is a larger term encompassing mystical philosophy or theology, mystical literature, mystical experience, and the overall mystical life of commitment to an ultimate reality. Having a mystical experience might be the defining ingredient of a mystic. On the other hand, the experience itself may still be considered ancillary to transformation of the self and through the self to others.

In order to formulate a working definition of mysticism for this particular study, I refer to an extract in *M* in which Underhill describes mysticism as an:

> expression of the innate tendency of the human spirit towards complete harmony with the transcendental order; whatever be the theological formula under which that order is understood. This tendency, in great mystics, gradually captures the whole field of consciousness; it dominates their life and, in the experience called "mystic union," attains its end. (*M* p. xiv)

It will come to be seen that for Underhill, mysticism includes, yet extends, beyond special experiences marked by a direct meeting between the self and God as infinite. The word "direct" is used to set mystical experience apart from an experience of God via an indirect route, such as the enjoyment of a conversation with a close friend, which leads me to appreciate and thank God for this enjoyment. It is also employed to distinguish mystical experience from a purely intellectual knowledge of God derived from reasoning. This is not to say that one cannot have a direct mystical experience of God that *follows* from an enjoyable conversation or theological deliberation. It is the nature of the experience which establishes it as one considered to be mystical or otherwise. The term mystical experience refers to special experiences corresponding to levels of mystical progress and characterized by variations of quality and intensity. At the apex of all mystical experiences is the experience of mystical union between the self and God. Note also that by "direct" I do not mean that there is absolutely no faculty (natural or divine) of the self involved in mystical experience. Despite the fluidity of the definition of mysticism, it is probably best to conceive mysticism as a dynamic system founded upon a whole life orientated to what is perceived as ultimate reality and that the mystic strives to attain profound union with this reality.

M is centred on Christian mysticism. This is a mysticism that has its origins rooted in Christian theology informed by ancient Greek thought such as Plato (429–347BCE) and Aristotle (384–322BCE), as well as by the biblical narratives. The writings of Plato and of his intellectual successors, especially Philo of Alexandria (20BCE–50CE), Plotinus (204/5–270), Iamblichus (240–325), and Proclus (410–485), are credited as the principal contributors to the birth of Christian mysticism (Louth 1981/2007, pp. xii–xiii, 17–18, 28–29, 35–36, and 156). Reliance upon the Bible for reference material has been present in Christian mysticism right from its infancy (see McGinn 2006, pp. 3–6). In fact, Origen of Alexandria (185–254), the first known Christian mystical theologian, is reputed to have been an accomplished biblical exegete who produced a mystical interpretation of the biblical Song of Songs (Origen 3rd cent./1957).

There are diverse disciplinary approaches to the study of mysticism. A feasible historical approach would be to trace the development of a mystical tradition and present descriptive and analytical accounts of patterns of change through time.

Bernard McGinn (2006, p. xi), for example, identifies three large stages of development of Western (as opposed to the Eastern denominations and rites) Christian mysticism: (1) the monastic era of the Fathers of the Church and the mystics and scholars of the middle ages; (2) the "new mysticism" (1200–mid-seventeenth century) characterized by the flourishing of language and literature in Europe, the emergence of Cistercian and Victorine scholasticisms, and the incorporation of ministry to the poor and social engagement in mysticism; and (3) the crisis of mysticism beginning in the mid-seventeenth century to the twentieth century.

From the perspective of psychology, mystical experience can be studied within the categories and methods of psychology. A fitting example would be a psychoanalytical study of mystical experience or a biopsychological investigation of physiological correlates of such an experience (see Belzen and Geels 2003). A literary theorist might be fascinated with the style of writing found in some mystical texts richly endowed with metaphors and imageries and perhaps possessing a unique rhetorical pattern that warrants examination.[5] The theological approach to mysticism generally confines its analysis to theistic mysticism (e.g., see Trethowan 1975). In this approach, set doctrines pertaining to the nature of divine reality and its relation to human beings and the world are deployed as interpretive frameworks for studying mystical phenomena. Both reason and revelation figure prominently in the subject of inquiry in mystical theology.

In my study of *M*, philosophy is the predominant disciplinary approach. Considering that Underhill's work ranges over the mystical writings of the theistic kind, engagements with the concept of God cannot be disregarded. My philosophical approach in this research also implies that biblical passages need not constitute mandatory sources of reference. Although *M* is not principally a philosophical text, unlike say, Walter Stace's *Mysticism and Philosophy* or the papers collected in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, edited by Steven Katz, the many instances of philosophical vocabulary contained in *M* cannot escape notice.[6] Two philosophical themes – *dialecticism* and *sublimity* – function as interpretive instruments to help unravel Underhill's treatise on mysticism. The hypothesis of this study is that reading *M* through the themes of dialecticism and sublimity affords me an avenue to identify and unpack the many weighty elements contained within the said author's comprehensive elucidation of mysticism. With a firm grounding in the discipline of philosophy, and the deployment of a theoretical framework consisting of dialecticism and sublimity, some advance can be achieved in the research on Underhill's scholarship and, by extension, the study of mysticism.

Every so often, explorations into mysticism unveil two interesting and pervasive questions: (1) Many mystical writings contain statements that appear to be paradoxical. As examples: "He [Paul the Apostle] saw nothing, to wit, God. God is

[5] Michael A. Sells's (1994) *Mystical Languages of Unsaying* is a book that tracks through the unparalleled mechanisms in which mystical languages, especially in the apophatic (way of negation) tradition, indulge in patterns of "unsaying" the said propositions.

[6] Despite Underhill's statement that mysticism is not a philosophy, she does declare that most true mystics are mystical philosophers, and not the other way around (most mystical philosophers are mystics) (*M* pp. 81 and 95).

naught and God is one. What aught is is naught as well" (Eckhart 14th cent./1992, sermons and collations, chp. 19: "Paul rose from the ground", p. 62); "[M]ysteries of heavenly Truth lie hidden in the dazzling obscurity of the secret Silence, outshining all brilliance with the intensity of their darkness" (Dionysius the Areopagite 5th cent./1920, *The Mystical Theology*, chp. 1, p. 191); "God, who is Not-other, is not the sky, which is an other; nonetheless, in the sky God is not an other; nor is He other than the sky" (Nicholas of Cusa 1462/1979, chp. 6, p. 51). What can we make of these statements of opposing concepts? (2) Like most forms of human experience, despite the reality of shared experiential content amongst these forms, it is possible to classify and individuate our major experiences. Experiencing sadness, for instance, is definitely different from experiencing happiness. Mystics claim that their experience of an encounter with ultimate reality is both powerful and substantially different from any other experience. In what sense can we conceive of the mystical experience as something which is very unique?

The underlying belief of this study is that by applying dialectics to the analysis of *M*, the first question above can be addressed and reading that same text through the theme of the sublime helps us grapple with the second question. The discourse on mysticism, especially the testimonies of mystics, conceals patterns of dialectical relations. These relations, on occasion, seemingly verge onto the contradictory, but at most times, they clearly suggest a mutually interrelated mixture of two opposing terms. Additionally, given that mysticism has its roots in that which is mysterious, dialectical reasoning opens up to instances of its own deficiency. Mystical relationship is amenable to analysis into dialectical configurations, and yet it is not fully compliant to such articulations. There are occasions in this relationship when a sublime experience is called forth in such a way as to elevate the experiencing subject while revealing the excesses of the beyond.

Numerous other works on mysticism can also be submitted to an in-depth study using those two themes. *M* is chosen on account of its recognition as a classic and pioneering work on the subject amongst Anglophone writers of the twentieth century. Its central focus is the significant stages of the mystical journey. With a keen eye for relevant details, Underhill has been able to draw upon a broad field of mystical writings, mainly in the Christian tradition. What I seek is not an anthology of writings by key mystics but an exposition and discussion on the content of the mystical life that offers this study a firm ground from which a relatively fresh exploration of mysticism can take off. In that regard, Underhill's text does not fail to deliver. Furthermore, as I progress in this study, it will become evident that the dialectical features buried within *M* do yield to efforts at distilling them into a coherent system. There are other reasons why Underhill's *M* is chosen. Underhill defines God as infinite being incorporating the universe. This conception of God as all-encompassing informs her submission that mysticism is a holistic life vocation, one which emphasizes contemplation as well as action, and that the mystical goal is not just confined to specific states of consciousness but an orientation to divine fecundity and concrete practical actions. What I find particularly valuable is that, with a consistent definition of God as infinite, Underhill has managed to render *M*, a text predominantly on Christian mysticism, rationally appealing to anyone attracted to a broad

and relatively nonsectarian form of mysticism. Finally, it may seem insignificant to some, but I think that the fact that Underhill is a woman and a lay person (not a consecrated religious) does have some bearing upon the writing of *M*. She is convinced that the mystical life is not for the elite few; rather, everyone is called to a life deeply immersed in the infinite. It is our true calling as human persons.

At this juncture, permit me to make some comments regarding the choice of dialecticism and sublimity. In *M*, there is no explicit assertion by Underhill that her work, in essence, is a dialectical approach to or a quest for dialectics in mysticism. Within the text, there is no indication of a painstaking attempt to identify the dialectical traits inherent in mystical writings and to pursue a dialectical pattern of reasoning in order to arrive at resolutions of binary opposites. Also, while the word "sublime" does occasionally surface from the many pages of *M*, it is more often used as an adjective – for instance, "the sublime heights of the divinity" (*M* p. 409) – than as a substantive concept of philosophy, particularly aesthetics. Hence, this interpretive frame is something that I deliberately apply to Underhill's text with the express purpose of unravelling the dialectical and the sublime within mysticism, which I hope will not only help address the two questions I posed above but more notably engender an appreciation of the value and uniqueness of a life vocation orientated to infinite reality. To the best of my knowledge, such an approach to *M* is still an uncharted terrain.

1.3 Writings on and by Underhill

There are a number of works about Underhill's life and thought. *Evelyn Underhill: Modern Guide to the Ancient Quest for the Holy*, edited by Dana Greene (1988), offers us selections of Underhill's immense corpus of writings, and these are set against the backdrop of Underhill's personal spiritual struggles and the turbulent and distinctive intellectual milieu of her time. *Evelyn Underhill: The Ways of the Spirit*, edited by Grace Adolphsen Brame (1990a), is a collection of previously unpublished devotional writings of Underhill. *Evelyn Underhill: Artist of the Infinite Life*, Dana Greene (1990), is a biography of Underhill. Amongst papers on Underhill are "Teresian Wisdom in Selected Writings of Evelyn Underhill", *Spiritual Life* (1995), "The Wisdom of John of the Cross in the Writings of Evelyn Underhill", and *The Evelyn Underhill Newsletter* (2000), both by Mary Brian Durkin who seeks to unravel the Teresian and Sanjuanist spiritualities, respectively, in Underhill's writings. "The Mystic and the Church" (published by Baylor University's Center for Christian Ethics), by Dana Greene (2005), is a paper that explores Underhill's account of the relation between individual mysticism and institutional church. Michael Stoeber (2003), in "Evelyn Underhill on Magic, Sacrament, and Spiritual Transformation", *Worship*, highlights the nontraditional views found in Underhill's early writings and seeks to extract Underhill's attempts to connect occultism with Christian sacramentology and liturgy. Gerald Loweth (2006) wrote a doctoral dissertation titled "The Evolution of Evelyn Underhill's View of Spirituality, Mysticism,

and Socio-moral Action", which explores Underhill's shifting emphasis from private prayer and devotion to a more committed engagement in social matters. "Beyond the Fringe of Speech: The Spirituality of Evelyn Underhill and Art" is Marie Therese Crowley's (2008) PhD thesis that investigates the impact of artistic constructions such as paintings and churches upon Underhill's spirituality. By any account, this listing of mine is far from exhaustive.

While my reading of *M* takes centre stage, the other writings of Underhill will occasionally function as handy references to help enhance specific points of discussion emerging from this reading. By way of inspiration from the letters of Paul the Apostle, the gospel of John, and the sacrament of the Eucharist, Underhill's (1913) *The Mystic Way: A Psychological Study in Christian Origins* presents the three mystical phases of purification, illumination, and union. There is also a topic in here that ranges over the mystical life of the early church and the monastic tradition. Underhill's attempt to impose those phases of the mystical pathway upon key events in the life of Jesus and of Paul the Apostle might be a bit stretched. It is questionable whether Jesus' baptism is aptly tagged the stage of purgation, his transfiguration, the stage of illumination, and his passion, the dark night of the soul that immediately precedes his union with God the Father. Though spiritually impressive, these associations are quite fanciful. The text does explore the mystical life as embodying the dual ingredients of contemplation and action.

Underhill's (1915/1943) *Practical Mysticism* urges us to heed the indispensable call to a mystical life that is devoted to a reality beyond the surface appearance of this constantly changing world. The arduousness of the mystical journey is not very dissimilar to the struggles of someone caught in the throes of war and confronting the prospect of death. Despite this dark foreboding ambience, the final view of life is not that of nihilism and evil triumphing over good but rather the promise of eternal life to those who faithfully love God. Another book of Underhill (1920/1999), *The Essentials of Mysticism and Other Essays*, reveals her attempt to relate mysticism to involvement in society. Aside from expositions on the fundamental elements of the spiritual life, there are also important areas concerning communal life of the church, the Christian basis of social reform, and the essential charisma of women in church ministries. In *The Golden Sequence: A Fourfold Study of the Spiritual Life*, we find Underhill's (1933) meditations on the evolving dynamic relationship between divine spirit and finite spirit.[7]

As stated, Underhill's *M* dwells mainly upon Christian mysticism. Accordingly, although researching the mysticisms of a variety of religions would be a stimulating and valuable endeavour, for the purposes of this study's focus on *M*, it would be more appropriate to confine my investigation to the Christian mystical tradition. My reading of *M* inevitably brings to the fore discussions rooted in the corpus of writings of renowned as well as lesser-known mystics and commentaries on mysticism that Underhill cites. Mystics whose writings are relied upon for their crucial contribution to Christian mysticism include John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila, John

[7] Commentators such as Todd Johnson (1997) assert that the later stage of Underhill's formation is largely influenced by Alfred North Whitehead's process philosophy, which she incorporates into her reflections on pneumatology and which pervades her *The Golden Sequence*.

Ruysbroeck, Nicholas of Cusa, Meister Eckhart, Julian of Norwich, and the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*. Also, participating in this forum of discussion are contemporary scholars of mysticism: Steven Katz, Nelson Pike, Robert Forman, and others.

1.4 Procedure

My content analysis of *M* is unmistakably theoretical in orientation. Though this study is immersed in the large discipline of philosophy, its trajectory is hemmed in by the banks of a specific thematic frame. I undertake an exploratory and constructive reading of *M* with the help of the themes of dialecticism and sublimity. At the outset, let me announce here that this study is not a thorough exegesis of *M* from page one to the closing page. My intended task is to employ Underhill's premier book on mysticism to generate a valuable discourse capable of giving prominence to aspects of Christian mysticism that contain the dialectical and the sublime. In other words, my reading of *M* is more reconstructive than interpretative, despite being both. I do not claim to produce a radically original treatise with reverberating erudition. The outcome of this study basically arises from my reflections upon mysticism aided by *M* and particular constructions of dialecticism and sublimity.

Cautioned by the risk of slipping into overgeneralizations when attempting to sharpen the analytic/continental divide, this study, with its numerous references to the writings of continental philosophers, may be said to reside within (though on occasion it wanders out of) the camp of continental philosophy. By John Caputo's (2002, pp. 2–3) reckoning, the analytic philosophers of religion are too preoccupied with fitting God into their metaphysical concepts of being, original causation, immutability, eternity, and so forth; and it is the continentals who got it right by imbuing their reflections on religion with the belief that God, and faith practices, easily slip through the metaphysician's fingers. This study, however, operates under a different belief. Its approach to mysticism is evidently not inimical to using metaphysical concepts such as "being" when attempting to understand God and God's relationship with the world. The words or actions that flow from a philosopher, poet, liturgical singer or dancer, and mystic can meaningfully be placed within the purview of *being*. This study assumes that undertaking an approach that is sympathetic to metaphysics is more beneficial for its purposes than adopting approaches that attempt to configure a theology totally accented on the notions of beyond being and absolute negativity.

An appreciation of the somewhat paradoxical vocabulary and the vibrancy of divine mystery that pervade the works of mystics can be initiated through using dialecticism and sublimity as theoretical frames when investigating mysticism. Underhill's *M* will be the anchoring point, but it will also function as a point of departure from which relevant concepts and theories within Christian mysticism can be raised and critically examined. Underhill will be engaged in dialogue with Underhill of her other writings, and with mystics, and other scholars on mysticism. Occasionally, Underhill will slip into the background while the other authors

participate in the dialogue. The mystics and commentators that Underhill cites will frequently be brought into discussions that have a firm footing on ideas such as divine infinity, trinity, finitude, being, becoming, mystical experience and relationship, transcendence, and immanence. Ideas of this sort take precedence over debates that revolve around issues of authorship and intention such as what Underhill actually meant when she uttered such and such a statement. The text of *M* will help anchor my discourse by serving to delimit my creative exploration, thereby preventing this study from drifting off into areas that serve little towards its objectives. Christian mysticism is not a monolithic enterprise which congeals virtually identical thoughts of all Christian mystics. My critical engagement with a broad range of writings from various Christian mystics constitutes an attempt to draft out as coherent as possible, with ideas that complement rather than contradict one another, an extensive yet focused discourse on mysticism.

Before proceeding to lay out the overview of chapters in this study, some explication on the dialectic and the sublime is imperative. Both dialectic and the sublime are capacious concepts with long intellectual histories. The dialectical method and its philosophical underpinnings can be traced from the Pre-Socratics right up to the present era. Expositions on the sublime can be found across time, from its inception as a rhetorical version to its development by postmodern thinkers.

Etymologically, "dialectic" comes from the Greek "*dialektike*" or "*dialektos*", referring to discourse, debate, or conversation (Kovel 2008, p. 236). Dialectic's coeval with the whole history of Western thought not only attests to its significance within the development of philosophy but also hints at its own evolution through distinct intellectual cultures. Aristotle acknowledges Zeno of Elea (circa 5th cent. BCE) as the founder of dialectic (as mentioned in Laërtius 3rd cent./1925, bk. 8, p. 373). Dialectic, in the main, is a conceptual representation of dynamic processes involving opposing qualities. Karl Popper, dialectic's vehement critic, interprets it as a method that has the ability to codify its own logic, a logic that appears to have rejected the law of noncontradiction.[8] Popper (1963, pp. 316–317) concludes that the dialectical method renders any proposition impervious to refutation (since contradictories can comfortably reside together). Popper, I think, seems reluctant to look upon dialectic as a method that is distinct from deductive logic and scientific empirical enquiry and yet valuable in the area of theoretical discourse.[9] Moreover, in my view, the opposing elements that are synthesized in the dialectical process are far from being in absolute contradiction such as "it is x and not-x at the same time".[10]

[8] Aristotle's (4th cent. BCE/1998, bk. Gamma 3, 1005b, pp. 87–88) law of noncontradiction: "It is impossible for the same thing at the same time both to be-in and not to be-in the same thing in the same respect". This law may be represented symbolically as $\sim(p \,.\, \sim p)$.

[9] Fredric Jameson (2009, particularly, p. 52) develops a brilliant defence of dialectics against those professing to debunk it. Even the Derridean (1972/1981, pp. 41–43) double execution of deconstruction, which attempts to overturn the privileging of one binary pole over the other and to subvert the whole structure of binary opposition, can itself be reintegrated into a larger dialectic (Jameson 2009, p. 26).

[10] According to Paul Tillich (1951, p. 56) dialectics do not infringe logical principles in order to support assumed contradictions within theological dogma.

Rather, the thesis and antithesis are opposing elements from different aspects of the same case in examination.

The binaries extracted from *M* are what I would call "dialectical opposites" – a phrase which I use to denote the conjunction of two opposing qualities or entities that are interrelated and open to some form of process towards reconciliation. This reconciliation process may be endlessly ongoing. It may also appear, in some cases, that no reconciliation seems possible, but by positing the conjunction of such opposing terms and ascribing some relevant meaning to it, this implies a form of prima facie reconciliation.[11] I need not survey the different versions of opposites as presented by Aristotle (4th cent./1991, *Categories*, chs. 10–11, Bekker nos.: 11b15–14a26, pp. 20–24).[12] Perhaps, grace and self-effort might be categorized as contraries that admit of intermediates (*species contraria mediata*). In this study's core chapters, the varied permutations in which opposing terms that are relevant to mysticism relate to one another will emerge. I view "dialectical opposites" as inimical to contradictories. I realize that some commentators appeal to what they consider as absolute contradictions present in mystical testimonies and claim that the mystic is in contact with a nonnatural order, an order that does not submit to the rules of logic (see Stace 1961, pp. 92–97, 162–165; Sells 1994, pp. 3–4; Otto 1926/1987, pp. 48–49). It is highly questionable whether anyone can actually experience something that is a strict contradiction. There will be places in all four chapters ahead where I shall argue and maintain that there is no necessity to assume mystical experience as including an experience of strict contradictions in order to support a belief that God or the divine realm transcends this universe with its laws of nature and logic. By asserting that there is an aspect of God that utterly transcends the universe, one is only entitled to admit ignorance of the content of this transcendent aspect of God and not that it includes a violation of the logical law of noncontradiction.

It would be unwieldy and injudicious to marshal a large number of forms of dialectic extracted from its intellectual history and engage them in the analysis of mysticism. After a careful survey, I have concluded that Georg W.F. Hegel's (1770–1831) dialectics, with some modifications where necessary, can best be used for analysing mysticism. To some extent, Hegel's overall dialectical scheme of "affirmation–negation–negation of negation" is versatile enough to have a broad applicatory function in contexts marked conceptually by dialectical opposites.[13] Friedrich

[11] Even the parallax gap which alludes to an apparently uncrossable divide between two ideas is, as envisaged by Slavoj Žižek (2006, p. 4), amenable to some dialectical procedure.

[12] In Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle Vol. 1 (The Revised Oxford Translation)*. Note that in this volume, pagination begins afresh for every work of Aristotle.

[13] Hegel's dialectics can take many formulations, but the most general triadic pattern is "affirmation–negation–negation of negation" (see Marx 1847/n.d., p. 105). The dialectic of "thesis–antithesis–synthesis" originates from Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814) and not, as many assumed, Hegel (see Williams 1992, p. 46 note 37). "Negation" for Hegel (1817/1991, § 81, pp. 128–129) conveys the idea that oppositions come from the original affirmation itself and not from the outside. The overcoming of this opposition is then regarded as the negation of this negation. See Inwood (1997, s.v. "negation and negativity", pp. 201–202) for some sample applications of negation of negation. My understanding of "negation", though, does include the possibility of the affirmative's opposition coming from outside the affirmative thesis.

Engels (1820–1895) claims to have distilled from Hegel's system of logic three laws of the dialectic: (1) transformation of quantity to quality and vice versa, (2) the interpenetration of opposites, and (3) the negation of negation.[14] Hegel himself does not explicitly state them as laws, but ideas closely related to them can be gleaned from his *Logic*.[15] I argue that two of these so-called laws – the transformation from quantity to quality and vice versa and the interpenetration of opposites – can be collapsed into a general dialectic of negation of negation.[16] The transition from quantity to quality and vice versa is derived from Hegel's concept of measure, and he illustrates with the changes of the quanta of water when heated or cooled to yield qualitative changes into steam or ice. Not every transformation is one of mutual transition between quantity and quality. Nonetheless, this form of mutual change can be condensed into a notion of mediation or progressive change that is subsumed under "negation of negation". Negation of negation that includes the mediating dialectic as well as the individualizing dialectic has also the characteristic of interpenetration of opposites.[17] As long as these opposites are not strict contradictories, each of them can be said to be incorporated in or incorporates its other. Hence, the all-essential Hegelian general dialectic to be deployed is "negation of negation". Note that while "dialectical opposites" refer to two opposing terms, the "dialectical triad", "triadic pattern/scheme", or simply "dialectic" (with three moments or phases) signifies a progression of the opposing terms towards a synthesis, regardless of whether or not a definitive synthesis is actually obtained. I intend to defer expositions on Hegel's dialectics, overall and specific, to particular places in this present work of mine just prior to their respective applications as interpretive frames. In those places, I shall extract relevant passages in Hegel's writings that elucidate and illustrate the nature of his dialectics and then run them alongside my reading of mysticism.

While Plato's dialectics enjoy the status of being the earliest well-formulated system of its kind, it is Hegel's that I regard to be most suitable for this study. Defining concepts is the principal objective of practically all the dialectics of Plato. The closer we come to the true definition of concepts, the closer we approach the knowledge of their forms. There are two relevant modalities of Plato's dialectic: hypothetical dialectic of ascending–descending series (Plato 4th cent. BCE/1994, *Republic* 509d–511c, pp. 745–746) and the collection–division dialectic (Plato 4th cent. BCE/1994, *Phaedrus* 265e–266b, pp. 511–512). In the hypothetical dialectic, the ascent procedure progresses from the thesis to be assessed to the apodictic first principle that is supposedly immutable. The descent procedure, however, progresses

[14] Engels (1883/1954, p. 83) unites them into what he conceives as fundamental laws of the dialectic.

[15] See Hegel 1817/1991, § 107–108, pp. 170–171 (transformations between quantity and quality); § 92, pp. 148–149 (interpenetration of opposites); and § 95, p. 152, and § 112, p. 175 (negation of negation).

[16] I am reluctant to regard these three statements as laws because they cannot be applied in all situations as necessary operations of logic.

[17] Both these specific patterns of dialectic will be explicated in Chap. 2.

deductively from the first principle, through implications, to the thesis to be assessed. The ascent–descent dialectic with its hypothetical sorites (a chain of connected premises and conclusions) constitutes a serviceable instrument for justification of claims or theses. The ascent phase works from the thesis examined to successive supporting conditional statements. This procedure is the attempt to determine the antecedent that will support the consequent of a conditional statement. Plato's collection–division dialectic is a dialectic of taxonomy, whereby concepts are united from the more specific to the more general (collection) and ramified from the more general to the more specific (division), thus configuring a network of interlinking concepts with their respective definitions. Plato's dialectics are already inherent within any argumentative discourse.[18] Hegel's dialectics, I think, have an advantage over those of Plato, for not only can they be used as a mode of reasoning, they are also deployable to configure *dynamic* processes, which for our purposes here are helpful in elucidating mystical development.

Aside from my choice of Hegel over Plato, I have also deliberately avoided including the forms of dialectic developed by theorists who come after Hegel. For instance, although Theodor Adorno (1903–1969) appears to propose a dialectic which seems antithetical to that of Hegel, his general dialectical structure springs from the Hegelian dialectical form. Adorno (1966/1973, pp. 5, 402–405) however, stresses upon the "negative dialectic", the inability to arrive at resolutions (see also Jarvis 1998, pp. 168–172). Indeed, this pervasive idea of Adorno would most aptly fit into the apophatic (negative) way of mysticism, which underscores the notions of radical negation and the irreconcilable other. Even so, by stretching Hegel's fundamental assumptions about the dialectic to allow the negation of negation to include possibilities for open-endedness, radical negation, and the respect for the irreconcilable other, I believe that depending solely upon Hegel for my interpretive instrument of dialecticism is justifiable.

In keeping with the dialectical tenor of this study, despite my intention to argue for particular theses, I shall strive to be as balanced as possible by presenting both sides of the arguments that are tied to the issues under consideration. Questions raised by an imagined interlocutor will be inserted in relevant places within the chapters. In my attempts to address these questions, there will be occasions when a final solution may not be reached. The adoption of a "dialectical attitude" in this study assumes that the open-endedness of discourse renders dogmatism inimical to this research. What this implies is that even though it is proposed that dialectics form the metaphysical structure of mystical development, such a structure is deemed as guideposts, and not absolute representations of reality. The dialectical *method* can function as a means and attempt to uncover the truth of a reality that does not

[18] Mortimer Adler's (1927/2002, pp. 147ff.) account of dialectical reasoning closely reflects the Platonic dialectics. By distinguishing categories, such as postulates, theorems, parts, wholes, systems, contexts, subcontexts, coordinates, supraordinates, subordinates, hierarchy, and definitions, and functions such as defining, implying, opposing, presupposing, analysing, and synthesizing, Adler is able to construct a reasonably clear picture of the dialectical method inherent in discourse.

shift according to our reasoning.[19] It can also reflect, diagrammatically, an evolutionary process of mystical development. Notwithstanding this, I would not posit dialecticism as a universal metaphysical *system* that embraces *all* realities and dynamisms. Indeed, there are other methods of reasoning and enquiry such as mathematical deduction and empirical discovery, which preclude a claim for dialecticism being the sole all-pervasive method and system.

The idea of the sublime has a long and somewhat chequered history. From its early days in literary rhetoric to its appearance in haute couture fashion (see Anderson 2005), this intriguing concept has been through varying formulations. The word "sublime" (from the Latin "*sublimis*" – "to or in a high position") indicates loftiness, grandness, and the idea of elevation to an exalted state of experience (Shaw 2006, p. 1). It first appeared as a definite object of study with its name as the title of a first-century written text. *On the Sublime* (Greek: *Peri Hupsos*), putatively authored by Longinus (1st cent./1965), designates the sublime as the loftiness of language that possesses the capability of elevating the reader to a higher state (p. 100). Its author energetically argues for the sublime effects literature has of evoking power, wonder, and ecstasy, which far exceed any comfortable, persuasive rhetoric. If one were to observe the many constructions of the sublime, it would be possible to define the sublime as referring to a powerful and significant experience of a subject, or the object of such an experience, an object that is excessively beyond the subject's ability to conceptualize it. While Longinus speaks of the sublime in the context of rhetoric, Edmund Burke (1729–1797) distinguishes between the experience of pleasure that he associates with the concept of the beautiful and the experience of terror or pain that characterizes the sublime (Burke 1757/1764).

Although Immanuel Kant's (1724–1804) treatise on the sublime appears to have its source in Burke's, Kant does build a distinct and complex aesthetic theory of this concept. It can also be said that some of the major postmodern approaches to the sublime tend to have Kant as their point of reference.[20] For Paul Crowther (1998), Kant's examination of the sublime seems to offer the best philosophical analysis of the central structure of the sublime amidst this concept's diverse scholarly expressions throughout its intellectual history. Clayton Crockett (2001, p. 19) observes that if we look at religion from the perspective of the sublime, it is possible to see the different theological constructions of the Kantian sublime by Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), Rudolf Otto (1869–1937), and Paul Tillich (1886–1965). Kant's understanding of the sublime has an influence upon these three writers' attempt to grapple with the profound and potent feature of religious experience. I have chosen Kant's theory of the sublime as an instrument to engage with the reading of *M* in order to build a discourse that binds mysticism with sublimity. Kantian sublimity, which is systematically articulated

[19] For example, the actual internal structure of the relation between our faculty of sense and our faculty of conceptualization is independent of our process of dialectical reasoning and debate that aims to uncover this structure.

[20] See, for example, Derrida 1978/1987, pp. 122ff.; Lyotard 1991/1994, "Preface" p. ix; and Lacan 1986/1992, pp. 286–287.

and firmly linked to the concept of *infinity*, is the most appropriate theory of the sublime that resonates with Underhill's mystical theology, which is founded on the relationship with *infinite* being.

Like the Hegelian dialectics, Kantian sublimity will be critically evaluated and framed against specific discussions on mysticism. Rather than construct a ready-to-use synthesized Kantian theory of the sublime and then consistently apply this framework to places in *M*, I have decided that, intermittently, I shall cite particular passages from Kant's writings on the sublime and juxtapose it with fitting passages gleaned from either *M* or other mystical texts.[21] On occasion, where appropriate, writings on the sublime by other theorists will be mentioned in the footnotes.[22] The dialectics and the sublime in mysticism will be treated independently of each other as well as knitted together into a coherent system of interconnecting concepts.

In essence, this study aims to produce a scholarly discourse on the dialectics and the sublime in mysticism by using Underhill's text, *M*, as its mainstay. While Hegel's dialectics help to identify and tease out the dialectical elements that pervade mysticism, Kantian sublimity operates as an efficient instrument to illuminate the unique structures of mystical experience and relationship. Mystical relationship is here condensed to the profound intimacy between infinite being and finite being. The underlying premise of this study is that mystical relationship is characterized by a mysterious harmony between the dialectically intelligible and the sublimely transcendent.

1.5 The Chapters

Four core chapters are directed towards fulfilling the declared aims of this study. Each of these chapters carries a binary term as its title. These binary terms of dialectical opposites are hyphenated, and related triadic patterns can be developed from them to signify the dynamism of unifying those terms. The first two chapters – "Being–Becoming" (Chap. 2) and "Infinity–Finitude" (Chap. 3) – focus on constructing a metaphysical structure that underlies the mystical enterprise.

In Chap. 2, with the aid of an extended treatment of Henri Bergson's (1859–1941) theory of vitalism (a theory that Underhill has recourse to in *M*), two specific dialectical schemes of Hegel, and extracts from Kant's exposition on the sublime, an overarching dialectical triad of *becoming–being–infinite being* is formulated. In this dialectical triad, each moment is immanent in and transcendent to the moment

[21] While Kant's *Critique of Judgment* as translated by John H. Bernard constitutes the primary reference text on the Kantian sublime, other works of Kant such as his *Critiques* (*Pure Reason* and *Practical Reason*) and his *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* will also serve as valuable resource materials.

[22] On account of Otto's theory of the sublime's close relations to Kant's, and its direct application in the investigation of religious experience, excerpts of Otto's writings will be included in the main text for examination.

preceding it. An engagement with Bergsonian vitalism attempts to disclose instances alluding to elements that are transcendent and irreducible to purely physical processes. After eliciting the mediating dialectic of "immediacy–mediation–mediated immediacy" and the individualizing dialectic of "particularity–universality–individuality" from Hegel's writings, I use them to configure the ways in which "being" incorporates and transcends "becoming". These two dialectics (mediating and individualizing) also serve to delineate the two main ways in which God as infinite being transcends the finite world: infinite being encompasses and overflows finitude and has an aspect (of God) that is radically beyond finitude. A major portion of this chapter is devoted to bringing together reports of mystical experiences and relevant extracts of Kant's exposition on epistemology and sublimity in order to illuminate mystical relationship in terms of these two ways in which infinity relates to finitude.

Chapter 3 covers an ample discussion on the relation between infinity and finitude. Here, aside from dialecticism, sublimity, and mysticism, certain areas in mathematics are enlisted in order to advance particular conclusions of mine regarding the nature of God and infinity. Hegel's dialectic of the Christian trinity receives due examination while it is compared with Underhill's conception of the trinity. In this chapter, I argue that God is predominantly potential infinity in the form of dialectical economic trinity that incorporates the universe and its historical development. What follows is that sublimity remains a potential within the mystical encounter between finite being and infinite God, as well as within God's relation to Godself. I also analyse the objective reference issue of mystical experience and suggest a means of reconciling the associated relation between objectivism and subjectivism.

"Light–darkness" is the dialectical pairing that best describes the five-stage mystical development elaborately sketched in *M*. For reasons of systematic presentation, I have decided to split Underhill's sequence of these stages into Chap. 4, "Light–Darkness (I)", the stages of awakening, purgation, and illumination, and Chap. 5, "Light–Darkness (II)", the stages of purification and union.

Chapter 4 starts off by enumerating the diverse interpretations of the light–darkness metaphor and the dialectic of negation of negation in terms of their connection to mysticism. I follow this with close analyses and discussions of the mystical stages of awakening, the first transformative night (purgation), and illumination. Dialecticism and Kantian sublimity are brought into conversation with several pertinent testimonies of mystics as well as commentaries on mysticism in order to address, amongst others, relevant issues that include questions concerning the source and nature of awakening, the purpose of purgation, the tenability of separating illumination and union, and the general integrity of the stage theory of mystical progress.

Chapter 5 covers the remaining two mystical stages of the second transformative night (purification) and the unitive life. Underhill contends that the distress of the second night is more intense than that of the first. My close examination of this

night of purification entails a dialectical structuring of the light–darkness metaphor in its progression right up to what mystics call "mystical death". In the final stage of the unitive life, I proceed to sketch out a critical discussion of the phenomenology of the mystical union experience and the nature of an enduring life of communion with God plus its accompanying problem of preserving the autonomy of the self submitted to the will of God. Another important point highlighted here is that the potential for the sublime comes through in both the darkness of purification and the light of union. In this chapter, I again examine the tenability of the "stage hypothesis" of mystical progression.

Finally, Chap. 6 not only attempts to bring together, in synthesized form, the entire trajectory of this study and its ensuing outcome, it also suggests the possibility of aesthetically conceiving mystical union as coalescence of the beautiful and the sublime.

1.6 A Note on Gender Pronouns

After some deliberation I have decided that outside of contexts where specific gender pronouns are correctly applied, I shall use the female pronoun as a universal reference to men and women. I have also made efforts to avoid ascribing a gender to God. This is done through the use of words such as "Godself" or simply "God".

Chapter 2
Being–Becoming

2.1 Introduction

Mysticism as anchored upon the pursuit of ultimate reality contains discourses that, explicitly or implicitly, engage with the subject of being and its correlate, becoming. Underhill's thoughtful consideration of these terms in *M* manifests her familiarity with some of their nuanced incarnations predominantly in the writings of mystics and philosophers. Although Underhill does not devote an independent chapter to this twin-theme, "being" and "becoming", it unmistakably permeates her works. Chapters 2 and 3 of this book revolve around paired concepts of being–becoming and infinity–finitude, respectively. These chapters are closely tied to one another and share a common objective of constructing a metaphysical structure that underpins mysticism as a profound relationship between self and God. The present chapter aims to sketch out the intricacies of the concepts of being and becoming elicited from discussions generated by Underhill's text. In order to appreciate and elucidate being–becoming in its relevance to mysticism, I shall read that pairing through the lens of dialecticism. My contention is that being and becoming are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they are dynamically related to one another in a dialectical fashion.

The fundamental premise of theistic mysticism is the intimacy between the finite mystic and infinite reality. This is represented in Underhill's description of the mystic's consciousness as "an ordered movement towards ever higher levels of reality, ever closer identification with the Infinite" (*M* pp. 81–82).[1] Edward Watkin

[1] Gregory of Nyssa (335–395) is probably the first Christian theologian who systematically developed the idea of God being infinite (see Pannenberg 1991, p. 30). In his *The Life of Moses*, Gregory of Nyssa (4th cent./1978, pp. 31 and 116) argues that God as the absolute good cannot have a boundary. For him, "good" in this context is not interpreted as the opposite of evil. Instead, the absolute good cannot have an opposite that imposes a boundary on it. God as absolute good is unlimited or infinite. John McDermott (1973, pp. 173–174) contends that it is actually Hilary of

P.C.-B. Gan, *Dialectics and the Sublime in Underhill's Mysticism*,
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(1920, pp. 11–12), in his *Philosophy of Mysticism*, concurs with Underhill when he defines the metaphysics of mysticism as consisting "in a doctrine of ultimate reality, of God, as the Unlimited, and of the consequent relationship between man's limited soul and the Unlimited". Accordingly, my assignment is to trace the multifaceted structure supporting the very possibility of theistic mystical relationship. God, the object of this unique relationship, is conceived as the ultimate reality and as infinite. Given that finitude cannot encompass the infinite, it stands to reason that such a profound mystical union between the finite mystic and infinite God necessitates a relation between immanence and transcendence whereby God is immanent in and transcendent to finite realities. Immanence here implies a meeting point between the finite with the infinite, and transcendence intimates either the excess or the complete otherness of the infinite. Hence, the very possibility of this form of mysticism is contingent upon the possible presence of immanence–transcendence for without this pairing, any postulation of relating to an infinite being would be vitiated. In this book, I use the phrase "mystical relationship" or "mystical intimacy" to imply the close relationship between the finite mystic and infinite God. This relationship is considered transformative for the mystic herself, and, in whatever form (direct or indirect), depth, and extensiveness, for the other realities of the universe.

The next or second section of this chapter establishes the likely instances that signal transcendence. This section takes its cue from *M*'s appeal to Henri Bergson's doctrine of vitalism and its postulation of creativity and indeterminism. Bergsonian vitalism, with its insights and sophistication, will come under careful scrutiny within the intent of this search for allusions to transcending realities. In the subsequent three main sections, I shall: (1) Sort out the meanings of being and becoming and argue, with the help of Underhill, Hegel, Plato, and others, that the template which configures the finite–infinite mystical relationship is the overall dialectic of *becoming–being–infinite being*, in which each moment is immanent in and transcendent to the moment preceding it. (2) Apply Hegel's "mediating dialectic" to becoming–being. (3) Apply Hegel's "individualizing dialectic" to becoming–being.

The application of Hegel's dialectics will show up three different models of transcendence with two of them taking the following forms: infinity's incorporating and overflowing the finite and infinity's otherness to the finite (section six will cover

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Poitiers (300–368) who first developed the notion of the infinite divine. McDermott, however, concedes that while Gregory incorporates his theory of God's infinity into his mainstream theology, Hilary's thoughts on the infinity of God is designed mainly to combat the Arian doctrine that rejects the divinity of Christ. Aside from these two Christian theologians, Plotinus (204/205–270), who lived before them and who was not a Christian (though his ideas profoundly influenced Christian theology), regards God as infinite (Plotinus 250/1956, 4th ennead 3rd tractate: 8, p. 249). For the purposes of this exploration into mysticism, I think it is important to point out here that Underhill's *M* contains over a hundred appearances of the word "infinite" or "infinity", and practically all of them referring to God.

these). Mysticism as an encounter with infinite being has correlative features with the sublime. Sublimity as theorized by Kant, on account of its substantial and foundational (for subsequent constructions of the sublime) content, offers us an apposite hermeneutic tool for reading mysticism. Hence, major portions of section seven will be devoted to framing Kantian sublimity and epistemology against testimonies of mystics claiming to experience God as the two forms of transcendence stated above. This endeavour aims to navigate through the many challenges posed by epistemic criteria in order to adumbrate a plausible pattern in which the two forms of transcendence configure the infinite–finite encounter.

Considering that Chap. 3 will be focusing on the infinity–finitude dialectic, I shall, however, get ahead of myself here and briefly say a few things about these two concepts. Although defining them often leads to disagreement, at this particular juncture, I take "finitude" to mean either the whole collection of finite beings or the quality of being finite. Similarly, while we can conceive of infinity as a substantive, more often than not, "infinite" is regarded as an adjective describing a substantive. I agree with Adrian W. Moore when he reasons that defining the infinite amounts to placing a boundary on that which is supposedly boundless. But, if the infinite is already assumed to refer to that which is boundless, is this not its definition? Pressed for a definition, Moore (1990, pp. 1–2) condenses the concept of infinity into two classes of attributes: (1) as mathematical infinite: "boundlessness; endlessness; unlimitedness; immeasurability; eternity; that which is such that, given any determinate part of it, there is always more to come; that which is greater than any assignable quantity"; and as (2) metaphysical infinite: "completeness; wholeness; unity; universality; absoluteness; perfection; self-sufficiency; autonomy". Indeed, any definition of infinity inevitably encounters problems. I prefer to define infinity simply as that which is unbounded.[2] Attributes like perfection, self-sufficiency, and autonomy may describe infinity, but any one of them need not be synonymous with infinity. Assuming that totality is bounded, but seeing that there is nothing beyond totality's boundary to limit totality, perhaps totality may be perceived as unlimited and thereby infinite. On the other hand, it is questionable whether the totality of finite beings is better labelled as "infinity" rather than "finitude". These matters are reserved for Chap. 3.

[2] I realize, though, that the term "unbounded", in reference to infinity, is not as straightforward as it seems. Numbers are unbounded by any smallest or largest number, but by virtue of being the infinite set of numbers, this set is bounded by all things that are non-numbers. Numbers are infinite yet confined within their own category. "Unbounded" is best aligned with "endlessness" so as to put forth the idea that while numbers are bounded by non-numbers, we are still entitled to call numbers infinite because its enumeration is endless.

2.2 Vitalism: Transcendence in This World of Flux

In general, "vitalism" is a theory claiming that living organisms differ essentially from inanimate things because living organisms possess a unique life principle infusing them with a capacity for activities that cannot be reduced to the merely physicomechanical (Mondin 1985/1998, pp. 26–27). This theory gained ascendancy as a reaction to René Descartes' (1596–1650) extension of deterministic mechanism to biological organisms (Descartes 1664/1972, pp. 112ff.). The vitalists argue for the inability of mechanical accounts to explain functions like perception and the growing process of living things. Vitalism's prominent exponents include the embryologist Hans Driesch (1867–1941) and philosopher Henri Bergson. Driesch (1905/1914, pp. 14 and 18) proposes the presence of an *entelechy* that powers organic processes. Bergson (1907/1922, p. 133) argues for the presence of an *élan vital* (vital impulse) in living entities. This *élan vital* is able to prevail over the inertness of inanimate matter and vivify it. Seeing that Driesch's exposition resides mainly in the field of biology, and Bergson's, in philosophy, the latter would thus be more suitable for the purpose of my discussion on transcendence, a discussion employing concepts and methods of philosophy.

Underhill holds in high regard and avails herself of the principles of vitalism in her first edition of *M* (1911). She applies them to her understanding of mysticism as contingent upon the presence of the realm of spirit that imbues nature with spontaneity and self-determination. In fact, in the twelfth edition, 19 years after the publication of the first edition, and even in the wake of vitalism's decline, she still retains her chapter that is titled "Mysticism and Vitalism", although she ends it with a note admitting that if she were to write the book for the first time, she would probably have shifted her reliance upon vitalism to the framework of critical realism (*M* p. 43). Baron Friedrich von Hügel's (1852–1925) construction of critical realism had an impact on Underhill, and it was responsible for this shift in her theoretical affiliation (Greene 1988, p. 9). Critical realism accepts the reality of objects in the world, but, unlike naïve realism, critical realism acknowledges a difference between external objects and the perception of these objects by a subject. Most critical realists are dualists who argue that consciousness and matter are independent and mutually interactive and who refrain from regarding perceived data as mere copies of objective reality (see Drake 1920, pp. 3–5). In my opinion, critical realism does not seem to match the interest and rigour in which vitalism extends beyond the epistemological, to attempt, meticulously, a structuring of the transcending creative forces within this physical universe. In the face of the natural sciences' rejection of vitalism, I realize that I shall be going out on a limb here with my sympathetic examination of vitalism and its links to transcendence. Then again, the viability of the theory of vitalism may still be an open question for consciousness studies.

Underhill locates vitalism's major flaw within what she sees as vitalism's one-sided concentration on becoming and immanence to the neglect of being and transcendence (*M* pp. 39–41). My contention, however, is that immanent within this world of becoming are the seeds of transcendence and being. The tenets of creativity and indeterminism in vitalism do sustain a presence of transcending elements

irreducible to any mechanical and monistic physicalism. I shall draw upon some passages of Underhill on vitalism as well as those in Bergson's books to form a groundwork from which the dialectical relation between being and becoming (being is immanent in and transcendent to becoming) can be constructed.

Underhill writes:

> Vitalists, whether the sphere of their explorations be biology, psychology or ethics, see the whole Cosmos, the spiritual and physical worlds, as instinct with initiative and spontaneity: as above all things free. For them, nature, though conditioned by the matter with which she works, is stronger than her chains. Pushing out from within, ever seeking expression, she buds and breaks forth into original creation. (*M* p. 27)

The vitalists regard nature as imbued with realities – substances or properties of substances – capable of initiating events that are original and, therefore, transcending of any deterministic series of causation.

Vitalism is often set in contradistinction to mechanicism. Mechanicism, in essence, presents nature as akin to a machine operating according to deterministic processes or laws. Its chief complaint against vitalism is that vitalism postulates the existence of metaphysical "realities" that are inaccessible and that supposedly lurk within physical or organic entities as their animating force (Mondin 1985/1998, pp. 29–30). While mechanicism claims that there is no justification for postulating any perceptually inaccessible force or entity, it does run up against problems in accounting for processes that are not reducible to explanations founded solely on the perceptible. It can be argued that consciousness, with its complex and broad compass of experiential capabilities, is irreducible to accounts of physics or chemistry. Moreover, if it is assumed that consciousness, by the monistic physicalist's interpretation, is numerically identical to physical processes of the brain, there is still the perplexing problem of accounting for a possible separation between the self's *experience* while conscious and the self's correlative brain or bodily activity.[3] Such a separation, labelled dualistic, cannot be submitted to a purely mechanistic schema, for an explanatory gap exists between the interactions of immaterial consciousness and material body.[4] Note that while in this discussion I deal with physicalism that is reductive and mechanistic, not all theories of physicalism are of

[3] For an enumeration of some of the problems that trouble the physicalist, see Baker and Goetz (eds. (2011), *The Soul Hypothesis*, pp. 9–11). However, I suspect that a few of these problems can be settled by comparing human cognition to computer processes. Emily Kelly (2007, p. 117) observes that a large following of present-day scientists and philosophers assent to the view that consciousness are byproducts of neural activities and that those amongst them who hold firmly to the physicalist axiom assert that in principle, consciousness is reducible to purely physiological processes. For Kelly, those who reduce mental events to physiological ones tend to focus solely on the epiphenomenalist assumption, i.e. physiology causes consciousness and not the other way around. Her paper challenges the physicalist axiom. This is done through a thorough examination of phenomena in which volitional and psychophysiological initiating forces suggest a reverse direction of causality – mental events determining physical events.

[4] Alter and Walter (eds. (2007), *Phenomenal Concepts and Phenomenal Knowledge: New Essays on Consciousness and Physicalism*) provides useful insights into the debate between physicalism and anti-physicalism within the context of the study of consciousness.

this sort. There is a version of physicalism that is non-reductive and accommodating of free will and indeterminism (see Davidson 1980/2001, pp. 170ff.).

The gaps between living consciousness and inert matter may be a problem confined to epistemology. There might be perfectly rational explanations for mechanically causal operations of physical matter, but due to limitations of our knowing faculty, these explanations elude us. Hence, physicalists argue that vitalists have no justification in imputing mysterious and inexplicable initiating forces in events simply because they, the vitalists, are unable to provide logical explanations for those apparent gaps. Interestingly, neither of these two camps has conclusively demolished the standpoint of the other.

Bergson develops a comprehensive thesis in support of vitalism and its endorsement of the pervasiveness of transcendence amidst dynamisms in this world. Indeterminism, creativity, and liberty are central themes in Bergson's philosophy. These themes are made apparent in Bergson's rejection of "radical finalism", which, for him (1907/1922, p. 41), "implies that things and beings merely realize a programme previously arranged". Radical finalism, to an extent, harbours the principle of mechanicism. Its underlying premise is that if we were to take the universe as a whole system, then from the conception of the universe to its terminal point, a continuous progression of determined and connected events unfolds to fulfil a pre-established plan. Vitalism, on the other hand, rejects both radical finalism and mechanicism.

There is no definitive proof defending vitalism's contention of the existence of creative vital impulses that sidestep the deterministic flow of events. Nonetheless, as Bergson (1907/1922, pp. 132–133) proposes, the evolution of complex living entities – especially human beings with a complex nervous system – and the many possible outcomes that confront distinct phases in the evolutionary progression do allude to the presence of indeterminism. As new and more complex forms evolve, the emerging properties these forms acquire are not entirely reducible to the properties and acts of their predecessors. Furthermore, there is also the possibility of these new complex forms having the capacity to act upon their evolutionary predecessors and bring about substantial modifications in them. Hence, by virtue of the diversity of possible outcomes, vitalism does not subscribe to any pre-established determined plan, and instead, this theory asserts indeterminism and unpredictability as salient in evolution.

The all-important assertion that vitalism makes is that hidden in the sequences of connected events in this world are the elements of indeterminism and creativity. This crucial point is found in the quote from Underhill above. Bergson's (1907/1922, p. 265) version of vitalism underscores it when he explains:

> The impetus of life, of which we are speaking, consists in a need of creation. It cannot create absolutely, because it is confronted with matter, that is to say with the movement that is the inverse of its own. But it seizes upon this matter, which is necessity itself, and strives to introduce into it the largest possible amount of indetermination and liberty.

The paradigmatic capacity for injecting indetermination and liberty resides within the flow of consciousness and also the interface between conscious will and physical action. If a subject possessing consciousness could have equally executed any initiating action from a list of at least two different actions, then the executed

action can be said to have been free, not determined by antecedent causes, and creative of the series of events that will follow from that subject's initiating action.[5] In the quote above, we see that Bergson acknowledges life's potential for creative and free activity, but this freedom is finite on the grounds of the limitations imposed by interactions with matter. I would cite the simple example of the conscious subject, though free, still acts through her material body with all its limitations. The interface between living will and inert matter is not a creative act *ex nihilo*.

In *Time and Free Will*, Bergson rigorously explores the dynamisms within consciousness and discloses the problems that emerge when we interpret processes within the realm of consciousness, which he categorizes as "duration", using spatial categories appropriate to physical phenomena. Essentially, while physical objects are extended in space and capable of simultaneous copresence, a person's conscious experiences are temporal and successive because that person's moment-to-moment states of consciousness are perpetually in flux and vary from one to the other (Bergson 1889/1910, pp. 77–79, 90–91). Bergson (1889/1910, pp. 119–122, 132–133) maintains that the stream of consciousness consists of qualitatively different states of consciousness where various modalities of emotions, thoughts, sensations, and desires interpenetrate each other at successive moments. More importantly, this stream of consciousness does not operate in a mechanically causal fashion.

The term "pure duration" for Bergson refers to the succession of consciousness that is able to hold together some of its past to its present, but without implying this spread to be a spatial, simultaneous grasp of past and present as if they exist on a line with numbered, homogeneous points representing my states of consciousness. As Bergson (1889/1910, pp. 104–105) explains, pure duration is neither an ephemerally "now" experience of my flow of consciousness without continuity nor a stretch of homogeneous spectrum of moments of consciousness, past and present, that are discrete rather than interpenetrative. Consequently, duration is distinct from the conception of time as numerical progression of equal portions of measurable time-units. Bergson (1889/1910, p. 107) writes:

> Granted that inner duration, perceived by consciousness, is nothing else but the melting of states of consciousness into one another, and the gradual growth of the ego, it will be said notwithstanding, that the time which the astronomer introduces into his formulae, the time which our clocks divide into equal portions, this time, at least, is something different ….

Bergson's separation of the two perspectives on time is discerning, but we also have to bear in mind that the support for the description of duration is not an immediate data of consciousness. A simple exercise may assist. When we strive to be conscious of our stream of consciousness, what immediately surfaces is our concentrated exertion to be conscious of the contents of consciousness. What we encounter is that being conscious of the contents of our mind requires a constant switching back and forth between our focus on "the act of watching" and "the content

[5] I use "events" in a broad sense because a non-event such as the failure of my friend to show up at my office can be said to *cause* the cancellation of our appointment. Hence, "events" when used to denote a causal or deterministic relation, includes non-events such as the above.

watched". The selective nature of our consciousness dictates that we can only focus on one particular act of consciousness at a time. We might, however, have the ability to be aware of a multitude of events in our minds, all at the same time, but only in a vague and non-focused mode of awareness. Interestingly, what is observed or watched is not a passive flow of mental events entirely disconnected from the watcher's injecting of thoughts and expectations. Indeed, consciousness is such a complex phenomenon. Furthermore, in the activity of self-observation, the current act of watching should itself be part of the content of consciousness. Again, I contend that a subject can only be vaguely aware of the content of consciousness (that includes the act of attempting to be aware of itself) while at the same time engaging in the very act of self-observation. It appears that an inevitable gap exists between the self that is observing and the self-observed. The data of consciousness captured are perpetually that which have passed. Hence, if duration implies a conscious awareness of a continuous spectrum of past and present, it is derived from a *reflected* consciousness and not the immediate data of consciousness.

As quoted above, Bergson (1889/1910, p. 107) stresses that "inner duration, perceived by consciousness, is nothing else but the melting of states of consciousness into one another, and the gradual growth of the ego". The interpenetration of elements of consciousness to the extent where bold divisions between states of consciousness do not actually exist is indicative of a dialectical structure. Bergson (1889/1910, pp. 158–161) opposes the associationist's assumption that states of consciousness are discrete units one after the other where the antecedent state *causes* the emergence of its immediate consequent through a process of associationism.[6] Although, when describing a person's experiences from the vantage point of the observing theorist, it might be reasonable to assume that our states of consciousness are discrete atomic units, one causing the next, the picture, however, from inside the experiencing subject is quite different. Bergson (1889/1910, p. 161) illustrates with an example:

> I smell a rose and immediately confused recollections of childhood come back to my memory. In truth, these recollections have not been called up by the perfume of the rose: I breathe them in with the very scent; it means all that to me.

With Bergson, there are no two discrete units of experience – smelling the rose causing recollections of childhood. More accurately, the smelling of the rose is already infused with recollections of childhood. In this regard, most, if not all, instances of sense perceptions have intrinsic properties unique to the subject's idiosyncratic history of experiences.

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[6] The theory of associationism and its relation to consciousness has its roots in Aristotle's (4th cent. BCE/1991, *On Memory* chp. 2, 451b17–23, p. 6) account of memory and recall. The theory gained currency when it emerged in the writings of British philosophers from the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries. Variously presented, it generally carries the idea of a mechanistic and atomistic progression of states of consciousness whereby one state evokes the next through associations formed from previous experiences or through a train of associated interactions amongst external stimuli, physiological responses, sensations, and ideas. Note that not all proponents of associationism advocate a necessary causal link between states of consciousness (see Reber 1985, s.v. "associationism", p. 58; and Gustafson 2005, pp. 63–64).

In sum, the interpenetration of past experiences, concepts, and present perceptions is not amenable to a theorization which neatly lays out states of consciousness as one causing the next. For the case above, it is the recollections of childhood that cause the smelling of a rose to have its particularly unique sensation and not the other way around. Bergson's argument against comprehensive and strict unidirectional causal determination within human consciousness and behaviour fits in with the plausibility of indetermination and free will. The absence of necessary causal series of events pervading the whole universe makes an allowance for the presence of creativity and free will of the subject.

Bergson's case for creativity, and by implication, the possibility of transcendence, is congruent with Underhill's subscription to the necessity of immanence and transcendence for mystical intimacy. Another virtue Underhill finds in vitalism resides in what she feels vitalism represents. For her, as an opposition to the Classical Greek emphasis on being, vitalism endorses the importance of becoming. She writes:

> Its [vitalism's] focal point is not Being but Becoming. Translated into Platonic language, not the changeless One, the Absolute, transcending all succession, but rather his energizing Thought – the Son, the Creative Logos – is the supreme reality which it proposes as accessible to human consciousness. (*M* p. 28)

Vitalism, as Underhill suggests, espouses a view of reality as eternally in flux. This constant change, which Underhill categorizes as "becoming", is set as the counterpoint to static "being". In sum, vitalism postulates the presence of creative forces or events rendering a universe that harbours certain degrees of indeterminism and unpredictability. Vitalism also takes the side of change/becoming rather than any supposedly unchanging being.

Despite Underhill's construal of vitalism's strong tilt towards becoming, it does not follow from this that vitalism cannot serve as a groundwork for building a union between being and becoming. Anticipating what is to follow in the next section, let me briefly say here that I intend to address issues pertaining to the definitions of being and becoming, the purported unchangingness of being, and the possible manner in which the transcending forces vitalism speaks of can corroborate the being–becoming dialectic to be formulated with some help from Hegel. By engaging Bergson's notion of duration, Underhill's treatment of being and becoming, and Hegel's dialectics, the structure underpinning mystical development can be illuminated.

2.3 A General Configuration of Being, Becoming, and Infinite Being[7]

According to vitalism, the universe and its evolutionary history accommodate forces that transcend the merely physical and mechanical. Would these transcendent forces be associated with the concept of "being"? The term "being" can mean different

[7] This section and three others that follow it constitute a revision and expansion of my (2011) article titled "Being and Becoming and the Immanence-Transcendence Relation in Evelyn Underhill's Mystical Philosophy".

things to different thinkers. It is tedious and unnecessary to traverse the entire conceptual history of being and becoming. This book focuses on how these concepts can be of service to the metaphysics of mysticism. Quite often, "being" is not just confined to realities that are unchanging, as if contrasted to "becoming". Rather, dynamic processes and entities that are in a state of constant flux are also called "beings".[8] Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980), Paul Tillich, Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), and Edith Stein (1891–1942) do not draw a bold divide between being and becoming.[9]

Not all Christian mystics feel the need to employ the concepts of being and becoming in their writings. Christian mystics with a philosophical background are more inclined to include these concepts in their works. One such mystic is Meister Eckhart (1260–1328), and in the passage below, we see a rather interesting though somewhat controversial way in which he (14th cent./1981, German works: sermon 52, p. 202) describes the condition of radical poverty that predisposes the mystic to divine union:

> For in the same being of God where God is above being and above distinction there I myself was, there I willed myself and committed myself to create this man. Therefore I am the cause of myself in the order of my being, which is eternal, and not in the order of my becoming, which is temporal.

The context of the above passage is Eckhart's counsel on aiming for the highest form of poverty in which the self is totally empty of self and of notions of God to the extent that God works through God, and the self is not even considered an instrument through whom God acts. Within this context, we understand Eckhart's description of the placement of the self in God rather than God descending into the self. Actually, this placement is more of a conscious realization of the identity "of the soul's ground and God's ground" (Eckhart 14th cent./1981, pp. 51–52). It is this identity that prompts Eckhart to claim audaciously that he is the cause of himself. This claim implies that on that ground in which the self is identical to God, God's

[8] Aristotle (4th cent. BCE/1991, *Physics* bk. 1 chp. 7, 189b34–190a37, pp. 13–14) regards being as logically prior to becoming for one cannot have change without having something (being) that changes. Aristotle, like Plato, intends to resolve the dispute between Parmenides who says that all reality is unchanging and, Heraclitus, for whom all reality is constantly changing. Aristotle's (4th cent. BCE/1998, bk. Theta 5, 1048a-b, pp. 263–268; 4th cent. BCE/1991, *Physics*, bk. 1 ch. 7, 190a32–191a12, pp. 13–15) solution is to suggest the difference between actual being and potential being and the difference between substantial change and accidental change.

[9] It can safely be said that phenomenologists/existentialists such as Heidegger (1927/1962, § 4, pp. 32–33, § 12, p. 83), Sartre (1943/1956, pp. 7–9), and Stein (1949/2002, pp. 45–46) see becoming as an inevitable feature of being, especially the being of the human person and all the phenomena that constitute human experience. Tillich affirms the dynamic nature of being. He (1952/2000, p. 32) also realizes that "if being is interpreted in terms of life or process or becoming, nonbeing is ontologically as basic as being". Being that constantly changes would have a questionable self-identity. Its moment-to-moment being constantly slips into what it is not, and it also faces the looming prospect of its final extinction (non-being).

function as creator is shared with the self.[10] While the eternal self in the order of being participates in the creative act, the temporal self in the order of becoming does not do so. From the passage above, three levels of reality can be outlined: (1) God above "God" and "God", (2) the order of eternal being, and (3) the order of temporal becoming. I would suggest that these three levels indicate the dialectical triad that would function as the governing principle overarching this book's discourse: *becoming–being–infinite being*, wherein each moment is immanent in and transcendent to the moment preceding it (more of this shortly).

What is important for our current discussion is that Eckhart here represents the philosophical mystics who make a distinction between being as an eternal order and becoming as a temporal order. In the context of Eckhart's thesis, being is immanent in and transcendent to becoming; and infinite being (God and "God") is immanent in and transcendent to both being and becoming. Note that there is an aspect of God that is utterly beyond all our conceptions including that of creator assigned to "God". Being encompasses that which shares in divine eternity, and becoming marks the state finite realities are in. It can also be inferred that since created and

[10] In sermon 52, we witness an intriguing development of Eckhartian thought. If, as Eckhart (14th cent./1981, German works: sermon 52, p. 202) says, "we take 'God' to be the beginning of created things", then "God" (within inverted commas) is regarded as a being that is the first cause of created things. Not only does Eckhart boldly place the eternal self on par with God above "God", he also alludes to an identification between this eternal self and "God" when he writes "for I am then an immovable cause that moves all things" (p. 203). Furthermore, he unifies the created self with all other created things and declares "[i]n my birth all things were born" (p. 203). Hence, with these postulations in mind, the following controversial conclusions of Eckhart become somewhat clearer and less shocking.

> And if I did not exist, "God" would also not exist. That God is "God", of that I am a cause; if I did not exist, God too would not be "God". (p. 203)

Eckhart merges the eternal self with "God" as first cause or creator of all things; and he merges the temporal, created self with all things created. Two separate deductive sequences follow from this. First, the non-existence of his eternal self as creator implies the non-existence of "God" as the first cause of all things. Eckhart takes this course of reasoning. Second, permit me to consider the conditional statement derivable from the definition of "God" – If "God" (first cause of all things) exists, then all created things came into being. Given Eckhart's claim that his created self is unified and was born together with all other creatures, then if this self had never come into being, the consequent of the above conditional statement would be denied, and thereby that statement's antecedent, that is, "God", would also be denied. Note that the conditional statement is not – If all created things came into being, then "God" (first cause of all things) exists – i.e. the reversal of the originally proposed conditional statement's antecedent and consequent, because it is possible that all created things came into being without "God". However, it is conceivable that all created things cease to exist while "God" continues in existence. On the other hand, Eckhart contends that "God" as first cause means "God" as perpetual sustaining cause of created beings (Latin works: commentaries on Genesis, pp. 101–102). Hence, the discontinued existence of sustained created beings implies the discontinued existence of "God" as sustaining first cause. But, Eckhart does not deny the mortality of the created self when he writes: "What I am in the order of having been born, that will die and perish, for it is mortal …" (p. 203). Consequently, other created things may continue to be sustained by "God" even though Eckhart's created self perishes. The drawback of this reasoning, though, is that creation becomes the necessary condition for God's existence rather than an outcome of God's free act.

finite realities participate in the infinite and eternal God, the finite state of becoming does overlap with the eternal realm of being. How shall we interpret Eckhart's problematic assertion that the self is on par with all levels – God and "God", realm of being, and realm of becoming? A possible interpretation would be that given the shared ground between divinity and the self and that infinite being unifies the preceding dialectical moments of being and becoming, Eckhart is here merely conveying the potential image of mystical union. Let us examine another philosopher–mystic, John of the Cross (1542–1591).

What needs to be mentioned concerning John of Cross is that the English translations of his works are all but devoid of the terms being and becoming. Geoffrey Mondello, however, has unravelled the connections amongst being, becoming, and eternity in John of the Cross' works. Mondello admits that though these concepts are not explicitly uttered by John, they are latent in the mystic's rumination. He (2011, online) explains:

> In the writings of St. John of the Cross, any attempt to seize upon a coherent notion of being immediately brings us to the ineluctable realization that for St. John the ontological is deeply radicated in the eschatological. Being in its utter immediacy is possessed of identity, and therefore history. The historical nature of being, embracing, as it does, all the antecedents that culminate in present being, being not merely verging upon, but enacted within the telos of becoming, is, within the mystical context, without terminus; it is eternally enacted because God is eternal. Ultimately, beyond the eschatological chrysalis, being is epiphanous, a perpetual epiphany in perpetually becoming. What I mean by this is that God's autonomous perpetuity is in Being. Man's heteron[o]mous perpetuity is in becoming.

The division between the divine realm of being and the created realm of becoming, which is found in Eckhart, is here echoed in Mondello's analysis of John of the Cross. The two realms are not mutually exclusive. Being is also regarded as the moment-to-moment culmination of its antecedent processes of becoming. Given that God is eternal (here, in the sense of everlasting), this consolidation of becoming into being is also an everlasting process. Finite being is never complete because there is always the being-to-come. While the passage claims that being absorbs *all* its antecedents, it is conceivable that there may be antecedent elements which do escape the culmination work of being. Furthermore, it is also conceivable that a culminated being is *more than* the sum of its antecedent processes of becoming. Hence, it is possible to postulate an otherness between the processes of becoming and the moments of its culmination in being. It is this otherness which conceals the trait of transcendence between being and becoming. Aside from Eckhart, and Mondello's John of the Cross, we can gain further insights into the various permutations of being and becoming pertinent to mysticism by turning to Underhill.

Underhill uses "being" to refer to the transcendent order of reality that is eternal and unchanging. In contrast to that order of reality, "becoming" refers to the order of sense realities in this world of time and change.[11] This division of orders is consistent

[11] See *M* pp. 35, 37, 41, 54, and 65. In this present book, for the purposes of crisp presentation and the avoidance of confusing the reader, I am going to dispense with using the uppercase for those terms. The contexts in which those terms appear will designate their usage as referring to the orders or as members of the orders.

with the basic distinctions between the realms of being and becoming as laid out above. And, when Underhill speaks of "pure being", this signifies God or the absolute/infinite/ultimate that unites, encompasses, and transcends the two orders mentioned above (see *M* pp. 40, 42, and 258).[12] There are places in *M* where Underhill refers to God simply as "being" (see *M* p. 113).[13] Hence, with regard to these concepts, it is difficult to pin down definitions that are consistently used by her. Furthermore, the "unchangingness" of being as transcendent realm poses a problem because, for Underhill, this being also manifests itself in the world of change and is amenable to human experience (*M* pp. 37–38). Underhill seems to flounder in attempting to delineate a structure of reality where the transcendent order is separate from and yet immersed in the events of this world of sense. This notion of immersion as a conjunction of any two orders, dynamic forces, or entities defines "immanence". Underhill also encounters a similar difficulty when attempting to portray the infinite as absolute being – distinct from and transcending the two orders – and yet immanent in both these orders.

Underhill does not detail out a logical pattern in which being is transcendent to and immanent in becoming, though she is convinced that both these concepts are relevant to the mystical life (*M* pp. 433–434). She appears to have taken on board Plato's axiom of the being–becoming distinct realms.[14] Nevertheless, in her writings, we do not see any intricate articulation of the form in which being relates to becoming.

I intend to formulate a systematic being–becoming relation that will help fill in the lacunae present in Underhill's work. Based upon the preceding discussion on the two orders, "becoming" refers to the order of this world of sense, and "being" refers to the order that transcends this world of sense and at the same time is immanent in it. Also, since Underhill contends that infinite/absolute/pure being is immanent in and transcendent to being and becoming, we have then a dialectical triad of *becoming–being–infinite being*, where each moment is immanent in and transcendent to the moment immediately before it. A delineation of the content and nature of this overall triadic sequence will, hopefully, conduce to a better understanding of the metaphysics of the infinite–finite relationship.

In order to follow through with the above dialectically linked concepts that refer to the orders or realms, I wish to develop a schema of the dialectical relation of being and becoming that form the constituent dynamic members of these broader orders. I venture to postulate that the dialectical model of immanence and transcendence at the broad category of orders is identically played out in these orders'

[12] I am aware that the concept "God" might connote the idea of a personal God that is distinct from the absolute, but in Underhill's text generally, "God", "absolute", "ultimate", and "infinite" are used interchangeably. For her, whether it is God or absolute, they both encapsulate the personal *and* impersonal characteristics of divine reality (*M* pp. 289 and 341). Note that while "absolute" is frequently used to refer to God, it can also carry the following senses: "non-relative" and "non-subjective".

[13] In this specific passage, "being" refers to the triune God of Christianity that is said "to manifest itself as becoming, as the dynamic omnipresent Word of Life".

[14] See below on Plato.

constituent elements.[15] To help articulate the ways in which we can look at being and becoming and how they relate to each other, I shall have recourse to Hegel's two principal dialectical frames of immediacy–mediation–mediated immediacy (I shall call this the "mediating dialectic") and particularity–universality–individuality (that I label the "individualizing dialectic"). Additionally, the thoughts of Plato, Bergson, and a few others will be relied upon to fortify the rigour of my discourse.

I suspect that Underhill's problem of consistently defining being and becoming is also encountered in Plato. It has been argued that any inconsistency in definitions of important terms in Plato is due entirely to shifts in intended purpose of writing and target audience across the Platonic dialogues (see Cormack 2006, pp. 10ff.). However, assuming that I deal strictly with the written text without presupposing the intention of the author, I am entitled to point out any inconsistencies that are present when reading Plato's corpus of dialogues as a whole. In his middle dialogues, specifically, *Republic*, Plato gives precedence to *being* as unchanging and stable, over *becoming* which is constantly changing. He distinctly separates the realm of being, composed of the substantial and immutable forms, from the sensible world of flux, the realm of becoming. The *Republic* (475e–480a, pp. 715–720) accords a privileged status to the being of forms because they are said to be eternal and unchanging. However, when we read Plato's late dialogues, we can detect the dynamism of being and the ascription of *real* being to things or events that change. In the *Sophist* (247d-e, p. 992), Plato defines real being as such:

> I suggest that anything has real being that is so constituted as to possess any sort of power either to affect anything else or to be affected, in however small a degree, by the most insignificant agent, though it be only once. I am proposing as a mark to distinguish real things that they are nothing but power.

Here, we can deduce that even a single fleeting thought in the mind of a thinker has real being because it is generated by something else, and this thought has the power to generate another thought. In this regard, one might conclude that the Platonic forms in the realm of being ought to possess power and to be susceptible to change. Interestingly, further on in the *Sophist* (248b-e, pp. 992–993), Plato appears to challenge any notion of the forms as unchanging realities. He says that since we have the power to know the forms, it must be within the capacity of the forms to be in active relationship with our knowing faculty.[16]

Our examination of Underhill and Plato informs us that we cannot *solely* set being and becoming as two mutually exclusive parallel realms. In Plato, aside from his postulation of the transcendent and immutable being of the forms, real being has

[15] This implies that it is possible to identify specific instances of being(s) immanent in and transcendent to becoming. Relatedly, Paul Tillich (1952/2000, p. 34) sees an identity between the pattern of self-affirmation found in the infinite being-itself and the pattern of self-affirmation in finite beings.

[16] However, as counter-argument, these forms perhaps do not undergo intrinsic change, but passively attract the knower to contemplate them. Change is seen here as relational, i.e. from a form not being known to that same form being known by a subject. For a distinction between intrinsic change and relational change, see Hoffman and Rosenkrantz 2004, p. 31.

within it the capacity to be changed and to effect change (see also Gulley 1962, pp. 112–113). Consequently, it is possible to conceive of beings as the substantive moments in a process of becoming. A $being_1$, for instance, is a substantive, consolidating its preceding and formative process of becoming, and will in turn effect or become another subsequent substantive, $being_2$; and the process continues.[17] However, seeing that Underhill and Plato do not dismiss the aspect of being as transcendent to becoming, the development of becoming into a substantive being must allow for a difference or gap between being and becoming. What constitute the difference are the unaccounted for: (1) consolidated state's "more than" the sum of its consolidating components and/or (2) elements of the consolidating process that do not go into the making of the consolidated state. It is this difference that forms the transcendence of being concealed within the dialectical development of $being_1$–becoming–$being_2$.

2.4 Being and Becoming and the Mediating Dialectic

In the context of mysticism and the explorations generated by some ideas in *M*, the preceding sections argued for specific ways of conceiving being and becoming. First, Bergson's thesis on vitalism postulates the existence of transcendent realities within a realm constantly in flux. Second, being and becoming are dialectically related to one another in which being is immanent in and transcendent to becoming. This structure is aligned with the stipulated understanding of mysticism as a profound relationship with ultimate reality that is infinite and is the synthetic moment of the general *becoming–being–infinite being* dialectical sequence. And, third, if being includes becoming, then it would be problematic to ascribe the attribute of unchangingness to being.

Despite the complexity of Hegel's metaphysics, we can extract a dialectical schema of his and apply it for the purposes of this present work. In using Hegel's dialectical schema, I do not think I am obligated to attach the whole gamut of metaphysical assumptions that supposedly underpin the said schema.[18] Hegel's (1817/1991, § 66, p. 115) mediating dialectic progresses through the sequence of "immediacy–mediation–mediated immediacy" (see also Inwood 1997, s.v. "mediation and immediacy", pp. 183–186). His analogy of the seed maturing into a tree helps us imagine the phase or moment of "immediacy" as representing the seed, "mediation" as the growth process, and "mediated immediacy" as the developed tree. When framing this pattern against our being–becoming binary, immediacy–

[17] This type of relation parallels Mondello's account of John of the Cross' description of being as culmination of its antecedent process of becoming. The subscripts on $being_1$ and $being_2$ signify a progressive consolidation of becoming from one substantive to another. The term "substantive" employed here is not strictly referred to solid things or objects. It can just as well refer to a state one is in, such as the state of having completed a research project.

[18] I need not, for instance, take on board any notion of a complete submission of a part to the all-consuming totality.

mediation–mediated immediacy correlates with being$_1$–becoming–being$_2$. Hegel (1817/1991, § 66, p. 115) adds:

> But, for all that the seed and the parents (in virtue of their just existing) are *immediate*, they are offspring as well; and, in spite of the mediation of their existence, the children, etc., are now immediate, for they *are* too. That I *am* in Berlin, which is my *immediate* present, is *mediated* by the journey I made to come here, etc.

The moment or phase of mediated immediacy constitutes the immediacy moment for the subsequent three-moment dialectical sequence, and the pattern is repeated. If immediacy corresponds to being, and mediation to becoming, then whether a particular being is immediate or is mediated immediacy depends upon its relation to the order in the dialectical sequence.

There is, however, the phase of absolute and unmediated immediacy that Hegel calls *pure being*. In reflecting upon the most abstract and immediate concept of all thinking and existing, Hegel comes up with the notion of pure being. Pure being, as that without determinations, is the ultimate beginning and the immediacy of all reality and thinking. It is also that which is most universal and abstract for it encompasses all beings and is not limited by any determinate form of being. In his *Encyclopaedia Logic* (§ 87–88, pp. 139–141), Hegel reasons thus:

> But this pure being is the *pure abstraction*, and hence it is the *absolutely negative*, which when taken immediately, is equally *nothing*. … And similarly, but conversely, *nothing*, as this immediate (term) that is equal to itself, is *the same as being*. Hence, the truth of being and nothing alike is the *unity* of both of them; this unity is *becoming*.

When we consider pure being, explains Hegel, we will see that since it has neither determination nor content, it is then identical to *nothing.* Picture being that is absolutely universal and having no specific form. Nothing appears in that picture. Pure being and nothing are not two distinct features because if they were two distinct features within one concept, then pure being would not be pure, undifferentiated being. Hence, in the phase of absolute immediacy, we have pure being and nothing as identical, not one immediate while the other mediated. Strange as it seems, there is no violation of the law of noncontradiction in this assertion. When viewed in the affirmative sense, it is pure being, but, at the same time, since being is here undifferentiated, we can view it in the negative sense as nothing. The unity of being and nothing is, according to Hegel, the concept of *becoming*.[19]

Pure being and nothing are presented as two different ways of viewing undifferentiated being. An objection may be raised against this Hegelian deduction. If we commence with the concept of nothing, it is difficult to imagine how this nothing leads us to the concept of pure being. Obviously, even if I were to think of nothing, then that thought of nothing would still be something. Nonetheless, having a notion of nothingness does not necessarily conduce to my thinking about pure being.

[19] Hegel does admit that many concepts can be employed to unite being with nothing. One of them would be "beginning" in that it serves to unite, conceptually, being and nothing as the most primal coexisting identities (Hegel 1817/1991, § 88 (3), pp. 142–143). However, he still reckons that "becoming" is the most appropriate term.

Therefore, the objection is that contrary to Hegel's account, the relation between pure being and nothing is not a two-way implication whereby pure being implies nothing and nothing implies pure being. Hegel presents them as equally immediate, and identical, but while I can understand thinking about pure being makes me think about nothing, I hesitate to conclude that thinking about nothing makes me think about pure being. Now, without the two-way implication, it is questionable whether we are entitled to identify pure being with nothing.

My contention is that pure being *appearing* like nothing is quite different from pure being *identical* to nothing. Hegel attempts to show how it is possible to deduce becoming from pure being. However, this line of reasoning is strictly conceptual rather than representative of any actual and concrete process of becoming consolidating into being. The above critical assessment of Hegel's thought on pure being and nothing becomes relevant to mysticism when we look at mystics such as Eckhart and Thomas Merton (1915–1968) who suggest the view that God is nothing or empty (see Chap. 5). The point I advance here is that the conception of "nothing" attached to God issues from the conception of "pure being" and not the other way around. Accordingly, when considering mystical purification's detachment from finite beings, its ultimate objective is not the attainment of nothingness but the realization of the pure fullness of infinite being. The relation between pure being and nothing will also come to bear upon my investigation of the pure consciousness event in Chap. 5.

Putting aside the problems associated with Hegel's deduction of becoming from pure being, the fundamental operation of the mediating dialectic can still be said to sustain a process of mystical development in which being overlaps with and surpasses becoming. It might be contended that it is artificial to delineate being as the consolidated substantive of its formative process of becoming. Moreover, we recall Bergson's assertion that the flow of consciousness is not a discontinuous succession of one discrete state of consciousness to the next but a co-mingling of qualitatively different elements of consciousness. Nevertheless, when we think of the many times we report our experiences as, for instance, "At this moment I am angry", the anger signifies a consolidated state of being angry that was constructed by and constituted of a series of dynamic becoming. Commonly, a state of anger might be intermingled with some element of fear and, perhaps, a tinge of a past sadness.[20] As discussed earlier, it is questionable whether each moment of consciousness solely and directly

[20] When we reflect upon our experience of pity, states Bergson (1889/1910, pp. 18–19), we might encounter a blending of pity, horror, dread of encountering a misfortune, and so forth. Even with the blending of emotions, I would think that there is still the unity of dynamic becoming into a state of being. Furthermore, while a consolidated state of being (say, of anger) is mediated by its preceding becoming, one can also imagine that within this mediating becoming, there are other consolidations into component beings (say, fear or sadness, which tinges the dominant state of anger; or an independent consolidation that sets off a conditioning line towards other consolidated states). A dominant linear progression from $being_1$–becoming–$being_2$ contains intersections of other becoming–being progressions. The dynamic processes of transitions amongst beings and becomings can be said to form a network of intersecting mediations, within which it is possible to identify dominant linear progressions.

brings about the subsequent moment. Are we then still entitled to use "being" as the consolidated state effected by a causal series of becoming? Precisely because of this lack of a neat causal transition from one moment to the next, the all-important gap of *difference* exists between being and becoming. Indeed, in a dynamic process, antecedent moments may partially mediate into the consequent moment. A past state can contribute to and constitute the present state. Nevertheless, some of the contents of a subsequent moment are not accounted for in the prior moment, and vice versa. Dialectical relations are quite unlike strict logical relations of atomic propositions, one implying the next.

It is reasonable to conceive of being as the moment of immediacy mediated by becoming. But mediation in dialectic must not be interpreted as plainly determinative. The difference between being and becoming makes up being's transcendence of becoming. In reporting our experiences, we employ universal concepts, and hence, our descriptions are not completely identical to our actual experiences. I venture to say that the justification in using "being" as referring to a consolidated state of prior becoming rests upon a linked series of antecedents and consequents, but the movement through this series is not characterized by an exhaustive coalescing of all antecedent becoming into consequent being. The mediated being is transcendent or other to its mediation.

The otherness between external events, internal experience, and the reporting of one's experience is brilliantly explained by Bergson using the example of drawing a line.[21] Let us draw a line on a paper using a pen. There are (1) the external objective process of drawing that line, (2) the internal experience of drawing that line, and (3) the depiction of the drawn line. Case (1) is a flowing process which is continuous, but lacks the duration of *consciously* linking the past with the present. The whole process is physical and transient: a moment passed is a moment lost and cannot be recuperated into the present by the inanimate pen, paper, or line. Note that the recuperation referred to here is that of a recuperation in consciousness. Obviously, a past event conditions a present event through a physical process and thereby is somewhat present in the now. However, for the inanimate pen, line, and paper, there is no conscious union of past, present, and potential future. In case (2), the experience of the process of drawing a line is a duration because the subject can be conscious of the flow of events as it takes place, wherein the recent past is incorporated into the present. Consciousness has the capacity to endure through and unify the past with the present. Finally, when we describe the process of duration, we point to the drawn line (case (3)) as if there is a simultaneous picture of the past and the present all at once. Each of these three cases is distinct, and to assume that they all are identical is to neglect the inevitable disjunction amongst them. The point I am pressing is simply this: the sequence of being$_1$–becoming–being$_2$ is dialectical, featuring co-mingling elements and a difference or transcendence between mediated being and mediating becoming. Moreover, the depiction of that dialectical sequence as a simultaneous all-at-once "line" belies its actual existence as a dynamic

[21] Robin Durie illuminates Bergson's explanation in his "Introduction" to Bergson's (1922/1999, pp. viiiff.) work.

duration. Therefore, being$_2$'s consolidation of being$_1$ and becoming, though depicted as a lined dialectic, ought not to be imagined as a neat simultaneous coexistence of the past with the present.

It is important to bear in mind that metaphysical concepts employed as signifiers are to be taken analogously and not literally (see Tillich 1952/2000, pp. 24–25). This is not to say that the choice of concepts is purely arbitrary; rather, it originates from our reflections upon our experiences and is tied to an intellectual history that helps us think about dynamisms beyond the empirical. Our mediating dialectic of being and becoming is also posited as a reflection of the overall dialectic of the orders mentioned earlier. Again, on the point of thinking about metaphysical realities, the imagery of orders or realms may be misleading. Technically speaking, when we regard becoming as the order of this universe with its plethora of existents and events, within this order, past, present, and future do not have the same form or degree of reality.[22] Similar to Bergson's case of drawing a line, the physical action of drawing a line has the present point of the line reached and then quickly moving from the actual to the actualized. The realm of becoming is not a world in which its temporal members all exist as simultaneous entities.[23] Correspondingly, the realm of being is not another world coterminous with the realm of becoming and, at the same time, floating somewhere above it as if its transcendent members are mysteriously held in limbo in a Platonic-like world of ideas. A reasonable method to conceive of the orders of being and becoming is in terms of a general sense of the existence of realities that extend beyond what is purely explainable by operations of physics.

As advanced earlier, this overall dialectic of orders is itself dialectically related to infinite or pure being. Underhill mentions pure being in *M* and discusses it in association with the dialectic of opposites. She writes:

> Pure Being, says Boutroux in the course of his exposition of Boehme, has two characteristic manifestations. It shows itself to us as Power, by means of strife, of the struggle and opposition of its own qualities. But it shows itself to us as Reality, in harmonizing and reconciling within itself these discordant opposites. … Hence, if Pure Being – the Good, Beautiful and True – is to reveal itself, it must do so by evoking and opposing its contrary: as in the Hegelian dialectic no idea is complete without its negative. … But He [Absolute Reality] is best known in that "light behind", that unity where all these opposites are lifted up into harmony, into a higher synthesis; …. (*M* pp. 39–40)

Underhill's view of pure being should not be confused with Hegel's pure being (that which is absolutely immediate, abstract, and undifferentiated). For Underhill, pure being contains some positive ascriptions. Relying on Émile Boutroux (1845–1921) and Jacob Boehme (1575–1624), she refers to pure being as the good, beautiful,

[22] In a process through time, there are potentially actualizing, actualizing, and actualized realities.

[23] As Stein (1949/2002, pp. 39–40) asserts, "Although the present moment could not be without past and future, these latter two dimensions of time are not static. They are not containers in which something could be preserved or from which something could emerge; no enduring being can be concealed in them".

and true and as dealing with dialectical tension and synthesis.[24] Pure being manifests itself as incorporating a dialectical tension of opposing qualities in the universe into itself and as harmoniously synthesizing these oppositions.[25] Indeed, in this account, pure being is an active agent, not merely an empty universal idea.[26] Elsewhere, Underhill stresses that pure being retains an ineffable mystery that extends beyond its unifying function and all descriptions of its intrinsic nature (*M* pp. 345–346).

For Underhill, the mystical injunction to be united with the infinite entails a participation in the unifying function of this reality via engagement with the world of change as well as sustaining a conscious realization of the omnipresent transcendence of the infinite (*M* p. 41). I have said that the $being_1$–becoming–$being_2$ correlates with Hegel's immediacy–mediation–mediated immediacy and that the dialectical process is not one of *complete* cumulation of a preceding component into the subsequent one.[27] There are elements within $being_1$ that do not go into $being_2$, and $being_2$ is more than the sum of its constituent process of becoming. Another and complementary representation of that difference or transcendence can be developed from a different dialectical pattern of Hegel.

2.5 Being and Becoming and the Individualizing Dialectic

In a section in *Practical Mysticism*, Underhill (1915/1943, pp. 41–42) explicates the mystic's ability to straddle both the realms of being and becoming by embedding this ability within a fundamental ontological framework of immanence and transcendence. She argues for a presence of an inner "spark or soul or spirit" within the

[24] The ideals of goodness, beauty, and truth can be traced back to Plato's dialogues (for examples, see *Phaedo* 65d, p. 48; 76d, p. 60; and *Republic* 501d, p. 737, 507b, p. 742).

[25] Many of the mystics and thinkers whom Underhill relies upon for developing her ideas, such as Dionysius the Areopagite, Meister Eckhart, Jacob Boehme, and Nicholas of Cusa, conceive of God's relationship, either within God's self or with the world, or both, as dialectical in form (see Cooper 2006, pp. 42–62). This, I think, reinforces the premise that dialectics figure quite prominently in Underhill's philosophy of mysticism.

[26] If pure being contains differentiation within itself, then there are determinate boundaries present within its infinity. I do not see any contradiction here for I doubt that infinity implies emptiness. This description of pure being also coheres with the notion of the infinite as including and overflowing the finite (as infinity including and exceeding the finite). The finite is contained within the infinite. Since the finite is not outside of the infinite, there is no bounding of the infinite by the finite. Moreover, an absolutely empty being would be vacuous and utterly impotent, far from reflecting the quality of pure being as infinitely dynamic. However, the problem that remains is the difficulty of reconciling this sketch of the infinite with the medieval notion of God as simple, not composite (see Aquinas 13th cent./1990, part I quest. 3 artcl. 7, p. 19).

[27] The word "cumulation" can be replaced with "sublation". Hegel's "to sublate" is technically used in connection with the dialectical process of negating the preceding dialectical phase and absorbing it into the subsequent phase (see Suchting 1991, pp. xxxv–xxxvi; and Hegel 1812/1969, pp. 118–119).

totality of reality as well as within each component part of reality. The part and whole relation is in harmony by virtue of this soul that operates in both those spheres. There appears to be a distinction between the inner "soul" of the whole and the respective "souls" of its parts. The relevant passage needs to be quoted in its entirety for our inspection:

> As they [the mystics] know themselves to dwell in the world of time and yet to be capable of transcending it, so the Ultimate Reality, they think, inhabits yet inconceivably exceeds all that they know to be – as the soul of the musician controls and exceeds not merely each note of the flowing melody, but also the whole of that symphony in which these cadences must play their part. That invulnerable spark of vivid life, that "inward light" which these men find at their own centres when they seek for it, is for them an earnest of the Uncreated Light, the ineffable splendour of God, dwelling at, and energizing within the heart of things: for this spark is at once one with, yet separate from, the Universal Soul. (Underhill 1915/1943, p. 41)

As the mystic is believed to be capable of transcending time while living in it, ultimate reality, says Underhill, inhabits everything and yet transcends this totality. This transcending while inhabiting is also said to be the analogue of the soul of a musician, capable of controlling each note she produces and the whole musical composition while at the same time transcending each note and the composition. There is a crisscross of dialectical relation of part and whole and a third term that is present within the part and the whole as well as transcending them.

Perhaps, Hegel's (1817/1991, §163, pp. 239–241) dialectic of universality–particularity–individuality can assist us in conceiving the way in which the inner soul harmonizes the whole–part division.[28] The most general pattern is that of a totality of reality that is represented by the moment of "universality", and every part of this totality is said to be the moment of "particularity". This simple pattern can be ramified into an intricate web of intersecting relative universals and relative parts, as, for example, the realm of humanity is a relative universal and each group of people belonging to a nation constitutes its relative part.[29] Each group of people sharing a common nationality, in turn, is a relative universal, while its members, the relative parts (see Inwood 1997, s.v. "universal, particular, and individual", p. 303). The relational terms of identity and difference best capture this Hegelian dialectic. "Individuality" is the third dialectical moment that synthesizes universality and particularity. To have some notion of how the individualizing dialectic operates, let us

[28] When discussing propositions, Hegel (1812/1969, pp. 645–650) argues that present in each of the universal (e.g. "All humans are wise"), particular ("Some humans are wise"), and individual ("Gaius is wise") judgments are characteristics of the other two. The individual proposition that "Gaius is wise" has the element of the particular in it because Gaius is a part of the human race. Also, since the attribute "wise" is predicated of Gaius as a whole unit and not part of Gaius, there is the universal character of that individual proposition. This illustration shows that universality, particularity, and individuality are not mutually exclusive moments in the dialectic; and especially, within individuality, there are universality and particularity.

[29] Humanity is not an absolute universal because it is a part of a more universal term, "living things". However, in relation to the class of people sharing a common nationality, humanity is universal.

examine Hegel's (1821/1967, § 273, p. 176) fleshing out of that dialectic in his main divisions of governmental powers that make up a constitutional monarchy:

> The state as a political entity is thus cleft into three substantive divisions:
>
> (a) the power to determine and establish the universal – the Legislature;
> (b) the power to subsume single cases and the spheres of particularity under the universal – the Executive;
> (c) the power of subjectivity, as the will with the power of ultimate decision – the Crown. In the crown, the different powers are bound into an individual unity which is thus at once the apex and the basis of the whole, i.e. of constitutional monarchy.

Hegel's framing of the individualizing dialectic – universality–particularity–individuality – upon the divisions of governmental powers, demonstrates, though not perfectly, corresponding relations between the two triadic configurations. The legislature represents the moment of universality on account of its dealings with universal rational principles operating to frame and sustain universally binding laws. Along with the executive, Hegel (1821/1967, § 287, pp. 188–189) places the judiciary, both reflecting the moment of particularity. The executive and the judicial arms of government are concerned with the implementation and adjudication of the specifics that come under the ambit of the universal constitution and laws. The monarch represents the individuality moment because as head of state, the monarch symbolically unites universality with particularity in an embodied individual subject.[30] In essence then, for Hegel, the person of the monarch as possessing inner subjectivity symbolizes that capacity to unite in her consciousness the formal universal laws with the concrete particular applications of the executive and judicial bodies.

In spite of the appealing way in which Hegel weaves the individualizing dialectic into the general configuration of the state, one might argue that the judiciary alone can function as synthesis of universality and particularity. Does not the judge represent individual subjectivity capable of subsuming particular cases under universal laws? Interestingly, Hegel affirms that all three moments are present in each of the governmental powers (see footnote above). Dialecticism embraces unity, difference, and intermingling of elements.

Returning to Underhill, I suggest that the inner soul as postulated by her represents the moment of individuality that is said to be the negation of negation between universality and particularity. The inner soul is present in both universality and particularity and thereby negates the negation or separation of those two moments in the dialectic. It unites and differentiates within and between universalities and particularities. The phase of individuality marks the synthesis of universality with particularity, indicating that the latter two moments are neither radically apart nor strictly identical; rather, there is a profound bond between relative totalities and relative parts. Furthermore, in Underhill's system, the universal soul of God is the omnipresent all-uniting bond. There are, in this synthesizing structure, relations amongst four enmeshed categories: the universal as whole, particular as part of this whole, universal soul, and particular

[30] Hegel (1821/1967, § 280, p. 184) has an explanation that attempts to justify *hereditary* monarchy, but we need not delve into it for it is extraneous to the arguments here.

soul. In Hegel's universality–particularity–individuality of legislature–executive/judiciary–monarch, each element contains the other two. Likewise, in our constructed dialectic of Underhill's theory of the inner soul, universals contain particulars, and the universal also has its soul that separates it from its particulars. The same applies for the particulars. Each particular contains a part of its universal and is made distinct from its universal by its individual soul.

This form of individuality is an intricate configuration encompassing identity and difference. Individuality then has two species:

1. A part is inevitably (*passively*) a component of the whole, and hence, there is an identity between them. However, by virtue of their being distinguishable, there is also the characteristic of difference between the two.
2. The inner soul/spark, as advanced by Underhill, represents the moment of individuality that is said to be the *active* or animating force behind the part–whole relationship.

As Underhill (1915/1943, p. 41) avers, the inner spark within the person is the "earnest of the Uncreated Light, the ineffable splendor of God, dwelling at and energizing within the heart of things: for this spark is at once one with, yet separate from the Universal Soul". While the universal soul can be said to inspirit universal totality, the particular soul is present in the part of this totality.

When placing the dialectical frame of universality–particularity–individuality against the being–becoming binary, the following pattern can be delineated. Universal being encompasses particular beings. Particular beings can also be viewed as relative universal beings that contain further particular beings. The active agent that connects the universal and the particular is the inner soul within each of these realities, and this inner soul is itself part of the universal soul. The inner soul dynamically holds together the universal being with particular beings in a process of *becoming*. As an example for illustration, an organization's "soul" is that intangible element that animates and inspires the whole organization's structure and its members. But this "soul" is part of and apart from the organization, and part of and apart from each member.[31] In this regard, the way to apprehend the relations amongst universal being, particular being, universal soul, and particular soul is one of *being a part of and apart from* one another. Moreover, even between two coordinate parts belonging to a shared universal category, each soul is part of and yet apart from the other soul.[32]

[31] Social processes are indeed part and parcel of the general ontological realm wherein being is immanent in and transcendent to becoming. Tillich (1952/2000, p. 88) considers it easier to envisage the identity and difference between part and whole when we view participation as a process or power. He cites the example of the power of being of a state, in which the citizens of the state participate. That power is shared, and yet there is the element of difference between the power of being of the state and that of each citizen.

[32] Plotinus' (250/1956, 4th ennead 3rd tractate, pp. 259–262) construction of particular soul and universal soul does not permit independence between the particular souls and the universal soul. Hence, by underscoring the oneness and identity of all souls, Plotinus, unfortunately, compromises the autonomy of individual selves.

The notion of the soul may conjure an image of distinct reified entities inhabiting every universal and particular. It would be prudent in this context of the usage of the term "soul" that we do not imagine it as an eternal and unchanging entity functioning as a principal executive of all processes undertaken by the particular being the soul inhabits. Indeed, the concept of soul has a plethora of definitions depending on who is defining it. For our purposes here though, we take soul, as inspired by Underhill and translated through Hegel, to carry a dialectical sense. Again, the concept is meant to be perceived analogously for the purpose of guiding our thoughts about the relational characteristics of identity and difference between universals and particulars. The notion of soul in this context functions as a dialectical synthesis (moment of individuality) that effects the identity and difference between universals and particulars.

The aspect of becoming serves to convey the idea of the dynamic nature of individuality's synthesizing function. This is expressed most saliently when we view the mystical journey as a development of the mystic's orientation away from finite egocentrism and towards infinite inclusiveness and universality.[33] The mystical journey operates dialectically and transformatively within this configuration of universals and particulars to reflect a close relationship with the source of all beings – infinite being.[34] There is, in this pattern of development, a conflation of the individualizing dialectic and the mediating dialectic. As the mystical relationship progresses, *being* marks the moments of successive mediated immediacies that incorporate and transcend its antecedent *becoming* and, at the same time, *being* also marks the moments of individuality as progressive expansions into synthesizing and transcending universals and particulars. By this reasoning, the soul, as the active moment of individuality, is best perceived as an evolving dynamic rather than an unchanging being. The development of mystical transformation entails a

[33] Ken Wilber (1995/2000, pp. 4ff.) proposes a dialectical progression of mystical development, whereby each phase integrates the traits and accomplishments of the previous phase and also transcends that previous phase. He borrows and develops Arthur Koestler's (1967, p. 48) concept of *holon* to refer to a "whole" in relation to its parts that make up the lower developmental phase, and at the same time this same whole is itself a "part" which forms a component of a larger whole in the higher developmental phase.

[34] Charles Hartshorne's (1953, pp. 1–25) model of panentheism and his adaptation of Alfred Whitehead's (1928/1978, especially, pp. 342–351) process philosophy have many affinities with the thesis we are presenting here. Panentheism proposes a God–universe relation that is analogous to a whole–part relation. The whole includes its parts, but it is also more than the sum of its parts. God, therefore, has the universe as part of itself and yet transcends the universe. One may hypothesize that each part and relative whole is in possession of spirit that is a component of universal spirit. While I submit that God includes and is more than the universe, and this relation follows the mediating and individualizing dialectics, I disagree with Benedikt Göcke's (2012, pp. 61–68) contention that panentheism, in order to distinguish itself from classical theism, postulates that the universe is an intrinsic and necessary property of God. Setting aside the actual position(s) taken by panentheists (it is conceivable that there are varied versions of panentheism), my contention is that as long as a finite universe exists, this universe is included in the infinite God, but the existence of this universe is contingent and is therefore not a necessary essential property of God.

broadening of the mystic's orientation and a movement towards larger and larger universalities.[35]

An objector might argue that mystical progress in the above description reflects the *ideal* case. In reality, there is the likelihood that the movement through the mediating dialectic allows for a progressively more restricted and egoistic consciousness and behavioural responses. This is a valid observation, and hence, it impugns any suggestion of a positive correlation between the mediating and the individualizing dialectics. It is possible that the mystic may suffer periods of stagnancy or even regression into less universal orientations in the context of the individualizing dialectic. But there is no regression in the context of the mediating dialectic if regression implies that a previous being–becoming dialectical progression goes into reverse gear and retraces its past trajectory. This is definitely not the case. The progressive movement of the being–becoming dialectic is irreversible in its direction. It may take another course that radically alters its previous consolidated state of being, but the movement is still forward and not a reverse into an already-traversed line. Additionally, we have to abandon the image of a unilinear progression and instead view the whole topography as a network of dialectical movements. The progression need not be one that tracks through a necessarily fixed hierarchical structure. There is always the possibility of sudden leaps of progress or sudden conversion experience from a previously low level status of relationship vis-à-vis infinite reality. As mentioned, there is also the possibility of different progressions that may diminish previous attainments. It is conceivable that someone journeying through a mystical relationship with God may be assailed by gnawing doubts, allowing these doubts to progress via the being–becoming dialectic into a state which counters her developed convictions in God.

Hegel's sequence of the individualizing dialectic needs alteration in order to accommodate the ideal pattern of mystical progress. In the ideal case of mystical growth, expanding movement towards synthesis of broader concerns and perspectives is more appropriately aligned with the individualizing dialectic sequence of particularity–universality–individuality rather than Hegel's universality–particularity–individuality. In Hegel's doctrine, universality is regarded as the starting point of reality with its inherent particulars. In his system of absolute idealism, Hegel (1812/1969, p. 603) explains the overall progress of the absolute idea when he says:

> [W]e cannot speak of the universal apart from determinateness which to be more precise is particularity and individuality, for the universal, in its absolute negativity, contains determinateness in and for itself. The determinateness, therefore, is not introduced from outside when we speak of it in connexion with the universal. As negativity in general or in accordance with the *first, immediate* negation, the universal contains determinateness generally as *particularity*; as the *second* negation, that is, as negation of the negation, it is *absolute determinateness* or *individuality* and *concreteness.*

Hegel often speaks of the universal as an abstract concept that determines itself into its first negative moment – particularity. For instance, upon close reflection of

[35] Mystical life, as defined by Underhill (1915/1943, pp. 148–154), involves a transition from narrow, self-serving drives to deepening and widening outlooks and responsibilities.

the absolutely immediate and universal notion of pure being, we arrive at this notion's negative, that is, a distinction between being and nothing. The second negation, which is the negation of the negation, is the moment of individuality, a moment that unites the abstract universal with its determinate parts. This schema conceals a doctrine of the unravelling of a concept (or reality) of its already innate parts by a process of distinction and then synthesis.

Given Hegel's sequence of universality–particularity–individuality, the movement from universality to particularity may connote a mystical development viewed thus – a pre-existent though innate divine relationship (the phase of universality as ideal and potential) unfolding itself through concrete particularized moments along historical time. However, I do not intend to postulate any pre-existing potential of a perfect mystical relationship that only requires unfolding in a progressive manner through actual particular mystical intimacies.[36] Such a postulation has an affinity with radical finalism, which I (following Bergson) reject. Furthermore, I can, with confidence, say that there is empirical justification for a dynamic universe. I cannot, with equal confidence, postulate a totality of potential realities immersed in infinite being as a whole and static entity, awaiting the gradual actualization of these realities in world history. Another problem with the thesis of a pre-existent universal unfolding into concrete particulars lies in its divesting of free will from the universal being. If universal being represents God, it would seem that God is somehow "predetermined" to unfold Godself in the concrete history of the world. However, the postulation of a distinction between universal soul and particular soul, and universal being and particular being in our individualizing dialectic helps circumvent this problem. God as universal being is more than the sum of all particular beings; and the distinction between universal soul and particular souls preserves the respective autonomies of the universal and the particular. In conclusion, when interpreting the progress of mystical relationship using both the mediating and individualizing dialectics, Hegel's individualizing dialectic has to undergo a sequence adjustment to particularity–universality–individuality. Rather than the unfolding of an innate universal into its particulars, ideally, mystical development is more likely characterized by an expansion of the mystic's being from a more particular to a more universal

[36] Dionysius the Areopagite, in his *On the Divine Names* (chp. 8: 2, p. 155), asserts God's power and causal agency in all things. However, we cannot hastily infer from this the idea of a preordained divine agency in events in the universe. Dionysius (chp. 8: 8, p. 159) does highlight instances in which individuals freely turn away from desire for God and commit wrongful deeds. I am aware that factious debates exist in the history of Christianity over the issue of predestination and free will. If God is all-powerful and all-knowing, then God would be responsible for all events in the world and have a precognition of them even before they occur. However, this doctrine collides with the belief that God gives humans free will to choose and act according to good or evil. In John Cowburn's *Free Will*, *Predestination*, *and Determinism* (2008, pp. 79ff.), we find an informative and insightful exposition of these debates. Admittedly, I have no airtight defence against a claim that all events in the universe pre-exist in God prior to their actualization. Perhaps, I may not be obligated to refute such a claim. Rather, the burden of proof lies with those who make the claim. Nevertheless, a note I wish to point out is that divine fore-knowledge does not demolish the premise that there exist actual occurrences of chance events and events springing from free human agency. I may still be said to have acted freely even though God already knows what I would do.

orientation, heading towards universal and infinite being. Infinite being, says Underhill (1915/1943, p. 41), dwells within everything and at the same time transcends everything.

2.6 Transcendence and Immanence, and the Being–Becoming Dialectics

Theistic mysticism, as put forth in this study, is grounded on the relationship between infinite being and finite being. Two relevant ways in which we can describe the manner in which the infinite relates to the finite are (1) the infinite includes the finite as its subset and exceeds the finite and (2) the infinite is other to the finite. The notion of infinity as including and exceeding finite realities relays a sense of the infinite as unlimited and unbounded by anything external to it.[37] Note that viewing the infinite as outside of and infinitely other to everything besides itself does pose some problems. "Infinitely other" is a relational rather than a substantial term. What this implies is that just because A is infinitely other to B, it does not follow that A is infinite. Moreover, one may be led to reason that if God is infinitely other to the universe, then the universe is also infinitely other to God; and hence, the universe is infinite. This deduction clearly highlights the fallacy of confusing a relational category with a substantial one. But dismissing the possibility of God's absolute otherness is to disregard the staunch *via negativa* present in mystical theology and testimonies. Is "*via negativa*" a decidedly firm promulgation of God as infinitely other? Logically, if God is absolutely other, in what sense can we talk about a relationship, any relationship, let alone a profound mystical one, between God and us?

Since the classical representative of negative mystical theology is Dionysius the Areopagite, it would benefit our investigation to examine some of his writings. In his *On the Divine Names* (chp. 7: 2, pp. 149–150), Dionysius attempts to sort out the perplexity of positing a God believed to transcend cognitive operations, yet able to know everything. He reminds his readers:

> But, as I have often said, we must interpret Divine Things in a manner suitable to their nature. For the lack of Mind and Sensation must be predicated of God by excess and not by defect … and Invisible Darkness we attribute to that Light which is Unapproachable because It so far exceeds the visible light.

The Dionysian mystical theology advocates discoursing on divine attributes in terms of traversing a dual path of affirmation and negation. God can be described using positive attributes found in reference to the universe on the grounds that since God is the uncaused cause of the universe, correlative attributes exist between them. Additionally, some of these attributes, such as power, are said to be present in God

[37] To help understand infinity's including and exceeding finitude, think of the finite set of integers: {8, 9, 10}. The infinite series of integers would include and exceed this finite set. And, since this set is *within* the infinite series, it would not form a boundary limiting the infinite series.

in an infinite degree. Some attributes, such as that depicted in the simile – "God is a rock" – ought not to lead us to imagine God having rockness to an infinite degree.[38] Dionysius (5th cent./1920, *The Mystical Theology* chp. 5, p. 200) then gives prominence to the path of approaching God through a systematic removing or negation of God's ascribed attributes. Here is a partial list:

> [T]hat It is not soul, or mind, or endowed with the faculty of imagination, conjecture, reason, or understanding; nor is It any act of reason or understanding; nor can It be described by the reason or perceived by the understanding, … nor is It unity, nor is It Godhead or Goodness; nor is It a Spirit, as we understand the term, since It is not Sonship or Fatherhood; nor is It any other thing such as we or any other being can have knowledge of; nor does It belong to the category of non-existence or to that of existence; ….

Not only does Dionysius negate all such attributes of God, he (5th cent./1920, *The Mystical Theology* chp. 3, pp. 198–199) also later insists that there are varying degrees of negation. God is "more" not-furious and "less" not-intelligent. Perhaps then, one ought to be reticent about imputing unto God a general *infinite otherness* to all affirmative divine attributes.

We cannot categorically dismiss the possibility of God being infinitely other to the universe, but to affirm it as an actuality renders all talk about mystical intimacy seriously problematic. I propose that we conceive the infinite–finite relation as a combination of "including–exceeding" and "excluding". Divine infinity includes and exceeds the universe and has that *aspect* of being other to (excluding of) finite beings. To maintain, exclusively, the including–exceeding part of the relation may conduce to a conception of God solely as sharing finite attributes of the universe, but possessing them in a quantitatively infinite degree. Moreover, if we imagine that God is more than the sum of everything in this universe, then God would include this universe, be more than it, yet somehow anchored in the sum of everything in this universe. Alternatively, positing God solely as a being that is infinitely other to finite realities in toto creates a boundary or even huge chasm between finitude and infinity. If this is the case, finitude would then limit infinity.[39] My proposed combination allows for a conception of God as quantitatively more than and qualitatively different from the finite world. For instance, one can say that God's beauty and power is similar to earthly beauty and power, but to a quantitatively infinite degree.[40] Alongside this, one can also say that since "beauty" and "power" have stipulated

[38] It can be argued that "rock" is a metaphor for stability and reliability and that infinite stability and reliability can soundly be attributed to God.

[39] Hegel (1827/2006, p. 406) maintains that "if God has the finite only over against himself, then he himself is finite and limited". The finite would limit God because God would then be boldly separated from the finite.

[40] Quantitative increment of beauty is dissimilar to quantitative increment of spatial size. Aspects that contribute to beauty are evidently more than a simple increase of the same type of quantum. Rather, features such as symmetry, and harmony of melding different qualities constitute contributing elements of beauty. Assuming that a universal assent exists for judging beauty, the fact that one object is appraised as *more* beautiful than another, and that it is always possible to conceive of a further increase in beauty, the phrase "quantitatively infinite beauty" can soundly be used to describe divine beauty.

meanings, there is an aspect of divine beauty and power that qualitatively differs from earthly beauty and power. God is not totally and infinitely other to the world, but there is an *aspect* or *component* of God that is indeed other to the world and that resists any infinite–finite conjunction. This stress on an aspect of God avoids splitting God into two independent substantial beings: one that includes–exceeds and another that excludes the universe. Dionysius (5th cent./1920, *On the Divine Names* chp. 9: 7, p. 167) argues for the universe being both similar and dissimilar to God. As regards dissimilarity, he asserts that the finite universe is "infinitely and incomparably inferior" to God. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) (13th cent./1990, part I quest. 4 artcl. 3, p. 23) interprets Dionysius as articulating differences in quantity/intensity and quality/kind. I regard this two-form difference as corresponding to "exceeding" (in degree) and "excluding" (in kind).

Undoubtedly, our attempts to sketch a picture of infinity from our finite perspective are bound to encounter difficulties. The attempt to put together the including–exceeding and excluding patterns of the infinite–finite relation is also found in Tillich's theological reflections. Tillich strives to formulate a satisfactory conception of divine infinity. His concept of *being-itself* for God is in opposition to any notion of God as a supreme being. If God is a supreme being, says Tillich (1951, p. 235), then God is *a being*, one of the other finite beings, albeit a supreme or perfect being.[41] To the contrary, continues Tillich (1951, p. 271), God as being-itself is the ground or the power of all beings, and hence, the finite self of the person is included in God in such a way that there is no subject–object dichotomy in the human–divine relationship. The very being that powers the subject's consciousness of the object (being-itself) is part of that object. Tillich (1952/2000, pp. 179–180) even states that being-itself includes non-being. Therefore, unlike finite beings that have to contend with non-being as an external limit on them, being-itself has non-being incorporated within it.[42]

Tillich is unsympathetic to any notion of God as absolutely other to the world. God as being-itself is inimical to such a radical otherness. On the other hand, he (1957, pp. 7–8) does argue for God's self-transcendence that reflects a mutual freedom and independence between God and the universe. God cannot be identified with the universe by virtue of God's freedom and self-determination. With regard to

[41] Pannenberg (1991, pp. 27–28) regards Thomas Aquinas' conception of being-itself as one that does not altogether reject the aspect of God as *a* being, i.e. a being who is unique on account of its identity of essence and existence. God as a unique being facilitates a perception of God as different from all other beings (cf. Aquinas 13th cent./1990, part I quest. 3 artcl. 4, p. 17; part I quest. 13 artcl. 11, p. 74).

[42] Tillich's argument that non-being is necessary to make being-itself active is susceptible to the challenge that being-itself has then to contend with non-being as an external, and not internal, force. In contrast to Tillich's view, Kant (1817/1978, pp. 44–46) holds that since the concept of God consists of all realities, it cannot accommodate non-being, the contradictory of reality or being. I think that non-being, regarded as the other of being, is part and parcel of divine infinity. That part of God which excludes or utterly transcends the universe as well as any form of being is able to accommodate non-being. Perhaps, "being -itself" may not be an appropriate concept if it is assumed to include non-being.

sketching a transcendent–immanent relation between God and the world, Tillich's formulation of being-itself parallels my presentation of the individualizing dialectic. Tillich (1957, p. 6; 1951, p. 205) opposes any association between *being-itself* and the totality of things. The individualizing dialectic's idea of *universal being* as including and transcending the totality of things, and of the universal soul as the centre of individuation, suggests a subtly distinct image of divinity's transcendence over the world. Indeed, Tillich is aware of difficulties wedged in any attempt at a perfect reconciliation of the immanent and transcendent aspects of God. His (1957, p. 9) admission is that our formulation of the unity of being-itself's transcendence of and immanence in all finite beings will always be a symbolic or analogous knowledge of God.[43]

Applying Hegel's two dialectical modalities to Underhill's thesis on mysticism helps us envisage a tenable synthesis of the above two aspects of God's infinity by showing that at the level of processes in this world, such a synthesis might possibly exist. The mediating dialectic represents the transcendence of being – as incorporating its antecedent formative dynamisms and yet maintaining an excess. Here we see a semblance of "including–exceeding". The individualizing dialectic as applied to Underhill's concept of the soul represents the agency of the soul in the part–whole unity but also the aspect of the soul's difference from the particular, universal, and the other souls. This, in an attenuated manner, reflects transcendence as "excluding".

Taking into consideration our constructed being–becoming dialectics and the dimorphic (including–exceeding and excluding) infinite–finite relationship, transcendence can be present in three distinct models discussed below:

1. As the infinite's immanence in and excessive overflowing of finite dialectical processes. I wish to label this as "infinite's transcendence that exceeds immanence". Mystical union is quite likely the contact between the self and this aspect of transcendence via perceiving a reality that includes and infinitely exceeds (overflows) the self. It is this model that offers, to my mind, the best account for the possibility of an infinite–finite union. When the infinite includes the finite, contact or union is rendered possible despite their divergent attributes. The mystic is convinced that she is in contact with something that she is uniquely part of and that this something is exceedingly more than her finite self. However, as stated before, within this finite world, there are elements within becoming that

[43] Heidegger (1927/1962, § 1, pp. 21–24) draws our attention to the ambiguity of the concept of being. Assuming that the Heideggerian "Being" is equivalent to "being-itself" and "universal being", there is, as Heidegger stresses, no universal being as *a* being, independent of the multitude of entities or beings (§ 1, p. 23). For him, "'Being' means the being of entities" (§ 2, p. 26). He also maintains that universal being, thought of as the most general category, does not clearly unify all beings in the way that a genus would unify its specific members (§ 1, p. 22). Being is not a substance apart from beings, and neither is it a universal property common to members of the most general class. In the next chapter, I shall make explicit the inherent problem of conceiving universal being as unifying or totalizing all beings. Indeed, the problems and ambiguity of universal being, when this form of being is associated with God as infinite being, open a space for the transcendence of God over the universe of things and ideas.

do not consolidate into being. There may be an excess of the antecedent becoming that is independent of the formed being. Does this feature of incomplete or partial inclusion apply to the inclusion of the finite within the infinite? Are there residues of finitude that are not included within the infinite? It could be that within the finite world, there is no complete inclusion of antecedent becoming into being, but all finite processes are ultimately and utterly included within infinite reality. Infinity as all-encompassing cannot have residues of finitude outside its compass. However, this does not imply that God as infinity is an agent responsible for every single event in the universe. Every moment or event is part of the infinite, but it does not necessarily follow that the infinite functions as a total being actively intervening in every moment or event. Another point worth noting is that while individual components of the universe, such as time and space, and human consciousness, may be infinite, the universe as a whole can still be regarded as finite. This is so because infinite time, space, and consciousness are still bound within their respective categories or realms.[44]

2. Within intermittent junctures of the dialectical process. These intermittent junctures are marked as the transcendent otherness of being within the overall this-world reality. Perhaps, there is in this model of the expression of transcendence,

[44] William Lain Craig, in his "Pantheists In Spite of Themselves? Pannenberg, Clayton, and Shults on Divine Infinity" (2012, online), mounts a scathing attack on the theism defended by those three scholars. Their form of theism is nonclassical and founded very much upon the concept of infinity as non-finite. For Craig, essentially, these writers postulate infinity as containing finitude for the express purpose of avoiding infinity being other to finitude (and thereby rendering the infinite finite). Nevertheless, continues Craig, they cannot avoid distinguishing the finite from the infinite; even conceding to an ontological difference between infinity and finitude. Craig regards the assertion of ontological difference between infinity and finitude as contradictory to the proposition that infinity contains finitude. He then argues that despite their efforts to avoid pantheism, their version of theism would inevitably force them either to admit monistic pantheism or change their understanding of divine infinity. Craig thinks that traditional theism does not regard infinity as non-finite; instead,

> "infinity" serves as an umbrella-term for capturing all those properties which serve to make God the greatest conceivable being. In saying that God is infinite, we mean that God is necessary, self-existent, omnipotent, omniscient, holy, eternal, omnipresent, and so forth. Were we to abstract these properties from the concept of God, there would not remain some further, undefined property *infinity*. Rather God's infinity is constituted precisely by these great-making properties.

In opposition to the definition of infinity spelled out in the above quote, God's infinity, I think, should not be constrained by those specific attributes. More importantly, the premise of God including all finite realities does not entail the absence of distinction between this infinite God and finite things. Even when we look at numbers, the distinction and boundary between the finite series, {1, 2, 3}, and the infinite series of numbers do not invalidate the infinity of the latter series. And the boundary separating a particular object from the whole collection of an infinite plurality and variety of objects does not compromise the infinity of this collection. Likewise, if the difference, even ontological, between finite beings and divine infinity does not compromise God's infinity, then in disagreement with Craig, I should think that there is no equivalence between the theism of God including all things finite and monistic pantheism. Incidentally, I might add that if we use Craig's description of infinity in theism, God is better regarded as a supreme rather than an infinite being.

a reference to the unaccountable difference between being and becoming in the mediating dialectic, and the otherness of the soul in the individualizing dialectic. I venture to name it "finite transcendence amidst immanence". Note that any experience of this particular transcendence might not come under the classification of mystical union if we assume theistic mystical union to entail the self's conscious awareness of meeting an infinite reality. However, it can be claimed that the self does experience that element of transcendence present within the realm of becoming. The encounter with transcendence is concurrent with the experience of the presence of the perceived object, an object which also hints at that difference enacted by the synthetic moments of mediated immediacy and individuality.

3. As the radical other to any dialectical process. I call this "infinite's absolute transcendence". Mystical union *could* be that glimpse of the absolutely transcendent through conscious union with the infinite "beyond the coincidence of opposites" (*M* p. 73). However, it is debatable whether a perception of this absolutely transcendent is possible in this finite existence. The very idea of union is antithetical to any absoluteness of transcendence. As argued above, the postulation of the infinite as including and exceeding the finite, combines well with the notion of an *aspect* of the infinite that qualitatively differs from the finite world, and even transcends the dialectics of opposites. Hence, my contention is that within the infinity of God, there is an aspect which excludes all affinities with the finite realm and which resides beyond the pervasive dialectical processes of this realm.

I think it is important to note that dynamisms outside the compass of mysticism are also amenable to delineation within the frames of the mediating and individualizing dialectics. Nevertheless, the discussions thus far inform us that a combination of dialecticism and infinity essentially characterize theistic mysticism. The mystic, notes Underhill, travels along two interweaving tracks: one, in touch with this world that unveils for the mystic the presence of the immanent absolute and the other, which affords the mystic a glimpse, of the transcendent absolute beyond the vicissitudes of this world (*M* pp. 35–36).[45] Having a loving relationship with God as a person appears to run contrary to the profound encountering of God as impersonal absolute. However, it is probable that the two apparently divergent reports spring from two different contexts surrounding the encounter. The reports might also reflect different stages of the mystic's relationship with absolute reality.

[45] Hildegard of Bingen's (1098–1179) visions and her interpretations of these visions, though frequently filled with imageries of God's intimate presence in the world, do include some depictions of God's transcendence, such as the following where God speaks:

> I am the day that does not shine by the sun; rather by me the sun is ignited. I am the Reason that is not made perceptible by anyone else; rather I am the One by whom every reasonable being draws breath.

(Hildegard of Bingen 1170–1173/1987, 1st part 4th vision, p. 128). The image of light is used here to convey its source within the imperceptible God who transcends creation.

For that matter, even ordinary experiences with another person at different times may conduce to two contrary opinions of that same individual. It might also be the case that two individuals from different mystical traditions experience ultimate reality differently.

Underhill is fully aware of these varied experiences and attributes their differences to the conditioning by the mystic's "temperament, by his powers of observation, by the metaphor which comes most readily to his hand, above all by his theological education" (*M* p. 102). Since infinite being is conceived as living, the infinite-mystic dynamism is a mutually relational one.[46] The idea of a living being does convey to us some form of finitude. On the other hand, if God cannot be said to be a living God because to be so would imply a limitation, then a nonliving God, ironically, would also be a finite God. The way to get around this is to postulate an infinite God that possesses all modalities of being, abstract and concrete, nonliving and living.

On account of theistic mysticism's anchor in a relationship involving living realities, it is possible to affirm that the mystic does not relate to a fixed, unchanging entity that engenders the same experiential content in different perceivers.[47] Furthermore, in a relationship in which the self is contained in the infinity of the object related to, this relationship, I think, will manifest itself in a unique state. It is a state in which the idiosyncratic subjectivity of the self figures and informs the mystical relationship. Therefore, there are bound to be variations in the reports of mystics. The interpretive map that shapes our encounter from the side of the mystic is contingent upon the theoretical input given her. However, having said this, there is also a claim by the mystic that the experience is powerful enough to instil a conviction that the mystical encounter is not entirely self-contrived (*M* pp. 100–102). Despite the inclusion of the subjectivity of the mystic within God, God exceeds this finite subjectivity. Being present in the interface between immanence and transcendence affords the mystic an experience of the sublime, whose notion and the varied approaches to it can be used as an interpretive instrument to build further our metaphysical edifice of the infinite–finite mystical relationship.

[46] In *M* p. 73, Underhill asserts that "the end which the mystic sets before him is conscious union with a living Absolute". See also *M* pp. 81, 89, and 116, where infinite being is regarded, severally, as "living and personal Object of Love", "living Person", and "living Ground".

[47] According to Brian Davies, when Aquinas speaks of God as unchanging, Aquinas is often misinterpreted as relaying the idea of a static God. On the contrary, corrects Davies (2000, p. 561), Aquinas' "unchanging" in reference to God means that since God is the cause of all changing things, God cannot be a changing being. Aquinas is essentially stating that God does not change in the manner in which created things change and not that God is static. I have to admit that Aquinas' essay (13th cent./1990, part I quest. 9 artcl. 1, pp. 38–39) that is relevant to this issue under interrogation is not exactly clear. On the one hand, Aquinas argues that God is "altogether immutable". On the other hand, he does also admit that God is capable of self-movement, though divine movement (or change) is unlike the way that finite beings change from potency to actuality.

2.7 Sublimity and the Two Forms of Mystical Transcendence

This section explores the avenues in which disquisitions on the sublime can be used to expand our discourse on the including–exceeding and excluding patterns of mystical transcendence. In Chap. 1 I identified some pertinent reasons why Kant's theory of the sublime applies most fittingly to our study on mysticism. Kant ties sublimity with infinity. He (1790/2000, § 26, p. 115) writes:

> But the infinite is absolutely (not merely comparatively) great. Compared with it everything else (of the same kind of magnitudes) is small.

After equating infinity with the absolutely great or that which renders everything else by comparison small, Kant (1790/2000, § 25, pp. 109–110) then describes the sublime in similar terms:

> [T]he sublime is that in comparison with which everything else is small. … the sublime is that, the mere ability to think which, shows a faculty of the mind surpassing every standard of Sense. But if we call anything not only great, but absolutely great in every point of view (great beyond all comparison), *i.e*. sublime, we soon see that it is not permissible to seek for an adequate standard of this outside itself, but merely in itself. … It follows hence that the sublime is not to be sought in the things of nature but only in our Ideas; but in which of them it lies must be reserved for the Deduction (Kant 1790/2000, § 25, p. 109).

The above-cited lines indicate that for Kant, the sublime has to do with the evocation of the idea of the absolutely great or the infinite, and its impact upon our faculties. In explicating the notion of the sublime, he differentiates between the *mathematical* sublime and the *dynamical* sublime.

Something can be said to be mathematically sublime when it has the capacity to evoke in the subject a consciousness of that which is absolutely great in magnitude. The subject is then brought to a realization of reason's capacity, over that of imagination, to grasp the infinite as an abstract concept (Kant 1790/2000, § 25–27, pp. 106–123).[48] A dynamically sublime object is one which, when encountered, evokes a consciousness of confronting something overwhelmingly powerful. Yet, despite being in the presence of something overwhelming, the subject is made aware of its possession of free will that is capable of transcending physical forces of nature by virtue of its nonphysicality and triumphing over natural instinctive drives by virtue of its potential for wilful moral exertion (Kant 1790/2000, § 28, pp. 123–129).[49] Amongst the samples of the inducements to the dynamical sublime are threatening rocks, lightning and thunder, hurricanes, and tumultuous oceans. They are sublime only when we take them to be terrifying and that we are in no present

[48] Further explanation below

[49] A sublime encounter triggers an experience of confronting something absolutely great in magnitude or power. In both cases, Kant asserts the ascendency of the human subject's spiritual or inner capacity over this great object. In the dynamical sublime, our autonomous will, which sets us apart from physical nature, is believed to preserve us from overwhelming fear of the might of nature. Kant (1790/2000, § 29, pp. 130–131) also adds that our moral will empowers us against disheartening psychological forces. This potential for not being subdued by such forces is part and parcel of the dynamical sublime.

danger of being extirpated by them. They elicit from us powerful emotions and a force of resistance that originates from our inner resources (Kant 1790/2000, § 28, p. 125).

Echoing Edmund Burke's treatment of the sublime, Kant (1790/2000, § 28, p. 124) identifies the delight in this encounter, partly with the feeling of being safe, the "cessation of an uneasiness", which is a form of negative pleasure.[50] Kant, however, goes beyond Burke in offering another more fundamental reason for the delightful terror of the dynamical sublime. Like its mathematical sister, the dynamical sublime has not the harmony between the faculties. Instead, there is the empirical presentation of power that is inimical to the faculty of desire, specifically, lower desire's need to subjugate nature in order to serve the subject's quest for happiness.[51] The dynamical sublime deals more with emotional than theoretical dominion (Shaw 2006, p. 81). The subject desires not to be overcome by the powerful force of nature and this incapacity pushes for a solution. The solution is the delight in the realization that despite the overwhelming power of the external force of nature as well as the internal force of our natural or instinctive drives, ultimately, it is the subject's nonphysical self and free will that has the potential to overcome these forces.

Fundamentally, both types of sublime call forth for the subject an awareness of the subject's ascendancy over nature. Kant notes that physical nature, technically, is not identical to the sublime. No matter how great an object in nature can be in terms of magnitude, one can always imagine something which is infinitely larger than it. Conversely, no matter how small an object in nature can be, one can always imagine something infinitely smaller than it, and thereby rendering this small object as something large. Therefore, it is not the physical object of sense that is sublime. What is sublime and accordingly, absolutely great is the functional capacity of the imagination to think the infinite as progressing unendingly and of reason to consolidate the infinite into a concept (Kant 1790/2000, § 25, pp. 109–110). Some objects of sense can trigger this functional operation within the subject, and though the object may erroneously be labelled as sublime, it is in fact the relation amongst the faculties of the subject that is truly sublime. I would also add that since the sublime concerns the infinite, nature, with its physical boundaries, cannot be identical to the sublime. Nevertheless, nature possesses the capacity to evoke a sublime experience.

Essentially, for Kant, sublimity is not a property of the object, but resides in the manner in which the subject apprehends the object. Kantian transcendental strictures upon positing the sublime beyond the self rests, in this particular instance, upon the property of formlessness (especially when infinity is associated with the sublime) that cannot with certainty be attributed to nature (Kant 1790/2000, § 30, pp. 150–151). While the aesthetics of beauty involves the apprehension of the form

[50] Negative pleasure refers to the pleasure associated with freedom from or reduction of pain. For Burke's explanation on sublimity's negative pleasure, see Burke 1757/1764, part I section 18, pp. 84–85.

[51] While the mathematical sublime is principally connected with the faculty of cognition, the dynamical sublime is anchored mainly in the faculty of desire (Kant 1790/2000, § 24, pp. 105–106). On the "faculty of desire", see Kant 1787/1996, preface, pp. 19–20 note # 2.

of the object, the aesthetics of the sublime involves the element of formlessness that triggers the sublime experience in the subject. But I should think that a sublime experience is engendered by a sublime object. In Chap. 4, I shall contend that the notion of the sublime experience having subjective purposiveness that demands some universal consensus suggests the existence of sublimity beyond the subject. And if God includes and exceeds the experiencing subject together with this subject's cognitive capacity to conceive the infinite, then a sublime experience of God would be an instance of sublimity being imputed to an object that is internal to as well as external to the subject. Consequently, there is some justification for imputing the aesthetic appraisal of the sublime onto an objective reality.

The Kantian sublime is an operation in which the lower faculties of sense, understanding, imagination, and desire brush against their limits and the higher faculties of reason and free will overcome these limits. This sublime then, despite its reference to the infinite, is not purely an experience of the infinite or the limitless. Rather, it is also a function of the self's setting of limits and the overcoming of these limits. As Philip Shaw (2006, p. 119) points out:

> [T]he Latin roots of the sublime: *sub* (up to) and *limen* (lintel, literally the top piece of a door). Etymology itself suggests that there is no sense of the unbounded that does not make reference to the placing of a limit or threshold.

If the Kantian sublime sets a limit upon the boundless, in what way can sublimity fit in with the model of transcendence as the infinite's including and exceeding the finite?

2.7.1 The Sublime in Transcendence as Including–Exceeding

Kant's linkage of the sublime with the notion of infinity is congenial to the metaphysical schema of the infinite–finite relationship. Mystical union, as an experience of infinite reality incorporating and overflowing (or exceeding) the self, is sublime in the Kantian sense, though, with some qualifications. Recognition of the infinite as including–exceeding the self entails an awareness of the limiting boundary between the infinite and the finite. However, important distinctions exist between Kant's theory of the sublime and the including–exceeding model. Let us examine the manner in which Kant (1790/2000, § 28, p. 125) juxtaposes infinity with limitation when he writes:

> Now, in the immensity of nature, and in the inadequacy of our faculties for adopting a standard proportionate to the aesthetical estimation of the magnitude of its *realm,* we find our own limitation; although at the same time in our rational faculty we find a different, non-sensuous standard, which has that infinity itself under it as a unity, and in comparison with which everything in nature is small. Thus in our mind we find a superiority to nature even in its immensity.

When confronted with immense physical nature, imagination is unable to consolidate the aesthetic comprehension of an apparently infinite object into the

understanding.[52] Kant argues that in spite of the regulative rule of reason for imagination to present a unified concept, no concept of number (as a value that measures magnitude) supplied by the understanding can adequately consolidate something that is apparently infinite. Hence, the job of the imagination to collect the manifold of sense intuitions into a universal concept supplied by the understanding is stultified. In the presence of immense nature, the self, vis-à-vis its faculties of imagination and understanding, becomes acutely aware of its limitations. However, the self then realizes that its higher faculty of reason is able to consolidate any object assumed to be of infinite magnitude into a totalized concept of infinity. Hence, the limitless shifts from nature to the self's superior faculty of reason. But the limitless here is ironically bounded by the *concept* of infinity. While the including–exceeding model of transcendence does mark the limit of the finite and the overflowing of this limit by an infinite that exceeds the self, Kant's limit of finitude is overtaken by an infinity that is totalized into a concept and thereby, ironically, limited as an abstract concept within the self.[53]

The infinite as immanent in and overflowing the finite is here, in this chapter, examined as a metaphysical model. It follows that in the context of this model, mystical union is perceived as an encounter with infinite reality, including and exceeding the self. Therefore, the self in mystical union should be experiencing (1) divine reality as infinite and (2) the self, with the rest of the other finite things, as immersed in this infinite reality.

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[52] In Kantian (1790/2000, § 26, pp. 111–115) epistemology, the two operations of the imagination that are involved in the experience of this particular form of sublimity are *apprehension* (immediate sense intuition) and *comprehension* (consolidating the multitude of related intuitions into a whole concept). In regard to grasping a physical object of immense magnitude, Kant distinguishes the imagination's function of *comprehensio aesthetica* (a sensory comprehension) from *comprehensio logica* (a numerical comprehension of the magnitude of an object). Our sense faculties can take in immediate sense intuitions piecemeal and so, in principle, it can go on indefinitely. However, consolidating the pieces into a whole poses a problem because our ability to maintain in totality all those related sense data is limited. Consequently the absolutely great cannot be comprehended. We may comprehend the absolutely great as *comprehensio logica* by conceiving an incredibly large number signifying magnitude, but this concept lacks a sensory comprehension (*comprehensio aesthetica*). A sensory concept requires some sensory apprehension of it, but unfortunately in this instance, it is next to impossible for the imagination to formulate a sensory image of the absolutely great. Note that "imagination" in this Kantian context is not to be taken in its commonly understood sense of a creative faculty capable of producing fantastical images and artistic works (Kant 1787/1991, p. 53. note # 1).

[53] Hegel departs from Kant on the doctrine of the sublime. When expounding upon the absolute's unveiling of itself within finite beings, Hegel (1835/1975, p. 363) writes:

> This outward shaping which is itself annihilated in turn by what it reveals, so that the revelation of the content is at the same time a supersession of the revelation, is the sublime. This, therefore, differing from Kant, we need not place in the pure subjectivity of the mind and its Ideas of Reason; on the contrary, we must grasp it as grounded in the one absolute substance *qua* the content which is to be represented.

Hegel agrees with Kant that the infinite absolute frustrates the faculties' ability to grasp it, but Hegel disagrees with Kant on confining the sublime to the subject's rational idea. Instead, he confidently posits the sublime as rooted in the infinite, an absolute substance.

2.7.1.1 Experiencing Divine Reality as Infinite

If someone were to come forward and say that she had an experience of divine reality as infinite, I should respond by asking the question: "Can anyone actually experience the infinite, let alone identify this infinite with God?" My exposition of the Kantian sublime suggests that epistemic conditions limit our experience of the infinite. The Kantian sublime calls into question the veracity of any claim of having a direct mystical experience of God as infinite being. Kant (1798/1979, p. 115) declares that:

> if God should really speak to man, man could still never *know* that it is God speaking. It is quite impossible for man to apprehend the infinite by his senses, distinguish it from sensible beings, and *recognize* it as such.

Undoubtedly, the senses are not up to relaying knowledge of God as infinite, for they are orientated towards objects of sense, which are obviously finite. But how are we to address this impugnment of mystical experience when one of the foundations of theistic mysticism is the direct experience of the infinite?[54]

In *M* we find Underhill singling out the all-essential ingredient of consciousness in mystical union:

> This act, this condition of consciousness, in which barriers are obliterated, the Absolute flows in on us, and we, rushing out to its embrace, "find and feel the Infinite above all reason and above all knowledge," is the true "mystical state." (*M* p. 51).

This excerpt clearly describes mystical union as a direct experience of the infinite.[55] However, does the phrase "above all reason and above all knowledge" refer to the infinite or to the finding and feeling of the infinite? This quote comes from John Ruysbroeck (1293–1381). A close reading of Ruysbroeck will tell us that – "above all reason and above all knowledge" – is predicated of God as infinite *and* of the experience itself. A clearer explanation of this transcendence of cognition in reference to the experience as well as the referred object experienced can be found in the following passage of Ruysbroeck (14th cent./1916, *The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage* 3rd bk. chp. 3, p. 174):

> And all those men who are raised up above their created being into a God seeing life are one with this Divine brightness. And they are that brightness itself, and they see, feel, and find, even by means of this Divine Light, that, as regards their uncreated essence, they are that same onefold ground from which the brightness without limit shines forth in the Divine way, … And this is why inward and God-seeing men will go out in the way of contemplation, above reason and above distinction and above their created being, through an eternal intuitive gazing. By means of this inborn light they are transfigured, and made one with that same light through which they see and which they see.

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[54] Underhill's condensed definition of mysticism as a deep relationship of love between the mystic and God includes the mystic's yearning for and attainment of that special experience of union between self and God (*M* pp. 71–73).

[55] Jerome Gellman (1994, pp. 54–55, 57) reminds us that God has other attributes besides infinity. A person having an experience of any of those other attributes of God may be led to admit having experienced God even without encountering God's infinity. Still, in the context of this study's identification of infinity as the defining feature of God, encountering God as infinite (not necessarily in its entirety) is crucial to a validation of theistic mystical experience.

Ruysbroeck tells us that at mystical union, the experience of the divine brightness without limit (the infinite) takes place beyond reason and knowledge. What this means is that the mystic does not apprehend the infinite within the confines of the cognitive faculty and then infer that the object encountered is beyond knowledge and reason. Rather, the mystical experience itself is beyond the confines of cognition because it is a direct experience of and powered by that which is beyond knowledge and reason – the infinite.

Kant, I am sure, would have problems with such a claim. As discussed, it is impossible for imagination to mediate a *comprehensio aesthetica* of the infinite in the understanding. And the faculty of reason can only formulate an abstract concept of infinity. In an apparent disregard for the Kantian epistemic conditions, Ruysbroeck and his commentator, Underhill, inform us that the mystic directly experiences God, the infinite beyond knowledge and reason, and that that very experience, being unified with and powered by the divine, is beyond knowledge and reason. Assuming that God's infinity is plenary – embracing infinite physical magnitude and non-physical magnitude – something beyond the capacity of our limited cognitive powers to grasp, then a direct intuition has to be, as Ruysbroeck avers, the initiative and power of God. Ruysbroeck and Kant are on two contrasting planes when it comes to dealing with a possible finite–infinite encounter. Interestingly though, in spite of Kant's reluctance in endorsing any possibility of a direct intuition of God, he is not averse to acknowledging an indirect route to God, via the idea of the sublimity of infinity. Kant (1790/2000, § 28, p. 129) writes:

> Only by supposing this Idea in ourselves, and in reference to it, are we capable of attaining to the Idea of the sublimity of that Being, which produces respect in us, not merely by the might that it displays in nature, but rather by means of the faculty which resides in us of judging it fearlessly and of regarding our destination as sublime in respect of it.

"Being" in the above passage is identifiable with divine infinite being. Elsewhere, Kant (1790/2000, § 85, p. 368) associates the original being – a being not derived from anything else – with the idea of infinite being. Note that original being and infinite being are in reference to God and the insertion of the modifier "idea" signifies Kant's avoidance of imputing with certainty this being's objective existence. Understanding the way Kant uses "idea" is important so as not to take the term as implying that for Kant, God is merely an abstract idea. Kant deduces God from a process of reasoning, and he does not affirm nor deny God's real existence. It seems here that for Kant, the *idea* of the sublimity of infinite being is arrived at via inference rather than direct intuition. Unsurprisingly, in keeping to his transcendental project, only the *idea* is arrived at and not the affirmation of an ontologically real noumenon.[56]

[56] Kevin Hart (1989, p. 209) observes that Kant, upon defining mysticism as making claims for a profound communion with God and thereby sharing in God's ability to have direct intuition of noumena, rejects mysticism on the grounds that our knowledge is inevitably tethered to either phenomena or pure abstract truths, never the noumena. Hart (1991, p. 9) even affirms "Kant's animosity towards mysticism". Stephen Palmquist (2011, online) does not think Kant opposes the possibility of a mystical experience of God. Given that immediate mystical experience of God is simply that and non-propositional (it has yet to make assertions), its possibility cannot be categorically rejected. Kant, states Palmquist, does not deny the existence of such mystical experiences, but he takes them as mysterious, not objectively verifiable, and cannot justifiably be a foundation from which theoretical knowledge can be inferred.

Note that despite Kant's (1817/1978, p. 48) realization that the mathematical and the metaphysical infinities apply to God, he is somewhat prejudiced against viewing divine infinity as mathematical. His contention is that the mathematical infinite is indeterminately infinite (*un*bounded). Furthermore, any mathematically infinite being would be measured by positing some correspondence between it and a finite property and merely extending the magnitude of that finite property to infinity.[57] For instance, says Kant (1817/1978, p. 49), if we take divine understanding as mathematically infinite, we may assume that God's understanding is comparable to human understanding, but having that property to an infinite degree. For Kant, this does not give us a determinate notion of divine understanding. Also, I might add that the mathematically infinite is commonly, though not necessarily, conceived in terms of numerical quantity lacking qualitative difference. Kant (1817/1978, pp. 49–50) believes that God is more appropriately conceived as being *metaphysically* infinite. The metaphysical infinite is determinate – it gives us some positive description of God. Examples of its application: God is the most perfect being whereby perfection is not measured merely in quantitative degrees; and God is a totality, the all of reality.

Kant's ascription of totality to God seems to resonate with his terminus of sublimity in reason's totalization of infinity as a determinate concept. In this present task of framing the Kantian sublime against the mystical experience of divine infinity that includes and overflows finitude, I am compelled to ask of the mystic some key questions. How would the mystic be sure that it is an infinite being that she is encountering? I may look up at the sky and assume that the sky is infinitely vast. But, of course, I can never be sure for no faculty of mine can grasp the boundless as sense perceptible. I can, however, *reason* that numbers extend to infinity and that it is possible for time not to have any beginning nor ending. But this is, through extrapolative reasoning, not direct intuition. In essence, can God be experienced, *immediately*, as infinite being? Kant's sublime starts from reason's imposition of the rule demanding imagination to mediate sense intuition into concepts of the understanding and ends in reason's conceptualization of infinity. The sublime for Kant is the triumph of human reason over nature. Working within the limits of our epistemic capacities, we can only hint at a possible objectively real infinity.

When mystics like Ruysbroeck claim to experience an objectively real infinite being, do their conviction spring from a *purely* direct intuition of this being? Or perhaps, their direct intuition is indeed tainted with ratiocination. Like the sublime encounter, I am aware that the object in my experience far exceeds me, my capacities, and everything I am familiar with, but I may or may not be certain that this object exceeds me *infinitely*. As to the ontological status of a referent infinite reality, the scepticism attached to this being, for that matter, applies equally to all objective referents. Nevertheless, there must be some property in the perceived being that makes me identify it as infinite and divine. This is not just an idea of abstract numbers extending to infinity but a plenary infinity that includes infinite numbers. Could

[57] In his *Opus Postumum* (1936/1993, p. 6), Kant asserts "To describe God as infinite is to regard him as of the same kind as his creatures, only beyond all measure as regards magnitude …."

it be that the mystic already has some ideas of what infinity implies and those ideas are also inextricably infused in the mystic's immediate intuition, leading her to a direct mystical experience of God as infinite?[58]

A plausible defence against Kant's opposition to the claims of mystical experience lies in an appeal to the perception of sense objects. I see the front of a filing cabinet and *immediately* take the object to be a filing cabinet. I cannot see the other sides of the cabinet that are hidden from my view, and yet I assume that this is a whole cabinet and not just two sides of a cabinet that had been halved, or a mere mirage of a cabinet having only its front image projected before my eyes. Would not the same principle apply to our perception of infinite being? Only a part of this being is perceived by the mystic, and yet, she realizes that it is the infinite reality that she is meeting. However, an objection would be that perceiving the infinite is disanalogous to perceiving a cabinet for if I wanted to, I can always swing around to the other side of the cabinet to look at its previously hidden parts for confirmation of its wholeness. I cannot do the same for the infinite. Well, in the extreme case, one can always assume that when I swing around to the other side of the cabinet, there is nothing to guarantee that the cabinet's front that was earlier perceived by me has not vanished. Hence, there is an extremely remote possibility that I am again reinstated in the situation of facing half a filing cabinet. Moreover, appealing to the first time I saw a filing cabinet and was told of its identifying name, thereby enabling me now to recognize this object as a filing cabinet, can also be called into question. The same susceptibility to scepticism applies to the first time you encounter a filing cabinet. My mind has the capacity to fit together past collected data and to fill in the blank spaces of the present perceptual image in order to compose a perception of a whole object. Should we not allow the same application for the perception of divine infinity? Previous data in one's memory – either a related personal religious experience, or an acquired theological knowledge, or both – have the capacity to enable one to recognize the presence of divine infinity despite the incomplete presence of all relevant perceptible information.

Incidentally, even the proposition supporting an immediate experience of God as a unifying totality (metaphysical infinite) can run into problems of epistemic justification for if our faculties lack the intuition of mathematical infinity, I should think, the same shortcoming applies to the intuition of absolute totality. The mystic who claims a direct experience of infinite being probably has some rational concepts of infinity infused in her "direct" experience, thereby conducing to her recognizing the object encountered as divine. However, ultimately, even these concepts of reason are not free of limitations.

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[58] Gellman (1994, p. 60) suggests that one may experience the infinite *capacity* of God ("the experience of God's ongoing amplification without end, so that one experiences *that* the power is infinite") and not the *actual* all-at-once manifestation of this infinity, thereby sufficing as an indication of experiencing the infinite God. He admits that this route is inferential, but because of its rapidity of transition, the experiencing subject "is inclined to think they have experienced the infinity itself". Gellman goes on to argue for the authoritative strength of some individuals' experiences of God and God's infinity over any reasoning by those intending to cast a sceptical view upon such claims.

Even though Kant (1817/1978, p. 47) tells us that reason surpasses imagination when conceptualizing infinity, he does acknowledge reason's failing when it comes to including the attribute of eternity in God:

> Thus for example it is very difficult for us to think of eternity without any limitations. But we must nevertheless have it in our concept of God, because it is a reality. So we ascribe it to God and admit the inability of our reason to think it in a wholly pure way.

Whether eternity is defined as everlastingness or all-at-once atemporality, it can never be perfectly represented by the faculty of reason (Blackburn 1994, s.v. "eternity", p. 126). A critical implication of this is that while imagination may not satisfactorily enable the self to apprehend divine infinity, our hope that, perhaps, reason might afford us some ideas of the infinite, sufficient to enable the mystic to recognize it in mystical union, is now probably diminished in the face of reason's limitations. Might this explain mystical intuition's transcendence of reason? Still, how would a mystic like Ruysbroeck "know" that mystical union had taken place when its occurrence is in a space beyond knowledge and reason?

Let us examine the following excerpt from Ruysbroeck. In describing the self in a state of mystical union, Ruysbroeck (14th cent./1916, *Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage* 2nd bk. chp. 52, p. 120, and 2nd bk. chp. 53, p. 122) writes:

> [T]hough its reason and understanding fail before the Divine Brightness, and must remain outside the door, the power of love desires to go forward. … And this is the life of love in its highest working, above reason and above understanding, but reason can here neither give nor take away from love, for our love is touched by the Divine love.

Ruysbroeck is here asserting that the direct intuition of the infinite involves the human capacity to love. Though this love is said to be beyond knowledge and reason, it somehow has the ability to recognize that the self is united to the divine infinite despite the self's incomprehension of the experience. It is reasonable here to include this experience that entails the involvement of love within the epistemology of mysticism viewed in its broadest sense, as encompassing the intellect, affections, and will.[59]

Before proceeding to the next subsection, let me lay out some of my thoughts that bring together the discussion above. Both Ruysbroeck and Kant agree that human cognition is limited. Kant cautiously moves through the various levels of knowing and then tethers himself to the edge of reason, extols reason's superiority despite its limitation, and suggests reason's allusion to the God postulate. Ruysbroeck declares that the infinite is experienced directly, above the functions of any knowing faculty safe the human capacity to love. The sublime is said to include an experience of marking a limit and then overcoming it. For Kant, it is

[59] While in this particular statement I use "epistemology" in the broadest sense possible, in Chap. 4, I speak of epistemology more in its intellectual capacity and use "conative" to refer to the volitional dimension of the human experience. Just as knowledge of that beyond knowledge is still a form of knowledge, later, it will be seen that the experience of that beyond experience is indeed still a form of experience.

through a sublime experience of an object that appears to be infinite, resulting in the awareness of the limits of knowing, that the infinity of God can be indirectly inferred. Ruysbroeck, on the other hand, starts with the self's direct experience of infinite being, and then subsequently, the self realizes the limits of knowing and the dynamism of love in overtaking the powers of knowing. It is as if for Ruysbroeck, the sublime experience of recognizing limits and the overcoming of those limits take place after the finite–infinite meeting. The other criterion required for our including–exceeding model is the experience of the self, with the rest of the world, as immersed in infinite reality.

2.7.1.2 Experiencing All Finite Beings as Immersed in Infinite Reality

The Kantian sublime sets up borders between the self and nature and between the modes of operation of the different faculties. A mystical experience of universal inclusiveness is assumed to contain a unity of the experiencing subject with everything else. If the experience is theistic in nature, then there is also an intuition of this whole unity being embedded in an infinite being. Like many of the claims of mystical experiences, a description of encountering unifying oneness of self, nature, and the infinite would inevitably confound standard systems of epistemic justification. An appropriate representative of this phenomenon of perceiving an all-encompassing unity is the extrovertive mystical experience.

Walter Stace (1886–1967) characterizes the extrovertive mystical experience as generally encompassing a unique apprehension of an all-consuming oneness of all realities – self and physical objects. This profound experience of unity amidst the multiplicity of things is often accompanied with intense joy and, in some cases, an insight into the vivacity or, in an uncanny way, the subjective consciousness present in the multitude of things (Stace 1961, p. 79).[60] Stace adds that individuals having such an experience insist on the objectivity of the knowledge conveyed by their experience. One striking testimony that depicts the experience of the inclusion of all things in God (though not necessarily a seamless unification, which I shall explain shortly) is Teresa of Avila's (1515–1582) when she (16th cent./1976 *The Book of Her Life*, chp. 40:9, p. 358) reports:

> Once while in prayer I was shown quickly, without my seeing any form – but it was a totally clear representation – how all things are seen in God and how He holds them all in Himself.

This experience is again recorded in *The interior castle* (16th cent./1980, 6th dwelling place chp. 10: 2, p. 419):

[60] Paul Marshall (2005, pp. 27–28) enumerates a more or less similar list of features crucial to the extrovertive mystical experience. Marshall, however, disagrees with Stace (1961, pp. 64 and 79) in confining such an experience to that which is solely mediated by the senses. Marshal (2005, pp. 29–31) believes that one can have an extrovertive mystical experience while meditating with eyes closed or in a near-death circumstance in which many of one's senses are not functioning.

> Although I say the soul sees, it doesn't see anything, for the favour is not an imaginative vision but an intellectual one. In this vision it is revealed how all things are seen in God and how He has them all in Himself.

One way to interpret the above is to say that Teresa simply experienced the truthfulness of the statement that all things are seen (or, can possibly be seen) in God and not that she actually saw all things in God. There is something to be said in favour of this interpretation for this particular passage sits in a context in which Teresa talks about all her sins being visible to God. She (16th cent./1976, *The Book of Her Life* chp. 40: 10, p. 358) also uses the image of the mirror to refer to God, a mirror that contains all images.[61] Being aware of the visibility of one's sins to God should bring about deep remorse and vigilance in the soul. When interpreted thus, Teresa's experience is not something that verges on the impossible. However, I intend to use Teresa of Avila's testimony as a springboard to a discussion that revolves around the extrovertive type of mystical experience and its relation to a definition of God as infinite. For this, I shall consider an alternative interpretation of Teresa's vision – she saw all things in God. It cannot be denied that Teresa believes in God's holding of all things within God's self.

It is reasonable to infer, from the phrases describing the containment of all things in God, an experiential instantiation of our including–exceeding model of transcendence. Teresa of Avila's encountered configuration of all things in God is not contrary to her conviction that God is infinite. God includes everything and yet is more than the sum of everything. Teresa does not, at least in these passages, tell us that she experiences a distinctionless unification of all things. It could be that all things are immersed in the infinite without losing their individual distinctness from each other. What is interesting in this particular testimony is that Teresa claims to have this experience via what she calls "intellectual vision". She (16th cent./1976, *The Book of Her Life*, p. 480 note # 3 to ch. 27: 2) explains that an intellectual vision is a form of intuition devoid of any form of sense data. While "imaginative vision" contains sense images constructed entirely by memory and fantasy rather than given by a sensible external object immediately present, a "corporeal vision" is a vision immediately relayed by the body's sense(s). Even though in this particular examination the focus is on extrovertive mysticism, it can be assumed that "all things" refer to everything physical and nonphysical. Not only is her vision non-corporeal, there is also no indication from her writing that she only experienced the sense perceptible. As contents of experience, representations of physical bodies, when compared with abstract ideas, are more resistant to unification. Given this comparatively greater challenge for phenomenal miscibility on the side of perceiving physical bodies, which requires more attention, the analysis that follows employs vocabulary

[61] Note that Thomas Aquinas (13th cent./1990, part I quest. 12 artcl. 8, pp. 57–58) rejects the claim that when one sees the essence of God, as if, in a mirror, one sees every reality in God. For him, no created intellect can claim to have specific knowledge of all realities, actual and possible.

referring to things of a physical nature. Nevertheless, even if nonphysical objects were to be added to the collection of finite beings, this addition would not fatally compromise the analysis' arguments.

Teresa of Avila's (16th cent./1980, *Interior castle*, 6th dwelling place chp. 10: 2, p. 419) extrovertive mystical experience is described by her as formless, but knowledge-conferring, though she has no idea how it came about and how it operates.[62] I intend to draw out some difficult points pertaining to her report of that experience. To state the obvious, there is no way that an individual can have a vision of all things in this world. However, Teresa is not here speaking about a corporeal vision, but an intellectual one. Incidentally, she (16th cent./1976, *The Book of Her Life,* chp. 28: 4, p. 238) is wary of corporeal visions, which she regards as highly susceptible to hallucinatory deceptions. The claim of seeing a range of different objects in front of me can most probably be corroborated or dismissed by one or a few other witnesses called in to report what they see in front of me. But claiming to see a profound *connectedness* amongst these objects I have in front of me is an entirely different matter and, most likely, incapable of being empirically corroborated by others. With greater reason, the declared vision of all things in God is not verifiable by physical observations of the witnesses.

I think that Teresa's vision is not entirely indefensible. There may be moments when a member of a large company or a nation sees herself as united with every other member in that collective. In a triumphant victory at the highest international sporting event, I may experience a momentary sense of being united to all other fellow members of my winning country in an ecstatic joyousness of success.[63] This sense of union or communion is not to be interpreted as an authentic perception reflecting actual physical unity of all members of my country. Neither is it to be interpreted as authentically derived from an actual perception of every single member of that same country. For sure, it is an experience that transcends physical senses and resides in the affective faculty. Perhaps, Teresa's vision has some affinities with such an experience. Next, through rational reflection, Teresa may have concluded that God as infinite being has to encompass all finite beings. But it is only during a deep state of meditation that she realizes this conclusion in the core of her being, and not just cerebrally. This realization, Teresa admits, is a gift of grace for it requires a way of knowing that exceeds ordinary modes of sensing, feeling, and reasoning, modes which cannot adequately mediate the perception of infinity.

Another matter to consider is the unification of all things. Teresa's report does not convey the idea of a distinctionless unity. To experience such a unity is to experience a singular undifferentiated entity, which would preclude any assertion of a

[62] Teresa's experience delivers information about the nature of all external reality, herself included. Hence, such an experience can be called extrovertive.

[63] Benedict Anderson (1991, pp. 6ff.) upholds that despite the inevitable limitations of our actual ordinary interactions, when we relate to the larger society such as our country, we create in our minds a sense of nationhood. In other words, we imagine this communion of members belonging to the same nation.

union of plurality. Bear in mind that a unity must incorporate the element of difference. The fact that an experiencing subject reports perceiving objects a, b, c, and d united into a single entity implies that she is also aware that a, b, c, and d are distinct (see Stace 1961, p. 66). Let us assume that there are no countervailing considerations that work against the veridical probability of Teresa of Avila's claim. Also, let us assume that Teresa's experience of the inclusion of all things in God does incorporate the perception of an inexplicable and profound unity of distinct entities. After all, the concept of all-inclusiveness does imply some form of unity, because a configuration of strictly separated entities is inconsistent with the possibility of a being capable of encompassing all things. If, say, a, b, c, and d are immersed in u, then u functions as the unitive bond that gels a, b, c, and d. Hence, Teresa's extrovertive mystical experience with the above constitutive features conduces to an experiential instantiation of our including–exceeding metaphysical model of the infinite–finite relation. Now, are there correlative elements between Teresa's experience and Kant's sublimity? If there are, how can the Kantian sublime help illuminate our understanding of this particular form of mystical experience?

For Kant, the locus of sublimity is the experiential space between the limited and the unlimited. Boundaries are inevitable, for the recognition of the infinite takes place within the finite. I would say that the perception of the unity of all finite things in the infinite is not a perception of pure infinity empty of finite compositions. Hence, Teresa of Avila's extrovertive mystical experience is sublime in the Kantian sense because her experience contains the phenomenal relation between the finite and the infinite. Nevertheless, as raised above, the recognition of being in the presence of the infinite does pose some epistemic challenges, such as that sketched by Kant. Teresa (16th cent./1980, *Interior castle*, 6th dwelling place chp. 10, p. 419) admits that she has no idea how the unique mystical encounter emerges and how it operates despite being a form of experience that is apparently beyond the limits of our epistemic abilities. She is convinced that the experience is of divine initiative and that it reveals the truth of the infinite–finite relation, notwithstanding the confusion that befalls its recipient. Throughout the foregoing discussion, I presented the problems that spring from a testimony of an experiential representation of the including–exceeding model of transcendence. I also attempted to address these problems by suggesting possible ways of interpretation. To continue on this path towards formulating an appropriate solution, I propose we have a look at an epistemological structure that Kant develops – the transcendental aesthetic of space. I shall argue that the representation of space, something which we take for granted in our everyday life, does conceal a structure analogous to that of the mystical experience of all things in God and that these structures are not free of difficulties relating to epistemology.

The transcendental aesthetic, in Kant's (1787/1991, p. 42) view, deals with the principles and methods relevant to our cognitive operation of sense intuition. This general aesthetic of sense apprehension is distinct from Kant's special aesthetic of the analysis of beauty and sublimity. One of transcendental aesthetics' *a priori* con-

ditions of possibility of sensible knowledge is the pure form – space. The other is that of time. Kant's assessment of space and time steers a middle ground between Isaac Newton's (1642–1727) view of space and time as absolute substantives, capable of independent existence apart from physical objects and events, and Gottfried Leibniz's (1646–1716) assertion that space and time are merely relational properties indicating the relation between physical objects or between events.[64] Essentially, for Kant, space and time are neither absolute realities nor "objects" reducible to relational properties. They are both pure *a priori* intuitions that enable us to apprehend, empirically, outer objects and the flow of events and mental states.

Kant's exposition on space, and not time, will be attended to here for our purpose of using it as a structure analogous to that of the mystical apprehension of infinity, including and exceeding the finite.[65] It is hoped that correlative elements between the two analogues would help us appreciate the notion of perceiving the inclusion of parts within an enveloping whole and address some persistent issues on experiential claims. There is no necessity to exposit and critique the debate between phenomenologists and Kant on the theory of space. The strengths and drawbacks on both sides of the debate fuel its ongoing discourse. And, to the best of my knowledge, Kantian space has yet to be definitively subverted.

Kant sets up several arguments to support his thesis of space being a pure *a priori* intuition. One foundational Kantian (1787/1991, p. 41) epistemological thesis is that knowledge of external objects requires the cooperative operation of sensibility, providing us with empirical (via our senses) intuitions (immediately given), and understanding, providing us with the general concepts that enable us to think about those particular intuitions. Kant adds that the object of empirical intuition is made up of its matter, which he takes as the raw sensation given *a posteriori*, and its form, which, unlike the sensation, is *a priori*, and provides a rudimentary organization of the sensations. Therefore, for Kant (1787/1991, pp. 41–42), space as pure form is that which remains when we remove the concepts of understanding and the material sensations of intuition. Space does not come to us from the outside as a sensation. Kant (1787/1991, p. 43) points out that since any sensation of encountering bodies outside of me presupposes the representation of space, it follows then that the representation of space is not derived from empirical sensation. When you think about it, empty space cannot be sensed. We only sense bodily objects and the occupied spatial contours of each object as well as the spatial relations amongst these

[64] As stated in Gardner 1999, pp. 70–71. In regard to the two competing philosophies of space, Kant (1770/1894, p. 65) summarizes the division by saying that while the substantivists perceive space "as an absolute and immense receptacle of possible things", the relationists argue for space "being the relation of existing things itself, which clearly vanishes in the removal of things and is thinkable only in actual things".

[65] Spatial objects can simultaneously be present in a single perceptual frame of an observing subject. Events in the flow of time are ephemeral and are not held together in a single internal intuition by the subject. Accordingly, the analysis of space is more congenial to our elucidation of the mystical perception of all things in God.

objects.[66] Kant (1787/1991, pp. 43–44) notes that space underlies every apprehension of bodily objects and that while we can conceive of (not sense) space devoid of bodies, we cannot conceive of bodies devoid of space.[67] Therefore, he concludes that our representation of space is (1) *a priori* and transcendental in that it is logically prior to outer experience, is itself nonempirical, and is necessary for the experience of all objects (the representation of space is the condition of possibility for experiencing physical objects) and (2) an intuition in that the representation of space is immediate and not mediated by the faculty of understanding's concepts (1787/1991, pp. 43–44).

In one of his arguments supporting his metaphysical depiction of space as intuitional rather than conceptual, Kant (1787/1991, p. 44) notes that "space is represented as an infinite given quantity". Unlike the application of concepts (a concept, say "book", has infinite instantiations), specific representations of spatial extensions of objects, distances between objects, and virtual excisions of empty space are actually parts of a single unitary space. Kant then deduces space as being intuitional on account of its assumed infinite extensibility and divisibility, its representations as composing parts of space, and its singularity (there is only singular space and not a plurality of space sharing common universal characteristics). For him, space is not conceptual because it does not function like a general concept of the faculty of understanding, under which all concrete instantiations lie (see Gardner 1999, p. 79). The connection between a concrete instance and its general concept is apparently absent in the case for space. The concept "book" is present in all concrete books. As for space, overall and unitary space is not present in every one of its concrete parts. Rather, all represented spatial parts are *in* overall space. The representation of space is therefore not conceptual. One might ask why "space" cannot function in a similar manner as "book" for we can imagine different *types* of space as concrete instantiations. It is not logically impossible to imagine a context in which several parallel worlds coexist, each with their own respective spaces. Hence, there is not just a single, overall infinite space in which concrete instantiations are its parts (see Gardner 1999, pp. 78–79). Would space then be more conceptual than intuitional? What is most interesting in this analysis of Kantian space is that Kant asserts that "space is represented as an infinite given quantity". Did we not see earlier that for Kant, the infinite cannot be intuited?[68] Indeed, it appears that Kant is contradicting himself when he considers space to be intuited as infinite. When we try to imagine infinite space, our imagination will be strained, and for sure this infinity of space

[66] Kant (1787/1991, p. 208) asserts that "if extended objects are not perceived, we cannot represent space".

[67] Kant includes this proposition to preempt a counter-argument that runs thus: since space cannot be represented without sensing spatial objects, space and spatial objects are mutually implicative; and hence, space cannot logically antecede bodies (see Gardner 1999, p. 76). For Kant, the possibility of conceiving space without bodies, and the impossibility of conceiving bodies without space, suggests a logical priority of space to bodies.

[68] See Kant 1798/1979, p. 115. And in *The Critique of Judgment* (1790/2000) § 26, pp. 115–116, Kant asserts that the infinite (including infinite space) cannot be aesthetically intuited as a given totality but only grasped as an abstract concept of reason.

cannot be directly intuited in its entirety. And if we imagine space to be finite, we can always imagine a further extension of space beyond any finite limit. Inevitably, one cannot imagine space to be either finite or infinite without entangling oneself in a contradiction. Hence, the idea that space is infinite is speculatively derived rather than directly intuited (see Adorno 1959/2001, pp. 231–232).[69]

Notwithstanding the "parallel worlds" hypothesis and its many "types" of space, and the inherent problem of the infinity of space as a given quantity, I would still agree with Kant that the representation of space is more intuitional than conceptual. My agreement with Kant on this is supported by a more parsimonious explanation – the representation of space necessarily accompanies every experience of external objects. Unlike concrete instantiations of specific objects, which require mediation into an already understood universal concept, the representation of space, a ubiquitous presence in all external perceptions, is immediately intuited. Perhaps then, the representation of space has attributes that parallel those of the including–exceeding mystical experience. Although we may not be able to intuit pure empty space, yet the intuition of space comes as part of the representation of embodied entities. Analogously, the mystical experience of infinite being entails an apprehension of finite being(s) as contained within this infinity. And just as the representation of space is said to be transcendental to empirical intuition in that it does not constitute that intuition via sensation nor via understanding's conception, similarly, infinite being cannot come under the cognition of the finite human mind, neither via sensation nor via conception. I wish to clarify that the space-occupying objects one perceives are not parts of space for while objects are entities, space is not. Only the individual spaces that these objects occupy are parts of space. If I may be allowed to expand on the analogy, finite beings are parts of infinite reality, but at the same time, like objects and space, there is an important distinction between individual finite things and their enveloping infinite reality.[70] Obviously, there is a difference between the perception of God as infinity encompassing all things finite and physical and the perception of space containing physical objects. Note that physical space is a component of infinite being. The principal aim of this comparative exercise is to provide us an inkling of the mystical experience of God as including–

[69] Gardner (1999, p. 79) tries to get around this problem, with dubious success, by saying that when Kant asserts that "space is an infinite given quantity" what he means is that we experience space *as if* it has no boundaries and that any part of space can be further divided, *ad infinitum*, into smaller parts.

[70] Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961) (1945/2002, p. 283) rejects the perception of space and spatial objects as container to contents on the grounds that such a relationship operates only between objects and space is not an object. He subscribes to a relationist conception of space. He also argues for a varied, moment-to-moment subjectively constructed apprehension of space that is propelled by the subject's bodily relations to her surroundings (pp. 284–295). Merleau-Ponty's case against the container–content relation between space and objects is assailable. Commonly, an object contains other object(s), such as a room contains a set of furniture in it. The room, however, is said to compose of empty spaces that enable the containment of solid objects, the furniture. In this regard, the notion of the room carries with it the idea of empty spaces set within a frame. Now, if we stretch our perception beyond the room, to the house, the house becomes the container for the furniture. Push the frame out to infinity and the contention that objects are contained within infinite space is plausible.

exceeding all finite beings and an appreciation of the inherent problems that inhibit a smooth and clear comprehension of both the perception of space and the mystical perception of God.

Kant's general transcendental aesthetic of space is distinct from his special aesthetic of sublimity. As suggested earlier, we can view the mystical experience of infinity, including and exceeding finitude, as sharing some corresponding attributes with Kant's mathematical sublime that requires the setting of limitations and the overcoming of these limitations. This form of mystical experience is also analogously related to Kant's sketch of the manner in which the representation of space operates in our cognition of embodied beings. Both sensibility and understanding cannot mediate a determined and comprehensive apprehension of infinity. Kant even adds that the higher faculty of reason cannot deduce the reality of infinite space without slipping into contradictions.[71] Presently, our focus is on mystical intuition and not deductive reasoning. Recall Teresa of Avila's account of her extrovertive mystical encounter as intellectual intuition. Her experience is purportedly immediate and not mediated by interpretation or deduction. But this claim runs against the grain of Kant's (1787/1991, pp. 62–63) thesis that intuition alone conveys no knowledge. However, by "intellectual intuition", Teresa means an immediate, non-sensory, and yet knowledge-conferring encounter. This sort of intuition is not confined to the passive reception of raw sensory data. My juxtaposition of Kantian space and Teresian intellectual intuition aims to unfold analogous, not identical, dynamics of immediate experience that challenges epistemological conditions and functions and to support the plausibility of mystical experience of the including–exceeding model.

The experience of space is indeed commonplace. However, despite the massive difference between this experience of space and Theresa's experience of God as including finite beings, it is possible to align a few points of comparison between them. If the proposition that space is intuited as infinite and as enveloping physical objects is not free of difficulties, *a fortiori*, Teresa's intuition of the inclusion of all things in an infinite God should understandably be riddled with perplexities. Moreover, the transcendental aesthetic cannot affirm the external objective existence of space, let alone *infinite* space. Correspondingly, while the mystic is convinced of the objectivity of her mystical experience, difficulties do remain with respect to epistemic justifications for a veridical mystical encounter of the infinite, including and exceeding the finite. Also, just as Kant is reluctant to agree with Leibniz on the reducibility of space to mere relations between outer objects, mystics like Teresa of Avila reject the reduction of divine infinity to the mere relation between finite beings, as if God is defined as the totality of *connections* amongst finite beings rather than the infinite that contains the finite. Bear in mind that Teresa of Avila is convinced of the objective reality of what her extrovertive mystical experience conveys.[72] One plausible way to account for the mystic's conviction in the

[71] See his first antinomy on the universe of infinite space and time in Kant 1787/1991, pp. 260–264.

[72] Teresa's vision of God's encompassing of all things is considered by her to be a revelation from God. Since, she (16th cent./1980, *Interior castle*, 6th dwelling place chp. 10: 5, p. 420) says, "God alone is Truth, unable to lie", that revelation constitutes a datum of truth for her.

objectivity of what she apprehends is that accompanying the experience of the containment of all things in God is a conviction, perhaps, divinely imparted, in the veridicality of her experience. What this implies is that the conviction of veridicality is concomitant with the mystical intuition of including–exceeding.[73] However, the mystic does not perceive this additional intuition as something distinct from her principal intuition.

I would suggest that Kant's general aesthetic of space provides us, especially those who have not been privy to mystical insights, with a corresponding structure by means of which we have an inkling of the including–exceeding mystical experience. The intuitive apprehension of God as including and exceeding all things is somewhat structurally similar to the intuition of space as including bodies, exceeding them, and on account of its transcendentality, resisting the scrutinizing gaze of cognition. Kant's special aesthetic of sublimity helps us conceive of that form of mystical experience as one in which finitude serves as a limit that necessarily enables us to comprehend the unlimited, albeit, in Kant's case, as submitted to the workings of reason. Nevertheless, the idea of infinity constructed by reason cannot sufficiently represent the infinite. The sublime is that interface between the limited and the unlimited.

2.7.2 The Sublime in Transcendence as Excluding

In an earlier section where the three models of transcendence were enumerated, I questioned the possibility of a mystical experience of God as infinite's absolute transcendence. This is due to the fact that by virtue of having an experience, there is already a compromise of absolute transcendence. Mystical union seems antithetical to any pattern of relationship claiming an infinite disjunction between the relating parties. Hence, I would think that testimonies of the excluding type of mystical experience do not avow a meeting with a God that is completely and infinitely other.

Underhill appeals to a passage in Marguerite Porete's *Mirror of Simple Souls* that she believes represents portrayals of God's transcendence as otherness or exclusivity:

> There is none other God but He that none may know, which may not be known, … No, soothly, no! Without fail, No, says she. He only is my God that none can one word of say, nor all they of Paradise one only point attain nor understand, for all the knowing that they have of Him. (*M* p. 337) (see Porete 13th cent./1993, p. 91)

Despite the text's reference to the soul's acknowledgement of God only on condition of the profound unknowability of this God, the lines preceding and following it actually underscore the author's subscription to the love for God and the

[73] Concerning the paradoxical presence of certitude amidst the apparent disablement of the faculty of understanding during contemplative union, Teresa of Avila (16th cent./1980, *Interior castle*, 5th dwelling place chp. 10, p. 339) explains that this special certitude is placed in the soul by God.

convergence of wills as the means to divine union (Porete 13th cent./1993, pp. 90–92).[74] For Porete, as for Ruysbroeck and the author of *The cloud of unknowing* (14th cent./1973, chp. 12, pp. 63–64), God is ultimately reached via love, not reason. This particular excerpt is technically not a report of anyone's personal mystical experience. It may be an interpretation-loaded commentary on an already-occurred personal mystical experience, or it may also be a theological reflection uninitiated by any direct mystical encounter.

A closer match to a reported experience of the excluding otherness of God is the following piece from Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1464) (1453/1960, chp. 13, pp. 59–60):

> Thus, while I am borne to loftiest heights, I behold Thee as infinity. By reason of this, Thou mayest not be attained, or comprehended, or named, or multiplied, or beheld. He that approacheth Thee must needs ascend above every limit and end and finite thing. But how shall he attain unto Thee who art the End toward whom he striveth, if he must ascend above the end? … Thou, my God, art Very Absolute Infinity, which I perceive to be an end without an end, but I am unable to grasp how without an end an end should be an end.

The opening sentence of the above quote indicates the author's testimony of a personal experience of God.[75] It could be that Nicholas had a fleeting and direct perception of God as infinite and then proceeded systematically to lay out the problems associated with reaching such an infinite being. We cannot, however, categorically dismiss the likelihood that the sort of infinity Nicholas encountered is that of the excluding otherness of God. There is something rather unique with the notion of otherness that Nicholas ascribes to God.

What is appealing with Nicholas of Cusa's analysis of his mystical experience of divine infinity is that he does attempt to put together both the excluding infinite and

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[74] As example, Porete presents the following dialogue between love and reason on the soul drawn to God:

> Love: The fifth point is that this Soul omits nothing to do for God which she might be able to do.
> Reason: Ah, for God's sake, says Reason, what does this mean?
> Love: This means, says Love, that she cannot do anything if it is not the will of God, and also she cannot will some other thing; and so she omits nothing to do for God. She does not allow something to enter into her thought which might be contrary to God, and for this reason she omits nothing to be done for God. (p. 90)

The assertion that the soul disallows anything contrary to God to enter her thought already suggests that the soul has some idea of God's nature in order to know that which is contrary to it. This means that the God that Porete meets is, unlike her claim, not completely unknowable.

[75] Note that a "performative language" approach to mysticism argues that mystical literature do not report special mystical experiences. Rather, it makes use of literary devices such as paradoxical statements and erotic vocabulary in order to convey to the reader an epistemological data about God (knowledge about the nature of God) rather than phenomenological accounts of God (experience of God). For a summary of this approach, see Nelstrop, Magill, and Onishi (2009, pp. 14–17). In my study of mysticism, I am reluctant to take a blanket view of all mystical writings as orientated solely to knowledge communication, minus the reporting of personal experiences.

the including–exceeding infinite. This emerges when Nicholas (1453/1960, pp. 61–62) breaks off into a series of statements, especially: (1) "otherness in unity is without otherness because it is unity" – Nicholas is aware of the problem of compromising otherness in any instance of unity; (2) "absolute infinity includeth and containeth all things" – infinity implies the absence of any bounding from the outside, hence its inclusion of all things finite. It appears that there is no rational solution to this aporia between union and otherness. "Learned ignorance", concludes Nicholas, is the place in which the mystic is led into when buoyed to the loftiest height of the infinite God.[76] If God is absolutely other to all things finite, then God's infinity would paradoxically be bounded by finitude and mystical union would be impossible. The solution, offers Nicholas, is that God's otherness is not like any other otherness.[77]

In *On God as Not-other*, Nicholas (1462/1979, chp. 6, pp. 49 and 51) writes:

> Not-other is not other; nor is it other than other; nor is it other in an other. (These points are true) for no other reason than that (Not-other is) Not-other, which cannot in any way be an other – as if something were lacking to it, as to an other. Because what is other is other than something, it lacks that than which it is other. But because Not-other is not other than anything, it does not lack anything, nor can anything exist outside of it … For example, I might say that God is none of the visible things, since He is their cause and creator. And I might say that in the sky He is not other than the sky. For how would the sky be no other than the sky if in it Not-other were other than sky? Now, since the sky is other than not-sky, it is an other. But God, who is Not-other, is not the sky, which is an other; nonetheless, in the sky God is not an other; nor is He other than the sky. (Similarly, light is not color, even though in color light is not an other and even though light is not other than color.)

The quoted passage is of some length because I include an illustration provided by Nicholas in the hope of helping us navigate through this convoluted argument of his.

Let me begin by explaining otherness using an example from Nicholas – the sky. The *other* of sky would be everything which is not-sky, such as land, cell phones, chairs, and so forth. I find it remarkable that Nicholas presents "other" in three different ways. Every finite object is an other because being finite it is determinate and therefore other to something else. God as "not-other is not other" (case 1) implies that God is not like any finite object (closely reflecting the excluding transcendence). On the other hand, God as not-other is not "other than other" (case 2), meaning that God is not entirely different from the finite being. Since God is not-other

[76] Nicholas (1453/1960, p. 60) affirms: "Thou, God, who art infinity, canst only be approached by him whose intellect is in ignorance, to wit, by him who knows himself to be ignorant of Thee". Together with Porete, the author of the *Cloud of unknowing*, and a host of mystics of the apophatic tradition, Nicholas gives prominence to divine mystery. But, this does not deter him from profound philosophical engagements with mystical theology.

[77] Notwithstanding a significant theoretical development of the concept of "other" by some philosophers, due to space constraints and the current concentration on mystical experience in the context of two modalities of transcendence, I shall restrict my analysis to Nicholas of Cusa's treatment of this concept.

("other" here implies determination and limitation), God includes everything for nothing can be outside of God; otherwise God would become an other. Accordingly, this depiction of God is aligned with the including–exceeding transcendence. Thirdly, not-other is not an "other in an other" (case 3). In this particular application, "not-other" refers to the principle of identity – a thing is identical to itself; it is *not other* to itself. This universal principle grounds every single thing (see Nicholas of Cusa 1462/1979, chp. 3, p. 39). God as not-other cannot be present within a finite being, an other, as an other, rendering that being as not identical to itself. The not-other (identity to itself) in a finite being, an other, is therefore not "an other within an other". Rather, its not-otherness entrenches the finite being's identity to itself.

It appears that Nicholas of Cusa is equivocating on the word "other". In (case 1) "other" refers to the substantive "the different", that which differs from all which is not it. In (case 2) "other" refers to the adjective "entirely different". And, in (case 3) "other" stresses upon the notion of "not-(identical to itself)". Putting aside the problem of equivocation and its questionable propriety of argumentation, Nicholas' subtle deployment of the three uses of "other", I think, is quite impressive as a means of constructing the multifarious and paradoxical relation between God and finite realities. By defining God as not-other, and through the three senses of "other", Nicholas strings together: God's excluding of others, God's including and exceeding of all finite beings, and God's immersion in every finite being as its principle of identity. The following is my grasp of how Nicholas strings these propositions together. Infinity is other to finitude. Every finite thing is an other. The infinite is not an other. Yet, paradoxically, by not being an other, it becomes the other of finitude. Hence, the infinite has to include finitude. It cannot be identical to finitude for then it would be the other, that is, finitude. The infinite then has to include and exceed finitude. Finally, the third proposition – the infinite as the universal principle of identity is within finite beings – implies infinity's sustenance of finitude's identity to itself. Not only is finitude within the infinite, the infinite is present in every finite being. Overall, the otherness of God is not like any other otherness because it deduces to a synthesis of apparently inconsistent forms of the infinite–finite relation.[78] However, this deduction hinges upon the equating of finitude with the equivocal term "other".

Now, the issue presently under investigation concerns the mystical experience of the excluding type of divine transcendence. As mentioned, Nicholas of Cusa does admit to having an experience of God as infinite. However, his whole exposition on God as not-other is obviously a well-reasoned analysis and not an immediate mystical insight. It seems that Nicholas, in encountering that aspect of God's otherness as exclusivity, is impelled to utter God's including–exceeding transcendence of finitude. Could it be then that God's otherness is unique in that it does incorporate inclusivity?

[78] Walter Lowe (2002, p. 250) also conceives the wholly otherness of God as "God differs – differently". He estimates that divine transcendence could then imply divine freedom, thereby allowing that God "would be capable of being immanent precisely *because* of being transcendent, i.e. free".

The sublime as an interpretive tool for mysticism is not explicitly found in Nicholas' treatise. There is, however, another important text that ties sublimity with the experience of God. This text can be placed in conversation with Nicholas of Cusa. Its author, Rudolf Otto, may not be a mystic, but his comparison of the sublime experience with the experience of what he calls the wholly other ("numinous experience") might help elucidate our present discussion.[79]

Otto identifies two key resemblances between the sublime and the numinous when he (1917/1950, pp. 41–42) writes:

> A thing does not become sublime merely by being great. The concept itself remains unexplicated; it has in it something mysterious, and in this it is like that of the numinous. A second point of resemblance is that the sublime exhibits the same peculiar dual character as the numinous; it is at once daunting, and yet again singularly attracting, in its impress upon the mind.

A noteworthy point is that while Otto echoes Kant's portrayal of the sublime as evoking ambivalent reactions, he is not as reticent as Kant is when it comes to marking the sublime as something mysterious. Otto binds the mysterious to the wholly other when he (1917/1950, p. 26) plainly states that "in the religious sense, that which is 'mysterious' is – to give it perhaps the most striking expression – the 'wholly other'". Indeed, it is this additional feature that informs Otto's linkage of the sublime with the numinous. However, in spite of the commonalities that Otto picks out, i.e. numinosity and sublimity are inherently mysterious and evoking of ambivalent reactions, he (1917/1950, pp. 43–44) rejects any suggestion that the numinous experience evolved from and is reducible to the sublime experience. A numinous experience may share some phenomenal content with other types of human experience, but it is still a *sui generis*, irreducible experience nonetheless.

Drawing from Kant's doctrine of schematism, Otto offers his theory of the relation between the sublime and the numinous. Kant (1787/1991, pp. 117–122) formulates an intriguing theory of schematism. As mentioned earlier, the faculty of imagination attempts to subsume sense intuitions into relevant concepts. Knowledge derived by the imagination is the product of the cooperation between sensibility's receiving of *sense* data from the outside and understanding's subsuming of these data under transcendental *a priori* categories. When it comes to *sensuous or empirical conceptions*, as an example, the concept of a book, there is a more or less correspondence between the sense impressions of a book with the pure concept, say, of a rectangle. A sensuous concept, "book", is closely related to its representation. However, there is no *complete identity* between the concept of a book with a physi-

[79] In *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational* (1917/1950), Rudolph Otto delves into the mystical elements that pervade religious traditions. The central focus in the economy of theistic mysticism is the "holy", which relates to what Otto calls "*numen*" (Latin for "dynamic divine force") (pp. 5–7). In this context of the holy as relating to numen and the numinous, Otto regards the holy as largely beyond the bounds of reason and morality and evoking more of the emotional aspect of human experience. The numinous experience is characterized by powerful religious emotions of *mysterium, tremendum, et fascinans* (the proverbial Latin phrase associated with Otto; meaning "the mystery that terrifies and fascinates") (pp. 12–40).

cal image because, being a concept, it is universal, and therefore any particular image of a specific book does not accurately represent the universal concept, "book".

The *pure conceptions* of the understanding, such as substance, causality, quantity, and quality, do not have direct sense representations. How then do we conceive of these pure concepts? Kant's answer is that there must be a mediating representation between the pure concept and its sense image. This mediating representation, proposes Kant (1787/1991, pp. 117–119), is the *transcendental schema*. It is transcendental on account of it being a product of the understanding and not a given datum from the outside. A schema functions as a means to graphically present a pure concept. It is not itself a sense image but a means or, in Kantian parlance, a "procedural rule". An example might help in the explanation. Kant's category of causality is a pure concept of the understanding. We do not perceive the causal relation between two events for we only perceive events. Causality is imposed upon the phenomena by the mind of the subject. Time, as succession of events between an antecedent and a subsequent, is the schema that helps to present a sense image to the concept. Note that events can have sense images, but time as a schema does not. We cannot perceive time as a sensory datum. Hence, while time as the schema for causality is not an image, the method or procedure of conceiving time as succession of events does present a sensory image. A schema somewhat straddles the abstract and the sensory, thereby aiding the representation of the purely conceptual. This form of schematism – *transcendental* – is what Kant regards as a *direct* form of synthesizing the sensory and the conceptual despite having a schema as a medium. It is direct because causality is directly related to succession of events. An indirect form of presentation, I would think, is the analogical or symbolic.[80]

Essentially, for Otto, it is possible to conceive of the sublime as a *schema* of the "holy". He (1917/1950, pp. 45–46) asserts thus:

> [T]here is more, too, in the combination of "the holy" with "the sublime" than a mere association of feelings; … the inward and lasting character of the connexion in all the higher religions does prove that "the sublime" too is an authentic "schema" of "the holy".

In Otto's view, the sublime is a direct or transcendental schema for the numinous. It is not a mere analogue of the numinous. Again, he (1917/1950, p. 65) stresses:

> [T]he connexion of "the sublime" and "the holy" becomes firmly established as a legitimate schematization and is carried on into the highest forms of religious consciousness – a proof that there exists a hidden kinship between the numinous and the sublime which is something more than a merely accidental analogy, and to which Kant's *Critique of Judgement* bears distant witness.

What he means is that the sublime in Kantian terms – as referring to the experience of excessive magnitude or power, resulting in a conflict of faculties – is directly

[80] Although the symbolic or analogical schematism is not treated under the heading of schematism in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, it is mentioned by Kant in his "What Real Progress has Metaphysics Made in Germany Since the Time of Leibniz and Wolff?" in *Theoretical Philosophy After 1781* (1804/2004, p. 412). Given that resorting to analogies for explaining or representing abstract ideas is a common practice, I think it is best to just restrict Kantian schematism to the direct and transcendental kind rather than superfluously adding the analogical schematism.

related to the experience of the wholly other. This sublime, argues Otto, functions as a schema that helps us represent the numinous experience of God, an experience that is not reducible to any other experience, yet amenable to some form of description and conception.

I do have reservations about designating the sublime as a *transcendental* schema of the numinous. Firstly, both sublimity and numinosity stand on equal ground as far as abstractness and purity of concepts go. Would not the sublime then require a schema to aid its apprehension by the subject? However, Otto might disagree and argue for a comparatively closer leaning of the sublime towards the sensible, especially when we consider Kant's doctrine of the sublime as derived from the experience of the immensity of physical nature. On this premise, the sublime, as more closely tied to the sensible, is entitled to function as a schema for the more abstract numinous. Even if I were to concede to this defence, the second and more important point I wish to advance is that if the numinous is the meeting with the *wholly other*, then any positing of a transcendental schema for it is highly suspect. On account of the wholly otherness of the numen, there can only be analogies of the numinous experience. Furthermore, after delineating the structure of the numinous as a schematic relation between the nonrational and the rational, Otto proceeds to unravel several other examples of such rational–nonrational schematic relations, music being one of them. The rational elements within music – describable in terms of lyrics, notes, and evoked emotions – coexist with music's nonrational elements, mysterious inherent properties and operations of music that elude conceptualization (Otto 1917/1950, pp. 47–49). If Otto claims to delineate such parallel structures between music and the numinous, then the structure of musical experience would just as well serve as a schema for the numinous experience. Instead, Otto relegates the experience of music to the collection of analogues of the numinous.

While the succession of time is directly related to causality in a robust if not necessary link, the same sort of link cannot be ascribed to the sublime–numinous relation. It is quite probable that the encounter with the wholly other may not evoke any ambivalence of pain and pleasure, terror, and fascination – foundational constituents of the Kantian sublime and Otto's numinous. Additionally, even though it is compelling to consider, as Otto does, the wholly other as nonrational, I suspect that the notion of the wholly other is not just confined to its nonrational character. In sum, against Otto, I consider the sublime an analogue of the numinous. Sublimity as analogue of the mystical encounter with the wholly other entitles us to speak about God and our experience of God while respecting God's otherness. Now, in what way is the foregoing discussion consonant with the analysis of Nicholas of Cusa's not-other?

Merely from the plain inspection of terms, "not-other" is diametrically opposed to "wholly other". Nevertheless, when used in contexts such as "God is not-other to God" and "God is wholly other to other things", their opposition is mitigated. Note though that while the former accommodates the inclusion of other things in God (God defined as all-inclusive), the latter rejects such an inclusion. Nicholas' subtle permutations of "other" are absent in Otto's straightforward appellation of God as wholly other. Nicholas' conception of not-other starts out with excluding the other

but quickly deduces to including the other into itself. When Otto attempts to frame the sublime against the experience of the wholly other, he invariably slips into making analogies: the sublime is similar to yet different from the numinous; musical experience with its inherent mystery is similar to yet different from numinous experience. The more he strives to bring the wholly other under some rational depiction, the more he compromises the absolute otherness of this being. Likewise, the same fate befalls Nicholas of Cusa. His synthesis of divine inclusiveness and divine otherness in the notion of divine not-other can be conceived as a unique form of otherness. In this regard, divine infinity is other to the finite world in such a way that it does not negate inclusivity. Therefore, are we entitled then to say that God is "wholly" other to everything that is not-God because God's otherness is not like any other form of otherness? But Nicholas, like Otto, slips into the same inevitable procedure. His illustration of the relation between light and colour does constitute an analogy of divine otherness, thereby attenuating the absolute disanalogy between divine otherness and finite otherness. Ultimately, as stressed before, one cannot assert the absolute otherness of God in mysticism without sliding into difficulties. Even God's otherness has a link, no matter how thin, with finite analogies. I appreciate Nicholas' presentation of divine transcendence, for he does attempt to put together the including–exceeding and the excluding forms of transcendence. Perhaps, while God is not wholly other, there is a part of God that is wholly other to the mystic.

If God is said to be a pure abstract concept of infinity, we can easily conceive God as an abstract idea negating of all determinations. However, major problems emerge when you have mystics claiming that they have experienced this infinite being, not as an intellectual grasp of a mere concept but as an intimate relationship affecting their whole being, holding them and all things in its grasp, and wholly transcending them. A concrete infinite is surely a paradox. The general configuration of the sublime is analogous to the configuration of the mystical relationship. And since incarnate in this paradox is the tension between opposing elements, alongside the analogizing function of the sublime, dialecticism, I would think, is regulative and, in some instances, constitutive of the metaphysical structure of mystical intimacy. Note though that in the mystical encounter with God, dialectic cannot arrive at any definitive synthesis, and hence, this inability is itself sublime. On the side of finite human beings with finite faculties, the apprehension of infinity is dialectical and sublime.

2.8 Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter, I explored the viability of reading mystical development through the being–becoming binary. In the context of mysticism, it is discovered that being and becoming are dialectical rather than mutually exclusive and that the overall triadic schema of mystical relationship is becoming–being–infinite being wherein each moment is immanent in and transcendent to the one preceding it. It is argued that this pattern of transcendence and immanence pervades processes within this world

of ours as well as infinite reality's relation to finite reality. By engaging theorists such as Underhill, Bergson, Plato, and Hegel, I endeavoured to articulate the contours of the being–becoming relation as seen through the mediating and individualizing dialectics.

Upon establishing the including–exceeding and excluding models of transcendence, this chapter had to confront two formidable tasks. The first is to identify testimonies of mystics that corroborate the two metaphysical models of the infinite–finite encounter and to run these testimonies through some rigorous epistemic criteria. The second is to attempt to reconcile the two models of transcendence by arguing that while God includes and exceeds finitude, there is also an aspect of God that qualitatively excludes the finite world.

For a gainful undertaking of these tasks, I invoked Kant's special aesthetic of sublimity and his general aesthetic of space to function as analogous interpretive instruments. Mystics or theorists who played key roles in the discussions developed here included Ruysbroeck, Teresa of Avila, Nicholas of Cusa, Stace, and Otto. While the discussions' argumentation was critical in its approach, I did strive to make a plausible case in defence of the principal thesis threading through this study – dialecticism and sublimity go a long way towards illuminating and tentatively solving the many apparently paradoxical constituents of mysticism. Dialecticism and sublimity are not expected to bring the discourse on mysticism to a contented conclusion. Rather, in the very process of elucidating mysticism, they unveil mysticism's resilient capacity to withhold its elusive mysteries. The coming chapter will home in on the intrinsic and relational properties of infinite being.

Chapter 3
Infinity–Finitude

3.1 Introduction

This chapter delves into an examination of a generic relational pattern pertinent to Christian mystics' orientation to the infinite. Nicholas of Cusa (1440/2007, p. 60), when talking about negative theology, confidently declares that all words in reference to God are susceptible of negation, save one – "one word alone may be used of Him: Infinite". Let us suppose that God is numerically or strictly identical to infinity. But, this runs against the grain of conceiving God as not like any other, including infinity. At best, infinity is an attribute of God. If God possesses, and is more than, infinity, then is it not true that being more than infinity is still infinity?[1] While I dissent from the view that God is numerically identical to infinity, I maintain that God possesses a certain form of infinity; one that includes–exceeds and excludes finitude.

In order to build a coherent discussion on the infinity–finitude dialectic, I intend to adopt a method of presentation that shifts between the two polarities of that pairing. Beginning with the side of infinity, a few short passages lifted from Underhill's *M* serve as an entry point into an engagement with the mathematical and metaphysical infinities. In this section, I then proceed to bind the mathematical with potential infinity and the metaphysical, via the notion of totality, with actual infinity. Included in this project is a brief foray into set theory of mathematics with the express purpose

[1] Georg Cantor's theory of transfinite numbers delineates an infinite series of sets of infinite numbers (see Dauben 1990, pp. 96–98). A limit to the first set of infinite natural numbers, symbolized as ω (miniscule omega), which also represents that first whole set of infinite natural numbers, becomes the first number of the subsequent set of infinite numbers: ω, $\omega+1$, $\omega+2$, … This second set is limited by 2ω, and the series of sets continues. If positing a limit upon a set of infinite numbers seems counter-intuitive, just think of the integers 0 and 1. Between 0 and 1 is an infinite series of real numbers, and yet 1 forms the limit of this infinite set. The same applies for between 1 and 2. Perhaps, one might analogize God as possessing infinity (the first set, ω) and being more than it. Hence, God is analogous to, say, $\omega+1$. In this sense, to go beyond infinity is not necessarily to be still submerged within that infinity. Nonetheless, ultimately, it is difficult to imagine God as not infinite.

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of aiding our grasp of that which formidably resists intellectual apprehension. My effort to integrate actual and potential infinities in God leads me to conclude that God is predominantly potential infinity.

Since the content of *M* is largely Christian mysticism, Underhill's discourse on infinity includes references to the trinitarian God of Christianity. Accordingly, the third section is devoted to a discussion on the trinity and its relevance to the discourse on infinity. A major portion of this section consists of a critical analysis of Hegel's dialectical trinity, which I think serves to unravel the intricate nature of the three persons of divine infinity, and this infinity's inclusion of the universe with its historical development. Deliberations within this section give rise to an understanding of God as economic trinity that includes–exceeds the universe and as possessing a part that is completely beyond the universe – unknowable and mysterious. I shall also, later in this chapter, challenge the belief that God is omniscient.

Next, the presentation shifts to the side of finitude with the mystic as the subject experiencing the infinite. In this fourth section, I focus on critically examining the objective reference issue of mystical experience and relationship and test the tenability of Walter Stace's "transsubjectivism" and Underhill's "objective idealism" in its epistemological and metaphysical capacities as applied to this particular issue. I follow this by proposing "tentative unitivism", a term I create denoting a synthesis of objectivism and subjectivism.

The following points thread through this chapter: (1) Infinite being, which is the dialectical terminus of becoming and being, is itself dialectically configured, especially as trinity. (2) God is predominantly potential infinite; and this is entailed by (3) the nature of plenary or unqualified infinity and the universe's ongoing temporal progress. (4) On account of divinity's potential infinity, sublimity remains a potential within the mystical encounter between finite being and infinite God, as well as within God's relation to Godself.

3.2 Talking About Infinity

In spite of the frequent occurrences of the term "infinity" or "infinite" in *M*, Underhill does not enter into the intricacies and problems of this concept. Nevertheless, there are places in *M* where the mathematical and metaphysical infinities are represented.[2] The following allude to the mathematical infinite:

> To say that God is Infinite is to say that He may be apprehended and described in an infinity of ways. (*M* p. 238)

[2] Recall the distinction between (1) mathematical infinite, "boundlessness; endlessness; unlimitedness; immeasurability; eternity; that which is such that, given any determinate part of it, there is always more to come; that which is greater than any assignable quantity", and (2) metaphysical infinite, "completeness; wholeness; unity; universality; absoluteness; perfection; self-sufficiency; autonomy" (Moore 1990, pp. 1–2).

> [T]he invisible God, the incomprehensible Trinity, eternally breaking forth and manifesting itself in a boundless height and depth of blissful wonders, opening and displaying itself to all its creatures as in an infinite variation and endless multiplicity of its powers, beauties, joys, and glories. (*M* p. 114)

The second statement is a quote Underhill borrows from the English theologian William Law (1686–1781). Both statements indicate the mathematically infinite content of God. It is also conveyed that this infinite content can be made apparent to created beings. Elsewhere, in describing the core of the soul as the locus of conjunction of infinite being with finite being, Underhill writes:

> This depth is the unity, the Eternity, I had almost said the infinity of thy soul, for it is so infinite that nothing can satisfy it, or give it any rest, but the infinity of God. (*M* p. 52)

Here, the infinite soul and infinite God indicate unboundedness or endlessness, i.e. the mathematical infinite.

While most of Underhill's use of infinity is of the "unboundedness" type, there are a few references to the metaphysical infinite, such as this:

> The initial break with the "world", the refusal to spend one's life communing with one's own cinematograph picture, is essential if the freedom of the infinite is to be attained. (*M* pp. 33–34)

The notion of freedom, when wedded with the concept of infinity, takes on the sense of autonomy and self-sufficiency, rendering the infinite as metaphysical infinity. Furthermore, when Underhill avers that "God is pre-eminently the Perfect – Goodness, Truth, and Beauty", the designation of perfection is generally considered to be a species of the metaphysical infinite (*M* p. 341). Totality as metaphysical infinity, though rarely applied to God by Underhill, is here captured in her statement: "This One [God] is for the mystic, not merely the Reality of *all that is*, but also a living and personal Object of Love" (*M* p. 81; emphasis mine).

In Chapter 2, I said that infinity is best defined as the unbounded or the unlimited. Words such as "totality", "perfection", "autonomy", and "self-sufficiency" need not be synonyms of infinity. Apparently, such terms are in reference to infinity mainly because the feature of unboundedness tends to portray an infinite that, overall, lacks positive descriptions. The above terms are indeed affirmative ones, in contrast to the negativity of "unboundedness".[3] I intend to explore the possibility of incorporating the metaphysical infinity into the mathematical infinity. Can God as unbounded consistently include attributes such as totality, perfection, autonomy, and self-sufficiency? Totality refers to the collection of everything; nothing indeed is left out of this unified whole. At this juncture, I shall provisionally say that totality does not seem amenable to being extended indefinitely for a boundary surrounds the collection of everything.[4] One should be able to say that the infinite is autonomous and self-sufficient and it contains within itself an unbounded number of other things, properties, and so forth. But, if infinity contains parts such as happiness and power,

[3] Moore (1990, pp. 45–46) notes that Plotinus resurrected the concept of metaphysical infinity and applied its features such as perfection and self-sufficiency to God.

[4] A thorough discussion on totality awaits us in the next two sections.

which perpetually possess the potential for becoming more, would this not compromise infinity's self-sufficiency? I do not think so because as long as perpetual increment of power or happiness takes place within this system of infinity, there is no compromising of this infinity's self-sufficiency.[5] Assuming that there exists an object whereby self-sufficiency is its only property, then I do not think it is justifiable to label that object "infinite". It would suffice to call it "the self-sufficient".[6]

I consider unboundedness to be the necessary condition for infinity, and that notions of metaphysical infinity such as self-sufficiency can be incorporated into the all-essential concept of mathematical infinity as one of its infinite properties. A self-sufficient being is autonomous and unconditioned by anything outside it. It is not determined by anything outside it, but it does not follow that a self-sufficient being is unbounded in the sense of being endless. Indeed, the self-sufficient's immunity from external conditioning marks its end or boundary and sets it apart from conditioned and conditioning elements. Hence, self-sufficiency or unconditionality need not be equated with infinity.

The consummately perfect is inconsistent with the unboundedly perfect, unless consummate perfection presupposes a perfection that is infinitely (without limits) perfect. In other words, infinitely continuous perfection is complete perfection. Unfortunately, it appears that I am stretching the purported solution beyond reasonable acceptance because a perfect being is generally not open to further improvement. There is clearly a problem with reconciling divine perfection with an infinite divine that is unbounded. I suspect that philosophers such as Plotinus (250/1956, 5th ennead 4th tractate: 1 and 2, pp. 378 and 382) and Aquinas (13th cent./1990, part I quest. 3 artcl. 7, p. 19; part I quest. 9 artcl. 1, pp. 38–39) maintain the infinity of God as metaphysical because they are beholden to a doctrine of God's simplicity and immutability. A conception of God as unchanging and not composed of parts is not congenial to the idea of God being mathematically infinite because in this type of infinity there is always the potential for being more. My exploration of the possibility of incorporating the metaphysical infinity of God into God's mathematical infinity is an attempt to address the question: is God potentially infinite or actually infinite or both?[7] This question can be addressed more usefully after I examine some other elements relating to infinity.

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[5] As long as the changes that take place at a part or several parts of a system are not caused by anything outside the system, the self-sufficiency of that system is preserved.

[6] Thomas Aquinas might disagree with me when he (13th cent./1990, part. I quest. 7 artcl. 1, p. 31) maintains:

> Since therefore the divine being is not a being received in anything, but He is His own subsistent being as was shown above (Q. III A. 4), it is clear that God Himself is infinite and perfect.

Divine being's self-subsistency or self-sufficiency, says Thomas, is adequate reason to define God as infinite. However, assuming that there exists a small object that is its own subsistent being, it would be difficult to imagine this small object as something infinite.

[7] The alliance between mathematical infinity and potential infinity and that between metaphysical infinity and actual infinity will be explained in the next section.

3.2.1 *Potential and Actual Infinities: Establishing the Contention*

Apart from this fundamental division of mathematical and metaphysical infinities, there is also the important consideration of types of things regarded as infinite. Broadly, we have two categories of beings, the material universe and the universe of minds and ideas. God or ultimate reality can be regarded as encompassing both these universes. What I propose to do in this section is to sketch out a diagram on the infinite based upon the above divisions and types and their overall relevance to Underhill's treatise on mysticism. Scientific debates abound on the question of whether the universe of matter, space, and time is infinite or otherwise. I do not intend to revive these debates here.

Aristotle (4th cent. BCE/1991, *Physics*, bk. III chp. 6–7, 206a9–207b15, pp. 45–48) makes an important distinction between the actual infinite and the potential infinite. The actual infinite, states Aristotle, is that which is infinite all at once. The potential infinite is that which is infinite over time. Everlasting time is potentially infinite because its infinity is not present all at once, but over time. Aristotle does not hold that the actual infinite exists. For him, there is only the potential infinite.[8] Similarly, it is assertible that natural numbers can be counted without end and are, therefore, potentially infinite. Rudy Rucker (1995, p. 3) highlights an important observation by Georg Cantor (1845–1918) – counting numbers and existing over time are potentially infinite only if infinite numbers and everlastingness are actually real in the sense that they do exist all at once, perhaps in the universe of minds and thoughts. Cantor concludes that the actual infinite is logically prior to the potential infinite and that without the reality of the actual infinite there is no potential infinite.

Hegel finds the mathematical infinite of unending extension, division, or duration, abhorrent. To him (1812/1969, pp. 227–228), this is a false or bad infinite because every discrete unit or quantum is bounded by its neighbouring units, and the extension or division is not only tedious and boring, there is no resolution into a unity. Hegel favours infinity as totality over that of unendingness because for him a totality unites all its discrete parts and it is not bounded by anything outside itself.[9] He (1817/1991, § 30, p. 68) then adds that this totality is reason. Reason is an all-embracing unity, underlying everything, and is the principle behind the operations of the universe.

As argued above, I hesitate to use the label "infinite" for attributes such as self-sufficiency, autonomy, and perfection if they individually stood purely on their own. Therefore, the discussions below set metaphysical infinity on the same side as totality (actual infinity all at once), while the mathematical infinity conjoins with the

[8] Aristotle (4th cent./1991, *Physics*, bk. III chp. 6, 207a7–16, p. 47) opposes any equating of wholeness or totality, with infinity. For him, wholeness is limited and thereby finite, while infinity is unbounded and successive or potential.

[9] See below for a detailed discussion on Hegel's understanding of the true infinite.

potential infinite. The mystic, Nicholas of Cusa, maintains that God as infinite combines both potential and actual infinities. He (1453/1960, pp. 70–71) writes:

> But Thou, O infinite Light, makest answer within me that absolute potentiality is infinity itself, which is beyond the wall of coincidence, where potential becoming is one with potential creating, where potentiality is one with act. … Thus, in infinite being, the potential being of all things is infinite being itself. In like manner, in infinity, the actual being of all is infinite being itself.

According to Nicholas, in infinite being are coalesced all actual and potential beings. Nicholas' mystical theology saliently expresses the containment of all things in the infinite divine. Also, it is worth noting that the phrase "beyond the wall of coincidence" refers to Nicholas' assertion of that feature of God that lies beyond the coincidence of opposites. The coincidence of opposites signifies the dialectical unification of opposing terms. God's infinity possesses the capacity to transcend all rational procedures of such unification (Nicholas of Cusa 1453/1960, pp. 82–84).

In another Cusanian work, we come across a passage that musters the author's thoughts pertinent to our present endeavour to synthesize potential and actual infinities. Nicholas (1440/2007, pp. 49–50) unfolds the content and nature of divine knowledge:

> [I]f all the things that are merely possible but never happen are objects of God's knowledge, His knowledge of them is not merely possible but actual knowledge, though from that it does not follow that these objects actually exist. … His Providence, then, is unchangeable, inevitable and all-embracing; therefore, with reference to His Providence all things are rightly said to happen necessarily. All things, in fact, in God are God, and He Himself is absolute necessity.

This passage tells us that all actual and possible events in the universe exist as objects of God's knowledge in actuality. Possible events are not actual in the universe but actual as divine knowledge. All things in God (including in God's knowledge) are indeed intrinsically God; and given God's necessity, these things have a necessary being in God. It is not difficult to speculate on the axioms from which the above propositions are derived. If God is perceived as fundamentally infinite, unchanging, simple, and necessary, then (1) God encompasses all things; (2) God's knowledge is an actual all-at-once (thereby unchanging) unity of all actual and possible beings in the universe; (3) since God is simple and not made up of parts, God's knowledge is indeed God; and finally, (4) God and all these constituent elements are necessary. I intend to work critically with these ideas of Nicholas, disclose some of the problems derivable from them, and suggest alternative ways to think about the potential and the actual infinities of God. The discussion is quite involved and I request of the reader to keep these Cusanian thoughts in mind as we proceed.

3.2.2 A Synthesis of Potential and Actual Infinities

Someone agreeing with Nicholas might conclude that we cannot have an infinite reality that is solely metaphysical/total/actual or solely mathematical/unending/potential. The challenge is to combine the two coherently. The previous chapter

consistently maintained that Underhill's conception of infinite being is one that includes and transcends finite realities. The material universe may or may not be mathematically infinite, but for sure it would be difficult to deny the infinite nature of the mental universe. An infinite number of thoughts exist and we can think about numbers continuing infinitely. In order to attempt a synthesis of the metaphysical and the mathematical infinities, and considering that Underhill and Nicholas of Cusa present God as bearing both these infinities, I shall invoke Cantor's set theory. This theory not only attempts to support the infinity of the mental universe, it also functions as an analogue to help us appreciate the enigma of God as infinite.[10] To be sure, the infinity of God defies any crisp and comprehensive explanation. However, Cantor's theory of the infinity of numbers and sets can help us formulate some notion of divine infinity especially within the frame of potential and actual infinities and the conception of God as including–exceeding and excluding the finite universe.

Cantor defines a set as "a Many that allows itself to be thought of as a One".[11] A welter of items in my room, for instance, can be organized into sets of furniture, pictures on the wall, stationery, and so forth. Interestingly, a set can be formed from a nothing. There is what is known as the empty set Ø or { }. According to Cantor, the iterative operation of set construction enables us to build an infinite number of sets: the empty set, Ø; the set of the empty set, {Ø}; the empty set and the set of the empty set, {Ø, {Ø}}; the set of the set of the empty set, {{Ø}}… (this goes on infinitely). Now, do sets exist in the mental universe even if no one is thinking or has thought of them? For that matter, do numbers exist even if no one counts? Let us assume that the mental universe houses these ideas even if no one thinks of them. From the above iterative operation, a set of a fixed number of members can produce a larger number of subsets. For example, {1, 2, 3, 4} produces subsets {1}, {2}, {3}, {4}, {1,3}, {2,4}, and {1,2,3}. Hence, the number of possible subsets exceeds the number of members in the original set. For Cantor, an infinite number of sets can be generated; sets can be mathematically infinite.

The all-important question is: can all these infinite sets be collected into a unity, a single set of all sets, or a totality of infinite sets? After all, is it not the definition of the set to be a "many thought of as a one"? The procedure for forming a set has two sequential steps: (1) identify the prospective members and (2) collect them into a set. Is the "set of all sets" a set? Can a set actually belong to itself, meaning, be a member of itself? If this were to take place, before you can have the possible members of the set, the set must already be there (because the set is included in the list of prospective members). This is indeed odd and will condemn the whole process of set formation into a perpetual swing between (1) and (2). Before you form the set, you need the members, but before you have the members, you need the set because the set is one of the members. Diagrammatically, imagine a set of all sets being a

[10] Gregory Chaitin (2007, p. 96) believes that "it was Cantor's obsession with God's infiniteness and transcendence that led him to create his spectacularly successful but extremely controversial theory of infinite sets and infinite numbers".

[11] For my account of Cantor's set theory, I am indebted to Rucker's (1995, pp. 191–196) excellent exposition of and commentary on the subject.

member of itself. The circle that represents this set would contain all sets plus the set of all sets; and this whole picture would in turn be contained within itself and so on. Perhaps, due to this particular problem, the set of all sets cannot be a member of itself. Therefore, it is not a set, and accordingly, not a many thought of as a one. The set of all sets is just a many. The mind-puzzling end point that we inevitably reach is that the set of all sets (infinite number of sets) appears to be uniting all the sets, and yet, as not a set, it is not actually uniting all the sets. If the set of all sets is not a part of itself, and thereby implying that the set of all sets is not a set, then there is already a duality – the "set of all sets" as not a set, separated from the multitude of sets. If this is the case, there is then no unity.

Whether the set of all sets is a member or not a member of itself, there is no way we can arrive at a definitive and complete knowledge of this unique set. Assuming that the set of all sets *is* a member of itself, every time knowledge of its complete membership is reached, this whole set is itself a member of itself, and so, you have a new composition and this goes on perpetually. Another case to help us think about this self-swallowing pattern is the "thought of all thoughts". Once we arrive at the thought of all thoughts, we then have a new thought (the total synthesis of all thoughts), which has to be known together with the others in order to achieve the thought of all thoughts. Again, a fresh thought of all thoughts is reached and a new thought (the new synthesis of all thoughts).[12] Now, even if we assume that the set of all sets is not a member of itself, by virtue of this set's containment of infinite sets multiplying infinitely, again, definitive and complete knowledge of this set is unreachable. In essence, the totality of infinite sets cannot be completely known. It is elusive. This is a totality (metaphysical infinite) that continually stretches beyond reason's unifying grasp, in a mathematically infinite fashion.

The intriguing thing about Cantor's set of all sets is that this set, in its immediate sense, does appear to unite all the infinite number of sets. When we proceed to analyse it, the tension between the set as unifying entity (as a set) and as just multiplicity (as not a set) emerges. The synthesis of this tension sees the set of all sets as collecting together and yet exceeding the collection. The set of all sets accomplishes a synthesis of metaphysical and mathematical infinities, but with a preeminent position accorded to the mathematical. In unifying the "many", the "one" is a metaphysical infinite, but this unifying action is continuously an approximation that never arrives (mathematical infinite). However, if there is only a "many", without a unifying "one", the possibility of an infinite proliferation of items, especially in the mental universe – as illustrated by Cantor's iteration of sets – clearly depicts, again, the mathematical version of infinity.

Upon concluding the above discussion that includes an excursion into set theory, permit me now to restate an earlier question: is God potentially infinite, actually infinite, or both? When one discusses God in terms of finitude and infinity, Graham Oppy argues that three conceptions of God surface: finite, potentially infinite, and actually infinite; and all three, he believes, cannot successfully support the

[12] A pattern similar to this infinite generation of the all encompassing is found in Josiah Royce's (1855–1916) work, but for Royce (1900, pp. 478–479), the generative element is relationality.

traditional cosmological proofs for God's existence.[13] A finite God poses problems for the theology of God as ultimate reality and ultimate source of all finite things. If God is potentially infinite, then God can perpetually be "better" or "more" than what God presently is. This consequent undermines God's perfection and, accordingly, God's status as concluding terminus of the cosmological argument's line of reasoning. We are left with an actually infinite God. However, even this conception of God, avers Oppy, faces difficulties in rationally defending doctrines such as that of incarnation.

Oppy (2006, p. xi) admits that the problems highlighted above confront traditional theism.[14] It is conceivable then that those problems may not beset nontraditional conceptions of God (see Dombrowski 2007, pp. 25–37). I can tentatively say that God may be perceived as *actually* infinite within God's self, provided that there is a unique form of actuality within divinity. Consistent with this, in God's exterior relations, God can also be said to collaborate with and incorporate the development of events in the world in such a way that God's *potential* infinite unfolds through events in history.[15] This picture parallels the set of infinite numbers (actual infinity) as being logically prior to the consecutive enumeration of numbers from a starting figure through the perpetually potential infinite. However, in view of the above concluding outcome of the Cantorian-initiated disquisition on the infinite as totality, it would still be difficult to imagine how God would hold within God's self the totality of everything as actual infinity, without sliding into the potentiality of the mathematical infinite.

Would it be reasonable to imagine a dimension of God as the other that excludes the universe and as harbouring an actual infinite within it? For sure, it is far from rare to encounter theories suggesting a conception of eternity as beyond what we know about time and about the other dimensions or universes beyond our universe, as the negative of our present dimension or universe. Should we not then be entitled to think of God as possessing an inner self apart from the universe, yet, in a unique way, constituting actual infinity? From our perspective, though, infinity is predominantly mathematical even with the inclusion of a fragile totality.

In postulating that God possesses an internal nature that is transcendent to the universe and is *actually* infinite, one is not committed to saying that this internal

[13] As part of a preview of a possible work that explores infinity in the context of philosophy of religion, Graham Oppy raises this issue in the "Preface" of his *Philosophical Perspectives on Infinity* (2006, pp. xi–xii). The gist of the traditional cosmological proofs is that given that the universe is finite, the explanation for its existence has to appeal to an originator – an infinite and self-originating being, that is, God.

[14] Traditional or classical theism, asserts Charles Hartshorne (1953, p. 2), defines God as necessary, creator of all things other than God, simple, eternal, spiritual, actual rather than potential, absolute, and self-sufficient.

[15] Panentheists such as Hartshorne reject the actual infinity thesis. For Hartshorne, infinity is potential, never actual; and while God is potentially infinite in Godself, God's involvement in the world is actual and, hence, finite (see Clarke 1990, p. 115). Clarke (contra Hartshorne) conceives God as having an inner life that is *actually infinite*, while possessing the ability to be involved in the world through finite actualities (p. 116).

nature is entirely separated from God's external being that includes and exceeds the universe. Surely there is no necessity to posit two different Gods. But can one part of God be actually infinite and another potentially infinite (by virtue of its inclusion of a temporal and processual universe)? I intend to approach this question by exploring and assessing two possible standpoints: (1) a firm distinction of the actual and the potential infinities through God's internal and external natures, respectively, and (2) a weak or loose synthesis of those infinities within an integral divine being.

The defence for standpoint (1) starts off by arguing for God's internal nature being atemporal and as possessing all events and beings in the universe, plus the excess of God's transcendence, in a unified totality.[16] This picture is similar in form to a depiction of time as a static block of space-time dimensionality.[17] Imagine all events, past, present, and future, frozen in a unified entirety in one single block. Then, existing in tandem with this totalized and actual infinity within God's internal nature is God's external nature that includes God's involvement with the universe's flow of events through dynamic time, stretching for a potentially infinite progression. Splitting God's nature in two serves the purpose of retaining actual and potential infinities in God. However, it prompts the question of a requisite third "nature" of God that integrates these two distinct and clearly different natures. Perhaps, it may be suggested that a third nature is unnecessary because God's internal nature alone undertakes the integration of the atemporal–durationless internal with the temporal external sides of God. However, if this is the case, the totalized actual infinity of God's internal nature may quite likely be compromised. To examine why this is so, I shall begin with a quote from Underhill.

When exploring the notion of a special atemporal realm called the "astral plane", Underhill comments:

> [T]he Astral Plane is regarded as constituting the "Cosmic Memory," where the images of all beings and events are preserved, as they are preserved in the memory of man. … There too the concepts of future creation are present in their completeness in the Eternal Now before being brought to birth in the material sphere. (*M* p. 155)

The idea of a transfer of events from the atemporal–durationless realm to their progressive unfolding in the temporal realm suggests an adherence to fatalism. Moreover, this idea of transference has also to contend with the problem of the fragile totality of Cantor's set of all sets.[18] In a static block realm, since every flow

[16] Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius (480–524) (524/1785, bk. 5 prose 6, pp. 216–219) contends that the infinite as eternal is outside of time, having its being all at once. This all at once is not to be conceived in a temporal sense. God is not in temporal duration for past, present, and future are present in God all at once. Essentially, God is atemporal and durationless.

[17] For an account of the static theory of time, see DeWeese 2004, pp. 15–16.

[18] The issue of the concept of eternity and the possibility of a God outside of time being able to intervene in a world of temporal succession is a contentious one. Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann (1981), following in the tradition of Augustine and Boethius, attempt to make a case for the compatibility of divine life as timeless and having its everlasting duration all at once with the ability to intervene in our temporal order. They propose a term called "eternal temporal (ET)-simultaneity", referring to a simultaneity relation between eternal and temporal events that enable eternal (timeless, all at once) to be present, even causally, to temporal entities and events. This idea

of time is frozen in a single block, one must assume that an infinite number of transitory moments are involved in a simple motion, say of a person walking from one spot to another that is ten steps away. Imagine photographing an infinite number of frames capturing this motion, and all these frames are frozen in a single block. Hence, this whole block must be immensely filled with an infinite number of events, and each of them carrying an infinite number of static frames. Not only that, the interface of events between the atemporal realm and the temporal realm has also to be included in this block. For totalization to be complete, God's atemporal internal nature of actual infinity must combine with God's partly temporal external nature of potential infinity. Furthermore, since each eternal(atemporal)–temporal conjunction carries with it the totality of events in the eternal side, imagine factoring this into the ever burgeoning block realm. In sum, even the supposed metaphysical actual infinite of God's internal nature cannot escape the problem that infects totalization. Even when we split God into the inner and outer natures, it appears that God's supposed actual infinity within God's inner self is unavoidably a potential infinity.

It may be asked why God's internal nature should be a totalized mirror image of the external realm that has its being progressing through dynamic time. Evidently, such a scheme aims at defending certain divine properties, namely, omniscience, infinity as incorporating finitude, and immutability. Consequently, to eliminate the static and totalized feature of divinity's internal nature would entail eliminating at least one of these properties. Supposing that we are not averse to letting go immutability from God, perhaps then we might consider standpoint (2) – a weak or loose synthesis of the actual and potential infinities within an integral God. This approach dispenses with the need to posit an internal nature of God that is atemporal, static, and a totalized actual infinite. Instead, God is viewed as an integral, substantial

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offers a way to explain the intervention of divine eternity in temporality. If God is able to relate to temporal beings and events, there must be some simultaneous occurrence of God's being with those temporal entities and events. Moreover, proponents of *divine immutability* would assent to this idea because it postulates that God has his being all at once, no change through time. ET-simultaneity implies that two entities or events, one must be temporal and the other eternal, are symmetric (x[temporal] is ET-simultaneous with y[eternal] and vice versa), but not reflexive because a temporal x cannot be ET-simultaneous with itself on account of this form of simultaneity requiring one element being temporal and the other eternal. This simultaneity is also not transitive; hence, x(temporal) ET-simultaneous with y(eternal), and y(eternal) ET-simultaneous with z(temporal), does not imply x(temporal) being simultaneous with z(temporal). Therefore, there is no possibility of deducing contradictory cases like "it is raining and not raining in the same place at the same time". One might ask: if the totality of temporal events is already present in God when he intervenes causally in a particular temporal event, why is it not the case that all other events are causally affected at the same time? We might answer that even the particular causal intervention while withholding other interventions in the temporal order is itself part of God's entire being. Then again, would not the different instances of divine eternal intervention in the temporal order indicate some form of change within God? Perhaps one can argue that the particular being of God's intervention is already incorporated in God's whole being and that while relational changes do occur, changes intrinsic to God are absent. There is also the issue of God's foreknowledge of future events being at variance with human free will. Boethius argues that divine omniscience is not inconsistent with free will because God may know all events to occur and he may contain within himself the being of all things and events, but it does not imply that God intervenes in all events.

being, including–exceeding and excluding the universe. The part of God that excludes the universe is considered divine mystery, and we have no justification for any characterization of its content and structure. Not only is the atemporal–durationless realm absent in this model, there is even no assertion of God's atemporality. Plainly put, this mysterious part of God is hidden from us.

In this standpoint (2), the mediating dialectic (immediacy–mediation–mediated immediacy), with its dynamic progression, can aptly be applied to the potential infinity of God, while the individuality dialectic of particularity–universality–individuality helps us interpret the actual infinity of God.[19] In light of our temporalized experiences, and taking into account the foregoing deliberation, the mediating dialectic and its correspondence to potential infinity is a closer sketch of the infinity of God. God is envisaged as unlimited and continuously being more. An allusion to actual infinity would quite possibly reside in the conception of God as universal being. However, in the context of the individualizing dialectic whereby the synthetic moment of individuality has both the passive and active forms of uniting the particular with the universal, the constant openness to difference or transcendence is resistant to a configuration of a definitive totality. In sum, the combination of the mediating dialectic (aligned with potential infinity) with the individuality dialectic (reflecting a quasi actual infinity) offers us a weak synthesis of the actual and potential infinities for it favours a divinity that is potentially infinite.

I agree with Cantor's subscription to the existence of a logically prior unified set of actually infinite numbers located in an abstract realm of concepts. This set is logically prior to any concrete counting of numbers to potential infinity. However, when God is regarded as plenary infinity or unqualified infinity (where infinite numbers are just one of its contents), given that this infinity incorporates the physico-temporal universe, a robust case for an integral God being actually infinite is barely defensible.[20] In order to claim God as actually infinite, we would have to resort to looping together the comprehensive collection of beings into a unified set and place it in some transcendent, static, and, perhaps, Platonic realm of ideas. This would be pointless for it entails the conjuring up of another God beyond God. Hence, I am inclined to subscribe to a notion of God, especially when viewed in relation to this universe, as potentially infinite. I think it would be difficult to reconcile an uncompromising Cusanian assertion of God as holding all beings in a necessary and unchanging all-at-once presence in the actuality of God's infinite knowledge and being, with the potentiality of an ever enlarging totality and the avoidance of fatalism. The foregoing discussion shows up my hesitation in accepting Nicholas of Cusa's depiction of God (as embracing actual and potential infinities) in his quotes above.

[19] Refer to Chap. 2 for the details on the mediating and individualizing dialectics.

[20] Nicholas of Cusa (1440/2007, p. 60), on the other hand, advances one of his several interpretations of the relation between God the Father and God the Son: God the Father represents eternity, which is unified or actual infinity; and this is logically prior to what God the Son signifies, that is, infinity as negative or potential infinity (logically posterior). Accordingly, the idea that the father generates the son can be read as actual infinity logically preceding potential infinity. This relational diagram of Nicholas, I figure, faces similar problems highlighted in the above discussion on the distinction between God's internal self and external nature.

In the attempt to harmonize the actual (totalized) infinity with the potential (endlessly unbounded) infinity, the Kantian sublime comes to my mind. This attempt parallels, to some degree, our senses' gradually progressive apprehension of an object of immense magnitude. The attempt to tie together all these parts of the apprehension into a neat unity will always be futile. Correspondingly, the attempt to form a conception of God as actual and unified infinity will only conduce to a hazy formulation. Kant (1790/2000, § 26, p. 112) explains the tension created when viewing the pyramids:

> For if we are too far away, the parts to be apprehended (the stones lying one over the other) are only obscurely represented, and the representation of them produces no effect upon the aesthetical judgment of the subject. But if we are very near, the eye requires some time to complete the apprehension of the tiers from the bottom up to the apex; and then the first tiers are always partly forgotten before the Imagination has taken in the last, and so the comprehension of them is never complete.

Kant (1790/2000, § 26, pp. 111 and 116) contends that the inability of imagination to represent infinity as unified and the tension created within the faculties are constitutive of the idea of the sublime. If I may borrow Kant's illustration above and apply it to our present focus on God's infinity, I suggest that the sublimity of mystical intimacy can be located in the finite subject's encounter with an infinite reality that is perpetually unbounded.

An individual with exceptional eyesight might be able to stand far enough from the pyramid to take its entire visual image in one single viewing and at the same time have a clear image of every tier that makes up this colossal structure. However, having a similar apprehension of the combined infinity of all things, material and ideational, is impossible. For sure, it is an impossible undertaking for any finite being. A sublime experience admits of an awareness, even if faintly, of the exceeding of boundaries. Despite the mystic's realization of being incorporated within something infinite, the very recognition of incorporation entails an awareness of the object encountered as exceeding the finite boundaries of the mystic's self. Hence, this form of mystical experience is also a sublime experience. I wish to point out here that, according to Kant, the sublime comes into being in the inability of the infinite to be fully, unifiedly, and clearly apprehended by the faculty of imagination. This requirement is imposed by the higher faculty of reason that demands a unified totality. Kant (1790/2000, § 26, pp. 111 and 116) continues to argue that the pleasure associated with the sublime is derived from, first, the pain of imagination's inability and then, second, the realization (initiated by that pain) of the presence of a higher faculty in us, i.e. reason. Reason dictates this demand for totalization that imagination cannot fulfil, but reason has the ability to consolidate the infinite within the abstract concept of infinity.[21]

[21] In Kant's *The Critique of Judgment* (§ 26, pp. 115–116), the abstract concept of infinity is labelled a "noumenon". Although Kant sometimes uses "thing in itself" interchangeably with "noumenon", on occasion, he uses "noumena" to refer to abstract concepts such as infinity which cannot be intuited phenomenally (see Caygill 1995, s.v. "thing-in-itself", p. 393).

My question is why the infinite should be a totalized unity. It is as if it is rational to demand for a totalized or actual infinity. Is it not equally rational not to demand a closure to infinity? Moreover, even the concept of "infinity", an abstract concept provided by reason, fails to present the infinite in a clear manner, for that abstract concept only manages to create an inevitably vague notion of an apparently unified yet unbounded something or a unified quality of unboundedness. It has, however, been argued that Kant's theory of the sublime makes a subtle distinction between infinity conceived as unbounded and conceived as totality (unity) of the unbounded. While the former can be taken to be a concept of understanding, the latter is an idea of reason (see Matthews 1996, p. 173). Recall that imagination, in principle, can function to extend the capture of snippets of sense intuition to an unending series. Hence, "infinity" as merely unending or unlimited may be regarded as a pure concept of understanding. It is the more difficult function of totalizing this unlimited infinity that requires the work of a higher faculty – reason. This argument implies that without a need to totalize infinity (actual infinity), there would be no pain of imagination's incapacity, for a negative infinity (potential infinity) can be subsumed under a pure concept of understanding. Minus this pain of imagination's insufficiency, there will be no sublime experience. I have some problems with this argument. Kant (1787/1991, p. 79) does categorize concepts such as "substance", "causality", and "quality" as pure concepts of the understanding. These concepts are not so far removed from sense intuition as to warrant them being called ideas of reason. By being pure concepts of the understanding, there is no requirement for a close fit between sense intuition and universal concept, as, say, the concept of "book". However, one important requirement is that these pure concepts represent a form of synthesis (Kant 1787/1991, pp. 77–78). Even a numerical concept, say, the number 452, is a concept of the understanding. Despite the abstractness of this concept, it does represent a synthesis – the cardinality of 452. Accordingly, the concept of infinity merely as the unbounded cannot be a concept of the understanding because it does not reflect the function of synthesis.[22] I would regard it as a concept of reason.[23] Furthermore, our extended deliberations over potential infinity and actual infinity above demonstrate that potential or negative infinity cannot be categorized as a pure concept of understanding that closely reflects empirical reality.

[22] I am aware that in Kant's taxonomy of pure concepts of the understanding, he has "infinite" placed as a subcategory of "quality". This "infinite" has to be viewed within his transcendental logic of categorical propositions (Kant 1787/1991, p. 75). To help illustrate the use of "infinite" in this particular context, I shall use the following example: the proposition "all monkeys are not stones" has the category of "monkeys" placed in the region outside of the circle representing "stones". Though conventional logic deems this proposition an affirmative one ("all monkeys *are* non-stones"), Kantian logic would take the subject "monkeys" as placed in a predicate which is the infinite region outside of the region representing "stones". This predicate does not give an affirmative determination of the subject. Note though that that apparently infinite region is bounded by the "stones" region. This specific use of the term "infinite" is quite distinct from what we are here discussing on infinity and sublimity for in the context of categorical propositions the focus is not on the concept of infinity per se.

[23] For a general notion of the concept of reason or the ideas that are far removed from the foundations of sense intuition, see Kant 1787/1991, pp. 226–227.

Both, the negative notion of infinity and its positive or totalized version, are concepts of reason. And both these concepts cannot adequately represent (especially via *comprehensio aesthetica*) potential and actual infinities, respectively. Consequently, I wish to go beyond the Kantian sublime predicated on the derivation of pleasure in the realization of the superiority of reason as able to consolidate the infinite within the concept of infinity. I suggest that the pleasure of the sublime is more appropriately derived from a realization that there is an infinite that exceeds the finite and resists totalization. Rather than taking pleasure in an assumed sovereign faculty such as reason within us, I see the pleasure of the sublime as originating from the realization of divine infinity that incorporates the subject and at the same time is infinitely (potential infinite) more than the subject.

I wish now to explore the consideration of God's experience of God's self as sublime. We shall come to see in the next section that Aristotle, Nicholas of Cusa, and Hegel, in subtly different ways, uphold the idea of God knowing/loving Godself. If perfect identity exists between God as lover and God as loved, then the absence of any boundary within this unity implies that sublimity – which, as established earlier, requires the experience of a boundary between experiencing subject and experienced object – is absent in divine reflexive love. This non-sublime divine self-love presupposes the possibility of God being actually infinite, for a gapless coincidence between the two relata within God necessitates a unified actual infinity. Now, keeping in mind our discussions on the actual and potential infinities above, let us imagine God as infinite subject, knowing and loving God's self as infinite object. Every attempt of the divine subject at uniting with itself not only results in a subject–object bifurcation within itself, it also, in striving to effectuate a gapless coincidence, requires a totalized (actual) infinity, and this inevitably leads to the fragile totality as delineated above. The conception of God as perpetually coming to be entails a disjunction between the infinite subject and its infinite object that resists definitive totalization and thereupon attempts at a complete subject–object coincidence. When we examine the configuration of the triune God, the boundary between the first person of the trinity and the second person that includes the universe reinforces the presence of a boundary within the intimate self-relation of divine infinity. I then conclude that sublimity also characterizes God's experience of God's self. For a confirmation of this conclusion, and given that this study focuses on Christian mysticism, the next section will engage with divine infinity as dialectical trinity.

3.3 Dialectical Trinity

In this section, I intend to compare and contrast the structure of ultimate reality as constructed by Underhill, Aristotle, Nicholas of Cusa, traditional Christian theology, and Hegel in order to reconcile dialectical trinity with divine infinity. Our original formulation of the overall dialectic of becoming–being–infinite being has each moment immanent in and transcendent to the one preceding it. It is also postulated

that the intrinsic pattern within infinite being, and in this case the Christian trinity, corresponds to this overall pattern of immanence and transcendence. Underhill would endorse this idea for she says:

> Mystical writers constantly remind us that life as perceived by the human minds show an inveterate tendency to arrange itself in triads: that if they proclaim the number Three in the heavens, they can also point to it as dominating everywhere upon the earth. (*M* p. 110)

Since my previous chapter dwelled largely upon the dialectical triads pervading the earthly realm and the relation between this realm and God, the following discussions will attempt to configure the triadic structure of infinite being.

3.3.1 Configuring the Relational Structure of the Trinity

In her reflections on the Christian trinity of Father–Son–Holy Spirit, Underhill recasts her dyad of being and becoming into being–becoming–desire to render it commensurable with a dialectical interpretation of the triune God. "Desire" (within the context of her reflections on the trinity, Underhill considers "desire" as interchangeable with "love") is added as the third term because it signifies the unitive force between the other two terms (*M* pp. 113–114). When formulating a dialectical Christian trinity as the intrinsic form of infinite being, Underhill arranges the sequence of the first and second persons of the trinity as "being–becoming", which is the reverse of the sequence of our overall dialectic's first and second moments, i.e. "becoming–being". This is done to signify a quasi chronological and progenitive sequence of God the Father (being) as the absolute beginning, begetting God the Son (becoming) – a process of unfolding of being into becoming rather than dynamic becoming consolidating into being. Jesus as God the Son is said to have come from (thereby, after) God the Father. But bear in mind that on account of the substantial identity of the trinitarian persons, the order of the sequence is methodological rather than ontological. Ontologically speaking, there is no single moment/person of the trinity that is said to supersede or precede the others. All three persons are coequal and coeternal. In the light of Underhill's formulation, the Christian trinity can be unravelled as follows: The moment of "becoming" (God the Son) is presented as immanent in being (God the Father) and extending beyond him only in the sense of "going out" as the divine incarnate and the universe. The final moment is desire (Holy Spirit) and is here regarded as immanent in the Father and the Son and universe as the uniting bond of love between them. Desire is only considered as extending beyond these two preceding moments by virtue of being the concluding and synthetic moment of the dialectic. Basically, when we speak of "transcendence" within the frame of the trinity, it is not to be perceived as strict otherness, but more as difference in roles.

As a correlate to the trinity of being (Father)–becoming (Son)–desire (Holy Spirit), Underhill's metaphor of light (Father)–life (Son)–love (Holy Spirit) is

inspired from her research on mysticism (*M* pp. 114–117).[24] *Light*, perceived as uncreated and transcendent, represents the Father that is the source of all things. The incarnate Son is symbolized by *life* as the becoming of the universe vivified by divine manifestation. The divine *light* is transcendent to and simultaneously immanent in this universe. Underhill asserts that the historical incarnation of Jesus Christ is paradigmatic of the perpetual presence of God in this world of flux. There is something significant in the following passage from Underhill's text about the important relation between God the Father and God the Son:

> Life, the Son, hidden Steersman of the Universe; the Logos, Fire, or cosmic Soul of Things. This out-birth or Concept of the Father's Mind, which He possesses within Himself, … is that Word of Creation which, since It is alive and infinite, no formula can contain: the Word eternally "spoken" or generated by the Transcendent Light. (*M* p. 115)

Life as the "out-birth" of the "mind" of light is here said to possess the same infinity and mystery as its originator. The notion of the absolute or infinite engaged in knowing itself predates Christian theology. It goes way back to Aristotle.

Aristotle (4th cent. BCE/1998, bk. Lambda 7 1072a–1073a, pp. 372–375) argues that the prime mover (the Aristotelian "God") is an unchanging changer and, hence, cannot be the object of change by other beings. The prime mover is the cause of change by being the supreme object of desire by all other things. On account of the prime mover's infinity and insusceptibility to being changed by another, this prime mover cannot have physical magnitude, and so, it is immaterial. The only way for it to initiate change is by being the supreme object of desire. Aristotle (4th cent. BCE/1998, bk. Lambda 7 1072b–1073a, pp. 373–374) says that for an object to be supremely desired, it must exist in what he regards as the most desirable state – contemplation or thinking (cf. Aristotle 4th cent. BCE/1976, bk. 10: 7 1177a10–b13, pp. 328–329). Additionally, since this prime mover cannot desire something other than itself, for then it would be changed by the object it desires, it therefore engages in contemplation of itself. It thinks about its own thoughts.

The above quote of Underhill reflects a partial resemblance to Aristotle's idea of the prime mover thinking about itself. Since God is infinite and utterly unique, the only avenue for God to contemplate Godself is when God the Father contemplates himself as God the Son, who originates from the Father and is of the same status as him. Also, by drawing upon Aristotle's postulate of contemplation being the most desirable state, I reason that the Father's thinking about himself through his Son – the infinite, contemplating the infinite – is suffused with infinite desire or *love* between the two, which is represented by the third person of the trinity, the Holy

[24] She cites William Law's (1686–1761) (18th cent./1908, pp. 53–54) symbolic representation of the trinitarian three in one where God the Father is manifested in fire that generates light, representing God the Son. The third person of the trinity, the Holy Spirit, is manifested in the spirit that issues from the fire and light and is constantly united to them. Law's symbols here come from his teacher, the mystic, Jacob Boehme. The trinity of fire, light, and spirit is said to infuse the whole of the universe, manifesting itself in an infinite variety of ways. Underhill proposes to substitute light, life, and love for fire, light, and spirit, respectively. Essentially then, Underhill's two patterns of the trinity are being–becoming–desire and light–life–love (representing Father–Son–Holy Spirit).

Spirit. The fundamental difference between Aristotle's prime mover that thinks about itself through desire, and the Christian trinity, is the inclusion of the other things in the universe in the Christian "economic trinity". While the "immanent trinity" refers to the intrinsic and eternal life of the Father–Son–Holy Spirit structure, excluding any connection with the world, the "economic trinity" comprises the relationship amongst the trinitarian persons and especially the relationship between these persons and our world with its entire history (see Grenz 2000, p. 70).[25] It should be stated here that the theology of Christian trinity is indebted to Aristotle's philosophy (see Rea (ed.) 2009, in particular, Moreland and Craig 2009, pp. 25 and 29; Brower and Rea, p. 131).

The concept of the trinitarian God of Christianity is unmistakably infused with theological speculation. Do the mystics have, as direct and immediate as possible, an experience of the trinity?[26] Or, are their writings on the trinity more a combination of influences from tradition and their own theological reflections? Amongst mystics who report experiencing the triune God is Julian of Norwich (1342–1416). She (1373/1902, 1st revelation 4th chp., p. 10) tells us:

> And in the same shewing, sodeinlie [suddenly] the Trinitie fulfilled my heart most of joy: and so I understood it shall be in heaven without end to all that shall come there. For the Trinitie is God. God is the Trinitie, the Trinitie is our Maker, the Trinitie is our Keeper, the Trinitie is our everlasting Lover, the Trinitie is our endles joy and our blisse, by our Lord Jesu Christ, and in our Lord Jesu Christ: and this was shewed in the first sight, and in all. For when Jesu appeareth, the blessed Trinity is understood as unto my sight.

It is quite probable that this mystical revelation of Julian belongs to the same category as Teresa of Avila's intellectual or imaginative vision or a combination of both.[27] Julian adds that her vision of the trinity is concomitant with her vision of Christ, and it being compared to sight as well as the suddenness of its occurrence, hint at the immediacy of intuition of the vision. In the prefatory overview of her revelations, Julian (1373/1902, chp. 2, p. 4) admits to wanting a bodily (corporeal) vision of Christ in his suffering, but there does not seem to be any confirmation as to whether her first revelation described above did include such a bodily vision. Also, a detailed relational structure of the trinity is absent in that revelation. A mystical insight into the trinity, which displays some elements of an analytical or a doctrinal nature, can be found in Nicholas of Cusa's *The Vision of God*.

Nicholas (1453/1960, pp. 82–83) boldly announces that unless God is a unity of trinity, God cannot be perceived as perfect. He (1453/1960, p. 80) says:

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[25] Karl Rahner (1967/2001, pp. 22–24) argues for an identity between the immanent and the economic trinity in that God's communication and involvement with the world fully reflect (albeit progressively) what God is in God's self. I shall later argue that God's transcendence over the world and the distinction between the immanent infinite and the mediated infinite controvert Rahner's identification thesis.

[26] Anne Hunt (2010) selects and develops the contributions of eight mystics whose writings engage with the mysteries of the trinity.

[27] Teresa's different categories of vision are explained in the previous chapter. Teresa (16th cent./1976, *Spiritual Testimonies* § 29, p. 400) herself claims to have had mainly intellectual visions, but on occasion, imaginative visions, of the blessed trinity.

> Thou hast shown Thyself unto me, Lord, as in the highest degree loveable for Thou art infinitely loveable, my God! Hence Thou couldst never be loved by any in the degree that Thou art loveable, save by an infinite lover. … And from these two powers ariseth an infinite bond of love, between the infinite lover and the infinitely loveable, and this bond may not be multiplied. … I perceive in Thee, my God, love that loveth and love that is loveable; and by the very fact that I perceive in Thee these twain, I perceive the bond between them.
>
> Thou too, O loving God – since from Thee cometh the loveable God, as a son from a father – art the Father of all beings by reason that Thou art God, the loving Father of the loveable God Thy Son. … even as the act of loving uniteth in love the lover and the beloved. And this bond is called Spirit … (p. 93).

I shall assume that the words "shown" and "perceive" indicate that Nicholas probably had some form of a direct encounter. Apparently, in meeting God as infinite love, Nicholas also meets the implied triadic components of this love: the lover, the loved, and the bond of love. Nicholas concludes that one cannot perfectly perceive God without perceiving this pattern of a unified trinity, which represents the Father (lover), Son (loved), and Holy Spirit (bond of love). Intriguingly, Augustine (354–430), a veritable influence on Nicholas, in accounting for the coequal status of the Holy Spirit with the other two trinitarian persons, explains the trinity as follows: "One who loves Him who is from Himself, and One who loves Him from whom He is, and Love itself. And if this last is nothing, how is 'God love'?" (Augustine 5th cent./1887, "On the Holy Trinity" bk. 6 chp. 5, p. 189). The Son comes from the Father and "love itself" refers to the Holy Spirit. Note, though, that Augustine's trinity depicts a mutual love between the Father and the Son, while in Nicholas', it is the Father who loves the Son. Nicholas' mystical encounter with the trinity may have been influenced by his prior knowledge of Augustine's account. Furthermore, Nicholas' conception of the trinity echoes the Aristotelian prime mover's thinking and desiring itself. Such a conception of the trinity is not antithetical to traditional dogma. There are, though, subtle variations amongst theorizations on the trinity. One such theorization comes from Hegel.

Hegel's articulation of the Christian trinity within the triadic dialectic is pertinent to and particularly interesting for our present discussion. He (1827/2006) writes:

> These are the three ways by which the subject is related to God, the three modes of God's determinate being for subjective spirit. … the first is the realm of universality; the second, the realm of particularity; the third, that of singularity [or individuality]. (p. 415)
>
> (1) First, in and for itself, God in his eternity before the creation of the world and outside the world.
> (2) Second, God creates the world and posits the separation. He creates both nature and finite spirit. … God is essentially the reconciling to himself of what is alien, what is particular, what is posited in separation from him. He must restore to freedom and to his truth what is alien, what has fallen away in the idea's self-diremption, in its falling away from itself. …
> (3) In the third place, through this process of reconciliation, spirit has reconciled what it distinguished from itself in its act of diremption, of primal division, and thus it is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit (present) in its community. (pp. 415–416)

In a footnote to the above excerpts, we see the manner in which the three modes of God's being, including the ways in which finite realities relate to God, correspond to the trinitarian persons:

> This is the first relationship, which is only for the thinking subject, and is occupied only with the pure content. This is *the kingdom of the Father*. … The second determination is *the kingdom of the Son*, … If, according to the first determination, God begets only a son, here he brings forth nature. … [Finally,] the transition to *the kingdom of the Spirit*, … . (Hegel 1827/2006, pp. 416–417 footnote # 67)[28]

In essence, Hegel identifies God the Father with the initial moment of abstract universality and God the Son, together with nature, as the moment of particularity, that is, the moving out of the concept of universality into its components – the Son and the universe. Finally, it is the Spirit that represents the moment of individuality, the union of the universal with the particular. The immediate universality differentiates or particularizes itself through the Son and the world and then returns to itself through the Holy Spirit. There is here the imagery of Father begetting Son and universe, and the reuniting force between them is the Holy Spirit. This imagery reflects Hegel's dialectic of the primal moment begetting differences within it and then striving to resolve or synthesize these differences at a higher plane.[29]

Underhill can be compared with Aristotle, Nicholas, and Hegel vis-à-vis the trinitarian divinity. Briefly, Underhill's symbolization of light, life, and love opposes the aloofness of Aristotle's God and partially overlaps with Nicholas' and Hegel's dialectical trinities. For Underhill, God the Father, as light, signifies an all-pervasive infinite. The metaphor of light, as originating from a source and pervading all space, connotes the sense of God the Father as the source of the being of everything and as present within this totality (see *M* p. 115). This metaphor synthesizes Aristotle's prime mover as the original *cause* of all things, with Hegel's absolute that differentiates itself and is *present* in all things. Underhill is also strongly influenced by Augustine, for whom the Holy Spirit is the mutual love between the Father and the Son (*M* pp. 116–117).

The particularization of this universal light into the second component of the trinity, that is, life, has two modalities: one, as the Son, the coequal to the Father, and, two, the universe, within which the possibility of moving away from this light and life exists. Underhill, like Hegel, presents life (the Son) as emanating from the Father. The uniqueness of this particular emanation is that both light and life, as Father and Son, respectively, are coeternal. The Son, in this sense, is of one substance and coeternal with the Father. In another sense, the Son is immersion of

[28] The footnote contains passages recovered from Hegel's later, 1831, lectures on the philosophy of religion.

[29] This schema can be similarly stated in this form: Hegel's dialectic of the trinity is God the Father as the universal and undifferentiated *identity* of all beings, moving out into God the Son as representing the particularization and *differentiation* of the other as Jesus Christ and as the universe of all things, and, finally, God the Holy Spirit as representing the synthesis (the moment of individuality) of the prior two moments – the *unity of identity and difference*. Hegel's (1817/1991, § 115, p. 181) logic of the absolute avoids any one-sidedness of either identity or difference. Instead, its true significance resides in its synthesis of identity and difference.

divinity as Jesus Christ in a particular time in history and as the presence of God in the universe as a whole. There is in this latter sense an endorsement of our temporal universe: the becoming of immanence and the presence of the infinite divine within the universe. Underhill's symbol of "life" as the second person of the trinity has an affinity with Hegel's three significations of this second person. Hegel's (1827/2006) Christology can be inferred from the following statements:

> [T]hat the other, which we have also called "Son", obtains the determination of the other as such – that this other exists as a free being for itself, and that it appears as something actual, as something that exists outside of and apart from God. … This other, released as something free and independent, is *the world* as such. … The finite world is the side of distinction … hence it divides into the *natural world* and the world of *finite spirit*. (pp. 434–436)

> For the Son is other than the Father, and this otherness is difference – otherwise it would not be spirit. But the other is (also) God and has the entire fullness of divine nature within itself. (pp. 453–454)

> [T]he unity of divine and human nature must appear in just one human being. … the unity in question must appear for others as a singular human being set apart; … (p. 455)

According to Hegel, the second person of the trinity encompasses (1) the universe of physical nature and finite conscious beings, (2) the Son of God as coequal and coeternal with God the Father, and (3) the historical Jesus Christ.

This second person of the trinity has a decisive bearing upon the infinity–finitude relationship. Underhill's and Hegel's basic conceptions of God the Son corroborate this assertion, and they are quite consistent with traditional Christology. Pannenberg (1991, p. 65) offers us a handy sketch of this Christology:

> The Son of God is still considered the second person of the trinity, but while the Son became incarnate only in Jesus of Nazareth, he is conceived at the same time as being at work in the whole creation and especially in the life of human beings created in the image of God.

The historical event of Jesus Christ as incarnate divine, and nature, especially humanity, as participant in this second person of the trinity, is identical to meanings (3) and (1) from Hegel, respectively. As for Hegel's (2), Pannenberg (1991, p. 66) is not remiss in emphasizing the "concept of the Son of God as eternal correlate of the Father". Sharing in the same substance and being coeternal with the Father, the Son includes and extends beyond the historical event of Jesus Christ to encompass the whole of history.[30]

[30] It might be of interest to the reader to examine the debate between Slavoj Žižek and John Milbank (2009). The debate touches upon, amongst several other philosophico-theological issues, the human–divine incarnation – Jesus Christ – viewed as a monstrous unity, a term traceable to Hegel (1827/2006, p. 457). The unity is a monstrous or shocking unification of two diametrically opposed categories. Žižek (2009) argues that Christ represents a divine–human mixture that coheres to a dialectical movement from the Father to the Son and, in Christ's death, a radical announcement of the death of God, allowing for the emergence of the Spirit in the human community (pp. 31–33). Žižek views the Christian trinity as a dialectic of negation, absolutely bereft of any divine transcendence beyond humanity. For Milbank (2009), the monstrous union discloses the "paradox" of God as the eternal relationship of infinite love between God the Father and God the Son within the divine as well as expressed in the incarnation and creation (p. 186). Milbank, who is influenced by William Desmond's notion of the metaxological, claims to distinguish himself from Žižek by

For many Christian mystics, divine incarnation is not relegated solely to a particular period in history, but is something which is renewed in the person of the mystic who represents this divine immersion in finite humanity and in the world (*M* p. 118).[31] Underhill explains why the incarnation is significant to the mystic:

> [T]hese mystics see in the historic life of Christ an epitome – or if you will, an exhibition – of the essentials of all spiritual life. There they see dramatized not only the cosmic process of the Divine Wisdom, but also the inward experience of every soul on her way to union with that Absolute "to which the whole creation moves." (*M* p. 121)

The specific event of the immersion of God in history in the incarnation provides us with a paradigm of the self–divine relationship. Since this Son is coeternal and of one substance with the Father, embedded in his incarnate life is the emulable model for the mystical life.

For Underhill, the birth of Christ in the world is archetypal of the birth of the absolute in the life of every being in the cosmos (*M* pp. 118–122). It signifies the presence of the absolute in the world, not just during the period of the life of the Son but also the life and history of the world. We can infer from this that even without a belief in the incarnation of God in Christ, the driving force towards seeking mystical union can also originate from a belief in the presence of the absolute in this world. Underhill's more inclusive symbol of life captures the combination of the incarnate God *lived* in a specific period in history and the perpetual presence of God within this *life* of the universe. Converged in the human–divine historical Christ are the two essential natures: human being originated from and sustained by divine being and the substantial divine being itself.

Another significance of the second person of the trinity is his capacity to imbue the absolute with personality. Underhill's symbol of *life*, as the second person of the trinity, presents an image of God that facilitates an enriching intersubjective mystical relationship. She writes:

> Most often, though not always, the Christian mystic identifies the personal and intimate Lover of the soul, of whose elusive presence he is so sharply aware, with the person of Christ; the unknowable and transcendent Godhead with that *eterna luce*, the Undifferentiated One …. (*M* p. 344)

Semantically speaking, Underhill's metaphor of "life" is not strictly in reference to human life. Indeed, the signifier "Son" is a more precise reference to personal being.

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pitting paradox against dialectic, but illustrations of his paradox can very much pass for that of a dialectic. For an account of the metaxological, see Desmond 2008, pp. 116–117. Even the Thomistic (via Dionysius the Areopagite) triadic procedure of affirming a quality in God, denying its similarity to its presence in finite beings, and reaffirming its presence in God in its most eminent form, which Milbank (2009, pp. 194 and 204) invokes, is manifestly dialectical. I believe that both Žižek's and Milbank's theses are dialectical, though of different patterns. Žižek's lacks transcendence. Milbank's speaks of excess in terms of eminence, but there is little emphasis on the aspect of God's otherness that eclipses any dialectic (or paradox).

[31] Bernard McGinn (2006, p. 402) comments that the re-enactment of the incarnation, called the birthing of Christ in the soul, though prominently associated with Eckhart, is also found in the writings of patristic theologians such as Origen.

Nevertheless, the first and second persons of the trinity allow for two different types of mystical relationship: metaphysical and personal. Experiencing God as pervasive infinite reality is representative of a *metaphysical* sort of mystical encounter, while having a sense of a profound intersubjective meeting with God is of the *personal* type.

Whether metaphysical or personal, a common element present in both encounters is "love" in its unitive function. This brings me to the third person of the trinity. Whether it is Underhill's metaphor of "love", or Hegel's "spirit", or the doctrinal "Holy Spirit", it is possible to identify this third person of the trinity as a synthesis of the prior two. There are some distinctions in the manner in which love, spirit, and Holy Spirit function as a synthetic moment. In the following, Underhill lays out the position and nature of love/Holy Spirit in the trinitarian complex:

> [T]his personal Spirit of Love, *il desiro e il velle*, represents the relation between the two [the first and second persons of the trinity], and constitutes the very character of God. … And of this meeting is born the third Person, between the Father and the Son, that is the Holy Spirit, their mutual Love." Proceeding, according to Christian doctrine, from Light and Life, the Father and Son – implicit, that is, in both the Absolute Source and dynamic flux of things – this divine spirit of desire is found enshrined in our very selfhood; and is the agent by which that selfhood is merged in the Absolute Self. (*M* pp. 116–117)

As stated above, the Holy Spirit is the mutual love between the Father and the Son.[32] If I add to this proposition the established doctrine that all three persons of the trinity are symmetrically equal in substance, I now have a rather intriguing situation in which the relation between two beings is itself a distinct substantial being. Perhaps, we ought not to perceive the Holy Spirit as substance but more as dynamic force. Underhill describes it as "the very character of God". But, the Holy Spirit is more than just a character of God. It is God. It is at this point that difficulties pertaining to internal conceptual coherence assail our concept of the trinity.

I do not think there is an instance in the finite world in which the unitive bond between two entities is itself substantially equal to the relating parties. The mutual love between, say, a father and his son cannot be said to be of identical nature and substance to either the father or the son. Admittedly, by virtue of the two parties' participation in love's dynamics, there is a union of wills, but the mutual love between them is very much a distinct reality; a reality, depending upon how love is defined, is generally not a solid, independent being. Assuming that what is impossible for finite beings is possible for divine infinity, there is still another difficulty to contend with. The Holy Spirit as love between God the Father and God the Son is a dynamic rather than substantive reality. However, the Holy Spirit is also regarded as the third *person* of the trinity. As person, the Holy Spirit is a substantive, though it may share the same substance as the other divine persons. As a person distinct from

[32] This idea is strongly Augustinian. Even though I have relied upon this description of the Holy Spirit in this present discussion, there are interesting and detailed discourses surrounding other interpretations of the concept of the Holy Spirit, such as the *filioque*, as proceeding from the Father and the Son (as stated in the quote above), and the mainly Eastern Orthodox view of the Holy Spirit as proceeding solely from the Father (see Coffey, 1990).

the Father and the Son, how are we to characterize the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Father and the one between the Holy Spirit and the Son? If the love between the Holy Spirit and the Father is also another Holy Spirit, we now confront the "third man" problem of generating infinite distinct Holy Spirits. Holy Spirit_1 between Father and Son, in relating to the Son, generates Holy Spirit_2, Holy Spirit_2's love for the Father becomes Holy Spirit_3, and so forth! Nicholas of Cusa is aware of this problem, and so, immediately upon identifying the Holy Spirit as the infinite bond of love between the Father and the Son, he adds: "and this bond may not be multiplied".[33] For Nicholas, there is only one infinite bond of love.

There is no easy solution to the above difficulties concerning the internal coherence of the trinity. The problem arises mainly from the definition of the Holy Spirit as mutual love between the Father and the Son and, at the same time, as a substantial person. But to reject this definition and simply confine the Holy Spirit to a distinct person apart from the Father and the Son would, first, jettison a very important aspect of divinity – as dynamic spiritual forces of love, thought, and causation – and, second, invent a third divine person who is remotely, if at all, connected to the first and second persons.[34] Still, if we take the Holy Spirit solely as the love between the Father and the Son, would this not render the Holy Spirit *dependent* upon the other two trinitarian persons and, therefore, less divine than them? By the same reasoning, one might also say that since the Son issues from the Father, the Son is dependent on and less divine than the Father. As counter-argument, all three persons have to be conceived as contemporaneous. This means that prior to the historical advent of the Son and the Holy Spirit, the love between the coeternal Son and coeternal Father constitutes the coeternal Holy Spirit. Perhaps, a more viable option would be to retain the signification of Holy Spirit as love (in its broadest sense to include creativity, inspiration, and so forth), but remove from the term "person" any strict notion of a substantive entity.[35] In this way, as unifying force between the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit is not a person who engages in an interpersonal relationship with the Father and the Son. We thereby avoid the troublesome problem of a proliferation of Holy Spirits as distinct persons.

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[33] See above for the full quote from Nicholas of Cusa (1453/1960, p. 80).

[34] Tillich dismisses the importance of number three as signifying three distinct persons. He (1951, p. 228) states that in the history of theology of the trinity there were times when emphases had swung from three to two (leaving out the Holy Spirit) and even four (the addition of the relation between the Father and a unified substance of Father-Son-Spirit). For Tillich, trinitarian monotheism is the view that the three persons are *qualities* of the one divine reality. It would not be reasonable to throw in every conceivable attribute regarded as qualities of God into a plural monotheism. I think the choice of number three is not as easily dismissed as Tillich assumes, for it obviously has its basis in the gospel narrative of God the Father sending his Son and, later, the Holy Spirit.

[35] The expression *tres personae, una substantia* (Latin) in reference to the trinity comes from Tertullian (160–230) (3rd cent./1885, "Against Praxeas" p. 598). Often translated as "three persons, one substance", it would be better interpreted as "three *personae*, one substance" because "*personae*", meaning face, mask, and countenance, is less likely to evoke the image of a tritheistic doctrine of three persons as three gods (see Tillich 1967, p. 190).

As mentioned above, an important postulation relevant to our analysis here is that how we think about the dialectic of being and becoming as active in this finite world is isomorphic to how we think about the inherent dialectic of infinite reality. And, since, as consistently maintained, transcendence is present in this earthly realm, we would imagine that transcendence also pervades the internal being of infinite reality. Given that the immanent or intrinsic trinity deals solely with the single-substance three-person divinity, the symmetric relation amongst these three persons renders the feature of transcendence as different roles amongst them. Additionally, for the economic trinity that includes all things finite, transcendence intersperses the complex network of processes within this constantly changing world as well as the infinite–finite nexuses. In particular, the incarnate God and the all-pervasive Holy Spirit form the principal template of immanence–transcendence that sustains the possibility of mystical intimacy. Hence, the infinite being of economic trinity is considered to be identical in structure to that of the finite realm wherein the dialectic of immanence and transcendence subsists. To refine further my argument, I turn to a critical analysis of Hegel's dialectical trinity, which will help considerably in illuminating the intricacies of the dialectically patterned structure of infinite being.[36]

3.3.2 Hegel's Infinity and Trinity

Hegel's deductions on infinity and finitude are found in his *Encyclopaedia Logic*. The common understanding of infinity as extending perpetually without beginning or end receives an unmasking of its alleged false veneer by Hegel (1817/1991, § 94, pp. 149–150), who regards this form of infinity bad or spurious. There is an apparent dubiousness in the way Hegel attempts to distinguish between spurious and true infinites. He (1817/1991, § 94, pp. 149–150) describes the spurious infinite as a "negation of the finite" and the true infinite as "non-finite". Are they not the same? I shall try to shed some light on the matter by offering an interpretation. When Hegel sees the spurious infinite as a negation of the finite, the stress is placed on the work of negation (the first dialectical negation). He considers the ongoing negation of one finite being followed by another and the negation of the totality of finite beings as the spurious infinite. However, when he defines the true infinite as non-finite, he intends to highlight the affirmative quality of the infinite. Hegel (1817/1991, § 91 additions, p. 147) regards the finite as negation – as *not* its other.[37] He (1817/1991, § 94 addition, p. 150) then argues that the true infinite as non-finite is the negation of the negation (the second dialectical negation) and, hence, an affirmation. The true infinite for Hegel is something positive.

[36] Tillich (1951, p. 56) thinks that dialectic, far from being a form of contradictory reasoning, helps us unravel the mystery of the trinity.

[37] The "additions" in the *Encylopaedia* were placed there by the editorial committee that published the first edition of Hegel's *Werke* (Works).

In Hegel's assessment, infinite space and time are perpetually expansive in magnitude and sequential events, but finite nonetheless. Imagine a space of limitless number of points next to one another, and imagine the progression of sequential events without beginning and end; each point/event is bounded by another finite point/event adjacent to it. Therefore, according to Hegel, "infinite" space and time remain trapped within the realm of finitude. He (1817/1991, § 94, p. 149) characterizes the spurious infinite as the mere *negation* of the finite. There are two possible ways to interpret this: (1) The negation of a particular finite entity (say a point in space or an event in time) leads to another finite entity, and this finite entity is itself negated, and the negations continue endlessly, but never reach anything truly infinite. (2) If we group together every finite thing into this class called "finitude", its negation would be another class called "infinity". Now, since infinity is bounded by finitude (a boundary separates finitude and infinity), infinity is then finite.

The spurious infinite of endlessness, as described above, is recognizable as the mathematical infinite discussed earlier in this chapter. If we take the enumeration of consecutive numbers to infinity, undoubtedly, each number enumerated is bounded by the numbers preceding and following it, but the perpetuity of this enumeration does indicate an open rather than bounded end. What is essentially disconcerting for Hegel is that this perpetual sequential negation does not provide an affirmative closure to the whole process.[38]

There are two steps to comprehending Hegel's true or genuine infinity. The first step is described as follows:

> In its relationship to an other, something is already an other itself vis-à-vis the latter; and therefore, since what it passes into is entirely the same as what passes into it – neither having any further determination than this identical one of being an *other* – in its passing into another, something only comes together *with itself*; and this relation to itself in the passing and in the other is *genuine Infinity* (1817/1991, § 95, pp. 150–151).

Hegel is using the instance of a substantial being transiting from one mode of being to another as a representation of "being for itself" or self-determination. Let me use an example as an explanatory aid. If x_1 represents David prior to earning his diploma in arts and x_2, the same David after earning his diploma in arts, then x_2 is the other to x_1. When x_1 passes into or transits into x_2, the otherness of x_2 to x_1 is now negated for x_1 has become x_2. x_1 is said to self-determine into its other (x_2) which, hence, ceases to be its other. This first aspect of Hegel's true infinite posits itself as a dialectic of negation of negation within a frame of self-determination. As mentioned above, Hegel regards a finite entity as something negative because as finite, it is *not* something else. When this entity as negative to its other becomes its other, its negative is said to be negated. This double negative is essentially an affirmative, and hence, by this stroke of logical manoeuvring, Hegel breaks away from the perpetual negation of the spurious infinite. The true infinite for Hegel is actually an affirmation and a closure of the negative dialectic in a frame of self-determination. In other

[38] Hegel (1817/1991, § 94, p. 150) sees this perpetuity as tedious and lacking concrete reality on account of its continuous negations.

words, the true infinite obliterates any of its otherness through a process in which its otherness is subsumed into itself.

It is interesting that the starting point of this dialectic is not an affirmative for here a determinate being is viewed negatively as "*not* something else".[39] Obviously, one can challenge Hegel's privileging of the negative quality for any determinate being. One can assert that a finite entity is also affirmatively something. When it becomes something else, this positivity is negated. It might be that Hegel avoided the affirmative as a starting point because the negative of a positive entity is its indeterminate other. Hegel regards this procedure as antithetical to self-determination for it does not capture his intention of conveying the idea that the true infinite is something concrete and affirmative and whose other as negative is overcome. Starting with the affirmative and transiting to the negative is a scheme that coheres with the perpetual negation of the spurious infinite – the perpetual open-endedness of continuous negations of one positive followed by another.

The second step to comprehending Hegel's true infinite is found in the following account of his (1817/1991, § 95, p. 152):

> After the above consideration of the nullity of the antithesis set up by the understanding between the finite and the infinite … one can easily fall back upon the expression that the finite and the infinite are therefore *One*, that the True, or the genuine Infinity, is determined and expressed as the *unity* of the infinite and the finite. And this expression does indeed contain something correct, but it is equally misleading and false …

Since, as detailed above, setting finite and the infinite as negative of one another leads to the infinite being finite (self-contradictory), therefore, by the indirect proof method, Hegel concludes that the finite and the infinite are not antithetical to one another. The true infinite is a union of the spurious infinite (as other to the finite) and the finite. It is convenient to picture this notion of the true infinite as either (1) two separate classes of distinct qualities – finitude and spurious infinite – and the true infinite is the union or sum of both these classes or (2) as having the finite immersed within the infinite. The problems with these pictures are that for (1) the finite is still set apart from its spurious infinite and therefore not sublated, while for (2) we might imagine that infinity is compromised or "diluted" by the immersion of finitude within it (see Hegel 1817/1991, § 95, p. 152).

For Hegel, true infinity as unity of the infinite with the finite is best perceived within the context of self-determination (as illustrated in the first step above). A self-determining infinity would be all-encompassing, universal, incorporative of its differentiated particulars, and self-sufficient. As advanced by Hegel (1830/1971, § 381, pp. 8–9), the abstract absolute as infinite dialectically self-determines to the moment of nature (its finitude) and returns to itself as spirit.[40] The finite is a moment

[39] The idea that determination is negation is borrowed from Benedict Spinoza (1632–1677) (1662/1891, p. 370). Apparently, the translators of Hegel's *Encyclopaedia Logic* seem to think that Hegel actually interpreted Spinoza out of context and wrongly assumed that Spinoza subscribes to the proposition that all determinations are negations (see Hegel 1817/1991, p. 326 note # 15).

[40] Hegel's "abstract infinite" refers to the primordial and undifferentiated state of the absolute; see Chap. 2 of this book where Hegel's concept of "pure being" is explicated.

in this dialectical movement, and this finite as nature is one with the infinite, and yet, in its moment as the negation of abstract infinity, it is regarded as distinct from the infinite. Spirit signifies the third moment of the self-determination process of the true infinite. According to Hegel (1817/1991, § 96, p. 153), self-consciousness, unlike inanimate matter, possesses the capacity to contain nature within itself as conscious ideas. In sum, true infinity is the dialectic of abstract infinity (corresponding to God the Father)–nature (corresponding to God the Son and the universe)–spirit (corresponding to the Holy Spirit). Each moment of this dialectic interpenetrates the other moments. Finite nature is identical to and different from abstract infinity, the primal moment from which nature originates. Since finite spirit (human consciousness) also issues from the infinite, it is then identical to and different from nature and abstract infinity.[41] Hegel's absolute self-communicates itself through the incarnate divine (the Son) and the history of the world and returns to itself through spirit. A critical analysis of Hegel's trinity clearly tells us that this is a trinity profoundly resistant to any transcendent other that cannot be totalized into an immanent system.[42]

Before proceeding further with this analysis, I intend to highlight some important points: Nicholas of Cusa's, Underhill's, and Hegel's dialectical trinities do not establish a tritheistic doctrine of God. There is only one integral infinite reality, but with aspects that are dialectically related to one another. The foundational structure of mystical relationship, as consistently maintained in this book, is one in which divine infinity includes–exceeds finitude and has that aspect within it that excludes finitude. Hegel's true infinite coheres with metaphysical/actual infinity. However, I shall argue that within the context of the economic trinity wherein our universe of finite beings is incorporated, it is the potential infinity (regarded by Hegel as spurious) that best characterizes this trinity.

Hegel's dialectic of true infinity is inimical to the form of infinity as infinite otherness or transcendence. Nature's place in relation to the larger scheme of the true infinite is found in the following statements of Hegel (1827/1970, § 247 addition, p. 205):

> This then is the position of nature within the whole; its determinateness lies in the self-determination of the Idea, by which it posits difference, another, within itself, whole maintaining infinite good in its indivisibility, and imparting its entire content in what it provides for this otherness. God disposes therefore, while remaining equal to Himself; each of these moments is itself the whole Idea and must be posited as the divine totality.

As explained earlier, the Hegelian trinity posits God the Father as the absolute or totality that completely differentiates itself (as abstract "Idea") by mediating into

[41] The difference between Hegel's spurious and true infinites now draws into focus: for the spurious infinite, every finite being is consecutively negated, and the finite as a whole is negated and set as other to the infinite. For the true infinite, every finite being self-determines itself into its other (it becomes its other), and the totality of reality is infinite because it self-determines into nature and returns via spirit.

[42] William Desmond (2003, pp. 107–108) energetically puts across this point in his *Hegel's God: A Counterfeit Double?*

the Son of God, and *nature*, and then returning to itself as the moment of resolution – the Holy Spirit working through the human community of finite spirits. Hegel (1827/2006, p. 405) asserts:

> Consciousness is precisely the mode of finitude of spirit: distinction is present here. … Spirit must have consciousness, distinction, otherwise it is not spirit; accordingly, this is the moment of finitude in it. It must have the character of finitude within itself – that may seem blasphemous.

Considering the limitations of human consciousness, the return of the true infinite to itself through the infinite or Holy Spirit would inevitably be compromised by finite spirit's deficiency.

Hegel's self-contained totality projects the concept of the immanent infinite/absolute. Some serious problems arise from this arrangement. If, as Hegel stresses, the infinite is truly infinite only when it determines itself through nature and returns to itself through its mediation in human consciousness, it would appear that without nature and finite spirit, concrete and true infinity would not be realized. Would this dependence on finitude annul the true infinite's self-sufficiency and determination? It follows then that Hegel's true infinite cannot escape the problem of self-contradiction. To prevent infinity from being eternally incarcerated within the realm of pure abstraction, it needs the moments of finite nature and finite spirit to transform it into the concrete or true infinite. However, this need ironically renders infinity dependent upon finitude. Moreover, it is open to question whether finite consciousness has the capacity to step up to its duty of being the perfect instrument of infinity's return into itself.

Hegel (1817/1991, § 36, p. 75) argues that when we infer the existence of the infinite from the existence of nature, it does not imply that nature is the determinant of the infinite. Inferring from an observable consequent to its probable determinant is inductive reasoning. But, I think that when a consequent is said to be the *necessary* outcome of a determinant, what follows is that without the consequent, there would be no determinant. Hence, if nature is a necessary outflow of the true infinite, then without nature there would not be any true infinite.[43] The only way to preserve the self-dependency of the true infinite is to assign it a freedom either to move out of its abstractness into nature or remain as abstract infinity. However, eternally remaining as abstract infinite is obviously not Hegel's definition of the true infinite or God.

The German mystic, Eckhart (14th cent./1992, Sermons and collations chp. 11: "The hour cometh and now is", p. 43–44), might agree with Hegel on the necessity of the universe to God when he argues:

> [I]f we are Son, we must have the Father: none can say he is a son unless he has a father, nor father unless he has a son. … The son's life hangs upon the father, and the father's on the son … the plain truth is that of necessity God is bound to cherish us just as though his Godhood were at stake, as in fact it is. God can no more do without us than we can without him, nay even if we turned from God it would be impossible for God to turn his back on us.

[43] Curiously enough, Hegel (1827/2006, p. 407) does indeed see the progression from abstract infinity to nature and then returning to concrete infinity through spirit as a logical *necessity*.

In the economic trinity, the universe is an essential component of the second person of the trinity, i.e. the Son of God. Without the Son, the concept of the Father would be meaningless. But, the universe is just one component of the Son. There is still the eternal Son of God of the immanent trinity. Considering that the universe is finite with a definite beginning and thereby contingent, the argument that it is a necessary condition for God's existence lacks persuasive force. However, it may be advanced that God's perfection can be compromised if there were no universe. The assumption here is that the infinite attains perfection when it includes the historical progression of the universe. In Hegelian terminology, the concrete infinite with its differentiation into the universe is of a higher order of infinity than the abstract and undifferentiated infinite. This suggestion deserves consideration, but let me first examine William Desmond's reconstruction of Hegel's trinity.

Desmond (2003, pp. 116–117) postulates an alternative to Hegel's self-contained trinitarian infinity. This alternative takes the following shape:

> Father as origin and surplus good is overdetermined; Son as expression of the surplus good is also overdetermined; Spirit as communal intermediation, or the love of this secret life of the surplus good, is also overdetermined. No holistic logic of self-completing and self-determination will do justice to this excessive communication from full to full to full: from overfull to overfull to overfull. This agapeic God is overwhole. The overfull is in the origin, hence there is no lacking indefiniteness needing determinacy, and mediating its self-mediation.[44]

The Hegelian self-determination of God the Father through the second person and returning via the third is viewed by Desmond (2003) as self-centred (erotic) love because it springs from a lack, needing fulfilment.[45] Instead of conceptualizing an infinite, dependent upon the finite to fulfil its need for self-determination, Desmond proposes infinite overdeterminations amongst all three members of the trinity. He labels this movement of overdetermination as agapeic love. Each of the three trinitarian persons has an infinite excess of love. There is no implication of a lack, requiring fulfilment. Desmond adds that in agapeic love, goodness is gratuitously extended to the finite world without any self-serving motive. This love respects the otherness of finitude by not encasing it within a total scheme of self-determination and self-reconciliation of the infinite. In Desmond's trinity above, the finite universe is freely created, freely endowed with goodness, and freely related to as an other. Within this framework, it appears that the already overfull trinity has nothing lacking in it that requires filling up with the finite universe and its history. Nevertheless, I should think that in order for divine infinity to give gratuitously in agapeic love to the other, there must, in the first place, be an other.

Within the immanent trinity of coeternal and coequal persons who are of the same substance, one is not entitled to posit that having the Father, Son, and Holy

[44] "In agape [explains Desmond], there is a going towards the other but not from a lack in the lover but from an excess or surplus of good that gives from itself, gives beyond itself to the other" (p. 40).

[45] Erotic love, defines Desmond, springs from a desire for the other "in which one seeks and finds something that fulfills what in oneself is needed but lacking" (p. 40).

Spirit is *better than* having just the Holy Spirit and the Son or just the Holy Spirit (see Augustine 5th cent./1887, "On the Holy Trinity" bk. 7 chp. 6, p. 214). It may be assumed that the immanent trinity is an integral system completely perfect. However, the economic trinity that includes the historical growth of the universe cannot rightly be considered an already perfect reality. The denizens of this world of constant change have a responsibility to improve their world. It is the economic trinity that makes demands on our moral capacity and responsibility. Just on this score, I agree with Eckhart and Hegel that God needs us.

With regard to the problem of finite spirit's limitations in fulfilling the infinite spirit's return to itself, one possible way to circumvent this problem is to postulate a process of fulfilment that extends through history in infinite time. Although Hegel considers any infinite progression along a single line as bad infinite because it never arrives at closure, there is a problem with regard to his own conviction as to the progress of the infinite in human history. It is debatable whether Hegel was convinced that his philosophy encapsulates the closure of the whole progress. It seems to me more reasonable to assume that the process of the infinite's self-consciousness is still ongoing and, hence, progressing infinitely (spurious infinite of Hegel).

If the dialectical progress of the infinite's self-consciousness takes place within finite history and an inevitable gap exists between finite consciousness and infinite consciousness, then transcendence, as unravelled by our exposition on the mediating and individualizing dialectics, would unavoidably permeate Hegel's dialectic of infinite(undifferentiated)–nature–spirit. Despite Hegel's aversion to any perpetual movement towards an unattainable realization or synthesis, it appears that this pattern of infinity seems inevitable. In Hegel's opinion, the spurious infinite of relentless consecutive negations vexes our comprehension and patience. He (1817/1991, § 94, p. 150) says:

> Of course, it is also usually maintained that thinking must surrender as soon as it begins to deal with this infinity. Well, one thing is certainly correct, and that is that we must ultimately abandon the attempt to pursue this consideration further and further; but we do so not because of the sublimity, but rather because of the tedium of this occupation. It is tedious to go on and on in the consideration of this infinite progression because the same thing is continually repeated.

When "sublimity" surfaces in this context, Hegel probably has in mind Kant's mathematical sublime of the subject's confrontation with an object of seemingly illimitable magnitude. Infinity as endless reiterations of consecutive finite negations is not Hegel's idea of the true infinite, and though this endless process does distress our intellectual powers in a sublime (Kantian) way, Hegel avers that one would abandon this endeavour simply because it is tedious. More importantly, the whole notion of endless negations does not sit well with Hegel's sovereign principle of a closed circuit of the infinite's self-consciousness. But in light of the infinite's reliance on finite nature and spirit to fulfil its project, and that these finite beings can only fulfil it piecemeal and over time, it seems that the mediation through endless negations, in spite of Hegel's aversion to it, is inescapable.

Perpetual negations need not necessarily be tedious. Tedium arises when the same thing is confronted over and over again, and in this sense tedium cannot

constitute the sublime. The development of mystical relationship via the processes of the mediating dialectic and the individualizing dialectic can indeed be sublime. This sublimity is a signalling of the presence of an infinite that offers that which is perpetually new. The endless repetition of the same thing is far from sublime, but if God is infinite with infinite categories, each having an infinite content, then mystical experience and relationship ought to be sublime, not tedious. I wish to add here that while the meeting with a semblance of an infinite object can trigger a sublime experience in the subject, it is likely that once the subject is habituated to the experienced object, the sublime effect evaporates. A person, who has stood facing a thundering waterfall on numerous occasions, may eventually not feel the threat and awe of sublimity.

Nevertheless, given God's unqualified or plenary infinity, there is no way that anyone can possibly be habituated to the experience of God. Consequently, it is plausible that sublimity is an intrinsic property of God. In saying this, I do not mean that everyone, including infants, can have a sublime mystical experience. God as sublime implies that on the side of God, God's infinity ensures its perpetual sublimity and will always evoke a sublime experience in a subject appropriately predisposed. In certain respects, the infinity of endless negations probably has a greater potential for sublimity than the Hegelian closed circuit of infinite self-consciousness. Qualities like open-endedness, perpetual newness, and continual unattainability have the potential to unsettle our faculties' need for mastery and control of our surroundings and at the same time appeal to our innate attraction to the mysterious and transcendent.

If, as argued, perpetual finite negations form the way in which Hegel's true infinite can possibly return to itself from its other, then we may expect excesses or gaps between the immediate (undifferentiated) infinite and its progressing mediations (its return). Hegel might object saying that airtight identities exist between the progressive mediations through finitude and the immediate infinite. But, this would be inconsistent with his admission that the ideal and the actual do not always cohere. In his political philosophy, he acknowledges the presence of merely existing (rather than *actual*) states which do not reflect the principles of right.[46] Therefore, it would be difficult for Hegel to defend a proposition claiming a perfect fit between immediate infinite and mediating infinite, even if the perfect fit would only take place in infinite time.[47]

[46] "Actual" in Hegel's terminology means the unity of essence and existence or reflecting of the ideal. He (1821/1967, p. 283 note # 162) says that bad political states merely exist and are not actual.

[47] Hegel is insistent that nothing can lie outside of the infinite. Evil, either angelic or human in origin, which I take as referring to moral evil or evil that stems from free will, is part and parcel of Hegel's infinite. Evil's otherness is only a moment in the dialectic, and it will eventually be redeemed into the all-enveloping infinite (Hegel 1807/1977, "Analysis" § 780, p. 588). Relatedly, Julian of Norwich's (1373/1902, 13th revelation 31st chp., p. 74) apprehensions about sin and the absence of salvation are allayed when she hears God say: "I will make all thing well; and thou shalt see thyself that all manner of thing shall be well."

I am inclined to think that finite spirit's free will, irrespective of whether it comes from the infinite or otherwise, entrenches the very condition that sets it as an other, intractable to reconciliation. Hegel has an answer opposing the assumption that the infinite executes its reconciliation through endless finite determinations in this world. He (1817/1991, § 212, p. 286) writes:

> The good, the absolute good fulfills itself eternally in the world, and the result is that it is already fulfilled in and for itself, and does not need to wait upon us for this to happen. This is the illusion in which we live, and at the same time it is this illusion alone that is the activating element upon which our interest in the world rests. It is within its own process that the Idea produces that illusion for itself …

On the one hand, the abstract, immediate infinite has to realize itself concretely through this finite world. On the other hand, in order to circumvent the problem of the inevitable lack of a perfect fit between this abstract infinite and concrete finitude, Hegel suggests an "eternal" and, perhaps, already accomplished reconciliation – "the absolute good". The reliance of the infinite upon imperfect finite determinations is swiftly annulled in this statement of Hegel. While the illusion on the part of finite subjectivity is the requisite engine for actively realizing the infinite's ultimate end, this illusion is also said to be part of the plan of the infinite. It seems to me that the more Hegel strives to posit an infinite that is comprehensive in its embrace, the suggestion of an already accomplished reconciliation outside of time reinforces a transcendental difference between an already accomplished infinite outside of the finite world and a still developing infinite concretizing itself in this world with all its limitations. Hence, it is doubtful whether Hegel has successfully rid his infinite of any form of irrecoverable otherness.

I wish to raise another question relating to the Hegelian loop of the infinite's moving out of itself and returning to itself via particularities. Recall that in Chap. 2 I agreed with Bergson in rejecting radical finalism because it implies fatalistic determinism. If Hegel assumes an identity between immediate infinite and mediating infinite, then it is plausible that radical finalism characterizes Hegel's trinity. As discussed earlier, such radical finalism equally plagues the view that history plays out a pre-existing totality of all beings all at once contained in God's internal nature. My contention is that if Hegel is to be of some use in the interpretation of trinitarian theology, an important adjustment needs to be made to Hegel's thesis. Perhaps, the dialectical progression of the economic trinity is best perceived, not as an unfolding of the immediate absolute through history but as a part–whole relationship between finite reality and the infinite, a relationship congenial to instances of transcendence and open-endedness.

3.4 The Problem of Objectivity in Mystical Intimacy

Mystical intimacy refers to the profound relationship between finite reality and infinite reality. Considering that access to knowledge of this relationship is largely via the reports of mystics, the entry point into our enquiry is the mystical experience of

the finite subject.[48] In order for mystical experience to have any credibility, it must come to terms with the issue of objective reference. From the vantage point of the mystic, a strong conviction in the authenticity of her experience might render unnecessary a quest for further evidence of the independent reality of her experienced object. However, from the perspective of the analyst of mysticism, reports of a profound meeting with a unique objective reality have to be subjected to a critical appraisal culminating in a construction of a rationally sound defence. Underhill is fully aware of this credibility criterion. She commences her discussion on the matter by highlighting the mystic personality as consumed by a passionate pursuit of the infinite (*M* p. 3). For Underhill, this unique personality is present in a number of individuals across spiritual traditions and times. Their claims of a privileged encounter with infinite reality cannot be disregarded simply because we have not shared in this privilege. As Underhill avers, one has no right to dismiss the validity of the mystic's encounters on the basis that these encounters are not within the domain of our own spectrum of experiential data (*M* p. 4). If we are quick to believe reports of geographical explorers to the far reaches of the earth, why view with incredulity the reports of spiritual explorers since both forms of report describe things with which we have little familiarity? The common elements of the mystic quest, identifiable across chronological, geographical, and cultural borders, and the witness of a life consumed with one-pointed determination; these in themselves demand some consideration if not acceptance of the objective reference of mystical experience.

In her treatment of the possibility of the knowing-self knowing objective reality, Underhill examines the problem of "naïve realism", a common belief that in sense experience we directly perceive external physical objects as they are (*M* p. 8). There is no definitive assurance of, first, the actual existence of the perceived object and, second, the object's attributes. Underhill associates naïve realism with naturalism. Naturalism within the context of David Hume's (1711–1776) epistemology refers to our habitually formed disposition to accept what we perceive as real and also our tendency to impute causal connections onto phenomena.[49] Naturalism paints a picture of the universe as one that is intelligible and, perhaps, totally amenable to analyses within the frame of causation. The argumentation discernible within Underhill's

[48] Analyses of mystical experiences obviously rely upon the testimonies made by people who have had such experiences. It is possible that a person might be privy to a mystical experience and yet decide not to talk or write about it. The transformative effect of a mystical experience may quite likely infuse its experiencing subject and translate into behaviours that have a positive effect on other people. However, mystics often feel compelled, for a variety of reasons, to share their mystical experiences. Topmost amongst these reasons are the urgent need to be guided and the desire to guide others. Teresa of Avila (16th cent./1976, *Book of Her Life* chp. 23: 2–3; p. 201), for instance, felt the need to seek spiritual direction for she feared that her union experiences might be illusory and far from divinely sourced. Impelled by a sincere desire to offer sound spiritual direction to his charges, and by a request to write a spiritual guidebook, John of the Cross (16th cent./1991, *Ascent of Mount Carmel* prologue: 7–9; pp. 117–118) shared his mystical insights gleaned from his experiences and put them down into a systematic treatise.

[49] For Hume's "naturalistic epistemology", see Hume (1739/1968). There is also what is called "metaphysical naturalism", which is a belief that the universe comprises natural elements and operations devoid of any supernatural intervention (see "Naturalism" Lacey 2005, pp. 640–642).

approach to defending the credulity of mystical experience proceeds as a challenge to naïve realism and naturalism. The strategy undertaken by Underhill is to disclose the illusion of naïve realism and impugn the reliability of our knowing faculty to deliver knowledge of the sensible realm; to propose the strong possibility of truths of the transcendental realm that are veiled from us; and to affirm the plausibility of "objective idealism" when addressing human orientation to the real and meaningful.

Since our senses have a questionable reliability of producing knowledge that perfectly reflects external physical reality, a reaction to this would be the adoption of scepticism. Underhill tells us that one lesson to be drawn from scepticism towards the external world is not to circumscribe reality solely to that which comes within the purview of our sense faculty. In facing the divide between knowing self and external object, she advises:

> You are not asked, as a result of these antique and elementary propositions, to wipe clean the slate of normal human experience, and cast in your lot with intellectual nihilism. You are only asked to acknowledge that it is but a slate, and that the white scratches upon it which the ordinary man calls facts, and the Scientific Realist calls knowledge, are at best relative and conventionalized symbols of that aspect of that unknowable reality at which they hint. This being so, while we must all draw a picture of some kind on our slate and act in relation therewith, we cannot deny the validity – though we may deny the usefulness – of the pictures which others produce, however abnormal and impossible they may seem; since these are sketching an aspect of reality which has not come within our sensual field, and so does not and cannot form part of our world. (*M* p. 11)

In essence, Underhill admonishes against any outright denial of the veracity of the general claim of mysticism that the mystic is in contact with ultimate reality. However, just from reliance upon the inherent uncertainties of our assertions about external reality, her critique of the denial of the veracity of the mystic's claims makes for rather frail cogency. Therefore, from this critique, Underhill proceeds to an affirmation of the veracity of mystical reports. The anticipated riposte would be that physical reality is amenable to public verification, while the claims of the mystic reside largely in subjective experience, and hence, their reports of an objective encounter are liable to be treated with suspicion. Underhill's defence of the veracity of mystical claims can be better sustained by a more rigorous discussion on the objective reference issue. Walter Stace's (1961, pp. 134–206) enquiry into the issue of objective reference can help fill this gap.

3.4.1 Transsubjectivism and Mysticism

After identifying the "universal core", or defining characteristics, of mystical experience, Stace contends that the unanimity of mystical experiences from a broad range of religious or spiritual traditions strongly suggests the authenticity of the mystic's encounter with an objective reality. Nevertheless, he (1961, pp. 135–136) also realizes that it is possible for a large group of people to have common

perceptions that do not correspond with external reality, for instance, seeing a mirage in the desert or seeing yellow after ingesting santonin.[50] Unanimity then is necessary, but insufficient to ensure authenticity of objective experience. Stace proposes another criterion besides unanimity to be imposed upon mystical claims, and that criterion is "order". He (1961, p. 140) defines order as follows:

> By order I mean law, that is to say, regularity of succession, repetition of pattern, "constant conjunction" of specifiable items. Order is thus a quite general concept of which what we call nature or the natural order of our daily world is a particular instance. Strictly speaking, objectivity is to be defined in terms of the general concept of order and not in terms of our particular world order.

By using the "general concept of order", Stace intends to avoid confining his notion of order to a specific sense as in reference to the actually existing laws of nature. Assuming that we were to migrate to another universe sustained by laws of nature that are direct opposites to the ones in our previous universe, then it would be these new laws of nature that make up the concept of order. Given that we currently live in a universe with a determinate set of natural laws, the criterion of order applies to adherence to this set of natural laws.

This criterion of order, which Stace adds to the criterion of unanimity as constituting necessary conditions for objectivity of experience, encompasses internal and external relations. Before explaining these two relations with an example, let me state here that for Stace, the objectivity of a reported experience requires that the content of that experience be consistently orderly, both in its internal and external relations. Any violation of this stricture, either internal or external orderliness, renders the report subjective (Stace 1961, p. 140). A dream for instance is *internally* disorderly if within the narrative of the dream, there is an event in which a team of people takes off into the air, totally unaided, and flies for long distances. A dream is also *externally* disorderly in the sense that the content of your dream might be perfectly orderly where you are sitting in a plane in flight approaching Mongolia (no violation of natural order here) but wake up in your bed at home in Malaysia (transition from plane to home within a couple of seconds is a violation of natural order). So, as long as internal and external orderliness are not violated, and the reported experience can be publicly verified for the purpose of fulfilling the unanimity criterion, objectivity of that experience is secured.

There is a problem not mentioned by Stace. It can safely be said that in the seventh century BCE, virtually everyone perceives the world as flat and judges it to be so. At that period in history, many people would agree that the world looks flat and feels to be stationary, and to the best of the observers' knowledge, there is no transgression of natural order, and hence, the world *is* objectively flat and immobile. Cartesian doubt cautions against absolute certainty of sense experience. Perhaps, we are entitled to declare that the fact of an existing world is objective, while its attributes are constantly being discovered, even at times wrongly interpreted. The same can be said of infinite reality. Mystics are convinced that they are in the

[50] The example of colour perception proffered by Stace may not be fitting because colours are not present out there, but are in the sense faculty of the perceiver.

presence of "something" or that they are having an experience that is exceedingly beyond any other previous experiences. Furthermore, while the immediate experience spontaneously generates faith in its authenticity, the subsequent interpretation has the potential to be susceptible to erroneous judgments of this encountered reality's attributes.

Stace's proposed condition of an experiential content being consistent with natural order as indication of nonsubjective experience appears to be quite appealing. This is especially so since illusory perceptions, be it in dreams or elsewhere, tend to transgress natural law. For Stace (1961, pp. 22–29), experiences of this natural plane, i.e. the physical universe, are subjected to the principle of determinism and are explicable by natural laws.[51] It is of no surprise then that Stace identifies natural order as the canon of objective experience. I fully agree with him (1961, pp. 47–51) as do several mystics of good standing on the matter of omitting visions and locutions from the panoply of genuine mysticism.[52] Any claim of encountering supernatural celestial beings ought to be viewed with suspicion and not regarded as comprising the essential ingredients of mystical experience.

Stace (1961, p. 110) pins down the profound experience of undifferentiated unity as receiving broad consensus from major religious traditions and thereby constituting the paragon of all authentic mystical experiences. In this sort of experience, since there is no succession of items because discrete elements have collapsed into an all-consuming and undifferentiated unity, there is no order, internal or external, to violate. Therefore, for Stace, mystical experience is neither objective nor subjective. Lest one interpret this form of experience as confined to just some subjective inner contact with one's own pure individual ego, Stace (1961, p. 147) assures his readers that the self in this unique state:

> experiences itself as at once becoming one with or becoming dissolved in an infinite and universal self. The boundary walls of the separate self fade away, and the individual finds himself passing beyond himself and becoming merged in a boundless and universal consciousness.

[51] I suspect that Stace here intends to exorcise mysticism of any superstitious assertions of perceiving real supernatural beings that intervene and eclipse the orderly operations of the law of nature. He would later argue that in the contact with ultimate reality, the mystic is in touch with a nonnatural order, what he calls the eternal order (pp. 198–199). Stace comes across as subscribing to a bold divide between the natural and supernatural realms and where the supernatural realm houses things and events that may violate the law of noncontradiction.

[52] John of the Cross (16th cent./1991 *The Dark Night of the Soul* bk. 2 chp. 2, pp. 396–398) warns against placing importance upon and seeking visions and voices because God is beyond any form of a sensory nature. Besides, these phenomena can be purely illusory. A similar suspicion towards visions is found in Eckhart (14th cent./1992, chp. 76: "Ascension Day Sermon 1", p. 187). While I think that some mystics oppose such phenomena, I would not jump into making a generalization as Underhill (1922, p. 22) does in her introduction to *The Cloud of Unknowing*: "For these supposed indications of Divine favour [psychic phenomena], the author of the *Cloud* has no more respect than the modern psychologist: and here, of course, he is in agreement with all the greatest writers on mysticism, who are unanimous in their dislike and distrust of all visionary and auditive experience."

Stace (1961, pp. 146–147) labels this "undifferentiated unity" mystical experience as "transsubjective." Mystical experience is neither subjective nor objective (because it transcends the condition of order), and so, it is transsubjective.

I am reticent in accepting Stace's transsubjectivism that is neither subjective nor objective. In fact, mystical experience of the unity of things in this world would intuitively appear to most people as violating the principle of natural order because nature is made up of discrete parts. Stace's injunction of imposing order as the criterion of objectivity may have some drawbacks because it can be self-defeating for the intentions of genuine mysticism. Stace (1961, pp. 161ff.) himself claims that as reported by mystics, radically contradictory elements can be constituted in profound mystical experience. For instance, the alleged experience of infinite reality as both utterly personal and utterly impersonal, dynamic and static, having qualities and devoid of qualities unequivocally contravenes the order of nature. To be consistent then, Stace ought to have admitted that mystical experience is subjective and not beyond subjectivism and objectivism. However, Stace (1952, pp. 75–76) defends his stand of mystical experience and of its referent being transsubjective by postulating two distinct world orders: the natural order and the eternal order.[53] It is the unique eternal order that the mystic contacts, which cannot come under the categories of subjectivism and objectivism because it transcends all categories of existence/non-existence, fullness/emptiness, and even subjectivism/objectivism and hence allows for the paradoxical coexistence of contradictory elements. Note also that Stace (1961, p. 16) associates objectivism with external physical reality out there in the natural order.

We should be circumspect in dealing with claims of seeing supernatural beings in physical form. Stace's criterion for objective experience matters in this case. However, we need not follow Stace by asserting that the mystic encounters an eternal order that transcends the law of noncontradiction. I argued above that the infinite includes and surpasses the totality of the physical universe as well as the nonphysical universe of thoughts. Accordingly, the infinite is not exactly like any physical object. Divine infinity is not objective as a tree, for instance, is said to be objectively out there, but it can be objective in the sense of not being relative to any finite viewpoint. The infinite as experienced is not the conjured psychic content of the mystic. It is not a subjective experience empty of objective reference. Perhaps, the discourse on such a spiritual experience has affinities with the discourse on aesthetic and moral values. The difficulty I find in Stace's division of orders is in the interface between the orders, wherein lies mystical experience. Arguably, for the mystic to interpret an experience as undifferentiated, this in itself is a form of differentiation because it requires the undifferentiated to be *differentiated* from the differentiated. Moreover, the very recognition of discrete elements collapsing into an undifferentiated unity already implies that there is an identity of differences. Otherwise, how would the perceiver realize that distinctions have melted into an undifferentiated

[53] Stace proposes two distinct orders of being: one within the space–time parameter (*natural or temporal order*) and the other the realm of the supramundane – the *eternal order* of God's being.

unity?[54] She might as well say that the perceived object is absolutely monochromic or empty. I believe that when the finite subject encounters the infinite, the experience on the side of the subject cannot entirely bypass finite conditions. It is not an experience of contradictory elements, for it is highly doubtful if contradictory elements can actually be perceived. There is an objective experience, but an objectivity that is different from that of the physical variety.

I think that for the case of mystical experience as well as for the case of a number of judgments contingent upon sense experience, objectivity is a *heuristic* assumption. There will always be the element of tentativeness in claims of objectivity, and such claims must be open to future investigations, which largely rely upon some consensus amongst mystics of good standing. Just as the many believers in a stationary, flat earth eventually switched their belief upon discovering our earth to be an orbiting sphere, likewise, the same mode of heuristic investigation, assessment, and reassessment applies to mystical experience and beliefs. This is where, perhaps, the notion of "objective idealism" can assist us in clarifying the content and objectivity of mystical experience. It is this objective idealism that Underhill takes up in her analysis of mysticism.

3.4.2 Objective Idealism and Mysticism

Underhill has a high regard for "objective idealism" as a philosophical standpoint characterizing the mystic's experience of reality that is not an invention of the individual ego (*M* pp. 11–13). She admits that as a standpoint, this is still just a schema to help us understand reality. The boundary of idealism is not so boldly drawn, and there are differences when it comes to delineating its essential features (see Brightman 1933, pp. 429–435). If we take physicalism to imply the mechanistic world that adheres to natural law, Underhill pits objective idealism against physicalism. Not all versions of idealism absolutely reject the existence of the material world, despite there being subjective idealists who do so. One model of idealism argues for the *greater importance* accorded to values of the spirit or mind. Values like love and altruism can never be reduced to sensible or physical realities. The "objective" qualification of Underhill's idealism has affinities with that of Hegel's absolute idealism. She explains:

> Reality, says Objective Idealism, is the complete, undistorted Object, the big thought, of which we pick up these fragmentary hints: the world of phenomena which we treat as real being merely its shadow show or "manifestation in space and time." … All life, all phenomena, are the endless modifications and expressions of the one transcendent Object, the mighty and dynamic Thought of one Absolute Thinker, in which we are bathed. (*M* p. 12)

I figure that the above quoted model of idealism comes very close to the subjective idealism of George Berkeley (1685–1753). Berkeley's (1710/1967, pp. 66–68)

[54] To be fair to Stace, he (1961, p. 167) eventually does argue for mystical experience as being an encounter with "identity in difference".

slogan of "*esse est percipi*" ("to be is to be perceived") identifies the real with the perceived. However, what is the ontological status of objects that are undiscovered or not at the moment perceived by any perceiving subject? Berkeley's (1710/1967, pp. 220–226) answer is that the eternal perception of the mind of God sustains the existence of such objects. Hence, Berkeley's subjective idealism becomes theistic idealism.

How then would Underhill's objective idealism be distinguished from the subjective form of idealism? Postulating ideals as mental entities whether in the mind of a finite individual subject or an infinite absolute subject is still subjectivism. From the perspective of the finite individual subject, it is objective since it is not manufactured by the individual, but from the perspective of the infinite subject, it is subjectivism nonetheless. Subjectivism of this sort tends to dismiss the independent reality of the physical world. Stace's transsubjective mystical experience of undifferentiated unity can be interpreted as subjective on account of its violation of Stace's own criterion of order. Underhill's objective idealism affirms the objectivity of mystical experience. However, it may be interpreted as a disguised form of subjective idealism or as privileging ideas while not taking into consideration the status of physical reality within the configuration of infinite being. I shall attempt to develop a viable scheme of conceiving mystical experience and relationship in such a way that avoids these shortcomings.

3.4.3 Tentative Unitivism and Mysticism

Mystical intimacy may be perceived as a dialectical terminus of its preceding moments of infinity and finitude: "infinity–finitude–mystical intimacy". From the synthetic moment of mystical intimacy, another relevant arm of dialectic can branch off as subjectivism–objectivism–unitivism. I have decided on "unitivism" as the synthesis of subjectivism and objectivism. I wish to avoid what I see as problems besetting Stace's transsubjectivism and Underhill's objective idealism. Furthermore, I maintain that divine infinity cannot coherently be confined to ideals, ideas, or consciousness. It has to include materiality. Incidentally, unifying the subject and the object in self-consciousness is not a helpful attempt at a synthesis for it merely strips the objective of any independent reality and reduces it to a subjective content of consciousness.[55] Unitivism represents a union of objectivism and subjectivism, while allowing for differences between them. The finite mystic, in meeting the infinite, encounters an objective being that includes the mystic's subjective being. Although mystical experience necessitates the presence of the finite subject, it is not confined to a purely subjective experience. Objectivism requires the priority of the independent perceivable reality over the perceiver. My contention is that profound

[55] The dialectic of subjective consciousness perceiving the distinction between itself (subject) and its other (object), and then unifying the subject–object distinction into the subject's consciousness of itself, cannot free the object from subjectivism.

mystical experience and the development of mystical intimacy are orientated towards infinite reality as all-encompassing and thereby non-negating of the individual mystic's subjectivity. Even while confronting epistemic scepticism, the mystic who is convinced of the authenticity of her experience does not feel the need to settle for a solipsistic subjectivism. As examined in the previous chapter, Teresa of Avila is convinced of the objective genuineness of her experience of all things being contained in God.

Unitivism is consistent with the implications of the individualizing and mediating dialectics. Valuable parallels can be drawn between the dialectics of subjectivism–objectivism–unitivism and particularity–universality–individuality. Objectivism correlates with the moment of *universality*, relative to subjectivism that corresponds to the moment of *particularity*. And, just as individuality reflects the synthetic moment of its antecedents by highlighting the immanence and transcendence between them, in a similar vein, unitivism unites subjectivism and objectivism while retaining their respective differences. Another crucial feature of mystical intimacy is its dynamism. The mystic experiences and relates to a dynamic and living infinite being. Consequently, the mediating dialectic underscores the processual characteristic of these experience and relationship. My extensive discussions on infinity and trinity lead me to a conception of the divine as potential infinity of the economic trinity that incorporates the universe. I then infer from this that in mystical intimacy the mystic comes in contact with and relates to a divine infinity that is perpetually open to being more. In this regard, unitivism is not a closed totality; rather, it is a form of tentative unitivism. Tentative unitivism has two senses here: (1) Metaphysical – while the objective infinite includes the subjective finite self, this union, at the level of its dynamic mystical relationship, constitutes a form of being that allows for continuous renewals of union. Hence, the union is tentative rather than final. (2) Epistemological – just as claims to the objectivity of our knowledge of the world we live in are heuristic in that our claims are open to future investigations, revisions, and restatements, similarly, the dynamic nature of mystical intimacy leaves the mystic's understanding of God as constantly open to reinterpretation. Divine infinity's transcendence precludes conclusive utterances about the capacities and actions of God. The mystic may be utterly convinced that she is in contact with God, but her descriptions of the contents and attributes of this being will always be tentative.[56]

As I approach the conclusion of this chapter, there is a particular problem that I wish to raise. My partiality towards viewing God as potential infinite, and my contention against fatalism as inferred from a premise of God's actually infinite internal nature unfolding through concrete historical events of the world, entails forfeiting a key attribute of God – divine omniscience. I shall not unravel and attempt to resolve

[56] As William J. Sparrow-Simpson (1920, p. 204) comments on the negative theology of Dionysius the Areopagite: "We can only say that God *is*; but *what* He is we are unable to affirm". John Ruysbroeck (14th cent./1916, *Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage* 1st bk. chp. 21, p. 35) goes to the extent of cautioning his readers: "Whosoever then would know and understand what God is – which is not permitted – he would go mad".

the many definitions of this term.[57] I am concerned only with a form of divine omniscience that has relevance to this present discussion on infinity. My critique here is directed at divine omniscience interpreted as God having complete, specific, and experiential (God has identical experiential knowledge of our experiences) knowledge of all things, actual and possible. According to this particular form of divine omniscience, God has a durationless–eternal comprehensive knowledge of all events across space and time. Potential infinity, with its endless open-ended process, calls into question the very possibility of such an attribute. Fatalism need not follow from fore knowledge. X may know what Y is going to do in the next two days, but it does not follow that X determines Y's actions for the next two days; neither does it imply that Y's actions are fated because it is simply the case of one person, X, who happens to have knowledge of another person's, Y's, deeds for the next two days. However, it is quite a different situation with the case of God as infinite being, incorporative of all finite beings. Consider: (1) the comprehensive knowledge of all things runs into the "fragile totality" phenomenon, and hence, comprehensive knowledge will continuously be out of reach, and (2) God's omniscience requires God to have an *existential* and *precise* knowledge of how a person feels angry, rather than a mere propositional knowledge of that person being angry. Points (1) and (2) lead to the statement that given the immersion of the finite universe within infinite God and that the temporal unfolding of events has also to be incorporated into the comprehensive knowledge of God, divine omniscience, if at all possible, entails a fatalistic unfolding of every event pre-existing within God's intellect. Note that fatalism does not mean that God determines every single event. Suppose that I have existential, precise, and accurate knowledge of what I am going to do in the next two days. Although I am not the sole determiner of my actions for outside factors are codeterminants, my actions for the next two days constitute an exact replay of actions already present in my mind. This is a small instance of fatalism. In order to reject fatalism, one would have to reject this form of divine omniscience as well.

Although Nicholas of Cusa frequently underscores the incomprehensibility of God's attributes, we have seen above that he advances an idea that alludes to divine omniscience (Nicholas of Cusa 1440/2007, pp. 49–50). It is not the case though that most mystical writings express a similar view.[58] Neither is it the case that they explicitly reject this doctrine. Admittedly, it is probable that my outline of the omniscience problematic, which flows from philosophical reflections on the nature of God and on mysticism, may not be directly corroborated by any mystical writing.

[57] There is a definition of omniscience that rejects the idea that divine omniscience implies God's ability to know every truth (see Hoffman 2002, pp. 111–113).

[58] *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Teresa of Avila's *Interior Castle*, and, quite likely, John of the Cross' writings make no reference to divine omniscience. When enumerating God's fundamental attributes, John of the Cross (16th cent./1991, *The Living Flame of Love*, stanza 3:2–6, pp. 673–676) mentions, amongst others, divine omnipotence, wisdom, and goodness. It is unstated whether "wisdom" is equivalent to "omniscience". Elsewhere, John (16th cent./1991, *Ascent of Mount Carmel* bk. II chp. 26:5, p. 246) claims that divine knowledge "never deals with particular things since its object is the Supreme Principle". This suggests that for John of the Cross, God's knowledge does not include any exact and existential knowledge of a particular individual's experience. On account of this deficit, there is no justification to assume that God is omniscient.

3.5 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter is devoted to exploring and developing the third moment of the overall dialectic of becoming–being–infinite being. Its task is basically divided into sketching out the nature of infinity and attempting to settle the objectivity issue of mystical experience and relationship. Through a critical discourse that draws upon the insights of Underhill, Aristotle, Nicholas of Cusa, Cantor, Eckhart, Kant, Julian of Norwich, Desmond, Hegel, and Stace, the conclusions reached are as follows: (1) God is predominantly potential infinity in the form of a dialectical economic trinity that incorporates and transcends the universe with its historical growth. (2) The potential for sublimity can be said to reside in the relationship between the mystic and God and in God's relationship to Godself. (3) The objectivity issue of mystical relationship is best conceived as tentative unitivism, which is a heuristic development of a synthesis of subjectivism and objectivism. (4) Omniscience may not be an attribute of God. The end of this chapter brings to a close my project of detailing the structural intricacies that underpin theistic mystical relationship. The next chapter commences my research on the stages of mystical development as traced out by Underhill.

Chapter 4
Light–Darkness (I)

4.1 Introduction

In the previous two chapters, I discussed the dialectics of being–becoming and infinity–finitude with the purpose of unravelling the content of *becoming–being–infinite being*, which is the main triadic pattern that forms the metaphysical basis of mystical relationship. This chapter and the next are directed towards the heart of *M*, the "Mystic Way". Consolidating first-hand reports by mystics and various commentaries on mysticism, Underhill deftly constructs a blueprint of mystical progress through five distinct stages. For the sake of systematic presentation, I have split this five-stage series into two main divisions: (1) the first three stages (to be discussed in this chapter) – awakening, purgation, and illumination – and (2) the subsequent two stages of purification and union (reserved for the next chapter). While there is no gainsaying the saliency of the dialectical pattern inherent in mysticism, one dominant dialectical binary that appears to integrate the whole complex of Underhill's "Mystic Way" is the theme of light and darkness. Light–darkness can serve as a useful hermeneutic in assessing this prodigious piece of work that traverses the terrain of mystical development. The current chapter explores the many relevant applications of the dialectics of the light–darkness metaphor and the discursive themes in "awakening", "purgation", and "illumination".

The next or second section consists of an investigation and enumeration of relevant usages of the light–darkness metaphor in the context of mysticism. In it I also sketch out the principal interpretations of the dialectical procedure of "negation of negation" as applied to this light–darkness metaphor. I plan to reserve close analyses of mystical writings pertinent to Underhill's stages of mystical progress when these stages are individually treated in this chapter and the following chapter. Hence, for this second section, with an aim to provide a survey of the varied interpretations of the light–darkness metaphor, references and quotations relevant to these interpretations will be footnoted. The third section contains an overview of Underhill's stage progression of mystical development. Highlighted in this overview is the idea

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that progression through the first three stages is characterized by an alternation of light to darkness and then to light again. Also, embedded within each of these stages are expressions of the light–darkness metaphor that relate to mysticism.

The fourth section covers the stage of awakening as the dawn of the mystical quest. Here, with the assistance of some testimonies of individuals' mystical awakenings and pertinent passages from Kant's writings on aesthetics, I attempt to unveil and discuss some points for consideration inherent within this commencing stage of mystical development: the mysteriously obscured origins of awakening, awakening as sudden or gradual, and awakening with some or with virtually no prior conditioning. In the fifth section, I delve into Underhill's treatment of purgation, which is the first of two separate stages of mystical purification. Underhill identifies detachment and mortification as the dual means by which the self undergoes a requisite transformation of the will. This transformation primes the self for a committed and sustained relationship with God. In order to complement Underhill's focus on the conative (concerning the will) component of purgation, I include an examination of the epistemological component of purgation. In this section and the section before it, dialecticism and Kantian sublimity are engaged in order to help address some of the points relevant to these sections. Through this engagement I hope to dispel some of the haziness associated with the mysterious obscurity of awakening's origins, the objectivity of experiences specifically related to the sublime and to awakening, and any assumed incompatibility between interpersonal human relationship and mystical finite–infinite intimacy. I also maintain that mystical experience, while sharing many parallel features with the sublime, surpasses Kant's setting of human reason and free will as sovereign values in his theory of the sublime.

The sixth section of this chapter is devoted to the stage of illumination, especially its highest attainable phase of contemplation. Some differences between contemplation and the other two meditative phases of recollection and quiet, and that between contemplation and the unitive life, receive special attention in this section. I explore as well the many challenges to the validity and integrity of Underhill's stage schema. In spite of these challenges, I share Underhill's opinion that the five-stage series that she subscribes to provides us with a cogent yet flexible framework for conceiving mystical development.

4.2 A Dialectical Metaphor

The metaphors of light and darkness are not extraneous to mystical literature. Applications of words like "illumination", "light", "dark night", and "divine darkness" by mystics and writers of mysticism attest to the ubiquitous presence of the light–darkness metaphor in discourses on mysticism.[1] "Light" and "darkness",

[1] For Denys Turner (1995, p. 13), the metaphor of "light–darkness" in mysticism originates from Dionysius the Areopagite who in turn was inspired by Plato and by Moses' divine encounter as narrated in the story of the Exodus.

whether together or independent of each other, and contingent upon the context within which they are embedded, convey a host of meanings. I intend to construct a conspectus of each of these possible meanings. The enumeration does not aspire to detail every application of those metaphors, with comprehensive references to places in which they appear. This would be unnecessary for my main concern here is with formulating the connotations of light and darkness in the framework of mysticism in general and Underhill's exposition of mystical development in particular.

4.2.1 Dialectical Pairing

Below are the varied interpretations of the light–darkness metaphor, which are deduced from this metaphor's relation to mysticism. Quotations from mystical writings that serve as pertinent examples of these interpretations will be footnoted. These interpretations will come to the fore when I delve into specific testimonies and commentaries that emerge later in this chapter and in Chap. 5.

(A) The Notion of Pure Being: Pure being as that without distinctions of specific qualities or substances can be likened to the supreme brightness of light, without any dark, defined contours within it. Absolute darkness as the antithesis of pure light may signify absolute nothingness as the total absence of being. I would think that the metaphors of light as pure being and pure darkness as nothingness, two extreme poles in the spectrum of being, have some interesting significance in the metaphysics of mysticism. However, instead of either pure light or pure darkness, the paired light–darkness metaphor frequently refers to degrees of light/darkness. I venture to argue that even if light and darkness are not taken as mixtures of each other, there is another way to reconcile the apparent contradictory coexistence of light and darkness. The solution comes from interpreting their relation as an absolute–relative one. God as pure being is deemed absolutely real and present. This is represented by the metaphor of "light". However, from the perspective of the observing subject, pure being as supreme light without a hint of shadowy determinations within impairs the subject's perceptual faculty, rendering her apprehension of supreme light as complete or partial darkness (see Turner 1995, pp. 17–18). While the light (as pure being) is absolute or independently real, its apprehension by the subject (relative to the subject's viewpoint) is of darkness. God, as pure being, causes "visual" impairment in the subject who comes face to face with God.[2] As

[2] John of the Cross (16th cent./1991, *Dark Night*, bk. 2 chp. 16: 11, pp. 433–434) writes:

> Because of their [the souls'] weakness, individuals feel thick darkness and more profound obscurity the closer they come to God, just as they would feel greater darkness and pain, because of the weakness and impurity of their eyes, the closer they approached the immense brilliance of the sun.

It is because of God's immense fullness and brightness that the soul, meeting God, suffers impairment of its finite faculties and thereby is caused to experience darkness.

such, the subject then perceives God as darkness. This darkness is not that of nothingness but an outcome of the contact with pure being.

The mystic recognizes her encountered object as divine on account of experiencing the incomparable grandeur and overpowering nature of this object. In that moment of apprehending pure, unqualified, and unmitigated light that causes her to experience darkness, she senses a meeting with infinite reality. The dialectical metaphor here carries the meaning of the causal association between absolute and relative events. Moreover, perceiving the actual light relies upon the capacity of the perceiving subject. In other words, the *degree* of light or darkness apprehended depends upon the subject's capacity, and this can vary through time in the same subject and also amongst subjects. The absolute–relative dialectic renders pure being along two ontological levels: at one level, as independent and absolute reality and, at another level, as experienced and thereby relative reality.

(B) The Notion of Infinite Being: Infinite being cannot set itself apart from nothingness, for infinite being as light also has to include nothingness as darkness. The way to circumvent this apparent contradiction is to start with the axiom that God as infinite, universal, and all-encompassing cannot have an *other.* Even the apparent otherness of nothingness (darkness) has to be included in infinite being. Here, God is being *and* non-being, something *and* nothing, light *and* darkness. Starting from infinite being as infinite light, by virtue of its infinite all-encompassing capacity, infinite being has to include darkness.[3]

In another interpretation of light–darkness relevant to the idea of divine infinity, "light" refers to the divine as immanent in the universe, and "darkness" refers to the divine as transcendent to the universe. As advanced in Chap. 2, God's transcendence of the universe can take the form of "exceeding" and "excluding" the universe. The infinite includes (immanence – light) and exceeds (transcendence – darkness) the

[3] Assuming that God is infinite, why should this infinity be confined to the infinite maximum? What about the infinite minimum? Therefore, God is the infinite maximum (light) and, at the same time, the infinite minimum (darkness). Infinite darkness assumes that light is infinitely diminishable; the reduction of light can never reach an end. Nicholas of Cusa (1440/2007, chp. 4, pp. 12–14) attempts to explain how the maximum and the minimum have some kind of identity by bracketing out the idea of quantity (largeness and smallness) from them and instead grasping these attributes solely in terms of their being superlatives. He also argues for their identity based on what he considers to be their shared definition: "the minimum is that which cannot be less than it is; and since that is also true of the maximum, it is evident that the minimum is identified with the maximum" (p. 12). This argument of Nicholas has a catch in it for "cannot be less than it is" actually applies differently to the maximum and the minimum. To be less than the maximum is *to fall short of* the maximum, while to be less than the minimum is *to go beyond* the minimum in terms of lowest value. Further on, Nicholas argues more persuasively when he writes:

> There is, in fact, no difference between these two affirmations: "God, who is the absolute maximum itself, is light"; and "God is light at its highest, therefore, He is light at its lowest". (p. 13)

Here, Nicholas begins with the premise of God being the maximum. The pervasiveness of light becomes the metaphor for God's greatness. Light as all pervasive is found in its maximum intensity as well as in its minimum intensity as darkness.

universe and has an aspect that excludes (is absolutely transcendent to – profound darkness) the universe. There is a profound darkness of God, which represents this absolutely transcendent and mysterious aspect of God that is beyond being.[4] In this case, the profound darkness of God as utter transcendence abrogates or negates any significations and distinctions of the light–darkness metaphor. Accordingly, even the metaphors of light and darkness have to be negated. This negation is not just a negation of light to imply the term complement of light, i.e. darkness, and vice versa. Rather, this radical negation negates all terms and language. Negative terms do carry an image.[5] The negation of negation in this instance entails a radical negation of signification itself of all images. God is light and darkness, and God is beyond light and darkness. This foregoing deduction unveils the relations between the metaphors of light and darkness, the notion of divine infinity as including and exceeding the universe, and the operation of the double negation as representing the aspect of God that excludes the universe.

(C) The Presence and Absence of God: A third category of possible applications of the light–darkness metaphor relates to the perspective of the mystic. The mystic experiences God's presence (light) and at times God's absence (darkness).[6] In view of the subjective nature of the experience, there may be a myriad of reasons why the self makes the claim for divine presence or absence. The self's level of progress in mystical development also plays a role in this experience. A mystic still in the early period of purgation may experience God's absence (darkness) most intensely because of the unrelenting suffering assailing her. However, upon reflection, the mystic may come to understand that God is present (light) all the time to ensure that she develops a more selfless and pure relationship with God.[7] It is when the mystic feels the infinite's absence most strongly that she also recognizes the presence of the infinite in being the active agent in the accomplishing work of mystical union. The determinations of divine absence or divine presence spring from the then existing and dominant force of the self's personality. Note that this particular modality of light–darkness dialectic is different from the absolute–relative type mentioned above. In the absolute–relative, the distinction is between actual light/divine and the perception of it. For interpretation (C), light as divine presence and darkness as divine absence are considered entirely on the side of the perceiving subject, i.e. *relative* to the subject.

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[4] Otto's (1917/1950, p. 29) portrayal of mysticism's numinous object as "wholly other" establishes this object as beyond being and tags it as "that which is nothing" for it is "absolutely and intrinsically other than and opposite of everything that is and can be thought".

[5] For instance, a term like "non-blue" carries the image of all colours that are not blue (assuming that the scope of discourse is restricted to colours, which excludes items extraneous to colour such as "numbers").

[6] See, for example, Julian of Norwich's felt experience of God's absence and presence (Julian of Norwich 1373/1902, 15th revelation 64th chp., p. 173, and 15th revelation 65th chp., p. 176 respectively).

[7] Upon enduring a profound sense of God's absence, Madame Guyon (1647–1717) embarks on a quest for her beloved only to arrive at a realization that God is present everywhere (Guyon 1683/1879, pp. 61–62). I shall re-examine this particular experience of Madame Guyon in the next chapter.

(D) Happiness and the State of Building Up on One Hand and Suffering and the State of Breaking Down on the Other Hand: Light can signify pleasant affirmation and transformation of the self, divine fecundity, or apotheosis, while darkness connotes painful purgation of egoism from the self, or the self's acute realization of its sinfulness and finitude. The mystic's development may be conceived as a sequential alternation of light and darkness, of happiness and suffering. Additionally, considering that the process of breaking down and building up frequently go together, the suffering of purgation is also conceivable as running alongside the beatific condition of transformation of the self. The light and darkness pairing in this context contains a saliently dialectical temper in the manner by which purgation and progress interweave. In essence, the stages mapped by Underhill can be said to contain the metaphorical representations of light and darkness *alternating along* the stage sequence and occurring *together within* each stage.[8]

(E) Activity and Passivity: Another application of the light–darkness metaphor arises from associating light and darkness with activity and passivity, respectively. An overlapping pattern of relation between the self's activity and divine activity can be sketched. "Light" symbolizes the active participation of the self in the mystical project. "Darkness" indicates the passivity of the self. However, in the higher stages of mystical progress, divine activity abounds (see John of the Cross, 16th cent./1991, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, prologue: 3, pp. 115–116).[9] As such, while the self is passive (darkness), grace is working relentlessly (divine light).

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[8] Just before Underhill presents an overview of her five mystical stages, she alerts her readers to an important observation:

> The first thing we notice about this composite portrait is that the typical mystic seems to move towards his goal through a series of strongly marked oscillations between "states of pleasure" and "states of pain". … The soul, as it treads the ascending spiral of its road towards reality, experiences alternately the sunshine and the shade. (*M* p. 168)

In citing Jacob Boehme's description of his experience of a combination of elation and pain, Underhill alludes to the possible interweaving of light and darkness within each stage. She writes:

> In these words Boehme bridges the gap between Purgation and Illumination: showing these two states or ways as co-existing and complementary one to another, the light and dark sides of a developing mystic consciousness. As a fact, they do often exist side by side in the individual experience. (*M* p. 227)

Underhill's theory of mystical progress through five distinct stages is amenable to an interpretation that employs the light–darkness metaphor as sequential alternations of light and darkness through these broad stages as well as an interweaving of light and darkness within each stage of this series.

[9] John of the Cross (16th cent./1991, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, bk. 2 chp. 4: 1, p. 159) also links darkness with passivity and light with activity when he advises the soul advancing in mysticism:

> I believe you are learning how faith is a dark night for the soul and how the soul as well must be dark — or in darkness as to its own light — that it may allow itself to be guided by faith to this high goal of union.

The counsel here is that the soul ought to render passive its own activity in order to enter into the passive night of faith.

There is another application of the light–darkness metaphor in terms of activity and passivity. It is found in the situation of mystical relationship where intellectual reason is kept in the dark while emotions and the will, especially the conation of love, form the beacon of light to convey the soul to union with God. The "blind stirring of love" phrase, fondly used by some apophatic mystics, tells us that what drives the soul in its mystical journey is the propulsion of love.[10] This love is not solely an affective energy; rather, it is mainly a function of the will. The discursive faculty has to be "asleep in the dark", leaving the will and love as the engine of mystical advancement. This seems to be at odds with the commonly accepted associations of light and enlightenment with intellectual realization, while darkness and benightment with ignorance, obscurity, and lack of moral and cultural vigour. From the perspective of mysticism, intellectual *ratiocination* may be "benighted", but intellectual *intuition* is still a serviceable faculty in the mystical process. More importantly, while reason is not categorically jettisoned (it does have its place, especially in the analysis of experience), it is love that has to be well lit in the consciousness of the mystic.

Lastly, though I discuss the metaphorical use of light and darkness, I feel obligated to mention here the literal interpretation of light and darkness, so as to cover instances where they may surface in mystical reports.[11] At the least, their literal interpretation would perhaps be a seeing, with the inner mind, an image of brightness or darkness on the "screen" of consciousness, rather than a physical seeing of external light or darkness.

In sum, light and darkness are correlative elements that may communicate the dynamic indwelling of absolute and relative, presence and absence, within and

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[10] The author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* (Johnston, ed., 14th cent./1973) advises:

> And so, humbly trust the blind stirring of love in your heart. Not your physical heart, of course, but your spiritual heart, your will. (chp. 51, p. 113) Never give up but steadfastly persevere in this nothingness [that the mind is focused on], consciously longing that you may always choose to possess God through love, whom no one can possess through knowledge. (chp. 68, p. 136)

In her introduction to *The Cloud of Unknowing* (14th cent./1922), Underhill clarifies the meaning of the book's title as such: "Reason is in the dark, because love has entered the 'mysterious radiance of the Divine Dark, the inaccessible light wherein the Lord is said to dwell, and to which thought with all its struggles cannot attain'" (pp. 30–31). From the excerpts above I infer that in mystical contemplation, the faculty of reason is kept passive as if in the dark, while the will to love actively operates to enter the illuminated abode of God.

[11] Rulman Merswin's (1307–1382) experience might fit into this category. He (14th cent./2004, p. 40) reports:

> And so it was that as I was walking in the garden in this penitent frame of mind it came to pass that a clear light quickly surrounded me, and I was taken up and swept up from the earth and carried in all directions back and forth throughout the garden.

Merswin claims to have had a physical experience of light. This experience, he admits, "was all beyond my comprehension" (p. 40). A spiritual significance with light as a metaphor for divine presence and love may be latent in this event. This study, however, will not focus on bodily visions of physical light.

beyond, happiness and suffering, building up and breaking down, activity and passivity, bright love and benighted reason, or even the apparently paradoxical relation of being and nothingness. Note though that within the framework of mysticism, the metaphorical nuances of "darkness" not only signify the negative quality of absence of light and in which light and darkness admit of degrees, they also stretch to include a positive qualification such that purgation as darkness carries the meaning of the presence of distressful, yet valuable, personality transformation.

4.2.2 Dialectical Procedure as Negation of Negation

Aside from the paired dialectical opposites of light and darkness, the process of dialectic entails a procedure or progression through a "negation of negation" whereby an affirmed thesis is negated, and then this negation is itself negated. With this in mind, I shall attempt to enumerate four different patterns of negation of negation in relation to the light–darkness metaphor.

Firstly, while a specific and literal statement such as "this is a dog" and "this (referring to the same object) is a non-dog" cannot strictly be true together, a pair of metaphors like "God is light" and "God is darkness" can hold true together, provided that the metaphors "light" and "darkness" do not connote two contradictory items. "God is light", which metaphorizes the sense of God as the living source that emanates its presence through created beings, can be consistently affirmed with "God is darkness", which metaphorizes the unknowable dark mystery of divinity. The dialectical pattern of negation of negation can take the form of asserting "God is light" and then asserting its negative, "God is darkness", and, finally, negating this negative since in this context the first negative is *not* a strict negative due to the possibility of God being both light and darkness (referring to different aspects of God).

The second pattern is not something which I label as firmly dialectical for it concerns two strictly contradictory statements. For instance, I assert that "God is light" (the living source that emanates its presence through created things). I then assert its negative as "God is darkness" (regarded here as implying that God is *not* the living source that emanates its presence through created things). This contradiction results from having light and darkness referring to the same aspect of God. The suggested way out of this contradiction is through the radical negation of negation – the negation of language in its entirety including the operation of negation viewed as a constituent of language – because God transcends language and all its operations including the one used in describing God.[12] The first negation leads to a contradictory situation. The purported solution to this contradiction is the radical

[12] Turner (1995, pp. 33–40) regards the dialectic of metaphors as performing such a radical function, whereby the negation of negation is a transcendental negation alluding to the incapability of language in capturing divine attributes.

transcendental negation: a negation of language, which includes the operation of negation itself. In this particular pattern I hesitate to label the opposing terms as dialectical because they are actually contradictory to one another. Furthermore, the movement of negation of negation as applied here leads to an absolute negation of all propositions. I think it would be more parsimonious to state plainly that God transcends language and that there is no necessity to assert a pair of contradictory propositions as supporting premises. In the dialectical metaphor of interpretation (B) as sketched in the preceding subsection, I argued that God's profound darkness can represent God's exclusion or absolute transcendence of the universe (including language). Note that I did not reach this proposition via contradictory premises.

In John of Damascus's (675–749) work, we come across a negation of both light and darkness. He (8th cent./1958, *Orthodox Faith* bk. 1, chp. 4, p. 172) writes:

> There are, moreover, things that are stated affirmatively of God, but which have the force of extreme negation. For example, when we speak of darkness in God, we do not really mean darkness. What we mean is that He is not light, because He transcends light. In the same way, when we speak of light we mean that it is not darkness.

Immediately prior to advancing the above, John of Damascus asserts God's infinity and incomprehensibility (p. 172). From this assertion he infers that when God is described as light and darkness, what this description means is that God is not darkness and not light, respectively. If John of Damascus had started out by saying that God is neither light nor darkness, then these two terms would be contraries.[13] Therefore, there would be no necessity to have recourse to contradiction as a means to affirm God's radical transcendence.

There is also a third pattern of negation of negation, one that is conceived as temporal progression. This pattern characterizes dynamic changes through time. For instance, if I take Underhill's first three stages of mystical development, I am able to label this development as a movement from light to darkness to light, referring to the progression from awakening to purgation and then to illumination. The progression is one of change through incorporating the previous moment into the present and then over to the next moment – "immediacy–mediation–mediated immediacy". Each subsequent moment negates and incorporates the moment before it. Negation of negation is viewed as a linear progression, and not a circular perpetual return. While purgation is the negation of awakening, the negation of purgation (hence, negation of negation) is not the return to awakening but the advance to illumination.

Our enumeration continues with a fourth pattern. Unlike the light–darkness metaphor, the being–becoming, transcendence–immanence, and infinity–finitude pairings are utterances that are more literal than metaphorical in their respective

[13] An ordinary and nontheological example would be the statement: "That man is sitting on a chair", which is neither light nor darkness because it is subsumed under an entirely different category.

applications to mysticism.[14] Ultimate reality *is* being and becoming, *is* transcendent to and immanent in the universe, and *is* infinity, incorporating finitude. Ultimate reality *is not* literally light or darkness. However, as argued in preceding chapters, the plenary or unqualified infinity of God implies that God includes–exceeds and excludes finite reality. Accordingly, there is an aspect of God that transcends all conceptions of being–becoming, transcendence–immanence, and infinity–finitude. The literal application of "plenary infinity" to God subverts, partly, the literal application of "being–becoming", "transcendence–immanence", and "infinity–finitude" to God. God as *literally* plenary infinite negates the literality of all literal applications of utterances that refer to God – being, becoming, goodness, beauty, truth, and so forth – except plenary infinity. The first negation then renders these terms as metaphors. However, considering that the literal application of these terms to God cannot be absolutely disregarded, the negation of negation implies a synthesis of both literalization and metaphorization. Theological discourse and its relevance to progress in mystical relationship cannot dispense with either literalization or metaphorization. Both are necessary. Upon this broad backdrop of the intricacies of the dialectic of light and darkness, I shall now draft the outlines of *M*'s stages of mystical progression.

4.3 *Mysticism*'s Stage Development: An Overview

When analysing *M* through the lens of the light–darkness metaphor, Underhill's five-stage mystical development conspicuously fits into this particular dialectical metaphor. The progression of stages from "awakening" to "purgation" to "illumination" to "purification" and finally to "union" resonates with the dialectical progression (negation of negation as dynamic change through time) of light to darkness to light to darkness and finally to light. To gain an insight into Underhill's assessment and construction of stage progression in the mystical enterprise, we ought to hear her explanation of it.

Underhill writes:

> No one mystic can be discovered in whom all the observed characteristics of the transcendental consciousness are resumed, and who can on that account be treated as typical. Mental states which are distinct and mutually exclusive in one case, exist simultaneously in another. In some, stages which have been regarded as essential are entirely omitted: in others, their order appears to be reversed. We seem at first to be confronted by a group of selves which arrive at the same end without obeying any general law. (*M* pp. 167–168)

Note that "transcendental consciousness" as frequently used by Underhill refers to the spiritual consciousness that is attuned to a world of reality larger than that mediated by our ordinary sense-dominant consciousness. The transcendental conscious-

[14] It may be argued that all language is metaphorical and that the distinction between literal and metaphorical statements is not exactly clear (see Adler 1927/2002, pp. 94–95). Perhaps, one may suggest that in some cases, there is a relative difference between statements where one statement is more literal or more metaphorical than the other.

ness is also the locus of mystical experiences, particularly the contact between finite self and infinite being (*M* pp. 51–52). From the quoted passage above, we can infer that for Underhill, the ultimate destination of all mystics is the same despite their different descriptions of their respective journeys to that destination. Notwithstanding her admission of the difficulty in delineating the typical characteristics of the mystical journey, Underhill proposes to undertake a method that elicits a typical parameter: "all the outstanding characteristics contributed by the individual examples are present together, and minor variations are suppressed" (*M* p. 168). At the outset, Underhill professes to avoid any dogmatic assertions of stage divisions with bold borders between them and of strict sequential development that is universally applicable. She acknowledges the diversity within and amongst traditions of mysticism. Like the debate in human development (ontogenesis) over the veracity of stage, or continuity, or erraticism, mystical development confronts a similar controversy. And, like human development, mysticism is amenable to a description in terms of stage development, though with some caveats.

The feature which stands out in the typical growth in mysticism is the dialectical oscillation of opposing qualities or principles. Underhill proposes a fivefold division of the mystic way. She is quick to stress that her division is only a diagram and it cannot claim to be perfectly consonant with every mystic's actual trajectory of mystical development (*M* p. 168). The diagram serves as a guide. Furthermore, progress in any endeavour obviously consists of advances, but not necessarily devoid of stagnations, and regressions. At this juncture, I think it is important to keep in mind that any postulation of a common denominator of the mystic path and destination is a moot point. This present chapter's investigation includes a perusal of the problems associated with Underhill's stage theory of mystical development.

Underhill's (*M* pp. 169–170) stages are:

1. The "awakening of the self" through a brief savour of ultimate reality. This is usually a fleeting and pronounced experience that is characterized by feelings of joy and exaltation.
2. The stage of "purgation", which takes place when the self comes face to face with its own finitude, and its distance from the perfect and infinite. Awareness of this chasm creates a desire in the self to bridge it, with suffering and striving as consequences.
3. At the stage of "illumination", the self receives consolations and insights from achieving closeness with the divine. Illumination is pervaded by the experience of happiness resulting from a strong sense of God's presence.
4. The stage of "purification" involves intense suffering resulting from a purification of the spirit (especially the soul's sense of I-ness and self-will).[15] All desires harboured by the soul, including the desire for spiritual gifts, must be purified. The experience of divine absence might be quite pronounced here.
5. Finally, the stage of "union" signifies the attainment of the self's union with ultimate reality. Peaceful joy, equilibrium, enhanced powers, and certitude reign in this stage.

[15] Despite Underhill's labelling of the second and fourth stages as "purgation" and "purification", respectively, the two chapters in *M* that cover these stages are titled "the purification of the self" (for purgation) and "the dark night of the soul" (for purification).

Underhill continues to say that the mystical life is ultimately active and it impels mystics to become "modes of the Infinite" (*M* p. 172). Filled with the infinite, the finite soul desires to communicate this most valuable experience to other finite beings. Hence, the *telos* of mysticism can be said to be that of divine fecundity rather than spiritual marriage. I am of the opinion that regardless of a tradition's description of the ultimate stage of mystical union, dual or non-dual (monistic absorption), or leading to the additional phase of divine fecundity, it is possible to amalgamate these descriptions into the general category of "union".

This chapter and the next will be devoted to the assessment and discussion of the dialectical processes pervading those five stages and the identification of moments within those stages that conceal the components of the sublime. The present chapter focuses upon the stages of awakening, purgation, and illumination. The subsequent chapter will be directed to the stages of purification and union. Threaded through these five stages is the dominant theme of the light–darkness dialectical metaphor. As a general sequence of stage development, the dialectical metaphors operate predominantly as progressive alternation of the self's experiences of presence/beatification (light) and absence/suffering (darkness). Also, permeating every stage are some of the varied metaphorical applications of light and darkness as enumerated above.

4.4 The Dawn of the Mystical Quest

Although I have here labelled the initiating force in the mystical quest as "dawn", in a number of cases, the dawn of awakening breaks into an omnipresent darkness within the prospective awakened person. Affective and intellectual states like the sense of incompleteness, loss of meaning in one's existence, gnawing doubt, guilt, failure, and despair oftentimes antecede or form a backdrop to an awakening experience. Of course, a person who is quite removed from such afflictions can also be a candidate for an awakening. The precise contributing factors that brought about the awakening may elude the affected person. Nevertheless, broadly stated, the psychological dynamics of this momentous event revolve around the significant restructuring of the psyche with rearrangements of ideas and affective drives. A dominant idea cathected by the subject may suddenly be displaced by another psychic content that probably was lurking around the fringes of the subject's consciousness (see James 1902/1958, pp. 160–162).[16] Underhill acknowledges the "awakening of the self" as the first stage of the mystic's journey (*M* p. 176). It has some affinities with

[16] "Cathexis" refers to a subject's investment of emotive or intellectual energy into an idea, activity, external object, or another person (see Reber 1985, s.v. "cathexis", p. 111).

religious conversion but is more profound in its content because mystical awakening involves a radical change in consciousness rather than a new encounter with a religious institution.

Underhill feels that most mystical awakenings are sudden and prominent (*M* p. 177). This event, experienced as precipitous, may conceal a gradual, unconscious process leading to it. When did the awakening actually begin for the person? Was it sudden without antecedent determinants or gradually emerging from a fertile ground of ideological conditioning? James Pratt opposes what he takes to be William James's conviction that the awakening and conversion events are typically dramatic, powerful, sudden, and transient. Pratt asserts, on the basis of his survey, that the majority of awakenings are gradual, sober, imperceptible, and morally transformative (as documented in Wulff 1991, p. 502). Most probably, in the light of the saliency of the descriptions of dramatic awakenings, we tend to get the impression that such cases are the norm. The type of awakening that is enduring and subtle might instead be closer to reality and, hence, deserving of equal consideration. Moreover, a stretch of gradual spiritual development may be punctuated with "critical" moments of powerful sensations of awakening, i.e. profound and existential realization of what was previously only an intellectual acknowledgement.

It seems that either the sudden or the gradual type of awakening can be the dominant feature of an individual's mystical awakening. Quite likely as well, a combination of both these types constitutes a single person's awakening whereby the sudden and apparently unconsciously driven dawn of a new life experience and orientation emerges after a subtle and gradual conscious effort at self-transformation had been expended.[17] However, a shared feature between the two is the extreme difficulty of the subject to articulate the determinants of her awakening. This does not imply that the awakening is absolutely bereft of determinants.[18] Another significant commonality is that regardless of the nature of the awakening, be it dramatic or subtle, it is possible at the least to realize that one had an awakening. A devout person persistent in her faith duties, when asked, would be able to admit or deny that early in her spiritual journey, insights, joy, and conviction

[17] Interestingly, in the Early Chinese spiritual tradition, there are two main differences of theoretical assumption and practical approach to the attainment of the perfect spiritual state. There are those who assume that perfection in terms of one's intimate connection to the universal order and being is already internally present, as a potential, in the subject. The subject then has only to allow such perfection to surface. In the other camp, there is the assumption that we are far from perfect and we require strenuous effort in order to attain to that perfection of harmonious unity with the universal order. Generally, and not necessarily, the internalist (perfection already present) takes the event of perfection to be sudden because it is already in existence within the self, while the externalist (requiring effort) believes that the process to perfection is gradual (see Slingerland 2009, pp. 315–316).

[18] Edwin Starbuck (1866–1947) is convinced that there are indeed antecedents that determine an awakening experience, but the experiencing subject finds it exceedingly difficult to pin down these antecedents because they are largely processes operating in the deeper levels of the subject's consciousness (Starbuck 1911, pp. 106–113).

dawned upon her without her bidding (see James 1902/1958, pp. 168–170). These are manifestations of the awakening phase. Nonetheless, the precise causes of the awakening are very often hidden.

4.4.1 Testimonials on Awakening

The phase of awakening, whether at that powerful ephemeral moment or at critical junctures within an enduring state, is shot through and through with exquisite emotions, particularly the experience of profound joy. This impactful experience is the inaugural moment of a long process of mystical development. Some written accounts of mystical awakenings seem to employ the concepts and categories of mystical theology. This appears to be the case for Henry Suso (1295–1366).[19] However, Underhill proceeds to relay two individuals' reports of awakening, which she thinks are less informed by the technicalities of theological language. I shall mention one of them: Blaise Pascal (1623–1662). Pascal endured an extended period of spiritual dissatisfaction. He could not find pleasure in all the attractions of this world. Neither did he find solace in God, notwithstanding his appreciation of God as the only true, lasting source of satisfaction.

Then one day, for two whole hours, his awakening experience bursts upon him (*M* p. 189).[20] Pascal was led to the conviction that it is not through knowledge and scholarly pursuits that we find God. He (17th cent./1910, fragments # 277–278, p. 99) now believes that God is found through the heart, through love. The intriguing thing with this awakening experience lies in the scribbled transcription (called "Memorial") of it by Pascal (17th cent./2013 (online), p. 2) himself. Here is an excerpt of it:

> God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob not of the philosophers and of the learned. Certitude. Certitude. Feeling. Joy. Peace. God of Jesus Christ. My God and your God. Your God will be my God. Forgetfulness of the world and of everything, except God.

The scribbles, littered with emotive exclamations, probably report an accurate account of his inner experience, an experience, which Underhill imagines, is indescribably ecstatic (*M* pp. 189–190). The dissociation of "philosophers and of the learned" from God and the explicit reference to God of the biblical figures allude to Pascal's encounter with a living reality rather than an abstract being that is the product of reasoning. However, the inclusion of these biblical figures in his testimony does betray an influence of doctrinal beliefs in his awakening. It is probable that awakenings are determined by the awakened person's existing set of beliefs, but the force of this determination varies across persons and their respective experiences.

[19] Suso was a Dominican monk and a student of Meister Eckhart. His descriptions of his own mystical experiences are said to be founded upon and replete with the theological categories he acquired from his training (McGinn 1989, pp. 5–6). There is, though, the possibility that his descriptions are *solely* his ex post facto interpretations, and not of his original experiences.

[20] The experience is said to have occurred on 23 November 1654 (see Eliot 1958, pp. ix–x).

Pascal intended this beatific encounter to continue indefinitely, but existence in this physical world precludes it. His meditation led him to conclude that the way to maintain contact with his encountered reality is renunciation, the very hallmark of the stage of purgation, the stage that follows awakening.[21]

Even if awakenings of different people do differ, one typical feature of awakening as manifested in Pascal's case is the contrast between the pre-awakened and awakened states. To analyse this contrast, I will draw upon the metaphor of light dawning upon darkness as deployed by Marie-Alphonse Ratisbonne (1814–1884) when he recalls his awakening:

> But how came I, then, to this perception of it? I can answer nothing save this, that on entering that church I was in darkness altogether, and on coming out of it I saw the fullness of the light. I can explain the change no better than by the simile of a profound sleep or the analogy of one born blind who should suddenly open his eyes to the day. He sees but cannot define the light which bathes him and by means of which he sees the objects which excite his wonder.[22]

Ratisbonne's case illustrates the distinct dialectical feature of opposing states, which characterizes most, if not all, awakenings. The contrast between light and darkness signifies the profound impact of the awakening upon the experiencing subject. In another translation, "profoundly ignorant of everything" replaces "darkness altogether", and "everything clearly and distinctly" replaces "the fullness of light" (Lockhart 1842, p. 118). This particular translation indicates a transition from light to darkness as suggesting a shift from ignorance to clear knowledge. There is a degree of relative contrast between the pre-awakened phase and the brightness of awakening. The brightness that suffices to effect a major consciousness rearrangement renders the dawn of the mystical quest as the negation of the subject's pre-awakened state. Furthermore, and quite possibly, the darkness that Ratisbonne speaks of stretches beyond just a reference to ignorance. In De Bussières's record, Ratisbonne continues to ponder on his darkness to light conversion experience:

> The scene of these wonders was within, in my soul; and their impressions, ten thousand times more swift than thought, ten thousand times deeper than reflection, had not only shaken my soul to its foundation, but had, as it were, turned it round, and given it another direction, towards another end, and in the power of a new life. (Lockhart 1842, p. 119)

Ratisbonne's conversion is not just an intellectual one for it results in a deep and radical transformation of his whole self. By accentuating the amplitude of brightness with the phrase "fullness of light", what is conveyed is the intensity of awakening that forcefully negates the darkness of the preceding state.

From the analogy of waking up from deep sleep, or opening eyes previously sightless, we get a peek into the internal eruption that transpired within Ratisbonne.

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[21] Underhill comments that the second half of the "Memorial" consists of Pascal's reflections on his awakening experience (*M* p. 190). The statements "Let me never be separated from him. He is only kept securely by the ways taught in the Gospel: Renunciation, total and sweet" (Pascal 17th cent./2013 (online), p. 2) indicate Pascal's realization of the need for contrition and change of self for a continued relationship with God.

[22] As quoted in James 1902/1958, p. 183. James obtained this passage from an Italian translation of a letter in the *Biografia del Sig. M.A. Ratisbonne* (1843).

There was a massive alteration of consciousness, from a restricted, dormant one to an expansive openness to new realities formerly unknown. Although the light illuminated the contents of his consciousness, "he sees indeed, but he can give no definition of that light which enlightens him, and in which he beholds the objects of his wondering gaze" (p. 119). The light does not decisively eliminate the darkness. While the subject sees the contents illuminated by the light, there is still some "darkness" as regards the nature of the light itself.

Incidentally, Ratisbonne's awakening as examined by James is one amongst others of its kind in which the influence of a religious framework, functioning as a perceptual set and priming a conversion experience, is purportedly absent or at its minimum. Prior to his awakening, Ratisbonne, although nominally a Jew, was also antagonistic towards religion, especially Christianity (the religion he eventually converted to) (James 1902/1958, pp. 181–182). Arguably then, we can assume that the source of his awakening experience was outside of his existing ideological frame and orientation. Does this make his experience more authentic than another individual's awakening that is embedded within that individual's existing belief system? I do not think so. In any life-transforming experience of profound significance, no matter how wide the gap is between the previous self and the newly transformed self, it is the self, complete with ideological and affective predispositions, that undergoes transformation.

Awakenings do not take place in a vacuum. In essence, such encounters inevitably involve the dynamic relationship between the subject (who brings into the relationship her personality) and the encountered object. If we think about it, our judgments of other persons, events, social roles, and even of ourselves cannot escape the influence of our past experiences. These judgments and our interactions with reality mutually influence one another. Hence, if one is more exonerating of the authenticity requirement for such commonplace operations, why should it not be the case for spiritual experiences? Nonetheless, there is a test of authenticity of the awakening. If the being encountered is the infinite, there ought to be a sense of meeting something that is overwhelmingly greater than the self. Note too that since the finite is encompassed by the infinite, this encounter is an integrated experience of the infinite as other to the self and as including the self. When our fundamental premise is the subject–object separation, the authenticity of objective experience becomes an issue that troubles us. However, if we realize that the subject's experience of the object is not that of an aloof observer, but as immersed in the all-encompassing object, perhaps then, our worry about "objective" experience will be somewhat allayed, though not eliminated.

The awakened individual might be presented with a solution to her persistent psychological darkness, no less and no more. In this case, the experience is intellectually insightful, not mystical. Receiving insights into a predicament by way of understanding the contours of the predicament and the way out of it is surely valuable for the subject. However, Pascal's and Ratisbonne's awakenings seem to indicate experiences that are more than just intellectually insightful. In both cases, the

positive shift in perception, realization, and orientation takes place in the affective rather than intellectual domain. Their reports of ineffability allude to a form of knowing that is also unknowing. The subject knows that here is a light to his darkness, but he does not know its origins, its operations, and the manner in which he can accurately articulate the nature of this light. The insights gained from such an experience are more affective than intellectual in tone. By saying this, I do not dismiss the role that intellectual or conceptual operations play in awakening. For sure, the reporting of an awakening invokes the application of conceptual interpretation. While the immediate experience is mainly affective in nature, the intellect quickly attempts to make sense of the experience and to formulate the experience's impact on the self. Even in this initial awakening of the mystical consciousness, a sublime meeting with something infinite is rendered possible. The subject becomes aware of the gap between the direct knowledge of the encounter and the attempts to articulate it through fitting signifiers. For the awakened person, an infinite being takes her beyond just the contingency of her idiosyncratic darkness to an offer of a greater existence. In agreeing to engage in a relationship with the divine, she faces the prospect of enduring an ongoing tension that is unique to an asymmetric (disproportionate) finite–infinite relationship. The self may desire to merge with the infinite and yet wish to retain its identity and separation. Or the tension may take the form wherein the self intends to reduce the other to its own finite world of particular perspectives and needs. Such an attempt futilely or falsely reduces the infinite other to the self and is inherently counterproductive for the mystical project. Consequently, the awakening experience, particularly of the mystical variety, allows for a sublime experience through the subject's recognition of this asymmetric relationship and the infinite disjunction between the being experienced and the articulated signifiers.

Awakening brings forth a desire in the subject to partake in a committed relationship with the object of her encounter. The decision is left to her as to whether she acts on this desire or ignores it. At the core of this mystical impetus is the commitment of the will. From awakening to the unitive life, beginning to end, the mystic is challenged to endure many alternating forces of wilful self-effort and divine grace (see Underhill 1920/1999, pp. 136–137). The harmonious synthesis of particularity and universality, though inchoate and moving haltingly at the start, will grow in its individuation (the moment of dialectical synthesis) of infinite reality and finite humanity. The truth as enlightened by the light of awakening divulges the greater reality previously shrouded in darkness. Ratisbonne is now able to see "objects which excite his wonder", as if seeing them for the first time. During the phase of awakening, the transcendental consciousness makes its presence felt and impinges upon the subject's hitherto limited consciousness that was largely steered by the sense faculties and self-centredness. The glimpse of the transcendental consciousness, early in the mystic's journey, is suffused with positive vivifying energies. This brief taste of an exceedingly rich life of relationship with the experience's principal author is a fulguration that is indefinable, yet it demands a response from the experiencing subject.

4.4.2 Sublime Awakening

There are areas of resonance between the phenomenon of awakening and the experience of the sublime. According to Kant (1790/2000, § 5, pp. 53–54) the aesthetic judgments of beauty and sublimity reside in between the judgment of sensation and the judgment of the good (value). The judgment of the sublime then differs from the immediate, singular, and subjective sensations of the pleasant and the unpleasant in that the sublime experience, while singular, includes an assumption of universal consensus.[23] The judgment of the good involves the subject's evaluative responses to the concepts of value, especially moral values. As such, the judgment of the good, in Kant's view, is conceptual or rational and invocative of objective universal principles. Judging something as sublime, unlike judging something as good, is not constrained by adherence to concepts and precepts. Rather, the sublime pertains to a nonconceptual, relatively immediate, and subjectively universal judgment.[24] The explanation that the sublime is not constrained by adherence to moral concepts, I think, applies more to the mathematical than the dynamical sublime. The dynamical sublime involves the awareness of our capacity to overcome the forces of nature through our free will and moral strength (Kant 1790/2000, § 28, pp. 125–127). However, a distinction can still be drawn between the aesthetic judgment of sublimity and the practical judgment of morality. The judgment of the dynamical sublime concerns the affective response elicited from an intense moral exertion against overwhelming circumstances. The response can come from an outside observer or the moral agent herself. One judges this situation aesthetically due to the accompanying spontaneous feeling of the sublime, which is unconditioned by personal inclinations and by cognitive and moral concepts. Practical judgments of morality, on the other hand, entail the application of moral reason informed by moral concepts and precepts. Note that not all moral actions can be classified as sublime.

By way of comparison, another feature of Kantian aesthetics is instructive in shedding some light on the matter of the darkness of awakening's origins. There is, according to Kant, "purposiveness without purpose" in aesthetic judgments. Kant's (1790/2000, § 10, pp. 67–69) explanation is that the pleasure or pain associated with an aesthetic appraisal is free of subjective intentions and interests and the objective impositions of natural and moral laws. However, the absence of subjective and objective purposes in this form of judgment does not discount the presence of a general form of purposiveness – an apparent purposive connection between the object experienced and its evoked aesthetic feeling, a form of purposiveness in the

[23] In appraising something as sublime, one generally assumes that others will do so as well. This is not the case for the purely subjective sensation of something being pleasant. The experience of the sublime is subjective (unlike the objective claim of seeing, say, a vast ocean before me) yet universal. The term "singular" can refer to the single instant of having a specific empirical experience, or a judgment directed to that experience, such as "this drink is sweet".

[24] Kant carefully distinguishes the aesthetic judgments of the beautiful and the sublime from the judgment of the pleasant and that of the good in his *The Critique of Judgment*, § 7–8, pp. 57–63.

absence of an actual will with an intended purpose. Kant (1790/2000, § 11, pp. 69–70) talks about the determining ground of the judgment of beauty:

> Now this relation in the determination of an object as beautiful is bound up with the feeling of pleasure, which is declared by the judgment of taste to be valid for every one; hence a pleasantness, (merely) accompanying the representation, can as little contain the determining ground (of the judgment) as the representation of the perfection of the object and the concept of the good can. Therefore it can be nothing else than the subjective purposiveness in the representation of an object without any purpose (either objective or subjective) ….

There is then, as Kant argues, the absence of subjective and objective purposes in determining the judgment of something as beautiful. Neither the subjective sensation of pleasantness and the subject's idiosyncratic interest in what the subject deems as pleasant nor the objective concepts of nature (determining the type and attributes of the object) and the concepts of freedom (moral principles) ought to determine why one judges something as beautiful and assumes that this judgment has universal agreement. Since sublimity is an aesthetic judgment, the same purposiveness without purpose applies to the sublime. However, the feeling of the purposiveness in the sublime is grounded in the evoked awareness of the power of reason, which arises from the awareness of a lack of fit between that which is sensed and the faculty of understanding. Moreover, sublimity's alliance with the perception of the "absolutely great" reinforces the idea that the judgment of the sublime precludes a definable object functioning as representable purpose determining such an aesthetic judgment.[25]

Kant (1790/2000, § 10, pp. 67–68) stipulates "purpose" as referencing the object caused by its concept and "purposiveness" as the causality that operates when an object is caused by its concept.[26] When the form or existence of the object is conceived as a possibility and this possibility causes the subject to make this object its end, then a purpose exists. However, there can be a sense of purposiveness, a sense of a harmonious fit between the faculties *as if* there is an object as an end, but there is no object conceived – then purposiveness without purpose is obtained.

In the context of mystical awakening, the absence of a purpose (in Kant's sense) would leave the awakened subject in the dark as to the source of such an experience. I think that awakening somewhat shares sublimity's status as residing between sub-

[25] Kant (1790/2000, § 26, p. 113) draws our attention to the insufficiency of our represented concept to capture (*comprehensio aesthetica*) the magnitude of the infinite. Neither objects of art nor specific objects of nature can fully represent the infinite. Both these types of object have definite forms that can serve as firm purposes for the subject. Raw nature, regarded as having an immense magnitude, comes closest to representing the sublime; and such a formless object does not serve a firm purpose for the subject. Sublimity, considered in its pure aesthetic feeling response, lacks direct purpose on account of imagination's inability to fulfil the requirement to submit the infinite into a concept of the understanding. Ironically, it is precisely this lack of fulfilment that constitutes sublimity's purposiveness without purpose.

[26] One way to understand this is to think about a specific goal in a person's mind, say the writing of a letter. The *concept* of the written letter in the mind of the person becomes the cause of the person's effort to effectuate the reality of a completed written letter (regarded as the "object" in this context). Note that even if the object does not come into actual existence, its presence as an objective for the subject still renders it as a purpose.

jective sensation and objective and conceptually determined judgment of the good. Mystics awakened to divine infinity do not report having a merely subjective sensation. On the contrary, they admit to experiencing something objectively real. Is it possible to claim that the object out there, the mystic's faith concepts, or both constitute the overall determinant of the awakening, thereby imbuing an objective purpose to the whole awakening experience? However, assuming that the object experienced is infinite, it cannot then form a definite concept capable of producing a definite phenomenal content. Also, even if the mystic's faith concepts influence her awakening, no concept adequately and accurately functions in a causal capacity with respect to the awakening that entails some form of encounter with the infinite. Recall Pascal's articulation of his experience in very abrupt sentences and Ratisbonne's indefinable light that enlightens. Due to the incongruence between an already amorphous concept and its causal effect (object) in mystical awakening, it is plausible that awakening does, like sublimity, figure as possessing purposiveness without purpose. The heightened experience of awakening appears to be purposive, but the absence of a definite purpose signifying a concept–object causality accounts for the indefinable source of the mystic's awakening. Note that the absence of purpose does not imply an absolute absence of causality. It merely means that there is an absence of a representational object that serves as a purpose directing the will to bring the object into being.

Apparently, mystical awakening contrasts with sublimity in that the Kantian sublime, unlike the mystic's claim of being awakened by an objective reality, is purportedly locked within the subject and her faculties. However, both the judgments of taste (beauty) and of the sublime contain a normative criterion – other people *ought* to share my aesthetic appreciation. This universal validity condition suggests that an element of objectivity infuses aesthetic judgments. The "objectivity" that Kant appeals to does not pertain to something that resides outside of the subject, but an *a priori* principle internal to and shared by all subjects (excluding the anomalous cases of individuals with severely compromised faculties). This principle bears upon the manner in which judging something as beautiful or sublime has an effect on the relation of our inherent faculties.

Kant (1790/2000, § iv, pp. 16–17) distinguishes between a determinant judgment and a reflective judgment. As explained in Chap. 2, for Kant, the imagination works at bringing the manifold of sense intuitions (delivered by our senses) into a meaningful concept supplied by the understanding. In a determinant judgment, the sensed intuitions are gathered under a pre-existing universal concept. In a reflective judgment, the pure form of the represented object seeks out a suitable concept in the understanding. Imagine looking at a rose. The Kantian notion of judging it as beautiful springs from contemplating the pure form or shape of the rose, and not the empirical concept of it being a rose, nor any function attributable to a rose. If the rose, contemplated in such a manner, evokes a pleasurable experience, then this indicates that the pure form of the rose is able to engender a harmonious play between the faculties of imagination (gathering the manifold sensations) and understanding (that supplies the concept under which the sense intuitions fall). In the judgment of beauty, the aim is not so much to obtain a *specific* coherence between

the sense intuition of a rose and its concept, "rose". Rather, the pleasure resulting from contemplating the pure represented form of the rose hints at a *general* harmony between imagination and understanding (see Kant 1790/2000, § 9, pp. 63–67). The focus here is on the faculties and not the processed data.

In the case of the sublime, the aesthetic judgment evokes a mixture of pleasure and pain that indicates a shift in awareness from the shortcomings of the faculty of imagination to the strengths of the higher faculty of reason. Kant (1790/2000, § 27, pp. 121–122) explains:

> For just as Imagination and *Understanding*, in judging of the Beautiful, generate a subjective purposiveness of the mental powers by means of their harmony, so (in this case) Imagination and *Reason* do so by means of their conflict. … The *quality* of the feeling of the Sublime is that it is a feeling of pain in reference to the faculty by which we judge aesthetically of an object, which pain, however, is represented at the same time as purposive. This is possible through the fact that the very incapacity in question discovers the consciousness of an unlimited faculty of the same subject, and that the mind can only judge of the latter aesthetically by means of the former.

Having a sublime experience of a seemingly infinite object precipitates a distinct relational dynamic amongst faculties. The experience reveals imagination's inability to form an adequate sensory comprehension of the infinite and unveils reason's ability to formulate an abstract concept of infinity. Note that in Chap. 2, I argued that even reason's formulation of the idea of "infinity" cannot capture the true sense of something boundless or unlimited. Kant (1817/1978, p. 47) does admit to such a lack in reason when he points to the inability of reason to comprehend the notion of eternity.[27] Hence, the pleasure evoked by a sublime encounter could be better attributed to a twofold realization by the subject: that there is an element within the subject that transcends the merely sensible and that there is also, possibly, an infinite reality that includes and transcends the subject. The positive feeling associated with the mystical sublime springs not just from the awareness of one's supersensible faculty (Kantian sublime) but from a realm or reality that further exceeds that faculty. Essentially, the mystical sublime incorporates both the pain (darkness) of the insufficiency of our faculties and the overwhelming difference between the self and God and the pleasure (light) of the presence of our higher faculties of reason and especially the "ground of the soul" that connects the self to divine infinity. This "ground of the soul" is depicted here as a sort of distinct *faculty* or *capacity* within the human self. Although partially reflective of the notion of the "soul" explicated in Chap. 2 (signified therein as the synthetic moment of the individualizing dialec-

[27] In his first *Critique*, Kant (1787/1991, pp. 305–306) describes how the faculty of reason, by virtue of its function of generating ideas distant from the sensible, can only legitimately formulate ideas through a *regulative* and not *constitutive* principle. Reason provides the rules that enable us to understand such ideas. Accordingly, there is never a synthesis of infinite empirical phenomena constitutive of the idea of "infinity". Rather, this idea merely tells us to think of it as something unlimited, whether through progression or regression. In this respect, the faculty of reason may surpass the faculty of imagination, but its formulation of the abstract idea of "infinity" is still inadequate.

tic), the "ground of the soul" refers to that dynamic capacity that mediates the self's contact with God.[28]

Kantian aesthetics' universal validity concerns an "objective" operation between that which is perceived and the relation of faculties within the subject. In some respects, this form of objectivity corresponds with the form of objectivity found in mystical experiences. Watershed experiences such as awakening is characterized by an encounter with an object (not a physical object out there) that is described as immense and transforming of the subject's faculties. Awakening's contrast between darkness and brightness, though often reported as resulting in intense delight, is not inimical to the suggestion that pain might have a place in this experience. Pain here comes in the form of a jolt when transiting from an accustomed state of being to a vastly different state of being. For Kant, the sublime comes about from the triggered awareness of imagination's incapacity to present the infinite as a totalized sense intuition and its contrast to reason's capacity to collapse the infinite into an abstract concept. For the mystic, a different contrast is experienced, one which sits in the chasm between ordinary consciousness and transcendental or spiritual consciousness. It appears that while sublimity and awakening do not posit an objective provenance as something *physically* out there, sublimity, unlike awakening, is indifferent to the actual existence of the sublime-causing object. Yet, given that the Kantian sublime is grounded in conditions such as disinterestedness, purposiveness without purpose, universal validity, and a necessity of this normative (universal validity) criterion to be based on a common structural relations of faculties, there is some plausibility in assuming an objective source of the sublime experience. To put it succinctly, these conditions characterize a non-idiosyncratic experience that alludes to a possible transcendent sublime object.

I have attempted to focus on the sublime character of awakening. The foregoing considerations indicate that I am inclined to regard awakening as a stage that contains a heightened experiential state or several critical moments within an extended process of development.[29] The brightness of this initial phase is necessary to sustain the mystic who elects to venture further, for the trials that await her are the inevitable part of the mystical quest. This inaugural benefaction with its sublime temper may resemble a consummate mystical experience of divine union. Less spiritually astute individuals might erroneously assume that they have already arrived. From the immediacy of this phase, there is still much dialectical distance to traverse. Also, lest the reader assume that the mystical mission is confined to the province of con-

[28] This term will resurface later in this chapter and the next.

[29] Andrew Chignell and Matthew Halteman (2012, pp. 183–202) develop a fundamental structure of the sublime with the notion of religion trailing at the back of their minds. They suggest three core features of the sublime – *bedazzlement* (the shattering experience of terror and awe), *outstripping* (a sense of meeting something that transcends one's cognitive abilities), and that which resonates with our understanding of the awakening experience as life-changing, *epiphany* (a realization that is transformative) (pp. 184–185). Intriguingly, they also classify four models of sublimity within the context of religion: "theistic, spiritualistic, demythologistic, and nontheistic" (p. 184); the last two especially, in keeping with the radicalness of the sublime experience, ironically deflect from normative religiosity and slip into the domain of secularity.

sciousness, Underhill (1937, pp. 25–27) reminds us that the spiritual life extends beyond the exercise of consciousness expansion. Life with the infinite is much larger than the goings-on in a person's soul. It is a life that reaches out far beyond the self and unfolds in positive actions.

4.5 The First Transformative Night

Following from the experience of awakening, the person now confronts several possible options, namely, life as usual with no wish for a major life-changing project, a half-hearted wait-and-see approach, and a determined reorientation of one's life towards a profound relationship with the principal author of that encounter. This last option is the mystical quest, and it embodies what is simply a relationship, albeit a unique one. Individuals like Pascal, when enraptured in an emotionally intense awakening, harbour a wish that their encounter will never end. However, once the flaming light of elation subsides, a tinge of anticipatory dread befalls the person. Underhill's message is clear and austere. When consciousness is powerfully aroused to apprehend what is real, there is a realization of the distance between the finite and the infinite (*M* p. 198). The flip side of feeling divine presence is feeling divine distance. Such ambivalence of reaction to the infinite helps us understand the possibility of an elation–anguish experience. Being in the presence of the infinite makes one acutely aware of one's finitude. A profound sense of sinfulness and guilt can possibly overwhelm the self. Julian of Norwich (1373/1902, 16th revelation 71st chp., p. 190) outlines the nature of sin as such:

> In which shewing I saw that sin was the most contrary, so far forth that, as long as we be medled with any part of sin, we shall never see clearly the blessed chear [cheer/joy] of God. And the horriblier, and the grievouser that our sins be, the deeper are we for that time fro [from] this blessed sight.

If, according to Julian, God and sin are contrary to one another, then to attain to God, sin has to be overcome. The awakened person might resolve to overcome sin through efforts at transforming the self. Those who are merely stuck at the awakening phase and do not proceed further are, in Underhill's opinion, not mystics (*M* p. 198). What this means is that for Underhill, mysticism is a committed relationship, not to be equated entirely and solely with heightened experiences.

Mysticism's foundational assignment is the exertion to discard elements of the mystic's personality that move the self away from infinitude and towards increasingly restrictive finitude. Such elements include imperfection, illusion, and egoism. After being awakened to the infinite, the finite self might desire to be free from the chains of limitation and seek the unlimited. In order to fulfil this desire, the self has to undergo two major types of painful (represented by the metaphor of "darkness" or "night") transformative processes. The first night ("purgation") pertains to the elimination or sublimation of egocentric forces that entrench the self in its constricted existence. The second night ("purification") executes a transformative operation at the deeper levels of the self – levels that conceal vestiges of egocentrism in the form

of spiritual pride and greed. Consequently, the second night may even have to negate some of the positive qualities gained by the first night, especially if the self is still attached to those qualities. Ultimately though, the aim of mysticism is not just the attainment of positive qualities but a forging of an intimate relationship with God.

Underhill asserts that although the ultimate goal of mysticism is not the achievement of moral goodness, moral goodness is nonetheless a necessary though insufficient means to attain the unitive life with God (*M* p. 199). A deep sense of imperfection torments the awakened mystic and mandates for a commencement of purgation. Her inner conviction in the possibility of transcending her self-centred reality offers her the motivation to submit to purgation (*M* p. 201). It is this conviction that paradoxically instils joy in the midst of the mystic's afflictions. Proclaims Underhill:

> To the true lover of the Absolute, Purgation no less than Illumination is a privilege, a dreadful joy. It is an earnest of increasing life. (*M* p. 201)

The pain of contrition is the flip side of the pleasure of awakening, and mystics joyfully take up the suffering of purgation. Teresa of Avila explains that the medium of communication between the soul and God is like a mirror and that mortal sin stains this mirror, thereby obscuring God's revelation to the soul even though God "is always present giving us being".[30] Purgation is a means to return the "mirror" to its pristine and clear condition. The instinctive force to seek happiness in divine infinity impels the self to work wilfully at stamping out anything that comes between itself and God.

During awakening, the self has a brief relish of the infinite. In this early stage what is experienced is the effulgent joy of being in the presence of God that dispels the darkness of insecurity and spiritual impoverishment. Divine blithe in this case is transient and beguiling. Once ensnared, the self desires more of the consolations of God. It is this desire for that once present and now absent that contributes to the suffering of the self. In sum, the darkness of purgation includes the awareness of sinfulness, weakness, and the inability to re-experience divine consolation. Understandably, this early phase of relationship has still a long way to go – to shift the focus more from the self to God. Hence, even the mystic's rapport with vivifying awakening has to be transformed into a purer form of love.

After having an experience of the eternal, the quest for union with this being becomes the mystic's duty and joy. Although she might have intermittent flashes of illumination, the path of purgation is still considered to be the first voluntary step in the mystic way. This implies that unless the awakened individual treads on the path of purgation, no mystical journey has been undertaken. Also, while on this earth, the mystical journey will be punctuated with moments of these transformative nights. We read in *M*:

> In a sense the whole of the mystical experience in this life consists in a series of purifications, whereby the Finite slowly approaches the nature of its Infinite Source: … for the true lover of the Absolute like every other lover, is alternately abased and exalted by his unworthiness and his good fortune. (*M* p. 204)

[30] This discernment of Teresa is derived from one of her mystical visions (Teresa of Avila 16th cent./1976, *Book of Her Life*, chp. 40:5, p. 356).

It appears that purification is not something which comes and then disappears; rather, it continues through the many phases of mystical growth.[31] The first transformative night is the concerted and painstaking process of continued conversion after the initial awakening. Depending on how it is perceived, the source of the impetus to transform oneself is as much mystical as it is ordinary. This is so because that source is the internal logic of all forms of selfless love. Attendant feelings of communion and separation are forceful agencies of change in one's personality. The phrase "the true lover of the Absolute like every other lover" places mysticism on the same footing as interpersonal relationships. If our intimate interpersonal relationships exact personality transformations, then the same applies to our relationship with the absolute. To shift the balance from separation to communion requires some alignment of qualities between the two parties, hence the unavoidable pain of change. Underhill divides this arduous dynamic of purgation (the first transformative night) into two interrelated parts: (1) *Negative purification* is the work of self-stripping, of weeding out parts of the self that are illusory, unessential, and detrimental to spiritual growth. They have to be eliminated through the process of "detachment". (2) *Positive purification* is the process of character adjustment and of building up parts of the self which are considered relevant and of value to the goal of divine union. This purifying and building work is labelled "mortification" (*M* pp. 204–205).

4.5.1 Detachment

Underhill's analysis of the first transformative night hinges upon her treatment of detachment and mortification. To begin with, Underhill reiterates what she considers to be the thought of many mystics: detachment is not the absolute withdrawal of love from everything that is not God (*M* pp. 205–206). There is an urging to love all things, to love God in all things, and to love all things in God. Note that while mystics practise asceticism, not all ascetics are mystics. This all-embracing love follows from the premise that God is infinite. By loving all things in God and God in all things, and by not being attached solely to love for finite object(s), the mystic participates in universal love. Underhill considers this pattern of detachment to be part of a law of psychology, and not just a construct of the mystical life. It is in this detached manner of loving all things that we truly love them. Spiritual poverty is the basis of detachment and the condition of possibility for mystical union. To help elucidate the concept of poverty, Underhill has recourse to Eckhart's four progressive degrees of spiritual poverty:

> 1. The soul's contempt of all things that are not God. 2. Contempt of herself and her own works. 3. Utter self-abandonment. 4. Self-loss in the incomprehensible Being of God. (*M* p. 208) (See Eckhart 14th cent./1992, tractates chp. 10 – "Spiritual Poverty", pp. 348–350)

[31] Note that while "purification" (general sense) is indeed the transformation of the mystic in order to attain to the infinite, "purification" as a distinct stage (different from "purgation") in Underhill's schema of mystical development refers to the higher stage of purification of spirit, i.e. the second transformative night.

Eckhart's spiritual poverty is ostensibly exacting in its detachment. His detachment moves progressively from a global and indiscriminate contempt for all things, to the contempt towards the self and its contrivances, and finally to the absorption of the self into the being of God. "Contempt" here reveals an attitudinal stance rather than physical rejection or dispossession. The negations of spiritual poverty progress from the attitudinal negation of everything external to the self to the self's attachment to itself. Even so, instead of ending with self-abandonment, the self is lost in a positive reality. If divine being is infinitely all-encompassing, then the conclusion of this procedure in the loss of the self in God is a recuperation of the previous negations, for in God, one is part and parcel of all things. Poverty is the exercise of stripping oneself of the inveterate habit of *resting* in things. These things attract our attention and assume a false sense of value and importance (*M* pp. 210–211). Sole attachment to any part(s) of the universe of beings is entrenchment in restricted finitude rather than liberating openness to infinity. Note that detachment of possessions is not done for its own sake. Detachment in this context is a detachment of our habit to claim and possess. Poverty in mysticism is more of a mental orientation than a material state of being devoid of possessions. What is practised is the detachment of the will from all desire to possess.

The specifics of things which hamper a person from developing her transcendental consciousness differ from person to person, depending on the individual's own objects of attachment. Each person on the mystical path must determine the objects of attachment that divert her from reaching her goal. The attachment to those identified objects must be purged, regardless of how innocent or useful these objects may be to that person. Teresa of Avila's (16th cent./1976, *Book of Her Life*, chp. 22: 1 and 5, pp. 191 and 193) stage of purgation lasted for a long time, and it was graced with moments of illumination, i.e. the stage after purgation. Teresa's strong personality opposed the transcendental consciousness that was trying to surface within her. She disputed and challenged the workings of this transcendental consciousness. It was only later after her second conversion that she achieved rapid progress. It might be assumed that Teresa's extended purgation was actually the pre-awakening stage, but Underhill firmly places it as post awakening though prior to a second awakening. This probably implies that there is no rigid demarcation of progression from one stage of mystical development to another (*M* p. 213; see also note # 2 on this page). It is quite likely that mystics undergo several vacillations between the darkness of purgation and the light of awakening. Underhill comments:

> Though it is convenient for purposes of study to practice a certain dissection, and treat as separate states which are, in the living subject, closely intertwined, we should constantly remind ourselves that such a proceeding is artificial. The struggle of the self to disentangle itself from illusion and attain the Absolute is a life-struggle. Hence, it will and must exhibit the freedom and originality of life: will, as a process, obey artistic rather than scientific laws. (*M* p. 229)

Amidst the variety of mystics' respective trajectories of spiritual growth lie the core features of the light–darkness dialectic and perhaps some semblance of sequential progression. A pre-awakened darkness of purgation can be assumed to be less or differently transformative in its function as compared with a relatively more matured

post-awakened purgation. By the same principle, a spell of purgation after the first awakening followed by a second purgation subsequent to the second awakening are two distinct moments of the dialectical progression that are constitutively different where the second is informed by the first. This challenge to the doctrine of stage development in mysticism will resurface in the section on illumination later in this chapter where it will be discussed in greater detail.

Idiosyncratic factors contribute to the diversity of mystical developments. Here are some examples, provided by Underhill, of different detachments that different mystics feel constrained to exercise (*M* pp. 214–216). Teresa of Avila (16th cent./1976, *Book of Her Life*, chp. 8: 2–3, pp. 94–95, and chp. 24: 5–8, pp. 211–212) struggled between her innocent enjoyment of conversations with her friends in the convent and her love for God. She assumed that she could have both, but her attempts proved futile. When at conversation with her friends, she would think of the joys of her relationship with God, and when at prayer with God, she would reminisce her times with her friends. Many mystics might not be so drastic in their renunciation, and their work of detachment is probably more gradual than radical. Again, it is not the object that is to be focused on; rather, it is the self's attachment to that object. Underhill disparages excesses of asceticism (*M* p. 216). For her, genuine mysticism does not lead to a pointless engagement with asceticism but a more balanced approach to detachment. She thinks that extremes of asceticism miss the point of poverty. Poverty is a means to an end and not an end in itself. Detachment is meant to liberate the mystic in order to pursue God.

4.5.2 Mortification

Mortification, says Underhill, is essentially positive purification. While the old self is driven towards self-centred goals, the new self dwells in the realm of transcendence and is endowed with a new set of drives and requirements (*M* pp. 216–217). In the renewal of personality, some of the conditioned flow of the old personality's energies must be resisted or overcome in order to allow for new energies to surface. The psyche can be directed towards new objectives to initiate this renewal. This is the work of mortification. The more strong-willed the mystic, the more effort and struggle are required to make this displacement. Despite the etymological associations of mortification with death, the ultimate intention is life, in fact, new life. It is the old life that must die, in order for the new life to emerge. Underhill reasons that the more the elements of personality die to allow for the resurrection of new life in God, the more joys of this resurrection are experienced by the mystic (*M* pp. 217–218). Like detachment, mortification is a means to the divine. It functions to effectuate personality adjustments in the mystic in order to replace egoistic drives with divine love and divine will (*M* p. 218). The awakened mystic sees these drives as contravening the law of love. What propels her forward is an awareness of her imperfections, an intuition of the attainable perfect state, and the realization that this perfect state is a criterion of divine love (*M* p. 221).

Detachment and mortification, at a glance, seem to be indistinguishable, but there is an important difference. While detachment entails surrender of attachments and desires, mortification requires an active adoption of difficult tasks, whether it is some form of corporal discipline or the undertaking of work that one abhors. The mystic's deep desire for divine love drives her to embrace the agony of detachment and mortification, and yet there is happiness in this embrace. One interesting observation made by Underhill is that the mystic temperament, like the artistic one, is orientated to beauty. The call to embrace ugliness and unpleasantness is something abhorrent, and by virtue of them being part and parcel of God's creation, a call for indiscriminate love presents an opportunity for mortification. In order for the mystic to love God in all things, she must not have preferences and, instead, adopt universal love. Moreover, the call to embrace the ugly and unpleasant serves as a means to cultivate selfless divine love (*M* pp. 223–224). The intended end of mortification, like all forms of purification, is freedom from self-interest. Asceticism undertaken for its own sake, athletic heroism, or spiritual pride is asceticism without mysticism.

A familiar yet profound form of mortification is adopted by Thérèse of Lisieux (1873–1897). In her (1897/2008, p. 212) autobiography she relates how her desire to receive criticisms, not just praises, is granted her by God through the novice nuns in her convent:

> All the same, I sometimes get a terrible longing to hear something said about me which isn't praise! … at the moment when I least expect it, God lifts the veil that hides my imperfections, and these dear young sisters of mine see me just as I am; they don't care for that very much. They tell me, with delightful frankness, all about the rough time I give them, and my unpleasant habits, with so little embarrassment that you would imagine that they were talking about somebody else.

Thérèse goes on to say that, quite in opposition to natural instincts, such criticisms brought her much pleasure (p. 212). It is easy to imagine an unhealthy tinge of masochism infusing someone such as Thérèse who derives happiness from that which naturally produces unhappiness. For that matter, masochism may equally be ascribed to many other saints who appear to go overboard in their ascetical practices. But, I think, Underhill underscores the all-important objective of mortification; it is merely a means to an end, that end being loving union with God. Mystics such as Thérèse of Lisieux are genuinely aware of their failings, though, from our perspective, these may seem venial. What is interesting is that Thérèse perceives this form of mortification as coming from God. In one sense, when mortification's reference point is something much larger than the self, it is less likely that seeming humility in the face of criticism would swing around to return as self-accomplishment and self-praise.

Concerning humility, Kant (1790/2000, § 29, p. 142) designates ideas and affections that conduce to what he calls *false* humility – a subjection to ultimate reality in a self-deprecatory manner and a loss of awareness of one's powers – as not only distant from the sublime but also far removed from the beautiful. As I have emphasized, Kant sets the feeling of superiority of our supersensible capacities over that

of the sensible as the condition of the sublime. It is no surprise that he rejects any form of submissiveness involving absolute denigration of the self and surrender to another being. It might interest the reader to know that Kant, in a work preceding the writing of the first *Critique*, asserts:

> Monasteries and such tombs, to confine the living saints are grotesque. Subduing one's passions through principles is sublime. Castigation, vows, and other such monks' virtues are grotesque.[32]

Kant does not deign to justify these disparaging remarks. He may harbour an aversion towards monasticism and any excesses of asceticism, but in his more analytical work, *The Critique of Judgment*, Kant (1790/2000, § 28, pp. 128–129) affirms the sublimity of genuine humility that propels the subject towards a serious appraisal of her faults. Furthermore, when it comes to a person's attitude towards God and divine might, Kant (1790/2000, § 28, p. 128) believes that:

> [o]nly if he is conscious of an upright disposition pleasing to God do those operations of might serve to awaken in him the Idea of the sublimity of this Being, for then he recognizes in himself a sublimity of disposition conformable to His will.

There is nothing in this passage that conflicts with what we discussed about purgation and its intention of attaining goodness for the sake of communion with God. The right kind of humility and asceticism do not debase the self. Rather, they elevate the self to the level of the divine, in conformity with the will of God.[33]

Pointless self-debasement may not be part of Thérèse of Lisieux's spirituality. Be they compliments or criticisms, she receives them all as coming from the will of God. In fact, there are places in her (1897/2008, p. 209) autobiography where we see her explicitly relishing her accomplishments.[34] As stated above, Underhill views mysticism as departing from meaningless asceticism. In the next section we shall see her firmly dissociating mysticism from passive quietism. Far from denying the self, the mystic's efforts at cultivation of the self are not just directed at the attainment of freedom and morality but to reach that which is limitless.

From Underhill's point of view, the economy of mysticism, irrespective of its religious affiliation, has to include some form of night of transformation (*M* p. 226). At the tail end of this first night, the mystic, who now operates in the realm of the transcendental consciousness, is graced with moments of illumination. Jacob Boehme's experience is quite interesting. From his first powerful spiritual encounter in 1600, and until 1612, he (17th cent./1920, Underhill's "Introduction", pp. xiv–xvi,

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[32] Kant's *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime* (1764/1960), pp. 56–57. This early work, unlike *The Critique of Judgment*, approaches aesthetics without the complex technicalities of relation amongst the faculties.

[33] As Teresa of Avila (16th cent./1980, *The Way of Perfection*, chp. 39: 2, p. 189) says: "The pain of genuine humility doesn't agitate or afflict the soul; rather, this humility expands it and enables it to serve God more".

[34] Thérèse mentions the ecstatic joy she felt when, due to her advice and guidance, a positive breakthrough was reached by one of her sisters.

and Boehme, pp. 3–4) experienced moments of enlightenment amidst his dark struggles with purgation. Underhill observes that

> Boehme bridges the gap between Purgation and Illumination: showing these two states as ways of coexisting and complementary one to another, the light and dark sides of a developing mystic consciousness. As a fact, they do often exist side by side in the individual experience. (*M* p. 227)

At this threshold between purgation and illumination, mystics such as Boehme report experiencing the darkness of purgation alongside the brightness of illumination. I venture to add that the movements of coexisting light–darkness probably signal a transitory juncture. If the light of illumination gradually preponderates over the darkness of purgation at this threshold, then there is some sign, albeit subtle, of the transition from one stage to another. Underhill feels that the light–darkness alternation usually fades when the self increasingly moves into the phase of illumination (*M* pp. 227–228). At first glance, this appears to run contrary to her earlier statement on the perpetuity of purifications. Perhaps, the relative proportions of light–darkness mixtures change as the mystic advances, and in illumination, a *temporary* stability is reached. The relative proportions of light–darkness are not solely in terms of degrees (more light, less darkness) but also in terms of qualitative variations. Detachments from material possession and from false psychological security derived from habitual behavioural responses differ qualitatively, not just quantitatively. Quite intriguingly, Underhill admits that there are mystics who never arrived at the shores of stable illumination. She says that Rulman Merswin (1307–1382) experienced darkness and light, depression and delight, in alternating modes, right up to the stage of purification (second transformative night) (*M* pp. 228–229). It is not that he leapt over illumination, but his illumination appeared to have broken up into pieces existing side by side with purgation.

4.5.3 Dialectical Incorporation, Universal–Particular Dialectic, and Sublimity

In many ways, Underhill's treatment of the detachment–mortification complex is an exemplary synthesis of the crucial determinants involved in the first transformative night of the mystic. Having said this, I also wish to point out that there is a relevant aspect of purgation that Underhill appears not to have given sufficient attention to. The epistemological component of this whole exercise of transformation needs to complement its volitional or conative component, the component Underhill emphasizes. This is where John of the Cross's paradigmatic delineation of purification's intricate terrain can help us address this deficiency in *M*. It is very likely that John's separation of purification into two distinct tracks leads Underhill to propose a bipartite (purgation and purification) model. John employs the metaphor of "night" to relay the function of negation in this work of transformation. He (16th cent./1991, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, bk. 1 chp. 1: 1–3, pp. 118–119; bk. 1 chp. 13: 1–2, pp. 147–148) divides this night into the night of sense and night of spirit, and each

of these nights has its active and passive facets. "Active" implies self-effort, while "passive" refers to the intervention of divine grace.[35] In most of his writings, John structures the person (regarded as "soul") into two fundamental layers: the outermost is the "sensory" part, followed by the inner layer called the "spiritual" (or "rational") part.[36] The sensory part is subdivided into the exterior senses of sight, touch, hearing, taste, and smell and the interior sense of imagination and sense memory.[37] The spiritual part of the soul concerns itself with the incorporeal and comprises the faculties of intellect, memory, and will (John of the Cross 16th cent./1991, *Living Flame of Love*, stanza 3: 69, p. 702). These faculties are not totally divorced from the sensory part of the soul since they do depend upon sense data (John of the Cross 16th cent./1991, *Spiritual Canticle*, stanza 18: 3–7, pp. 547–548). Note too that the capacity for *feelings* appears to pervade both the sensory and spiritual parts.[38] While John of the Cross takes the spiritual part of the soul as the medium of contact with God, he mentions as well the centre/ground of the soul as the site of God's presence. This centre has many levels of depth, attainable through degrees of love (*Living Flame of Love*, stanza 1: 12–13, p. 645). John believes that divine and unitive love continues even when the sensory and spiritual faculties are passive. Therefore, it is possible to posit the ground of the soul as distinct from these faculties (*Spiritual Canticle*, stanza 16: 11, p. 542).

As regards the mystical transformation of the self through these nights, John of the Cross considers both the epistemological and conative dimensions. He (*Ascent of Mount Carmel*, bk. 1 chp. 3: 3, p. 122) subscribes to the empiricist's axiom of sense perception being the starting point of knowledge. If our sense data are originary, and causally responsible for our knowledge, how can one afford to negate them? Well, we do not negate the senses in any absolute sense. The senses have to be dialectically incorporated. Of course, although all knowledge originates from the senses, it is not the case that all knowledge contains sensory data. There are abstract computations that are free of sensory data. For instance, there is no way one can possess a sensory intuition of $5{,}678 \times 1{,}234 = 7{,}006{,}652$. The first time we learn to quantify and count, we have to rely on sensory intuition. But, once we master

[35] Note that active and passive are concurrent and that either self-effort or grace is the dominant rather than the only agency. Active and passive are not to be taken as strictly successive (see John of the Cross 16th cent./1991, translator's introduction to *Dark Night*, p. 355).

[36] The divisions of the soul must not be thought of as neat strata within the soul as if the soul is a physical object. The sensory and spiritual parts operate and are affected as a unified complex (John of the Cross 16th cent./1991, *Living Flame of Love*, stanza 1:10, p. 644).

[37] Exterior sense: see *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, bk. 1 chp. 3:2, p. 122; interior sense: *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, bk. 2 chp. 17: 4, p. 206; *Spiritual Canticle*, stanza 18: 7, p. 548. The sense memory stores data of the sensory kind. While the sense memory is closely linked to imagination and is categorized as belonging to the sensory part of the soul, the intellectual memory (or simply as "memory") stores data that are abstract and conceptual and is categorized as belonging to the spiritual part of the soul (see *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, bk. 3 chp. 14: 1, p. 289).

[38] Feelings are profound when they are said to be expressed as intense delight and suffering in the spiritual faculties (John of the Cross 16th cent./1991, *Living Flame of Love*, stanza 3:18, pp. 680–681). The feelings directed towards sensory objects are frequently regarded as "natural feelings" (*Living Flame of Love*, stanza 3: 75, p. 705).

the rudiments of arithmetic, we progress through sensory apprehension to abstract reasoning. One cannot skip the sensory phase and immediately grasp abstract operations. Sensory intuition is dialectically incorporated for higher cognitive operations. In the same manner, the night of sense does not categorically negate the senses. The mystic's work in mystical relationship cannot dispense with sensory experiences. Even the realization that our senses are not sufficient to convey us to mystical union necessitates the workings of our senses (see Gan 2009, p. 49). Physical objects and symbolic images in the imagination are important aids in meditation. They are used to focus the mind, and eventually, the meditator finds her consciousness opening up to a larger reality beyond the focused objects (see Underhill 1915, p. 94).[39]

In essence then, sensory mediations and data are incorporated and transformed in the service of more abstract rational operations. John of the Cross places the spiritual faculties together with the rational faculties of intellect, memory, and will. In deep contemplation, active efforts in either reflection or nondiscursive concentration may be taken over by divine grace. The mystic will find it increasingly difficult to hang on to her meditative methods because in deep contemplation God is the protagonist in the whole business of transformation and communion. When the metaphor of light is used to symbolize the involvement of emotions and love, while darkness, the silence and obscurity of reason, this refers to applications at specific moments in the meditative journey. It does not apply comprehensively, as if mysticism is antithetical to reason. In fact, it would be a serious misconception to dismiss the role of reason in mysticism and relegate this spiritual enterprise to the realm of the irrational or even non-rational.[40] John Smith (1983, pp. 264ff.) argues for a greater recognition of what he calls "rationalistic mysticism". Mystics whom he places in this class are Bonaventure, Nicholas of Cusa, Spinoza, and Hegel.[41] Their mysticisms are regarded as rationally dialectical, even when the advanced stages of mystical progress take a form of knowledge beyond what mystics are familiar with. In line with Smith's opposition to antirationalistic mysticism, John of the Cross would never take the night of spirit as an absolute negation of the rational or spiritual faculties. Dialectical purification implies a transformative going through, not a bypassing.[42] Incidentally, it is interesting to note that when referring to the night of sense, John (16th cent./1991, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, bk. 2 chp. 2: 3, p. 155) uses the metaphor of "dark night" and in the night of spirit – "darkness". "Darkness" is said to be darker than "dark night" and, hence, indicative of a greater obscurity in the night of spirit.

[39] Since, reasons Underhill, any object is a part of and connected to the rest of the universe, any object can be employed as a focus of concentration that will lead to an opening of consciousness to the broader realm.

[40] Although Bertrand Russell (1872–1970) sets mysticism in contrast to scientific reason, he (1917, pp. 9–16) contends that the best philosophers are those who attempt to hold, cooperatively, both the orientations of mysticism and of science.

[41] Underhill believes that "Hegel, who, though he was no mystic, had a touch of that mystical intuition which no philosopher can afford to be without" (*M* p. 21).

[42] In *Living Flame of Love*, stanza 2: 14, p. 663, John of the Cross stresses that the senses and reason, being natural faculties, are not the principal players in divine union. However, they cannot be bypassed; rather, they have to be surpassed.

Our desires and actions depend very much on the whole rubrics of knowing. Undoubtedly, the intellect, emotions, will, and actions mutually affect one another. What the senses perceive, the reason understands and deduces, and the memory stores. Our intellectual faculties have a powerful impact upon our desires and actions. Detachment and mortification cannot be divorced from a consideration of the field of epistemology. John of the Cross (16th cent./1991, *Sayings of Light and Love*, no. 37, p. 88) believes that our reason has to be enlightened and that when it comes to leading a virtuous life we cannot just rely on our feelings and desires for wanting to practise virtues. Our intellect and reason have to play a dominant role in moral conduct. As seen in my explication of Underhill's treatment of purgation, the field of conation or volition is amply dealt with by her. Another contribution from John of the Cross to this present enquiry is his rationale for detachment. He (16th cent./1991, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, bk. 1 ch. 4: 3, p. 124) says that attachment to an object forges a certain likeness between the liker and the liked. Attachment has the capacity to cultivate in the subject qualities that correspond to what the object represents for the subject. Again, this does not imply that such forging of similar qualities is necessarily bad. It only means that in order to attain to the infinite, the subject should not be detained by attachments to finite objects.

One may ask regarding the status of interpersonal intimacy in relation to attachment. Understandably, loving another human being forges higher-order qualities between the involved parties as compared with a person's love for inanimate things. Interpersonal exchanges amongst beings with consciousness can be enriching. A question not quite considered in *M* runs thus: Why should the love for God as infinite supersede the love between two persons? If the human person has intrinsic worth and her close relationship with another person is concrete and mutually enriching, then does it not supersede a love for God as infinite that seems abstract and vague? What is the justification for detaching oneself from loving another in order to love God? I shall attempt to address these questions. The objection to attachment is an objection to *halt* and *anchor* oneself at loving something that is good but limited. Attachment is potentially insidious to the wellbeing of the person due to its effect on the psyche. The object one is attached to can be appraised, erroneously, as the ultimate and pervasive element of the self, as if without it one's existence is meaningless. Therefore, the subject's attachment to any finite object impedes the subject's actualization of her full potential as a being orientated to the infinite. However, I would assume that interpersonal intimacy and mystical love are not mutually exclusive.[43] Underhill (1915, p. 94) says that meditation on any object can open one's consciousness to the infinite since the infinite includes all things. By the same deduction, a close

[43] Martin Buber (1878–1965) constructs an essay built upon his (1923/1970, pp. 59–64) conviction that in the interpersonal relationship in which each person treats the other with respect and as a fellow subject rather than an object or thing, a structure that is similar to the self–God relationship is formed. The attributes that make up this similarity are the mutual giving of one's being to the other, creativity, unmediated presence, and the transcendence of experience and description. Buber asserts that our relationship to God is inseparable from our relationship to other persons and the world (pp. 155–156). If our relationships with the world are shaped largely by utility, then such is our relationship with God.

relationship with another person can conduce to a relationship with the infinite. This is possible on condition that the self does not slip into the attachment illusion of taking the other person as absolutely essential to the survival of the self's being.

A sincere, selfless, and unattached intimacy with another person has the capacity to bring about a self-transcending experience. Divine infinity includes events in this finite world, and interpersonal relationships can be considered a form of event that is relatively broader (in comparison with purely physical events) in its involvement of processes at both physical and nonphysical levels of being. By virtue of its engagement of multiple levels of being–becoming dynamisms, an enriching interpersonal relationship can constitute a necessary but insufficient means to mystical intimacy. A corollary of this statement is that the self is not advised to abandon concrete love for another human being in order to participate in a love for an abstract infinite being. Instead, loving the infinite is made concrete in loving another human being. There is no legitimacy for an absolute value distinction between the concrete and the abstract. They both exist in a correlation. Take the example of a legislator at work. In order for her to understand the general needs of everyone, she needs at least to understand the needs of someone. In tandem with this concrete familiarity, concerns of justice and impartiality dictate that she acquires and transcends her actual experiences with particular individuals in order to consider the welfare of the universal polity. This movement between the concrete (particular) and the abstract (universal) implies that she derives knowledge from actual experiences and yet remains unclouded by them when conceiving the universal or general. Correspondingly, her abstract knowledge of human beings in general will influence her concrete perceptions of and interactions with particular individuals. I would think that the same principle applies in mystical relationship. In all honesty, I have to admit that the structure of loving God while loving other persons may be more complex and perhaps more problematic than my attempted construction above.[44]

[44] We find a humorous yet painful illustration of the occasional disaccord between particular and universal loves in this confession of a doctor friend to an elder in Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880/1992), p. 57:

> "[B]ut I am amazed at myself: the more I love mankind in general, the less I love people in particular, that is, individually, as separate persons. In my dreams", he said, "I often went so far as to think passionately of serving mankind, and it may be, would really have gone to the cross for people if it were somehow suddenly necessary, and yet I am incapable of living in the same room with anyone even for two days, this I know from experience. … In twenty four hours I can begin to hate even the best of men: one because he takes too long eating his dinner, another because he has a cold and keeps blowing his nose …" "On the other hand, it has always happened that the more I hate people individually, the more ardent becomes my love for humanity as a whole."

While mystical love, I assume, is not generally fleshed out in the above acute conflict between universal and particular loves, it is conceivable that there may be instances in the mystic's life where such disharmony does manifest itself. Even if it is questionable whether one can *genuinely* love humanity while finding individual human beings abhorrent, the above confession underscores the challenge involved in the sort of dialectic of universality and particularity that bears upon mystical love.

The exact manner in which loving another person intrinsically (for that person's own sake) fits together and concurrently with loving the infinite eludes me.

An interesting parallel can be drawn between the above issue and Kantian sublimity rooted in the tension between the respective assignments of the faculties of imagination and reason. I explained previously how Kant associates the sublime with the inability of the faculty of imagination to fulfil reason's requirement of consolidating the endless moment to moment apprehension of sense intuition into a totalized sense intuition of infinity. While imagination mediates between sense intuition and understanding, the faculty of reason possesses the capacity to unify these infinite intuitions into the abstract concept of infinity. Kant (1790/2000, § 26, p. 116) here references the faculty of reason:

> The faculty of being able to think the infinite of supersensible intuition as given (in its intelligible substrate) surpasses every standard of sensibility, and is great beyond all comparison …

Sublimity is manifested in the representation of infinity where a tension exists between the shortcoming of imagination and the ability of reason. Imagination functions to bring sensory data into meaningful concepts of the understanding. As such, this faculty deals with epistemic material that is concrete and particular. The faculty of reason can only hold together the totality of infinite particulars as a universal and abstract idea. Mystical intimacy is not relegated strictly to a state of consciousness engaged in loving an abstract universal being. Rather, as stressed by Underhill, its authenticity is manifested in concrete instances of the mystic's relationship with the world (*M* pp. 35–36).[45] Kantian sublimity's relation of conflict and harmony between the faculties of imagination and reason correlates with the tension between concrete instances of interpersonal relationships and the ideal finite–infinite mystical intimacy. Sublimity in the context of this tension, I conclude, is reflected in the dialectical relation between concrete, particular, and imperfect human–human relationships on one side and the ideal, universal, and asymmetric human–divine relationship on the other side.

Before ending this section on the first transformative night, I wish to explore the possibility of the mystic having a sublime experience while enduring the darkness of purgation. Transformation of the self may be gradual and consistent, absent of any hint of eruptive moments of sublimity. Nevertheless, this does not imply that the conditions of possibility for the occurrence of a sublime experience are inevitably exterior to the night of purgation. Sublimity is not confined to pleasant experiences. The notion of the sublime, as theorized by Kant, contains the postulation of a

[45] In *Practical Mysticism* (1915), p. 158, Underhill outlines the actualized life of mystical union as one in which the mystic becomes:

> a living, ardent tool with which the Supreme Artist works: one of the instruments of His self-manifestation, the perpetual process by which His Reality is brought into concrete expression.

The mystic's profound relationship with infinite reality has to manifest itself through concrete creative actions in this world.

powerful experience filled with positive and negative feelings. Latent within the enduring strain of the gulf between actual desire for the infinite and the ideal fulfilment of this desire is the potential for a sublime realization. In the depths of the pain of purgation, there is a glimpse of the divine, distant yet at the same time offering a prospect of an enriched and enriching existence of mystical intimacy. This situation may trigger the experiences of awe, confusion on account of the incapacity of our cognitive faculties to comprehend the seemingly impossible mystical project, and exaltation in the presence of the infinite – all of which are hallmarks of sublimity.

4.6 Illumination

After enduring the first transformative night of purgation, the mystic emerges into the light of illumination. She has cultivated a new way of perceiving reality and a new state of consciousness (*M* pp. 232–233). Underhill maintains that illumination is not yet union, but the self is more conscious of the universe and its own inner reality being grounded in the infinite. I shall first present Underhill's treatment of this stage and then discuss its ensuing relevant issues. She describes the distinct features of illumination:

> All pleasurable and exalted states of mystic consciousness in which the sense of I-hood persists, in which there is a loving and joyous relation between the Absolute as object and the self as subject, fall under the head of Illumination: which is really an enormous development of the intuitional life at high levels. All veritable and first-hand apprehensions of the Divine obtained by the use of symbols, as in the religious life; all the degrees of prayer lying between meditation and the prayer of union; many phases of poetic inspiration and "glimpses of truth" are activities of the illuminated mind. (*M* p. 234)

Awakening is believed to have initiated vigorous efforts from the mystic who is now set on the path towards mystical union. Illumination visits the mystic like remuneration after arduous work. This "remuneration" serves to reward and reinforce the mystic's resolve in her mystical venture. Underhill's concise overview in the passage above unravels illumination's constitutive features. The term "illumination" suggests the employment of light in its mystical context as representing divine presence, joy, intuitional knowledge, and meditative activity. The illumined mystic is aware of her self as distinct from and yet part of the whole canvas of physical and spiritual reality.

According to Underhill's observation, mystics who are in the illuminative stage report an experience of light that connotes beatitude, knowledge, and a firm conviction of God's presence (*M* pp. 249–250). Both "light" and "darkness" are used to convey the presence of God as convincingly real and yet vague and indefinable. The vagueness might be attributed to the perception of God both as a pervasive, undifferentiated being and as a personal being who is merciful and compassionate. God as supremely bright appears to be dark to the mystic because of the mystic's lack of ability to grasp the copresence of both these attributes of God. Or the mystic realizes the immensity of God's brightness as extending beyond her perceptual horizon,

thereby leading her to conclude that the origin of this light is the mysterious darkness beyond the horizon. Underhill maintains that the absolute light is unchanging, but the self that encounters it has a specific experience contingent upon the self's temperament. This temperament is shaped by the dual influences of nature and nurture (*M* pp. 252–253).

In my enumeration of the light–darkness metaphor, I mentioned the formulation of light–darkness as carrying an absolute–relative relation. The infinite is, in itself (absolutely), light, but our apprehension of the infinite is dimmed in relation (relative) to our faculties. However, contrary to Underhill's view, this does not necessarily imply that the infinite is absolutely unchanging. Despite Underhill's presentation of the infinite as dialectically synthesizing being and becoming, she still appears to hold steadfastly to a classical theology of an unchanging God. I grappled with this particular issue in Chaps. 2 and 3, and here I again draw the reader's attention to the problem confronting any binding of the notion of immutability to the concept of being as applied to God.

In communion with God, the mystic perceives the infinite as immanent in her and the contents of her consciousness while at the same time transcending them. A point of contention is that if the self is conscious of God as transcending her consciousness, then would it be correct to say that God is still part of her consciousness? The realization of God's transcendence is itself a specific content of consciousness. The counter-argument is that realizing God's transcendence is not God itself. For that matter, all referents are transcendent to signifiers in our mind. As in any perception of something immense, say the sky, we only perceive that which is within our span of perception, but we have an intimation that the object perceived greatly exceeds the horizon of our perception. Correspondingly, the infinite can also be perceived as immanent in one's consciousness and at the same time transcending it. The crucial point made by Underhill is that in the pursuit of the divine, consciousness ought to be as open as possible in its apprehension. God is found present in the universe and in the self (*M* pp. 254–255). Underhill (1915, pp. 90–91) goes as far as saying that any attempt to bypass the world, appraise it as evil, and strive only towards an other-worldly union with God is a manifestation of a "perverted mysticality". Contrariwise, subscribing only to a nature mysticism that neglects the transcendent realm is symptomatic of a stunted mysticism.

There are two important and interrelated things that I feel warrant a close examination. The first pertains to Underhill's notions of contemplation, and the second concerns the distinction between illumination and union. "Contemplation" has two senses. Used in its broadest sense, it refers to the methods of meditation and their corresponding mental orientation of the mystic aimed at a profound self-infinite communion (*M* p. 304). And it has a narrower sense that points to the highest phase attainable within the stage of illumination (*M* p. 330). I shall make a preliminary remark here that the contemplative experience in reference to the latter sense is also conceivable as the experience of mystical union. This will become clearer as the discussion progresses.

Underhill divides the development of contemplation (as meditation) into three phases, which she says is a continuous process whereby one phase shades off into

the next, rather than proceeding through boldly separated steps. The three progressive phases are "recollection" to "quiet" to "contemplation". "Recollection" commonly begins in meditation and develops into inward silence and simplicity. Gradually, the mystic then slips into "quiet" and "quiet" progresses into "contemplation", a state of passive union (*M* pp. 309–310). Underhill does not dismiss possible moments when the self experiences glimpses of advanced phases while being in an earlier phase. She again underscores the idea that actual development of mystical progress may not rigidly follow the inferred stages (*M* p. 310).

I digress for a moment and shall return to the three phases above. It is quite obvious that Underhill frequently invokes the claim that her stage schema is *only* a guide. I would assume that the plethora of reports by mystics may not so easily fall into their proper places in her stage theory. This poses a difficulty for her, especially when she encounters cases which she deems as counterexamples to her whole schema. It might be contended that if one were to appeal to simplicity of delineation, then the three principal stages of awakening, purification, and union should suffice as milestones in mystical development. After all, the first and second transformative nights can collapse into the stage of purification. Depending upon the particular mystic's unique mystical path, illumination can be a second awakening or incorporated into the stage of union. Underhill encountered in her data the anomalous cases of mystics having two awakenings, skipping a major stage, or having an advanced stage appearing incipiently in an earlier stage (*M* pp. 213 and 228).[46] Assuming that it is justifiable to add "illumination" to the "awakening–purification–union" series, and to split "purification" into two separate stages, it is also possible to add a third phase of purification after another illumination. If the primary pattern of light and darkness is maintained, imagine generating a variety of stage series. Depending upon the analyst of mystical progress, there can be series with number of stages expanding from three to five, then to seven, and so forth. However, on the whole, Underhill's five-stage series can be considered to represent a plausible model of mystical development. Besides, she rightly admits that this series of stages can at best be conceived as a general guide.

In a similar vein, the movement from recollection to quiet to contemplation is also open to debate. The transition is measured by the degree of self-effort engaged. The greatest amount of self work is in recollection and the least in contemplation. Underhill explains that after the recollection and direction of thoughts to a single object of focus, and after the stillness of quiet, the mystic arrives at the phase of contemplation. Here, the intellect is in darkness while the heart is radiant.[47] The phase of contemplation can take many forms depending upon the personality of the mystic. In some cases, the mystic loses all sense awareness of external reality and

[46] Underhill cites another dispute over an apparent counterexample: while early biographers uphold that Catherine of Genoa (1447–1510) bypassed the stage of illumination and jumped directly from purgation to union, Baron Friedrich von Hügel (1908, pp. 105–106) argues against this claim (*M* p. 247).

[47] Refer to the earlier account of the light–darkness metaphor (interpretation E) on passive reason and active love.

her body stiffens and appears to be in a state of trance. This is the state of rapture or ecstasy. Underhill asserts that rapture differs from contemplation proper in that rapture is wholly involuntary (*M* pp. 328–329). At the highest point of contemplation, there is a sense of union that the mystic finds hard to resist, but she still feels that she has control over the situation. Conversely, during rapture, the mystic has virtually no control over the situation.

Progress in concentration is indicated by a gradual expansion of consciousness that is aware of new realms, particularly of the transcendental kind. In contemplation, the concentration of the mystic is so intense, and this state is sometimes called "ligature" – a temporary suspension of the faculties (*M* p. 330). An adept contemplative may not sustain this special state for long, but its beatifying memory remains with her. The experience, however, cannot be clearly described. As William James (1902/1958, pp. 292–293) observes, both ineffability and noetic quality are the consistent trademarks of the contemplative experience.

Underhill attempts to describe the contemplative state so as to distinguish it from the other two, recollection and quiet. The two traits that identify the true contemplative state are "the Totality and Givenness of the Object" and the "Self-Mergence of the Subject" (*M* p. 332). She asserts that however much the mystic struggles to describe her contemplative state, the mystic generally seems set on reporting experiencing a *totality*, which is *given* rather than achieved. The mystic claims that it is the infinite that is revealed to her and not a particular aspect of the infinite mediated in symbolic form (*M* p. 333). The third characteristic of true contemplation as identified by Underhill is that the infinite is perceived by participation and not observation. What this means is that, unlike the phase of quiet that is predominantly characterized by passive receptivity, in contemplation the self actively meets and engages with the infinite. There is an active relationship between the self and God. The foregoing account of contemplation, as delivered by Underhill, accents the perplexing relation between totality and particularity and between activity and passivity.

As argued in Chap. 2, it is very unlikely that divine infinity can be perceived exactly in its totality. What are we then to make of the apprehension of totality as identified by Underhill? And if the mystic does not in fact perceive the infinite in its totality, does the perception of its part(s) imply an indirect encounter? In the slide towards deep contemplation, the object of concentration disappears, and the meditator becomes absorbed in the new object unveiled, that is, the infinite. The mystic is entitled to claim that she apprehends the infinite directly, albeit not totally. Somehow or other, the recognition of the object as comprehensive and excessive informs the mystic that this is no ordinary thing encountered. The inability to grasp the object in its entirety is what characterizes the apprehension as sublime. Underhill's positing of the totality of the object of contemplation may be expedient to convey the idea that the mystic perceives a totality rather than a *symbol* representing this "all". However, I would think that in order to negate the idea of a sole apprehension of the symbol, one need not jump to its supposed opposite – a universal totality. The symbol is used as an aid in meditation. Now, the meditator may be so absorbed in the symbol that the distinction between her as subject and the symbol as object dissolves.

Or the meditator experiences a shift from one symbol to another, for instance, a rose to the image of the beauty of the universe. These after-effects of meditating on a symbol may be granted to the mystic, even if the mystic initially had to exert effort in concentration. Moreover, these finite objects of perception can be said to have been grasped in their totality. However, an immediate apprehension of something *seemingly* infinite, initiated from the apprehension of something limited, may lend credence to, though not constituting affirmative proof of, the proposition that the shift from a finite symbol to an infinite object of perception has to be something given. The object apprehended is infinitely greater than the object of concentration. Nevertheless, I still maintain that any assertion of perceiving infinity in its totality is fraught with problems.

As outlined earlier, the sequence of progression from recollection to quiet to contemplation is purportedly one from activity of the self to increasing passivity, where grace takes over from the mystic's exertion. Hence, in contemplation, the mystic should be passive while grace active. To hold together activity and passivity in a reasonable balance is not an easy thing. If mystical contemplation is the product of the mystic's exertion, then it is possible that contemplation may be *entirely* contrived by the mystic. On the other hand, if the mystic were to slide into purely passive inactivity and just rest in the joyful spiritual mood of deep contemplation, this would be called "quietism", and it is strongly denounced by Underhill (*M* pp. 325–326). She describes the phase of quiet as not really "quiet" in the sense of quietism but filled with the combined activity of the mystic and God. Basically, the mystic strives to make herself receptive to the divine workings within her. Underhill appeals to Teresa of Avila's account of the psychological state of the person in contemplation:

> All the faculties fail now, and are suspended in such a way that, as I said before, their operations cannot be traced. … The will must be fully occupied in loving, but it understands not how it loves; the understanding, if it understands, does not understand how it understands. It does not understand, as it seems to me, because, as I said just now, this is a matter which cannot be understood. (*M* pp. 356–357) (See Teresa of Avila 16th cent./1976, *Book of Her Life*, chp. 18:14, p. 163)

This passage becomes clearer when we look at Underhill's specification of Teresa's distinction between the phase of quiet and that of contemplation (*M* p. 357). Teresa says that in quiet, the soul is drowsy, between sleep and wakefulness; in contemplation, the soul is asleep. During contemplation, the soul loves, yet it does not know how because it is asleep to itself and to its external world. The principal agency here comes from God. Now, the problem is, how do we distinguish such a state from that of the altered consciousness of sleep? The key to differentiate between real sleep and the "sleep" of contemplation asserts Teresa (16th cent./1980, *Interior Castle*, 5th dwelling place, chp. 2: 7, p. 343) lies in the transformative effect of the latter. She describes this effect as analogous to the transformation of the silkworm into a butterfly:

> When the soul is, in this prayer, truly dead to the world, a little white butterfly comes forth. … [I]n my opinion the union never lasts for as much as half hour. … Look at the difference there is between an ugly worm and a little white butterfly: that's what the difference is here.

It seems that the contemplative event is momentary, and yet the transformation as symbolized above appears to be quite momentous, much more than the refreshing effects of real sleep.

An interesting point worth mentioning is that according to Teresa (16th cent./1980, *Interior Castle*, 5th dwelling place, chp. 1: 9; p. 339), when self-awareness returns, upon the conclusion of contemplation, the self is fully convinced that God had visited it, that "*it has been in God and God in it*" (*M* p. 357).[48] This conviction comes after the event of contemplation and the conviction itself is God's grace. Furthermore, the event is seared in the mystic's memory that it would be virtually impossible to forget. For Teresa of Avila, contemplation is likened to sleep, a sleep infused with divine activity. By declaring that "[t]he will must be fully occupied in loving, but it understands not how it loves", we are informed of the active involvement on the part of the self, especially since the will is engaged. But here is the puzzling bit: the will itself does not understand how it loves.[49] It makes sense to take the will as being engaged since love is active, and if this love is mutually relational, then both parties, by right, ought to be engaged in this activity of loving. Furthermore, if there are infinite degrees of love within the finite–infinite love, then this activity of love is expectedly endless. Therefore, it is not so clear where self-effort ends and divine work takes over. In this deep mystical state, the will of the mystic does not wander off and disappear, nor does it merely sit and observe. Rather, the will is a participant in this state of contemplation. And the mystic cannot understand the will's role in the whole affair. Even, assuming that the understanding understands, the understanding will not be able to understand how it understands. How would the mystic be able to know that she had such an experience if in the midst of it the understanding does not understand? There must be a vestigial part of the self standing aside as observer that immediately after the event realizes that the self had undergone a unique mystical experience.

Is the self completely absorbed into the infinite during contemplation? Ecstasy is regarded as a phenomenon within the phase of contemplation, whereby at the height of the transitory consciousness of oneness with the infinite, awareness of outside realities *cannot* enter into the field of consciousness of the ecstatic. Even external stimuli that cause physical pain cannot be made conscious to the ecstatic (*M* p. 358). The physical correlate of ecstasy is called "rapture". The mystic may slip into it gradually after contemplating on an object of prayer. Rapturous trance may come abruptly to the mystic. During this state, the mystic's breathing and circulation slow down. The body may become cold and be in a state of catatonia before the onset of rapture (*M* p. 359). Is ecstasy mystical union? The heightened experience of mystical union is brief, like ecstasy. In mystical union, the self is said to be totally absorbed in the infinite. Earlier on, I quoted Underhill's characterization of the stage of illumination by saying that "I-hood persists". The descriptions of ecstasy and

[48] The term "fruition" is frequently used to refer to the mutual indwelling between the soul and God (see Underhill 1915, p. 141). A closer inspection of this concept will be done in the next chapter.

[49] Jean-Luc Marion (1986/2002, p. 71) draws our attention to the unintelligibility of love despite the fact that love is part and parcel of human existence.

rapture betray a different picture – I-hood disappears. If this is the case, how then do we differentiate illumination, especially its advanced phase, from the stage of union?

Underhill tells us that the presence of ecstasy or rapture is not evidence of genuine mystical experience that is spiritually worthy (*M* pp. 360–362). Some mentally ill individuals are also predisposed to experiencing ecstasy. Someone whose threshold of consciousness is extremely mobile (her consciousness can easily shift from one state to another) and hysterical patients are susceptible to such an experience. However, what about the case where a mystic has a genuine contemplation-related ecstasy? Her ecstasy is genuine and it has the features of union, and yet it is not union? This is indeed puzzling. Furthermore, illumination and union are not contiguous stages in Underhill's "Mystic Way". There is still the second transformative night between them. Therefore, one cannot argue that illumination is like union because union immediately follows illumination. Another matter to consider is the possibility of initiating a contemplation experience with the use of chemicals.

A drug capable of inducing a mystical experience may be created, but mystical relationship far exceeds any artificially induced state. In the context of our discussion on light and darkness, I venture to say that the presence of illumination minus the night of self-transformation does not make for a mystical relationship. A drug-induced illumination may be accompanied by terrifying visions and schizophrenic episodes, but such a brief dalliance with darkness hardly counts as transformative in a positive sense (see Horgan 2003, p. 21).[50] Then again, there have been individuals vouching for the efficacy of such pharmaceutical experiments in producing life-enhancing transformations.[51] And perhaps, we cannot be certain that such individuals whose consciousness and personality have been enhanced are not committed in their relationship with God. I think, at any rate, it is the dialectic of immediacy–mediation–mediated immediacy that represents the painstaking holistic cultivation of the mystic and her relationship with others. Broadening one's consciousness through chemical means may not have the same holistic effect. Growth in mysticism entails a transformation in the self through reflection and long-term concrete interactions with the world. Drugs might trigger a mystical and sublime experience, but it is still left to be seen if a mature mystical personality predisposed to a deep finite–infinite relationship is obtained. Undoubtedly, dialectics and the sublime are not just found in mysticism. An athlete's progress in her chosen sport entails a vigorous dialectical relation between sacrifice and attainment; and the elation of victory can be sublime. Nevertheless, as consistently advanced in this study, it is difficult to deny the patterns of dialecticism and sublimity operating within the

[50] Depending upon the drug used, whether mescaline or psilocybin, radically different effects can be elicited from different people (see also Zaehner 1957, pp. 1–29).

[51] Horgan (2003, p. 25) cites Aldous Huxley's (1894–1963) tinkering with mescaline and Huxley's suggestion that the experience triggered by that psychotropic drug may be an aid to soteriological endeavours (see Huxley 1954/1990, p. 73). Ken Wilber, on the other hand, thinks that drugs "can trigger a 'genuine breakthrough' in some people … but they cannot lead to stable, long-term spiritual growth". He also believes that ingesting such entheogens often creates fantastical notions of spirituality (as reported to Horgan in Horgan 2003, p. 61).

economy of mysticism. While mystical and nonmystical life vocations share a similar broad form of dialecticism and sublimity, their respective contents differ.

It is important to state here that in *M*, the final stage of mystical development is treated in a specific chapter called "The Unitive Life" (*M* pp. 413ff.). In this chapter, the reader will hardly find a description of a mystical union experience that is clearly singular and distinct from the experience of contemplation outlined above. It appears that for Underhill, the ultimate goal of mysticism is an *enduring life* of union between the self and God. Hence, her discussions on the mystic's experience of contemplation, which she places in the chapter on "illumination", are actually in reference to what some would call "mystical union".[52] In her analysis of purification, i.e. the stage before the unitive life, Underhill highlights the point that any identification of heightened spiritual experiences, with God, constitutes a form of illusion and attachment and, hence, an obstacle to reaching the true life of mystical intimacy (*M* p. 395). Perhaps, by placing a chapter on purification immediately after an analysis on contemplation, Underhill aims to stress the point that any elevated mystical experience is inevitably transient and can readily swing over to its opposite experience – desolation. The unitive life extends beyond these ephemeral states of consciousness. Contemplation, or mystical union, may be necessary but insufficient to define mysticism characterized as essentially a committed and stable relationship between the self and what the self regards as ultimate reality. In this book, a close examination of the experience of mystical union (or contemplation) will again be taken up in the next chapter. In there, this topic will be approached from a different angle. By doing this, it also means that I will depart from Underhill's stage schema because contemplation will be in both illumination and union.[53]

The heightened states of ecstasy and rapture may be part of this enduring intimacy, but not all mystics take them as essential constituents of mysticism. John of the Cross does not devote as much writing as Teresa of Avila does to ecstasy and rapture.[54] However, there is in what John says that will help us understand the distinction between contemplation (in its illuminative effects) and the unitive life. He (16th cent./1991, *Spiritual Canticle*, stanza 13 § 1, p. 520) first aligns ecstasy with the light of awakening that visits a tormented soul. Light (happiness and

[52] The passage above on Teresa of Avila's testimony actually originates from a context where Teresa (16th cent./1976, *Book of Her Life*, chp. 18: 14, p. 163) discusses mystical union. In fact, the quoted excerpt on the transformation to the butterfly has the word "union" in it. Moreover, Underhill says that this type of contemplation is also referred to as "Orison of Union" (*M* p. 356).

[53] According to John of the Cross, contemplation is not just present in a single mystical stage but is found in several stages. It is distinguished by its effects. Contemplation has its purgative, illuminative, and unitive effects (John of the Cross 16th cent./1991, *Dark Night*, bk. 2 chp. 7: 4, p. 408; bk. 2 chp. 23: 14, p. 454).

[54] The word "rapture" appears at least a hundred and twenty times in Teresa of Avila's writings as compared with around fifteen times that it surfaces in the Juanist oeuvre (see Teresa of Avila 16th cent./1976, index, p. 514; 16th cent./1980, index, p. 534; John of the Cross 16th cent./1991, index, p. 799). John of the Cross might have discreetly criticized his mentor, Teresa of Avila, for the importance she accords to raptures and visions (see Turner 1995, pp. 250–251). Eckhart (14th cent./1941, "The Talks of Instruction" § 10, p. 14) goes to the extent of declaring that it would be better for a person in rapture to get out of the rapture (if possible) and help someone in need.

meaningfulness) is commensurably bestowed upon the soul experiencing despair and meaninglessness (darkness). God is said to grant the soul consolations in proportion to the suffering the soul bears. Similarly, ecstasy and rapture are meant to provide consolation to the soul after the transformative effects of purgation. In this heightened state, John says that the mystic is inundated with ambivalent reactions. On the one hand, she desires such states, but on the other, there are pain and fear because the state manifests itself in bodily reactions to the extent that the mystic might wish for the rapture to be withdrawn. The ecstatic joy of the rapture is coupled with the fear and pain of losing control over one's body to an overwhelming force beyond oneself. John of the Cross (16th cent./1991, *Spiritual Canticle*, stanza 13 § 6, p. 522) has an explanation for this reaction:

> Those feelings are experienced in such visits by those who have not yet reached the state of perfection but are moving along in the state of proficients. Those who have reached perfection receive all communications in peace and gentle love.[55]

This passage elucidates the reason for the ambivalent reaction present in ecstasy. The mystic's whole being is not ready to receive the radiant visits of the infinite. Only after the second transformative night can the mystic expect to have more peaceful and sober states of consciousness.

4.7 Chapter Conclusion

When investigating mystical development, diverse and interconnected permutations of meanings of the light–darkness metaphor can be formulated. Far from exclusively unfolding in a successive pattern through the first three stages of mystical development, light and darkness are also concurrently pervasive of each of these stages, i.e. awakening, purgation, and illumination. By means of a critical discussion of these stages, and via juxtaposing them with extracts of Kant's reflections on the sublime, relevant questions can be floated and addressed. These questions concern, amongst others, the source and nature of awakening, especially its ineffable yet noetic quality, the purpose of purgation, the tenability of separating illumination and union, and the general integrity of the stage theory of mystical progress. Just as sublimity is rooted in the relation amongst the faculties, mystical progress also entails an internal dialectical incorporation of the respective operations of the faculties. However, the centre or ground of the self, as postulated by mysticism, is believed to possess a dynamism that surpasses rationality and autonomy (Kantian sublimity's sovereign values). The ground of the self, for the mystic, constitutes the meeting ground between the self and infinite reality. In the next chapter I shall discuss "purification" and "union", the remaining two stages of Underhill's "Mystic Way".

[55] "Proficients" refers to those who are in the stage of illumination, but with interposed bouts of purgation.

Chapter 5
Light–Darkness (II)

5.1 Introduction

Following from the first three mystical stages are the remaining two stages that complete Underhill's series of mystical development. This chapter is divided into two major sections: "the second transformative night" and "the unitive life", which represent the final two stages of Underhill's schema of mystical development. The second transformative night is the crucible of purification, and it paves the way for the crowning stage of union. The section on this night commences with Underhill's sketch of the second night as a dialectical shift from the light of illumination into the darkness of a more cumulative purification of the whole self geared towards a mystical relationship with God. Underhill considers this transformative night as something that naturally flows from the stage of illumination; yet, within this night, the initiative of supranatural grace predominates. In here, nature and grace are interwoven.

The distress of the second night is believed to be more intense than that of the first night. Several mystics and commentators compare this night with clinical depression. In examining the discourse related to this comparison, I shall identify the dialectical features within the second night, which distinguish it from depression. With the help of Denys Turner, John of the Cross, Thomas Merton, and Underhill, I hope to sketch out the form of the second night as oscillations and coexistence of light and darkness, with the light–darkness metaphor carrying diverse meanings. I shall also attempt to show that it is possible to read excerpts of Kant's and Otto's writings into this sketch and identify features of the sublime that subsist within this phase of purification. While exploring the contours of this second night, I shall pose and attempt to address some challenging questions hinging upon the rationale behind persevering through apparently pointless suffering. "Mystical death", a term found in *M* and other related literature, is the extreme state of the second night. My elucidation of this phenomenon by way of discussion includes a

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critical engagement with relevant portions of Jacques Derrida's (1930–2004) *The Gift of Death*.

The section on "unitive life" is bisected into the exploration of the experience of mystical union and the more stable life of communion with God. Given that mystical union is a singular experience of major consequence to the tradition of mysticism, I am compelled, in this first subsection, to embark on a meticulous study of this experience. Inevitably, problems such as monistic versus dualistic union, constructivism and perennialism, and identity of wills emerge to vex the student of mysticism. At this point, let it be said that my deliberations, while seeking to be balanced, tend to lean towards supporting what is known as "union and difference". I also argue that the monistic form of union experience is controvertible as to its phenomenological actuality and is contrary to the ontological distinction between self and God. In the second subsection, I endeavour to foreground Underhill's consistent definition of mysticism as a holistic and productive life of intimacy between the finite self and infinite God. In assessing the elements that constitute such a life, I grapple with the problem of preserving individual free will that is supposedly submerged in the will of God.

5.2 The Second Transformative Night

In Underhill's mystical stages, the fourth stage is the darkness of purification, and it follows from the light of illumination. This stage of purification has affinities with John of the Cross' "dark night of spirit". John's accounts of the dark night of senses and of spirit partly correspond to Underhill's purgation and purification, respectively (see *M* pp. 169–170). The passage below helps us grasp the essence of this particular stage:

> The Dark Night, then, is really a deeply human process, in which the self which thought itself so spiritual, so firmly established upon the supersensual plane, is forced to turn back, to leave the Light, and pick up those qualities which it had left behind. Only thus, by the transmutation of the whole man, not by a careful and departmental cultivation of that which we like to call his "spiritual" side, can Divine Humanity be formed: … The self in its first purgation has cleansed the mirror of perception; hence, in its illuminated life, has seen Reality. In so doing it has transcended the normal perceptive powers of "natural" man, immersed in the illusions of sense. Now, it has got to *be* reality: a very different thing. For this a new and more drastic purgation is needed – not of the organs of perception, but of the very shrine of self: that "heart" which is the seat of personality, the source of its love and will. In the stress and anguish of the Night, when it turns back from the vision of the Infinite to feel again the limitations of the finite, the self loses the power to Do; and learns to surrender its will to the operation of a larger Life, that it may Be. (*M* pp. 388–389)

From the light of the illuminative phase, the mystic now swings back to the darkness of purification. The "turn back", however, is not a regression. Rather, it is an indication of a dialectical progress into its opposite moment: darkness that is alike with, yet distinct from, the darkness of the first transformative night. In principle, purgation and purification are similar in that they convey afflictive change and different in

that the latter is a follow-up to the former. In this regard, by using the terms "first transformative night" to refer to purgation and "second transformative night" to purification, I hope to capture the notion of affliction ("night") and change ("transformative"), as well as the progressive sense of "first" and "second".

The epithet of "the dark night" is patently reflective of John of the Cross' treatise on the journey of the soul through the agonizing process of preparation for mystical union.[1] A more thorough engagement with John of the Cross in this discussion can be expected. The passage above together with the analysis of the first transformative night in Chap. 4 tells us that for Underhill, the two nights are different mainly because (1) in the first night, self-effort and the involvement of the sensory faculties predominate in the whole exercise of the mystic's purgation of egocentric perceptions and desires and (2), in the second transformative night, the purgation of egocentrism continues, but here, grace takes a greater role, and the spiritual or rational faculties (of intellect, memory, and will) in harmony with the sensory faculties (five senses and imagination) operate holistically towards being at one with God.

By saying that the mystic is "forced" to enter the night of purification, Underhill identifies the sense of compulsion in the current of mystical growth through the light–darkness passage. Here, it is as if the self had advanced prematurely into the realm of the spiritual or transcendental consciousness while leaving behind the unfinished business of transforming the ordinary or sensory consciousness. Underhill then, in this particular text, suggests that the second transformative night entails a retrieval of those elements in the sensory faculties that were overlooked or, perhaps, bypassed in haste, for adaptation to the whole self orientated to God. This remedial work constitutes a part of a more holistic and deeper transformative project. Before entering into the intricacies of this second night, I would like to explore further the notion of being "forced" into it.

According to A. Barratt Brown (1923, p. 476), the dark night that follows from the phase of illumination is characterized by a darkening of illumination, either through a diminution of illumination's intensity or a haunting doubt as to its authenticity. Also, spiritual exercises that used to be enriching now lose their flavour. The soul becomes plagued with meaninglessness, emptiness, depression, and temptations to sin. Brown acknowledges John of the Cross as the mystic who gives a systematic structure to the dark night of the soul. Despite Brown's assertion of a certain degree of intractability of this experience of darkness to any rigid systematization, he admits that individuals who have undergone the torments of the night do assign a value to them. Whether this is a phase that sits between illumination and union, or integrated into the whole mystical development as the moments of darkness in the innumerable oscillations of light and darkness, it has some distinctive features. The psychophysical laws of rhythm dictate that a heightened emotional state cannot be sustained for long and will eventually swing to its opposite (see *M* p. 382). If intense

[1] Generally, while John of the Cross's *Ascent of Mount Carmel* examines the active (more involvement of self-effort than grace) and passive (more involvement of grace than self-effort) night of sense, and the active night of spirit, the *Dark Night* exposits the passive night of spirit (see John of the Cross 16th cent./1991, *Ascent of Mount Carmel* bk. 1 chp. 1: 2 and note # 2, p. 119).

physical excitation requires abatement, similarly, intense emotional and spiritual elevation naturally seeks relief through dipping into the opposite direction. Quite likely, the non-sustainability of such elevated spiritual states accounts for the drastic abatement of their intensity; and since the mystic had tasted such divine benedictions, their absence become *relatively* agonizing to bear. Considering that the first transformative night follows from the elation of awakening, and the second from the elevation of illumination, this explanation seems plausible.[2]

Brown (1923, p. 482) goes on to cite Henri Delacroix's (1873–1937) hypothesis of the dark night being a psychological reaction to the ascetical repression of desires into the unconscious.[3] The mental states, especially those deemed as sinful temptations, are viewed in the psychoanalytic context as the eruptions of repressed materials in the unconscious (see Rennison 2001, pp. 30–31, 42). Underhill does not categorically reject psychoanalysis for she views some aspects of the second transformative night as originating from the unleashing of powers of the base impulses and useless thoughts that had been suppressed in the unconscious during the previous stages (*M* p. 392). She observes that mystics who suffer this trial may tend to attribute its origin to the artifice of the devil when it is quite likely a natural psychological process of growth (*M* pp. 392–393). On the other hand, Underhill is convinced that the transcendental consciousness is neither reducible to the unconscious segment of the psyche nor utterly amenable to scrutiny through psychoanalysis (*M* pp. 52–54). Even Delacroix feels that such a pathological account of the dark night cannot provide a complete explanation for the enriching and sustained joyousness that succeeds the nights (as stated in Brown 1923, p. 483). In sum, three possible reasons why the self is forced into the second night are: (1) A need to return to the stage of darkness, from light, for remedial work that is aimed at a more holistic involvement and transformation of the self. (2) The non-sustainability of heightened experiential states within the self results in a natural swing-over to the opposite experience. (3) The inevitable floating up of repressed negativities in the unconscious, causing distress to the self. All three cases above lead to the assumption that the push from light to darkness is a natural progression that can just as well be the explanation for nonmystical events.

Within the framework of mysticism as delineated by John of the Cross and Underhill, the second transformative night is generated by the higher, grace-enabled contemplative states in illumination. The presence of this divine initiative character-

[2] John of the Cross does not overlook the reality of the soul's vacillation between the trough and crest of the spiritual journey. He (16th cent./1991, *Dark Night* bk. 2 chp. 18: 2–4; p. 439) uses the metaphor of the ladder to signify the ascent and descent of the mystical process. He writes:

> This is the ordinary procedure in the state of contemplation until one arrives at the quiet state: The soul never remains in one state, but everything is ascent and descent. … until the ascent and descent cease through the acquiring of the perfect habits. For the soul will then have reached God and united itself with him. (bk. 2 chp. 18: 3–4, p. 439)

It appears that for John, it is only at the final perfect state of divine union that the soul attains rest from the ascending and descending undulations.

[3] Delacroix (1908) conducted serious researches in the field of psychology of mysticism.

izes the transition from bright illumination to the second night as a mystical process. It appears that the self is pushed, naturally as well as spiritually, into the night of purification. Furthermore, when considering the psychoanalytic hypothesis for the dark night, it is probable that mystical experience partakes of a source that is over and above just stirrings in the unconscious. What differentiates the mystical from the pathological vis-à-vis this dark night? A useful avenue to explore this question is to compare the second night with clinical depression.

Vast overlaps exist between clinical depression and the dark night. Nevertheless, the dark night is embedded within the economy of mysticism where, reminds Underhill, "the mystic life is a life of love: that the Object of the mystic's final quest and of his constant intuition is an object of adoration and supreme desire" (*M* p. 389). The nights of purgation and purification are therefore *consequences* of the self's profound relationship with infinite being. In Underhill's passage quoted at the start of this section, she asserts the purpose of the second transformative night as the formation of "Divine Humanity", the only means to a consummate relationship with divine infinity. The transformative nights work at compassing as close a likeness as possible between the finite human soul and the infinite divine, a means to the mystical unitive life. Hence, while the mystic may be forced into the second transformative night through a natural process, this transition to the second night is also the product of a spiritual initiative directed at drawing the mystic into a deeper relationship with God. Our comparison between the dark night and depression serves to individuate the mystical journey with its distinct dialectical light–darkness dynamism.

5.2.1 Dark Night and Depression

In researching the relation between dark nights and depression through studying John of the Cross' work, Denys Turner (1995, p. 227) strives to draw out the point that mysticism is not experientialism. He starts off by saying that the ascetical self constructed by purgation is a product of strenuous work to achieve a selfhood which is morally ahead of the pre-ascetical self. However, this moral attainment is also a form of egoism. The only way to progress beyond this point is to have the spirit of humility and to rely upon divine grace to bring about a comprehensive purification of one's desires and intentions to love God unconditionally. This type of purification entails a radical detachment from not just a self, constructed by asceticism, but any sort of self that needs to be defined by its experiences (Turner 1995, pp. 238–245). Being a self formed by its own labour, and still anchored in egoism and the anxieties of combating temptations, the ascetical self is susceptible to depression and is devastated by it. This is so because in self-attachment, failures bring frustration, shame, and despair. The passive night – the advanced level of purification of senses and spirit by grace, which I have called the second transformative night – on the other hand, makes the self realize that when selfhood evaporates, nothing is lost. Instead, paradoxically, in losing selfhood, the self truly lives. Turner (1995, p. 243) argues

that for John of the Cross, the similarities and differences between the dark night and depression are founded upon an important fact: "[T]hey are mirror images of each other. Every experience in the one is contained in the other, but everything is reversed." Basically, depression and the dark night share almost similar contents. According to Turner, the important difference is that while the depressed person tries to recover his lost "healthy" self, the mystic in purification strives to lose completely the old self seen as illusory in its attachment to that which is limited.[4]

Ultimately, what the passive night does is to lead the mystic to the realization that when all manner of selfhoods (pre-ascetical, ascetical, and so forth) are dismantled, what is left is a divinely transformed self. In this particular state, language fails and hence so does self-knowledge. The transformed self is immersed in the dark night of unknowing. Turner's point is that in union, on account of the loss of selfhood, and the engagement of the sole agency of grace, there is no experience of which that selfhood is the object. This is a realm that transcends our experiential framework, and the only experience one has is the absence of experience. Therefore, concludes Turner (1995, p. 246), the dark night of passive spirit:

> is an excess of light to the soul, productive in it of the darkness of unknowing, and its presence is known only through what it deprives us of: and we can, and do experience the deprivation.

It would be inaccurate to restrict our interpretation of the "darkness" metaphor to just the negative and painful experiences of the dark nights. In the advanced phase of passive purification, radical darkness is a negation of all experiences, not just the positive ("light") ones. As enumerated in Chap. 4, the mystical metaphor of "darkness" also bears the meanings of unknowing and the blinding effect of divine brilliance. Turner (1995, p. 250) is correct to assume that John of the Cross does acknowledge the distinction between the first- and second-order negations: between the first-order "experience of negativity" and the second-order "negativity of experience". At the end of John of the Cross' (16th cent./1991) *Dark Night* (bk. 2 chp. 24, pp. 455–456), the passive night is characterized by obscurity of all the faculties – they are said to be "asleep". However, this state of dormancy of the faculties does not mark the end of purification. John (16th cent./1991, *Dark Night* bk. 2 chp. 25, p. 457) concludes his treatise on the dark night by declaring that:

> love alone, which at this period burns by soliciting the heart for the Beloved, is what guides and moves her [the soul], and makes her soar to God in an unknown way along the road of solitude.

Despite the self's detachment from relying upon its faculties, both sensory and spiritual, the dynamic drive of love still prevails in the dark night. In Chap. 2, I

[4] Clinical presentations of major depression can be so varied across different cases that perhaps, caution should be exercised in generalizing the intentions of depressed individuals. It has been recorded that there are depressed persons who have actually incorporated their depression into their self-identity to the point where the supposed intention to recover one's previously healthy self is absent (see Beutler et al. 2000, p. 229).

highlighted that according to mystics such as John of Ruysbroeck and Marguerite Porete, God is reached by love and not by intellection.

Perhaps then, the matter revolves around whether love belongs to the category of human experience. One can of course regard love as experience, but considering that union with infinite reality exceeds all familiar notions of experience, mystical love here can also be said to extend beyond "experience". As Turner (1995, p. 249) notes, to overlook the metaphorical significance of concepts in mysticism is to resort to literal interpretations. Mysticism is not reducible to experientialism. In the mystical context, even the word "experience" transcends its literal meaning and incorporates a more expansive metaphor that speaks of experience beyond experience.[5] We are not to perceive the mystical dark nights on the same level with depression for depression is distinctly anchored in experience, the negative experience of psychological torment.

The duality of negative experiences (darkness – night, depression) and affirmative experiences (light – illumination, elation) is subverted by the transcendental negation of all experiences. This central thesis that Turner unravels from John of the Cross' exposition on profound purification merits some clarification. The second transformative night of purification concerns, amongst other things, the detachment of the self from any experience, pleasant or unpleasant, that the self feels, consciously or unconsciously, is an essential constitution of its selfhood. Detachment from such a situation does not imply the negation of experience per se. Indeed, if this were the case, then it would be pointless to discuss mystical *experience*. The experience of the negation of experiences is itself an experience, no matter how one looks at it. And indeed, so is the experience of love. I agree with Turner that mysticism is not reducible to experiences. Nevertheless, the mystical life *includes* unique mystical experiences and is *more than* that because it is fundamentally a life that is deeply rooted in infinite being. When the self willingly releases its hold on all experiences and self-concepts and allows grace to do the work of transformation, what remains is a self left in a state of unknowing because language fails to articulate this unique state, but this does not imply that experience is absolutely negated.

5.2.2 Sublimity and the Negation of Negation

If we take the sublime encounter to be an effect of an interaction between an experiencing subject and an object that is infinite or evocative of the infinite, then some consideration has to be given to the role language plays in this event. The interpretive framework that is involved in the sublime encounter is inevitably anchored in language (not necessarily restricted to its formal and explicit form). As mentioned above, in the profound passive night of spirit, transcendental negation unveils for

[5] Turner's notion of radical negation of experience bears some similarities to Hart's understanding of the experience of God's love as entailing interruptions of experience, which can be linked with the "experience of non-experience" (Hart 2002, pp. 168–171).

the self an experiential space that is beyond signification. Kant's definition of the "colossal" may be relevant to the notion of "presenting something that resists presentation". He (1790/2000, § 26, p. 113) writes:

> An object is *monstrous* if by its size it destroys the purpose which constitutes the concept of it. But the mere presentation of a concept is called *colossal*, which is almost too great for any presentation (bordering on the relatively monstrous); because the purpose of the presentation of a concept is made hard (to carry out) by the intuition of the object being almost too great for our faculty of apprehension.

This is the only passage that contains the word "colossal" in the whole text of Kant's *third Critique*. I am aware of the contentions that revolve around what Kant understands by the "sublime", "monstrous", and "colossal", especially the definitional distinctions and conceptual connections between them.[6] I am aware as well of the significance and extensiveness in which the concept of the monstrous, whether in the Kantian sense or otherwise, figures in scholarship in literary studies.[7] I do not think it is necessary for me to enter into these debates. For my purposes here, I shall extract the concept of the colossal from the above passage and reconstruct it in order to help explicate the passive night's experience of the negation of experience.

My explorations of mystical development have yielded a discovery of some apparently "self-refuting" statements such as Teresa of Avila's (16th cent./1976, *Book of Her Life* chp. 18: 14, p. 163) "the understanding, if it understands, does not know how it understands", Nicholas of Cusa's (1453/1960, p. 60) perception of God "to be an end without an end", Eckhart's (14th cent./1981, German works: sermon 52, p. 202) prayer "to God that he may make me [Eckhart] free of 'God'", and Turner's (1995, p. 245) interpretation of John of the Cross' mystical experience as experience of that which is "'hidden', 'secret', and utterly beyond experience". The colossal is viewed by Kant as the presentation of an object that is *almost* unpresentable. Jean-François Lyotard (1924–1998) takes a step beyond the colossal when he (1991/1994, p. 141) formulates the sublime as a presentation of the unpresentable. He (Lyotard 1979/1984, p. 78) argues against Kant's assumption that the faculty of reason can adequately subsume the infinite into the abstract idea of infinity.[8] For Lyotard, the infinite is unpresentable. Nevertheless, it is the possibility of presenting the unpresentable, which is sublime and which challenges humanity's confidence in the integrity of its cognitive faculties.

I suggest that the seemingly self-refuting statements above, which are extracted from mystical texts, reflect a combination of the Kantian colossal and Lyotard's

[6] Robert Clewis (2009, p. 109) thinks that some scholars have blunted the distinctions between these three concepts. He mentions Lyotard, Žižek, Derrida, and Jean-Luc Marion's independent suggestions that the monstrous is sublime. According to Clewis, such an equation compromises fidelity to Kant's aesthetics.

[7] To name two: Barbara Claire Freeman's "Frankenstein with Kant: A Theory of Monstrosity, or the Monstrosity of Theory" (1987), and Asa Simon Mittman and Peter J. Dendle, eds., *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and Monstrous* (2012).

[8] Lyotard's contention is that the abstract idea of infinity cannot offer a satisfactory representation in terms of exemplification, and this idea does not present us with knowledge of experienceable reality nor capable of giving rise to a harmony of the faculties.

sublimity. The infinite God is met at the edge of experiencing the almost unpresentable and the unpresentable. After thorough and deep purification, the self, no longer constrained by the limited except the fact that it is still anchored in this earthly body, is inevitably at that juncture where language and knowledge may still be serviceable, though barely, and yet the self does touch upon a reality that evades articulation. It is the concept of the colossal that alleviates the incomprehensibility of statements such as "experience beyond experience" by interposing an experiential border between the utmost limit of presentable infinite and the infinite beyond presentation.[9]

The second transformative night can be linked with Kantian sublimity via the affection of enthusiasm. Although Kant establishes the distinctiveness of the aesthetic judgment of the sublime (especially the mathematical sublime) by removing from it any imperative force of moral values, he does, however, establish a bond between sublimity and morality. Experiencing the sublime is generally believed to be affectively intense. Kant (1790/2000, § 29, p. 140) defines "enthusiasm" as a combination of the moral principle with its relevant affections. Intriguingly, he figures that despite the blindness of affections, affections such as enthusiasm have the potential to energize the moral will. Enthusiasm is rooted in Kant's dynamical sublime. The dynamical sublime, as explicated in Chap. 2, centres on the subject's confrontation with powerful forces, be it physical or psychological, that evoke the subject's awareness of its own possession of a more formidable power, that of free will and moral potency. Furthermore, Kant (1790/2000, § 29, pp. 146–147) proclaims that all affections (except sadness originating from sympathy) that are somehow rooted in moral ideas can be regarded as sublime. Even depression that springs from the awareness of evils caused by human agency can be sublime. Obviously, Kant wants the sublime to be constituted of emotions orientated to moral strength. But why leave out sympathetic sadness? While sympathy is said to be an amiable emotion, indignation or righteous anger towards the evil that "men do to one another" is judged sublime by Kant (1790/2000, § 29, p. 146). Perhaps, if sympathetic sadness leads to a realization of the self's strength and capacity for producing positive change, and not a defeatist attitude, then I suppose there is room for the sublime in this emotion. Also, further on in Kant's discussion, he asserts that even in situations where affections are apparently absent, or more accurately, determinately prevailed over by the will directed towards fulfilling the moral law, sublimity, says Kant, is manifested. Indeed, for him (1790/2000, § 29, pp. 140–141) due to the involvement of *pure* reason here, this is a better instance of the sublime. What is interesting here is that the sublime persists, and in fact, in a better mode, at that state where affective intensity vanishes while pure moral reason prevails.

[9] Some correspondence can be found between what is discussed here and Jacques Lacan's (1901–1981) (1986/1992, pp. 54, 63, and 118) concept of "the Thing", which lies in the realm of the "real" and which is refractory to signification. The "thing" exists as a void within the realm of the "symbolic". For a glossary of Lacan's "the symbolic", "the imaginary", and "the real", see Sheridan (1966/1977, pp. ix–x).

A likely problem of inconsistency within Kant's treatise on the sublime may be raised here. Recall that Kant (1790/2000, § 7–8, pp. 57–63) defines aesthetic judgments of beauty and sublimity as possessing purposiveness without purpose. Aesthetic judgments are distinguished from plain likes and dislikes as well as cognitive and moral judgments by being unconditioned by subjective interests and concepts of fact and value. But, in the situation above, we see Kant extolling the sublime character of moral exertion that is barren of emotions. Is Kant violating his distinction between aesthetic and moral judgments? One way to address this problem is to assert that the pure moral exertion of an agent can be judged aesthetically by an observer. This judgment is made without personal interest in and without being conditioned by moral concepts and practical ends. A sublime experience can be elicited from a witness to the noble act of a soldier who courageously accepts death rather than violate the moral law that prohibits killing innocent non-combatants. The witness' judgment is aesthetic rather than moral because it is predicated on the sheer feeling of awe over the soldier's act.[10] I also suggest that not just the witness but the moral agent (in this example – the soldier) himself can possibly be graced with an aesthetic experience of the sublime alongside his morally noble deed. Accompanying the fulfilment of his moral duty is his own awareness of the sublimity of the power of humanity in overcoming evil.

When one turns to Kant's *Observations of the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1764/1960, p. 53) published before his *Critiques*, one will be puzzled to hear Kant say that even moral depravity contains elements of the sublime or beautiful.[11] If this is so, how does Kant reconcile this view with his sublimity of the third *Critique*? I think that this prima facie anomaly actually supports Kant's characterization of the aesthetic judgment as being *indifferent* to direct determinations of concepts and precepts. The sublime as a pure aesthetic judgment is locatable in situations imbued with moral rectitude and in those imbued with moral depravity. The forces of nature out there and in the self (internal instinctive forces) that have the potential to occasion a sublime feeling are actually the forces that the suprasensible will of the self confronts and strives to triumph over. As stressed, mystical purification works at going beyond sense attachments in order to prepare the self for union with God. This purification includes the effort required to rise above sense

[10] Clewis proposes and exposits the "moral sublime", which he says is implicit in Kant's third *Critique* and which he argues is neither a component of the mathematical nor the dynamical sublimes. He (2009, pp. 84–87) writes:

> By "moral sublime," I refer to the effect on consciousness when the moral law, or some representation or embodiment thereof, is observed or perceived with disinterestedness and aesthetically rather than from a practical perspective. (p. 17)

In this account we see that despite the involvement of moral concepts in the observed event, an aesthetic judgment of the sublime that retains its criterion of being undetermined by moral concepts (as objective purpose) can still be called forth in the appraiser.

[11] Kant considers this work to be more descriptive than analytical. The example he gives for moral depravity being sublime: violent and unlawful revenge meted out to someone inspires "horror and gratification" in observers and is thereby sublime.

attachments in order to adhere to moral principles. However, in the advanced phase of the second night of transformation, even the attachment to moral integrity has to be forfeited. For sure, this does not mean that the mystic at this phase is free to slide into moral depravity. What it means is that mystical intimacy transcends all constructions of the self. In a sense, this parallels Kant's dynamical sublime that is perceived as being evoked purely from its aesthetic standpoint. However, the purification of the second night embarks upon a process of radical detachment of all forms of judgment, be it moral or aesthetic.

In order for the mystic to reach the divine, she needs to be purified. Purification entails loss, just as depression is deeply entwined with the experience of profound loss. The loss experienced in mystical purification is believed to be transformative. The experience of the darkness of loss is sometimes, though hardly perceptible at specific phases, coupled with the radiance of gain. The transition from the light of illumination to the second night of purification reflects a dialectic of negation of negation. The radical negation of this second night somewhat parallels Kantian dynamical sublimity that is conceived as anchored in the power of the human spirit to overcome adversities. Mystical purification, however, extends beyond this human potency by exacting from the mystic the further negation of all forms of judgment. This negation leads the mystic to a state of emptiness. To delve further into the discussion on the light–darkness metaphor as well as its dialectical progression to this state of emptiness, we shall explore Thomas Merton's reflection on the dark night.

5.2.3 Darkness as Emptiness

Enduring the second transformative night is crucial for a deeper life of divine intimacy. For Thomas Merton, the *dread* that torments human existence is associated with the awareness that one is capable of living a lie in assuming that as finite beings we are self-sufficient (as mentioned in Teahan 1978, pp. 271–272). To be able to go through dread and come out of it triumphant, one must surrender oneself to that which is infinite and self-sufficient. Merton admits that confusion leading to insecurity and depression has to be endured. In order to be transformed by God, one has to sit patiently in the dark void. As Merton (1969/1992, pp. 27–28) proclaims:

> The monk faces the worst, and discovers in it the hope of the best. From the darkness comes light. From death, life. From the abyss there comes, unaccountably, the mysterious gift of the Spirit sent by God to make all things new, to transform the created and redeemed world, and to re-establish all things in Christ.

Waiting alone in this profound darkness may risk pushing the sojourner into the abyss of despair, but without it, she misses the opportunity for a truly intimate meeting with the infinite. It is in those moments of utter dependence on God that Merton finds the prospect of divine visitation. God's visitation is not contrived by the mystic as if triggered by the mystic's entry into the dark night. But it is the emptiness in the mystic that places her in readiness for such an encounter.

Note that Merton does not relegate the dark night strictly to the preparatory phase as prelude to union. For him, darkness also pervades the meeting with God in union. He speaks of "seeing" God in the dark abyss of incomprehensibility. In fact, the deeper one finds oneself descending into the depths of darkness, the greater assurance one can likely have of the closeness one is to mystical union (see Teahan 1978, p. 274). This assertion of Merton aligns with the dialectical negation of negation whereby there are many progressive levels of darkness, including one which signifies the transcendence of language and knowledge. Merton is not averse to describing mystical union in paradoxical expressions like "luminous darkness", or "illumined by the tremendous darkness which is the light of God" (as quoted in Teahan 1978, p. 275). Merton's symbolism of darkness has also to be read within his understanding of "emptiness", for mystical union can only take place when the self attains emptiness, which is the means to reach God (see Merton 1955, p. 74). Emptiness, for Merton, refers to the realization of one's spiritual poverty and finitude and the liberation from selfish attachments. He (1961, p. 40) also associates the distinctively Christian doctrine of divine *kenosis* (Greek for "emptying") in Christ, with this concept of emptiness. Christ's emptying of his divinity to assume human form, and to submit to crucifixion, is the paragon of the emptying of oneself in order to be perfectly filled by God. Further to his discussions with the Zen teacher, Daisetsu T. Suzuki (1870–1966), Merton developed his understanding of emptiness as fullness.[12] Mystical progress is a movement from the emptiness of interior poverty to the fullness of divine union. In this union, one is both empty of separation and full of union with God (Merton 1968b, pp. 114–115). The notion of emptiness in this context has two senses: as *means*, poverty as emptiness (darkness) is necessary for and precedes union (light), and as *end*, emptiness (darkness) and fullness (light) coexist in which emptiness of separation implies the fullness of union. The negation of separation is union.

According to Merton, emptiness is not something that one achieves. Rather, it is a realization of one's true self that is completely empty, yet, at the same time, full of the likeness to God (see Teahan 1978, pp. 280–281). Merton together with mystics and theologians like John Scotus Eriugena (800–877) and Eckhart does not just characterize the human person's true self as empty. They also regard God as nothingness, the abyss, and the nameless nothing. For Eriugena, God, as transcendent to being, non-being, and knowing, is said to be nothing (see Moran 1989, p. 217).[13]

[12] Merton (1968a, p. 85) talks about the Buddhist concept of *Sunyata* as referring to emptiness that is not to be interpreted as absolute void, but as fullness without determinations. A fullness that is without borders is what we should imagine when we think of emptiness. In this account is represented the dialectic of pure being and nothingness whereby pure being that is without any particular determination is perceived as nothingness. See the discussion on this paired concept in Chap. 2 of this study. D.T. Suzuki (1957/2002, pp. 10–30) has made an interesting comparative study of the concept of "emptiness" in Buddhist philosophy and in Eckhartian mysticism.

[13] John of the Cross (16th cent./1991, *Ascent of Mount Carmel* bk. 1 chp. 2: 4, p. 121) tells us that at the end of the passive night, when God communicates Godself to the soul, God "becomes another night for the soul". There are three levels of darkness or night in John of the Cross' (16th cent./1991, *Ascent of Mount Carmel* bk. 1 chp. 2: 3–4, pp. 120–121) mysticism: the first night of purgation of the senses; the second night of purification of spirit, in which the mystic walks by faith alone; and finally, the communion with God who appears as night.

Eckhart (14th cent./1992, sermon 99 – "Be Ye Renewed in the Spirit of Your Mind", p. 246) describes God as the "superessential nothing". On account of God's infinity, any descriptions would fail to encompass God. Even the notion of "being" is insufficient. Consequently, God is nothing. Moreover, Eckhart (14th cent./1981, Latin works: commentaries on John § 100, pp. 160–161) uses the light–darkness metaphor in his analysis of the intellect and knowing. In order for the intellect to know the cognizable object, the intellect must become that object intentionally, not materially. If the intellect becomes the object materially, then there is no way to distinguish that object from its other, thereby disabling the intellect's knowing of that object. To know means to distinguish an object from its other. Hence, in order for the intellect to know everything, it must be nothing – the light of the intellect is founded on its darkness (nothingness) (see also Turner 1995, pp. 157–158). But, for sure, the intellect is indeed something; it is of a particular substance. Eckhart would then have to say that the intellect would not be able to know its own nature due to the absence of differentiation. At any rate, the finite intellect would not be able to know everything. Aside from its inherent limitations such as its reliance upon the faculty of sense, at the least, the intellect is unable to know its own nature at the time of its act of knowing.

5.2.4 Oscillation and Coexistence of Light and Darkness

The juxtaposition of light and darkness in a manner distinct from their serial alternation through stages – as illumination (light), then purification (darkness) – manifests itself as either fairly close oscillations between light and darkness, or as concurrent coexistence, but from different aspects. For example, in Eckhart's argument above, the material nothingness (near nothingness) or darkness of the intellect is concurrent with its intentional fullness or light. As regards the close oscillations of light–darkness, Underhill draws our attention to the mystics' reports of frequent swings between the two opposing states. She writes:

> Rapid oscillations between a joyous and a painful consciousness seem to occur most often at the beginning of a new period of the Mystic Way: between Purgation and Illumination, and again between Illumination and the Dark Night: for these mental states are, as a rule, gradually not abruptly established. (*M* p. 383)

Such oscillations are more pronounced in the transition from one stage to another, although they are also present within each particular stage. There is probably more of elation in illumination than in the dark night, but this does not mean that illumination is completely devoid of desolation and pain. Correspondingly, there is more distress in the second transformative night than in illumination, but some light of consolation is still present. In a way, Underhill (1913, p. 54) considers this alternation akin to the pain and pleasure suffered by an individual at that stage of development where she leaves childhood to enter adulthood. The rearrangement of the individual's psychic forces, perhaps around new centres of orientation, inevitably entails painful adjustments.

Apart from the rapid shifts between light and darkness, there is also, as stated, the concurrent coexistence of both those opposing metaphors. Entrance into the second transformative night is the consequence of the brilliance of illumination. The coexistence of the light–darkness metaphor is best explained as the light of illumination concurrently *causing* the darkness of purification. In this metaphor, divine light is objective (absolute) and is the cause of the darkness experienced (effect and relative to the subject's faculties). Furthermore, despite the good illuminative delights bring, these delights have the potential to detain the mystic in her progress towards divine union. These consolations may lead the mystic to identify them with God or hold the mystic back through being satisfied with delights that are still finite.[14] For such reasons, these delights have to be withdrawn to prepare the mystic for something greater.

The mystical spirituality of John of the Cross is not negation for negation's sake. Instead, the pains endured by the mystic during the second night aim at transforming the mystic's faculties to facilitate a purer relationship with God. In John's opinion, the second night flows from the infused illumination. In essence, the second transformative night is experienced as a painful night even while suffused with the presence of God. The distinction here is between actual light and perceived darkness. The overwhelming actual light plunges the perceiver into darkness. The unprepared perceptual faculties of the perceiver receive the light as darkness because the light overwhelms as well as ravages the capacity of these faculties. It is akin to the damage caused to the visual faculty of someone gazing at the sun (see John of the Cross 16th cent./1991, *Dark Night* bk. 2 chp. 5: 3, pp. 401–402). John of the Cross (16th cent./1991, *Dark Night* bk. 2 chp. 5: 5, p. 403) suggests that the self feels so low in its impurity that it assumes itself "worthy neither of God nor of any creature". Aside from the tormenting effect of the finite–infinite contrast, the self also suffers as a result of the active work done on it by God's immense light. The transformative potency of divine light is painful for the weak and ill-prepared self. John (16th cent./1991, *Dark Night* bk. 2 chp. 5: 6–7, p. 403) maintains that despite the pain and darkness endured by the self when confronting this transforming grace, ultimately, the goal is not chastisement but transformation of the self in preparation for union.

Besides the "causality and absolute–relative" thesis that accounts for the concurrent coexistence of light and darkness, there is also the "presence–absence" explanation. While in the torment of the dark night the mystic feels God's absence. She also comes to realize God's active presence, though hidden, in the work of purification (*M* p. 384). In Madame Guyon's (1683/1879, pp. 61–62) mystical interpretation of

[14] I use "consolations" and "delights" interchangeably. Teresa of Avila, however, distinguishes between "consolations", the natural joyful experiences that can be obtained from efforts at spiritual exercises or achievements and good fortunes in ordinary life, and "spiritual delights", the joyful experiences given by God through grace (Teresa of Avila 16th cent./1980, *Interior Castle*, 4th dwelling place chp. 1: 3 – chp. 2: 4, pp. 317–324).

the Song of Songs, we read in this particular excerpt how the mystic, upon finding God absent in herself, embarks on seeking God in other creatures:

> [S]he no longer finds her Well-beloved in her resting place … *She seeks*, nevertheless; for her heart loves and can find no rest but in the object of its love, but *she finds nothing*, because God has not departed from her to be sought in other creatures. He desires to be sought in Himself, and when she shall have arrived there she will discover another truth, the beauty of which will entrance her, that her Well-beloved is everywhere and in everything, and that everything is He, so that she can distinguish nothing from Him who is in all places without being enclosed in any.

The biblical Song of Songs, a lyrical presentation of the love, putatively, between King Solomon and a Shulamite woman, is often interpreted by mystics as allegorizing the love between the soul and God. In the above passage, Madame Guyon describes the transition the mystic undergoes from finding God absent in her self to finding God present in all things when God is found truly in Godself and not in God's gifts. The process of finding God in Godself is a painful one for the mystic, who, during this process, experiences God as absent when it seems that God is only hidden (Guyon 1683/1879, p. 53).

The "presence–absence" dialectic can take the form of a transition from the mystic's initial perception of divine absence to a later perception of divine presence when God's affirmative presence is felt. Another possibility, which is seen in Madame Guyon's reflection, is the shift from the mystic's initial perception of divine absence to a later realization of divine presence even amidst the earlier dark moments of absence. God's presence need not be immediately perceived. William Alston (1991, pp. 11–12) advances a relevant point: just as one can think that one is having an experience of God when it is not the case, there can be genuine awareness of God that the subject takes as something else, misses completely, or immediately forgets the experience. However, if we assume that the experience of God as infinite ought to be so overwhelming, it would be impossible for the subject not to recognize the infinite's presence. Then again, the impossibility of not recognizing one's divine encounter arises only when we take mystical experience to be confined to the explosive "mountain top" kind of experience and ignore the low intensity background experiences of God's constant presence. In those low intensity version, it is possible for the subject to be oblivious of her mystical experience. As Alston (1991, pp. 11–12) illustrates:

> I may be aware of God's sustaining me in being, while I suppose that I am merely feeling particularly fit and chipper at the moment; or I may be "hearing" God speak to me (not with audible words), while I take this to be just thoughts floating through my mind. Perception of God can be genuine without being putative as well as vice versa.

A person may have a genuine mystical experience, but thinks otherwise, or she may think she has a mystical experience when it is not actually the case. Consequently, we can then assume that even though the mystic perceives God as absent, there may

be a deeper level of perception of divine presence that the mystic is at that moment unaware of, but only later realizes it.[15]

When we attempt to read what is discussed above through the lens of the sublime, another approach to the sublimity of the dark night can be found in Otto's work. It is in his definition of the sublime as a numinous encounter filled with terrifying awe, which has explicit relevance to our search for the sublime element in the night of purification. For Otto (1917/1950, p. 105), the spirituality of love and communion that pervades Christian mysticism does not eliminate the sense of the *tremendum* (Latin: tremendous) in the numinous. The *tremendum* of painful terror and ecstatic awe:

> remains a living factor in the *caligo* [Latin: darkness] and the *altum silentium* [deep silence], in the "abyss", the "night", the "deserts" of the divine nature, into which the soul must descend, in the "agony", "abandonment", "barrenness", *taedium* [weariness], in which it must tarry, in the shuddering and shrinking from the loss and deprivation of selfhood and the "annihilation" of personal identity.

Recall that in Otto's (1917/1950, p. 42) opinion, "the sublime exhibits the same peculiar dual character as the numinous; it is at once daunting, and yet singularly attracting in its impress upon the mind". However, Otto's sublimity of the numinous experience, unlike the Kantian sublime, is not orientated to a sort of final resolution in either a concept or consciousness of self-potency. It can be contended here that infinite being has the potential to reduce the self to the depths of darkness and to ravage this self's faculties while yet retaining its hope in faith for a profound divine union. Even in the *taedium* and agony of mystical striving, we find the constituent potential of a sublime experience (replete with the ambivalent mix of painful terror and ecstatic awe) in the presence of the wholly other. The aesthetics of the sublime is congenial to both resplendent brightness and dismal darkness.

5.2.5 Purification of Sense and Spirit

In the previous subsection, I attempted to unravel the structure of the second transformative night in terms of consecutive oscillations of darkness and light and the simultaneous coexistence of these two opposing qualities. This present subsection delves into the manner in which the purification of spirit dialectically incorporates and differentiates itself from the purification of sense. As reported earlier, Underhill distinguishes purgation (first transformative night) from purification (second transformative night) by saying that the latter constitutes a deeper and holistic

[15] Hart (2005, p. 77) makes a vital observation when he says: "It is one thing to affirm that the full revelation of God was in Christ, quite another to suggest that this full revelation presented itself to anyone's consciousness when Jesus was alive". In the gospels, there is not much report of people who interacted with Jesus proclaiming that they had an experience of God. Hart advances the point that faith is the basis of our experience of God and that during the time of Jesus, the doctrine of the trinity was not an article of faith.

purification of the self in its faculties of sense and spirit and that this form of purification entails the predominant work of grace. While in the first transformative night the self strives, through detachment and mortification, to get beyond egocentric attachments, in the second transformative night the advance of purification into deeper levels of the self necessitates a much greater involvement of divine activity (*M* pp. 381, 388–389).

Underhill, unlike John of the Cross, does not provide a fine analysis of the distinctions between the faculties of sense and of spirit and their differences in the purification process. Nevertheless, she does regard the relation between the first and second purifications as fundamentally one in which the second transformative night dialectically incorporates the first. The second night homes in on a more exhaustive purgation of egocentrism. Underhill writes:

> In Illumination, the soul, basking in the Uncreated Light, identified the Divine Nature with the divine light and sweetness which it then enjoyed. Its consciousness of the transcendent was chiefly felt as an increase of personal vision and personal joy. Thus, in that apparently selfless state, the "I, the Me, the Mine," though spiritualized, still remained intact. The mortification of the senses was more than repaid by the rich and happy life which this mortification conferred upon the soul. But before real and permanent union with the Absolute can take place: before the whole self can learn to live on those high levels where – its being utterly surrendered to the Infinite Will – it can be wholly transmuted in God, merged in the great life of the All, this dependence on personal joys must be done away. The spark of the soul, the fast-growing germ of divine humanity, must so invade every corner of character that the self can only say with St. Catherine of Genoa, "My me is God: nor do I know my selfhood except in God". (*M* p. 396)

Embedded in these words of Underhill is the compacted account of mystical progression in relation to the cumulatively greater involvement of the essential faculties from the senses to the spirit, to the spark of the soul. As explained in Chap. 4 of this book, the operations of the faculties of spirit – intellect, memory, and will – build upon the data derived from the senses. The labour of detachment and mortification is said to transform the self to be more attuned to infinite reality. However, the clinging to the positive states of being that accompany the attained "illumination" exposes the mystic's continued attachment to the "I, the Me, the Mine". The attachment now takes place at the higher spiritual level whereby the self identifies these positive states with the whole self in its internal, subjective, moment to moment immediate experiences (the "I"); the self as an object viewed from a third-person perspective (the "Me"); and the possessions of the self (the "Mine").[16] The principle upon which the first and second transformative nights rest is that unless we release the hold self-centred interests have on us, we can never adopt a perception and conation that are more universal, more other regarding, and less ephemeral in their orientation.

[16] Reflections on the identifications of the self's varied states of being – sensing, perceiving, desiring, feeling, and so forth – with the "I", the "mine", and the "my self" (or "me") are also found in a Buddhist text (Bodhi, trans., probably 1st cent. BCE /2000, chp. 7: 18 – "*Rāhulasaṃyutta* (Connected Discourses with Rāhula)", pp. 694–698). In here, the counsel given is that unless the self realizes the impermanence of all these states of being, and thereby loathes them, the self will never progress towards liberation.

In the quote above and in the general mystical programme lies a perplexing question. How does the happiness of the self fit into the whole configuration of the mystical enterprise? The will is directed to that which the self judges as possessing ultimate value and, in many ways, the drive to attain the willed object has some inevitable connection to the happiness of the self, perhaps, in this instance, the ultimate happiness. If the first night is necessary because the happiness derivable from sense-directed pursuits can get in the way of the attainment of a higher happiness, that is, happiness of the spiritual kind, then should this spiritual happiness, once achieved, be purified (in the second night) because it gets in the way of a much higher happiness? This challenge to mysticism is profound, for it asks why a person should devote her whole life to the pursuit of infinite reality when the darkness of suffering is a close companion, even to the end when one is required to give up the highest earthly beatifications of the spirit. To discuss this challenge to mysticism, I intend to probe into the nature and purpose of the two stages of purification and to explore further Underhill's assertion that the mystic actually undertakes a journey to be truly human. The mystical quest is not a rejection of one's humanity in order to adopt an existence in a supernatural realm believed to be real. This relation between humanity and divinity is essential in addressing our broached issue: why endure sufferings for a supposed ultimate happiness?

Why the need for another purification beyond the night of sense? John of the Cross (16th cent./1991, *Dark Night* bk. 2 chp. 1: 1, p. 395) admits that a higher spiritual delight is encountered after the night of sense, as compared with the delight experienced before this first night:

> In this new state, as one liberated from a cramped prison cell, it goes about the things of God with much more freedom and satisfaction of spirit and with more abundant interior delight than it did in the beginning before entering the night of sense. … Nonetheless, the purgation of the soul is not complete. The purgation of the principal part, that of the spirit is lacking, and without it the sensory purgation, however strong it may have been, is incomplete because of a communication existing between the two parts of the soul that form only one suppositum.

In this particular extract, the nights of sense and of spirit – typical expressions used by John of the Cross – have to be endured by the mystic who intends to progress further. This is because of the integrated way in which the faculties of sense and spirit operate. There is an important issue I wish to take up with a claim in the quote above. This issue deals with the justification of claiming a distinction of delight or happiness experienced. Happiness as a phenomenological datum has variegated nuances, and it is questionable whether one can actually say that one person's happiness is *more than* that of another person's or even that my own happiness experienced at a stage in my life is *better* than the happiness I experienced in another stage. Let us focus our consideration on the intrinsic experience of happiness rather than the extrinsic or second-hand evaluation of that same experience.[17] Can one

[17] "Happiness", as employed in this discussion, refers to a subjective experience rather than the Aristotelian *eudaimonia*, that is, a more complex concept embracing a life of virtue and goodness (Aristotle 4th cent. BCE/1976, bk. 1: 8, 1098b12–1099a32, pp. 78–79).

rightly say that, for example, the delight I experienced as a child enjoying a new toy is less, in quality, intensity, and duration, than the delight I, as an adult, experienced when getting a much desired job offer? In a similar vein then, can the intrinsic experience of happiness in the stage of awakening be regarded as less, again, in quality, intensity, and duration, than the happiness of illumination? When it comes to judging the intrinsic experience of happiness, there is no blanket rule to dictate that happiness actually experienced at a higher and later stage is better than that experienced in an earlier stage of mystical development. It is usually the after-the-fact evaluation that one makes, based on an extrinsic set of criteria, that we judge the distinctions of happiness. Quite likely too, since the earlier experience of happiness is long gone in one's past, there is no way we can perfectly resurrect the earlier happiness and compare it with the present one.

The deliberation above impugns the justification for tolerating progressively painful phases of the dark night in order to attain progressively higher levels of happiness on the grounds that serious problems exist in making differential valuations of happiness based solely on the actual experience of happiness. Therefore, a mystic might quite rightly refuse to endure the second night and, instead, bask in the bright delights of illumination, thereby challenging the whole purpose of mystical progress. I think there is a way out of this perplexity, which is to appeal to a *natural* inability to sustain any form of happiness for an extended period of time. Using our example above, the happiness derivable from enjoying a new toy will eventually run its course in the child; and the same applies to the adult receiving a much desired job offer. Correspondingly, when applied to mysticism, the happiness of awakening cannot last forever. And, this is where the mystic would argue that the mystical journey *prods* one to progress into ever deeper levels of experience fundamentally because the prior happiness cannot be sustained, irrespective of whether valid measurements of happiness at its different manifestations are obtainable. Perhaps, John of the Cross' idea of a greater "freedom and satisfaction of spirit" (see the quote above) suggests that without a broadening of the faculties of the self, the delight experienced at an earlier stage, no doubt, probably just as intense and enduring as that in a later stage, would eventually peter out. A greater "freedom and satisfaction of spirit" is the condition that creates a flexibility of capacities in order to appreciate and enjoy a broader range of happiness.

Let me take stock of this discussion thus far. I raised the issue of why endure the dark nights when happiness, in whatever stage of its attainment, should contain in itself sufficient reason for the person to be content with it rather than proceed towards further suffering. One argument against this "contentment" rationale is that in human nature, any form of happiness will eventually run its course. The human person possesses higher faculties beyond the senses. Accordingly, it can be assumed that a person would be willing to sacrifice the enjoyment of sensual pleasures in order to fulfil the desire for moral or spiritual attainments. In constructing an ethical system based on human beings' natural pursuit of pleasure or happiness, John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) postulates that we all desire to experience not just sensual happiness but also the higher level happiness like the happiness of friendship, intellectual achievement, power, fulfilling one's moral duties, and so forth (Mill 1861/1969,

pp. 259–260). Still, there is no certainty that human beings naturally desire the higher forms of happiness and would, for instance, naturally sacrifice their own enjoyment of pleasures for the well-being of a large number of people, including strangers. The principal differences between the happiness connected to the faculties of spirit (intellect, memory, and will) and that connected to the faculties of sense are that the enjoyment of spiritual happiness is not confined to the actual presence of sense objects and that the enjoyment of sense objects is largely determined by the conditioned nature of the spiritual faculties. The happiness derived from intellectual pursuits need not require the actual presence of a physical object. Moreover, it is possible that excessive enjoyment of a physical object can lead to the opposite experience of pain, for example, overeating. Hence, the spiritual faculties have to temper the urge to overindulge in eating so as to avert any painful consequences.

A human being, by Mill's assessment, would naturally desire the fulfilment of higher forms of happiness. However, the assertion that all humans naturally, either explicitly or innately, desire the higher happiness is not susceptible of definitive proof. It seems reasonable to accept that everyone desires happiness, but to desire the happiness of others over one's own is still open to question.[18] And it is precisely here that we speak of the imperative of morality and spirituality. The transformative nights demand a radical purification of faculties in order to move away from finite egocentrism towards infinite universalism. Considering that for the human person, generally, the spiritual faculties influence the propulsions of sense desires, in the second transformative night of spiritual purification, the application of purification extends to include the sense faculties. The purification of senses is carried up into the purification of spirit dialectically because for the human person, ultimately, the spiritual faculties have a greater determinative function over the whole self. In this regard, we can assume that built within the human person is a natural drive to proceed beyond the exhaustible happiness of sense to a more expansive appreciation of happiness found in the cultivation of the spiritual faculties. Underhill contends:

> The Dark Night, then, is really a deeply human process, … Only thus, by the transmutation of the *whole man*, not by a careful and departmental cultivation of that which we like to call his "spiritual" side, can Divine Humanity be formed: … (*M* p. 388)

Underhill's regarding of the mystical push into the dark night as a human process echoes the premise that human beings are naturally orientated to pleasures that correlate with a holistic synergy of spiritual and sensory drives. However, even if assuming that the spiritual faculties have a greater management over the sense faculties, there is nothing to prevent a case in which a person rationally and wilfully decides to devote her whole life to the pursuit of sense pleasures.[19] On the other hand, any form of attachment, whether it is the outcome of a subconscious drive or

[18] If Mill intends to found morality on the actual desire for happiness, he has to show that everyone actually desires the happiness of everyone else (the universal happiness), but I suspect he cannot do so. This problem has not been resolved by Mill (1861/1969, pp. 26–28).

[19] Eroticism, as encompassing a pursuit of sexual (and thereby sensual) pleasure, is perceived by Georges Bataille (1897–1962) to be a means to an inner experience that exceeds mystical experience. He (1944/1988, p. 13) contends:

a committed devotion, eventually leads the attached person to some form of unhappiness. It seems that the path of purification that leads to infinite happiness entails a most radical negation of negation – a dark night of emptiness and, ultimately, of mystical death.

5.2.6 Mystical Death

As Underhill avers, the mystical dark night of transformation is a human and holistic process. In principle, within the mystical pursuit lies a potential for inexhaustible delectation. However, due to a host of conditions, predominantly, the natural constitution of the human person and the adaptive demands of human existence, limits exist in this enjoyment of happiness. And, as discussed, plausibly, though not demonstrably, a cultivated human person would be willing to endure some suffering for the attainment of spiritual happiness. But even these higher pursuits are not without their limits, for a finite human person will constantly have to contend with obstacles to the perfect fulfilment of such pursuits. This is not to say that categorically all pursuits are worthless and futile. Rather, this situation alludes to a deep-seated and conflict-ridden desire within the human person.

When we look at the clash of natural drives in the human person, we encounter an aporia of the conditions of possibility being also the conditions of impossibility.[20] Our senses form the foundation of our perceptions and conations in our relationship with our world. Our spiritual (rational) faculties are dependent upon and are mutually determinative with our sense faculties. Without traversing through and having some (not necessarily all) familiarity with experiences mediated by sense and spirit, the desire for the infinite would not arise. However, the operations of those faculties also conduce to an attachment to the objects of sense and spirit. Our instinctive attraction to pleasure and aversion to pain tend to make us cling to our health, favourite activities, and enriching relationships. Unfortunately, these attachments to finite realities may impede our attainment of that which is infinite. The conditions of possibility for the natural drive to the infinite are also the conditions of impossibility for the realization of that drive. Nevertheless, despite an apparent aporia of harbouring the conditions of possibility and impossibility, strict contradiction is absent. Both the quest for the infinite and the impediment to this quest are contingent upon

> Mystical and erotic experience differ in that the former is totally successful. Erotic licentiousness results in depression, disgust, and the inability to continue … Eroticism is too heavy a burden for human strength.

It is contestable whether erotic licentiousness can correctly be considered to be a form of extreme negation without recompense (see Gan 2005, pp. 206–207).

[20] Derrida identified various instantiations of the clash between conditions of possibility and conditions of impossibility. One of them pertains to the effects of the signature (see Derrida 1971/1982, pp. 328–329). However, Derrida's argument is open to question because of problems with what he pins down precisely as constituting the shared conditions of possibility and impossibility.

operations of sense and spirit, but there are independent contributing factors that lead to a divergence of effects. Natural faculties and drives are necessary for the mystical quest for the infinite, but whether an individual person stagnates by clinging to a finite attachment or proceeds to the ultimate mystical goal depends upon other factors.

I suggest here that this tension between the desire to hold on to that which is finite and the desire to let go of the finite in order to attain the infinite reflects a parallel tension that is constitutive of the Kantian sublime. It is the tension that arises in a sublime encounter with a seemingly infinite object whereby the faculty of imagination's attempt at a *comprehensio aesthetica* of this object via successive apprehensions of that which progresses to infinity clashes with the requirement of the faculty of reason to grasp the infinite in an all-at-once totality. The potential infinite is an unending progression of finite units. The clinging to these finite units is probably a manifestation of an innate desire to possess the infinite without sacrificing any of infinity's finite constituents. After all, is it not argued in this book that infinity includes finitude? Perhaps, then, it may not be the case that a person who is attached to finite realities has no desire for infinite reality. Probably, innate in that person's subconscious mind is a desire to amass an indefinite amount of pleasure or happiness.[21]

It seems inevitable that whether a person wishes to preserve the pleasure enjoyed in a single object of desire, or to experience new pleasures from new objects of desire, something has to be sacrificed in order to gain something else. I think that the potential for the sublime that inheres in this situation is rooted in the perpetual tension represented by the particular–universal dialectic in which the desire for particular objects clashes with the desire for universal reality that includes these particulars. The enjoyment of concrete particular objects of desire may spur the self to proceed towards a more universal and more inclusive object of desire. It is this perpetual tension between the different drives towards the particular finite and the universal infinite that informs the potential sublime within the human phenomenon of striving for happiness. In the subject's relationship to a particular object, there will be a tussle between rendering that relationship transitional or final. Furthermore, the experienced relationship with the universal and infinite being leads to a renewed perspective on and experience of finite particular beings. Just as the conception of infinity requires some concrete imagination of unlimited particular units or entities, the close communion with infinite being cannot be abstracted from the connection one has with finite beings.

To reiterate, the human impetus for the limitless exists together with a natural instinctual drive to cling to that which brings temporary happiness. R.P. Poulan

[21] Significant comparisons and contrasts can be made between what is discussed here and the complex structure of relations amongst desires, as constructed by the psychoanalytic tradition. While the development of these relations has ramified into subtly different formulations in the hands of Sigmund Freud's (1856–1939) successors, these relations do have their basis in Freud's (1920/1961, particularly pp. 30–33) notions of, amongst others, the life and death drives.

(Augustín François Poulain, 1836–1919) succinctly enunciates the overall purpose of the transformative nights:

> In order to attain to the mystic union, it is necessary to detach ourselves from all that is not God. Now, every trial, borne with resignation, serves to weaken some natural attachment; attachment to health, to the joys of the senses, to the world's esteem, to fortune, to certain friendships or occupations, to tranquility, etc. God only gives us extraordinary favours to aid us to attain to an extraordinary renunciation. (Poulan 1901/1910, p. 401)

If mystic union implies union with the *all-inclusive* infinite, then in the midst of the desire to attain to the limitless is the contrary desire to retain the limited. Claiming these two dynamisms to be natural within the self is not necessarily slipping into a contradiction, since they both can originate from two different sources within the self.

The radicalness of the purification of spirit sustains Poulan's assertion that "God only gives us extraordinary favours to aid us to attain to an extraordinary renunciation." Poulan admits that the sensory and spiritual attachments are natural. This would imply that the breaking of these natural attachments requires the work of something beyond the natural, perhaps, grace. But what exactly constitutes "natural" for human beings? If the desire for the infinite is deemed natural, then the determinants of renouncing attachments ought also to be natural. When it comes to the capacity for the infinite, it is difficult to arbitrate between the natural and the supranatural. Then again, a desire may be natural, but its realization constitutes a collaboration of nature and grace. Furthermore, in the framework of the tripartite structure of the soul – "sense–spirit–ground of the soul" – one can postulate the supranatural as already present and yet other to the natural. I think that a stronger argument for the involvement of the supranatural in the radical night of spirit can only reside in the phenomenon of mystical death. It would seem "unnatural" for a person to renounce everything and endure a radical renunciation akin to death.

Underhill's description of the mystical death goes to the extent of speaking about the loss of the presence of the supranatural soul within the person. She writes:

> When this total privation or "mystic death" is fully established, it involves not only the personal "Absence of God", but the apparent withdrawal or loss of that impersonal support, that transcendent Ground or Spark of the soul, on which the self has long felt its whole real life to be based. Hence, its very means of contact with the spiritual world vanishes; and as regards all that matters, it does indeed seem to be "dead". (*M* p. 390)

Intensity of negation in the mystical death does not just arise from the vanished affectionate intimacy with God. Even the intrinsic connectedness to God in the soul of the self is felt to have slipped away. Underhill continues her depiction of this radical negation by quoting John of the Cross' (16th cent./1991, *Dark Night* bk. 2 chp. 6: 4, p. 405) account of it as:

> "one of the most bitter sufferings of this purgation. The soul is conscious of a profound emptiness in itself. A cruel destitution of the three kinds of goods, natural, temporal, and spiritual, which are ordained for its comfort. It sees itself in the midst of the opposite evils, miserable imperfections, dryness and emptiness of the understanding, and abandonment of the spirit in darkness." (*M* p. 391)

The metaphor of death in "mystical death" conveys the kind of pronounced destitution the mystic feels in her whole being – natural and divine. Mystical death is an aftermath of the progressively profound relationship the self has with infinite reality. In here, all the identifications that the self, consciously or unconsciously, makes of the attributes and gifts of the infinite, with the infinite itself, are wrenched away. What is terrifying is that, in the end, the self is left with nothing, emptiness, or penetrating darkness. The mystic journey appears to end in an ironic twist. In drawing closer to God, God draws a closed end over the mystic.

Is the mystical death as presented in *M* and other cognate literature considered a component unique to the mystical enterprise on account of its radical plunge into obliteration? Actually, Poulan (1901/1910, p. 400), in his opening sentence to his chapter on the trials endured by mystics, announces:

> With the exception of St. John of the Cross' first *night* of the soul and certain obsessions, none of the trials of which I am about to speak are confined to those who are in the mystic way or destined to it; but with those persons they sometimes reach an *exceptional degree* of acuteness.

It is unclear why Poulan excludes John of the Cross' first night of the soul and some types of obsessions, but I agree with him that torments akin to the mystical death are not the sole preserve of mystics. However, Poulan seems to think that the "death" mystics undergo is more acute. Just as it is difficult to justify comparing happiness as more or less acute, it is similarly difficult to assume that a person's torment is more acute than that of another person. Furthermore, perhaps, as a mitigation of the "acuteness" of suffering endured by the mystic, I shall argue that mystical death is not one of absolute loss and desolation.

"The mystic life is a life of love", says Underhill; and the darkness of the mystical death is the experience of the absence of the mystic's object of love (*M* pp. 389–390). As quoted earlier, Underhill describes mystical death as the self's felt loss of the ground of the soul. But, further on in her exposition on this phenomenon, she writes:

> It is clear that so drastic a process of unselfing is not likely to take place without stress. It is the negative aspect of "deification": in which the self, deprived of "perception, knowledge, will, work, self-seeking" – the I, the Me, the Mine – loses itself, denies itself, unforms itself, drawing "ever nearer" to the One, till "nothing is to be seen but a ground which rests upon itself" – the ground of the soul, in which it has union with God. (*M* pp. 400–401)

Here, contrary to Underhill's earlier statement, the ground of the soul is still present, and it is the only thing left that forms the site of mystical union. Hence, mystical death is not absolute darkness. The apparent desolation and emptiness conceal a slight glimmer of affirmative light. It is the intimate finite–infinite relationship that sustains the mystic going into and through mystical death. Underhill decidedly labels the mystic as one who "never rests in that search for God which he holds to be the fulfillment of his highest duty; yet he seeks without any certainty of success" (*M* p. 92). It might be observed that mysticism is no different from any other venture that propels a person to pursue the ultimate goal of life without any certainty of success. Then again, it is conceivable that mysticism is the only venture where a person

willingly surrenders everything in order to get everything, and this is done in a manner that demands even the seeking of that everything to be surrendered.

It is John of the Cross who elucidates best the affirmative faint light that sustains the mystic in and through the ultimate negation (darkness). Towards the end of his text on the dark nights, he (16th cent./1991, *Dark Night* bk. 2 chp. 21: 11–12, pp. 448–449) speaks about the soul having to put on the cloak of faith, hope, and love. These theological virtues have the following important roles: Faith dims the intellect of its natural understanding to prepare it for receiving divine wisdom; since to hope is to hope for something radically unfamiliar, hope then purges the memory of all the soul's possessions of what is ordinary and natural; and love drains the will of all that is not God and redirects this will to God. It is in this deep night that we see the transition from the workings of nature to the workings of grace. In the final chapter of *Dark Night* (bk. 2 chp. 25, pp. 456–457), John of the Cross sums up the purpose of the nights by saying that the transformation of the senses and the spirit leads the soul to soar to the infinite with the vehicle of pure and simple love. It would be difficult to imagine someone wilfully traversing the whole mystical journey and especially the darkness of mystical death with absolute emptiness of intention. If the severity of mystical death is precisely due to experiencing the absence of the absolute, then this absence can only exist on account of the love the mystic has for the absolute. Love, faith, and hope orientated to what is unknown and uncertain are still love, faith, and hope. Mystical death is that unusual situation of being at the threshold of possessing a deep stirring that is empty of preconceptions, a state of pure wilful submission. Even the mystic's seeking of the infinite is surrendered.

Derrida's *The Gift of Death* can help augment this present exploration of the relation between mystical death and radical surrender. In this work, Derrida builds upon Jan Patočka's (1975/1996) reflections on the multifaceted link between religion and responsibility. Derrida talks about death (perhaps, influenced by Heidegger's [1927/1962, § 50, pp. 293–295] analysis on the same topic) as categorically marking that which is the sole possession of mortal being:

> Everyone must assume his own death, that is to say the one thing in the world that no one else can either give or take: therein resides freedom and responsibility. … Even if one gives me death to the extent that it means killing me, that death will still have been mine and as long as it is irreducibly mine I will not have received it from anyone else. Thus dying can never be taken, borrowed, transferred, delivered, promised, or transmitted. And just as it can't be given to me, so it can't be taken away from me. (Derrida 1992/1995, p. 44)

Derrida maintains that death is ultimately one's own. No one can take it away from me nor endure death in my place. Moreover, death cannot be given to me by anyone. Even if another person were to kill me, explains Derrida, since that death is undergone by me, it is still mine and not given to me by someone else. If death appears to be the only thing that I truly possess, then I can act responsibly by freely assuming responsibility for my own death. I can accept the gift of death or give my death as sacrifice for another being.

These weighty thoughts on death are relevant to this present assessment of mystical death. However, I do hold some reservations about Derrida's assertions. Death is

not the only thing one possesses. Many aspects of life belong to us and are not open to being taken away from nor given to us. Let us take any particular form of suffering, say, belonging to me. Someone else can alleviate that suffering, or stop its continuance for me. However, the suffering *already* endured belongs to me alone. Any experience, be it pleasant or painful, though ephemeral, is part and parcel of my phenomenological constitution and belongs to me. Another person may be able to be the cause of my particular experience, but that experience belongs to me. A person's death may be delayed by the actions of another, but death is certain to come to all persons. Similarly, I may have the capacity to delay a person's suffering for a time being, but suffering, in whatever form, is bound to befall that person. Death then has no unique privilege as the only thing truly possessed by the individual.

What is interesting is that Derrida (1992/1995, pp. 42–44), like Heidegger (1927/1962, § 47, p. 284), admits that no one can die for another, but following upon the thesis that death is one's own, then the gift of death "for another" is an act of pure autonomy and individuality (the free giving of one's death, my death which individuates me). In dying for another, I only delay the other person's death and not substitute it with my death. Hence, in the gift of death, I do not give life to the other and neither does it bring any gain to me. The gift of death signifies that giving beyond economy or utility. This giving requires a responsible and free act from the giver to be in a situation in which the giver totally gives without assurance of any recompense. Derrida then extends this radically responsible (free) giving to the infinite other and to particular others.[22]

Derrida contends that the infinite otherness of God is also extendable to the otherness amongst particular beings because of this notion of the individuality of death. He (1992/1995, p. 78) writes:

> Every other (in the sense of each other) is every bit other (absolutely other). From this point of view what *Fear and Trembling* says about the sacrifice of Isaac is the truth. Translated into this extraordinary story, the truth is shown to possess the very structure of what occurs every day. Through its paradox it speaks of the responsibility required at every moment for every man and every woman.

Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855), in *Fear and Trembling* (1843/2006, pp. 41–43), explores the difference between religion and philosophy, and between faith and ethics, in God's ordering of Abraham to slay his son, Isaac. Abraham, says Kierkegaard, is a "knight of faith" because of his willingness to transcend general responsibility (informed by ethics founded on general rules of reason and convention) and to ascend to absolute responsibility, the responsibility that springs from individual free will (not determined by general ethical rules). Yet, Abraham is said to respond to the absolute as the originator of ethics. This response of Abraham is a leap of faith, faith that is founded on the absurd. The absurd in Abraham's case would be that God will eventually save Isaac. It would be absurd for God to order the slaying of Isaac and

[22] The notion of the asymmetric responsibility to give to the other, as originary, and prior even to general ethics defined by universal rational rules, is very much Levinasian (see Levinas 1961/1969, pp. 79ff.).

then, at the last minute, rescind this order. It seems that Abraham's response to God's command interrupts the deterministic influence of general ethics and thereby becomes an autonomous act. Derrida (1992/1995, pp. 67, 72, 77) posits absolute responsibility as breaching the borders of general responsibility. However, I contend that absolute responsibility can also be incorporated into general responsibility. A society might set obedience to God as its supreme ethical value and, therefore, part of that society's general ethics. Moreover, it can be argued that Abraham's desire to obey God and to have faith in God's providence would constitute another determining influence, negating his assumed free response. Likewise, the mystic's radical surrender in the darkness of mystical death constitutes also an act of faith that is not totally devoid of the influence of desire or love for the infinite. But, being an act of faith, there is no certainty of recompense. Death, be it mystical or actual, would be totally devoid of economy if it is absolutely absurd, such as the taking of one's life for absolutely no purpose either for oneself (relieve from unbearable suffering) or for another. This absolutely absurd death, I am convinced, is neither the death of the mystic nor the leap of faith of Kierkegaard's knight of faith.

In the above passage, Derrida ascribes absolute responsibility to every person, and by implication, each person is said to be absolutely other to everyone else. What is intriguing, though, is that for Derrida (1992/1995, p. 78), God as wholly other "out there" becomes God as wholly other "in me". This is because "God, as the wholly other, is to be found everywhere there is something of the wholly other". He (1992/1995, p. 109) continues to say: "God is in me, he is the absolute 'me' or 'self', he is that structure of invisible interiority that is called in Kierkegaard's sense, subjectivity".

An implication of Derrida's postulation of absolute responsibility and, accordingly, of the wholly other, to every subject, is the imposition upon every subject the duty of absolute responsibility to every other subject (Derrida 1992/1995, p. 78). Interestingly enough, there is actually a symmetrization of the self-other relation.[23] I am not too sure if Derrida is aware of this corollary. For, since the wholly other is within me, would I not then have an equally absolute responsibility towards myself? Consequently, it cannot be the case that only the other, exterior to me, would be an absolute other and capable of demanding my duty towards her. Moreover, if the other *demands* a duty of absolute responsibility to her, then would this not run contrary to my capacity for an autonomous response? I should think that the notion of a symmetrical self–other relation logically coheres with the concept of absolute responsibility. I am to choose and act freely from alternatives of serving persons, including myself, of equal status. And, if I willingly sacrifice that which is most profoundly mine for the sake of the other, then I do it freely, without any imposed obligation.

To bring to a close our exploration of mystical death and Derrida's "gift of death", I wish to enumerate some important points. Death is not the only truly sole

[23] By this I mean that there is an equalization of the ethical responsibility one has to oneself and to the other.

possession of the self. Every experience of the self constitutes that which is not replaceable. Nevertheless, accepting death for the sake of the other is indeed the ultimate form of giving of the self without desire for returns. Hence, mystical death signifies this ultimate sacrifice for the other. On the other hand, it appears that the mystic is not divested of everything, for there remain in "death" faith, hope, and love directed at the infinite. Would the presence of the theological virtues negate the radicalness of the mystical sacrifice, thereby encasing the mystical project within the perimeters of economy? I do not think so, for the love, faith, and hope the mystic holds are founded, not on certainty, but, like Kierkegaard's thesis, on the absurd, and where even this drive of the theological virtues towards God has to be forgotten. Sublimity, I infer, resides in this apparent absurdity of ultimate sacrifice for another without justification from ethics or anything else. The sublime is that moment of aporia when the responsible action for another can never be completely justified by ethics and when the ultimate sacrifice of oneself is made for that which is infinitely other, without certainty of recompense and without consciously intending recompense. While the mystical sublime surpasses Kantian sublimity's terminus of reason and will, the sublime of mystical death, on account of love, pushes beyond the limiting concern of self-preservation.[24]

In this section on the second transformative night, I attempt to delineate the dialectical relation between the metaphors of light and darkness. In the midst of this pairing's dialectical progression, through the negation of experiences and concepts, and right up to the darkness of emptiness and mystical death, is found the dialectical relation between light and darkness as oscillation and as coexistence.

5.3 The Unitive Life

Purification at its deepest level, right up to the dusky frontiers of mystical death, is the preparation for the radiant final stage of Underhill's schema of mystical progression. This is the stage of the unitive life, and in this section, I shall explore some of the principal features that pervade what is regarded as the unitive life – the experience of mystical union and the stable unitive life. As explained in Chap. 4, Underhill's description of the experience of contemplation that she places in the stage of illumination is also a description of the experience of mystical union. "Contemplation" and "mystical union" are virtually interchangeable. Hence, I shall soon re-examine the passage from Teresa of Avila, which Underhill refers to in her treatment of contemplation.

[24] Barbara Freeman develops a different comparison between Sappho's and Homer's poems from that formulated by Longinus. According to Freeman (1995, pp. 18–19), the protagonist in Sappho's poem, unlike that of Homer's, hurries towards death for the sake of love. The sublime in this instance comes to the fore, not in the striving with and overcoming of death but in the ultimate sacrifice of the self for the sake of unitive love.

As an entry point into the discussion, the following quote from Underhill gives us an overview of the relation between mystical union and the unitive life. After the momentous ecstatic experience of mystical union subsides, explains Underhill:

> [W]hen equilibrium is re-established, the true effects of this violent and beatific intuition of the Absolute begin to invade the normal life. The self which has thus been caught up to awareness of new levels of Reality, is stimulated to fresh activity by the strength of its impressions. It now desires an eternal union with that which it has known; with which for a brief moment it seemed to be merged. The peculiar talent of the mystic – power of apprehending Reality which his contemplations have ordered and developed, and his ecstasies express – here reacts upon his life-process, his slow journey from the Many to the One. His nostalgia has been increased by a glimpse of the homeland. His intuitive apprehension of the Absolute, which assumes in ecstasy its most positive form, spurs him on towards that permanent union with the Divine which is his goal. (*M* p. 378)

It seems, from this passage, that the transient experience of mystical union is not merely a spike in the regular cadence of the stream of consciousness, having no consequence at all to the constitution of the mystic. Rather, the heightened experience of mystical union offers the mystic a glimpse of an existence imbued with the absolute, a corresponding deep and holistic transformation of the self, and a reorientation to that infinite life. In this book, my discussions on mystical union will far exceed those for the unitive life. Although Underhill accords greater importance to the stable unitive life over mystical union, there are significant contentions tied up with the union experience to warrant a lengthy critical discussion. I feel that these debates are not sufficiently dealt with in *M*. In my analysis of the experience of human–divine union, I shall first attempt to decipher this experience's relation to the content of consciousness.

5.3.1 Experience of Mystical Union and the Issue of the Content of Consciousness

Let me begin with that apex phenomenon of mystical union. For this, I refer the reader to Underhill's recourse to Teresa of Avila's (16th cent./1980, *Interior Castle*, 5th dwelling place, chp. 1: 9, p. 339) description of the union experience:

> True contemplation, as the mystics are constantly assuring us, must always be judged by its fruits. If it be genuine, work has been done during the period of apparent passivity. The deeper self has escaped, has risen to freedom, and returns other than it was before. We must remember that Teresa is speaking from experience, and that her temperamental peculiarities will modify the form which this experience takes. "The soul," she says, "neither sees, hears, nor understands anything while this state lasts; but this is usually a very short time, and seems to the soul even shorter than it really is. God visits the soul in a way that prevents it doubting when it comes to itself *that it has been in God and God in it*; and so firmly is it convinced of this truth that, though years may pass before this state recurs, the soul can never forget it nor doubt its reality. … But you will say, how can the soul see and comprehend that she is in God and God in her, if during this union she is not able either to see or understand? I reply, that she does not see it at the time, but that afterwards she perceives it clearly: not by a vision, but by a certitude which remains in the heart which God alone can give." (*M* p. 357)

What does it mean to have the senses and understanding momentarily incapacitated during contemplative union, and yet subsequent to the union, the self is aware of what had transpired? Also, could it be that the experiencing subject was mistaken in assuming that she had had an experience of mystical union? After all, her own faculties, being incapacitated, would have no means of apprehending any sort of experience let alone a mystical one. Perhaps, one way to address these questions is to reflect upon deep sleep. Although deep sleep is regarded more as an altered state of consciousness than complete unconsciousness, arguably, it is very rare that someone in deep sleep is concurrently aware of the state she is in. However, it is possible, upon awakening, for that person to have some inkling that she was in deep sleep a while ago. Hence, by the same reasoning, it is plausible that immediately following a union experience, realization of having that experience dawns upon the mystic.

I shall use the quoted passage above as a springboard for a discussion on the nature of the unitive mystical experience. This route of teasing out relevant discussions on the interior landscape of mystical union gleaned from the reports of mystics is dealt with quite extensively by Underhill, but I intend to take the discussion further through exploring aspects of consciousness. Valuable insights are embedded within the intricacies of debates where phenomenology, epistemology, and metaphysics converge upon the evaluation of the nature of mystical experience and its corresponding claims about the nature of reality. These insights will have some bearing on my purpose of examining mysticism within the framework of dialecticism and sublimity.

I single out from the quoted passage above the sentences that home in on Teresa of Avila's experience of the transient process of mystical union:

> "The soul," she says, "neither sees, hears, nor understands anything while this state lasts; but this is usually a very short time, and seems to the soul even shorter than it really is. God visits the soul in a way that prevents it doubting when it comes to itself *that it has been in God and God in it*; …"

Did Teresa mean to say that the senses and understanding are unable to grasp the object encountered in the subject's consciousness because they apprehend "something", but they cannot conceptualize it, or because there is absolutely nothing in there for sensing and understanding? If it is content of consciousness that we are looking for, at the least, the subject has some "sense" of the duration of that specific event.[25] Then again, probably, even this sense of temporal duration is absent and only felt *after* the experience.

Teresa of Avila (16th cent./1980, *Interior Castle*, 5th dwelling place chp. 1: 10, pp. 339–340) continues in her account with the following:

> Now, you will ask me, how did the soul see this truth or understand if it didn't see or understand anything? I don't say that it then saw the truth but that afterward it sees the truth clearly, not because of a vision but because of a certitude remaining in the soul that only

[25] Although the transiency of Teresa's mystical experience is reflective of most such experiences reported by mystics, and that William James (1902/1958, p. 293) has said that the most a mystical experience may last is two hours, we have to leave open the possibility of a longer-lasting experience. James H. Austin, in his *Zen and the Brain: Toward an Understanding of Meditation and Consciousness* (1999), p. 28, cites a survey report of some respondents claiming to have had mystical experiences lasting a whole day.

> God can place there. I know a person who hadn't learned that God was in all things by presence, power, and essence, and through a favor of this kind that God granted her she came to believe it.

Underhill's presentation of Teresa's thoughts and Teresa's own clarification gives us, in compact form, a launching platform for our analysis of mysticism's issues pertaining to constructivism, pure consciousness event, and the monistic versus dualistic union experience. The operations of the cognitive faculties may be in abeyance, but, from what Teresa writes, a conviction remains in the subject about the divine truth encountered. I assume that this conviction is part of the content of the subject's consciousness.

Some scholars of mysticism have argued that the ultimate mystical experience is a state of contentless pure consciousness.[26] Purportedly, this state best captures the experience of perfect union where no subject–object distinction prevails. This state can also be referred to as the monistic union experience, and it is empty of any recognition of encountering an ultimate reality because any such recognition entails a subject–object duality. A contentless union experience coheres with the belief that in mystical union the self encounters infinite reality as indeterminate pure being wherein even the self is dissolved. It can also be assumed that the contentless union experience cannot be characterized as sublime on account of this experience's absence of any self–other distinction. In order to examine these points as well as others that bear upon the subject of mystical union, I need to embark upon a careful investigation of the contentless pure consciousness event. In the ensuing discussion that will involve a critical examination of the strengths and weaknesses of both sides of the argument, I am inclined to conclude that the mystical union experience is neither a product of the sole construction of the experiencing subject's beliefs and expectations, nor solely describable within the hypothesis of the contentless pure consciousness event.

Robert Forman's edited volume that is titled *The Problem of Pure Consciousness* contains essays that challenge the constructivist standpoint on mystical experience – all mystical experiences are constructed by the set of beliefs, practices, and concepts of the experiencing subject. Even Underhill notes the constructing influence upon Teresa of Avila's experience: "her temperamental peculiarities will modify the form which this experience takes" (*M* p. 357). Forman's edited volume

[26] Walter Stace (1961, pp. 131–132) and Robert Forman are amongst those in this group of scholars. Forman (1990, pp. 5–7) examines the nature of mystical experience and draws upon Roland Fischer's (1980, pp. 286–287) "cartography" of conscious states – essentially, a spectrum from "ergotropic" (hyperactivity and hypersensitivity) states to "trophotropic" (hypoactivity and quiescent) states. Forman then goes on to stipulate mysticism as dealing mainly with "mystical" experiences, which he restricts to the trophotropic variety. For him, visions, raptures, auditions, and other states of hyperarousal come under the category of "visionary" experiences. He considers his restriction of mystical experience to the trophotropic variety to be in agreement with the literal meaning of "mysticism" as containing the verb "to close" and "the overtones of the term as it was employed by Pseudo-Dionysius, that is, separate from the sensory ('rapt out of himself')" (p. 7). Forman, however, further narrows the ambit of mystical experience to cover just the pure consciousness event. Of course, such a stipulation of mystical experience is always open for debate.

directs its challenge mainly at Steven Katz's mystical constructivism. Katz' (1978, p. 26) fundamental premise: "There are NO pure (i.e., unmediated) experiences". Since different religious traditions have different beliefs and practices, it stands to reason that mystical experiences of the different traditions are inevitably constructed by their respective conceptual frameworks. Hence, these experiences are expectedly different from one another. Forman (1990, pp. 10–12) calls this the "pluralism thesis", a thesis which highlights the differences of mystical experiences. He then proceeds to enumerate three models of constructivism: (1) Complete constructivism – the experience is entirely constructed by the set of beliefs and concepts of the experiencing subject. (2) Incomplete constructivism – mystical experience is partially constructed by the subject's set of beliefs and concepts. The other part of the experience is formed by other determinants, perhaps, sensory input. (3) Catalytic constructivism – the subject's set of beliefs and concepts do not directly produce the content of the experience. The "generative problems and meditative techniques may serve as a catalyst for the experience, but not play an epistemologically heavy role in shaping its actual character" (Forman 1990, pp. 13–14). It can be argued that practically all the major religious traditions share similar generative problems and meditative techniques that operate as a catalyst for the production of mystical experiences (at the advanced stage of spiritual development) with a similar content.[27] If this is the case, then Katz's "pluralism thesis" breaks down.[28]

For Forman (1990, pp. 16–17), it is not plausible that every concept that we hold contributes to our experiences. If it were so, then every time I change my concepts, my experience should correspondingly change; and one can only learn within a coherent set of experiences mediated by a coherent set of concepts. It is as if new and radical experiences cannot emerge unless our concepts undergo a radical change. The question in my mind concerns the main issue of this debate. Does it revolve around whether mystical experiences are constructed (completely or partially), or unconstructed by our conceptual sets, or does it revolve around the possibility of a common denominator uniting all mystical experiences? Note that they are not necessarily inconsistent with each other. Perhaps, constructivism is largely directed against the perennialist axiom, an axiom that claims a common set of core features of mystical experience existing in all religious traditions; and that the constructivist does not believe that there actually is a common determinant found in all religions, which is able to construct a common mystical experience.[29]

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[27] Life's ultimate challenges such as suffering, death, and a general lack of meaning in human existence are commonly shared concerns that may be the generative (initiating) issues confronted by and capable of eliciting relatively similar (at its core level) reflections from the major religions.

[28] It is reasonable to assume that model (1) complete constructivism, best sustains the pluralism thesis on the basis that the stronger the role a religious tradition has on mystical experience, and considering the differences of creedal concepts and practices amongst the different faiths, their respective mystical experiences would obviously differ.

[29] Underhill is often categorized as a perennialist (see Staudt 2012, p. 115). She endorses Louis Claude de Saint-Martin's claim that all mystics "speak the same language and come from the same country" (*M* p. xiii and 80) (see Waite 1901, p. 368).

In his critique of mystical constructivism in general, Forman (1998, p. 6ff.) raises some important counter-arguments. The history of mystical experiences has shown that there have been cases where established concepts and doctrines were disconfirmed by mystical experience. Also, there have been cases where neophytes without doctrinal preconditioning were privileged with mystical experiences, after which they adopted a set of religious doctrines, and not the other way around, i.e. a doctrinal preconditioning led them to have a specific mystical experience.[30] Exemplifications of this are found in Ratisbonne's awakening testimony (see Chap. 4) and in Teresa of Avila's report above where someone only came to realize divine omnipresence from a personal mystical experience. In essence, "a conservative theory like constructivism has difficulty accounting for creative novelty" (Forman 1990, p. 21). Aside from the neophytes, even some adepts who are well steeped in the ideational tradition of a religion have reported encountering novel experiences that challenged their existing conceptual set. Teresa of Avila (16th cent./1976, *Book of Her Life* chp. 22: 3, p. 192; also, Forman 1990, p. 21) has divulged that prior to her profound mystical encounters, she had no idea what she was doing. The general argument advanced by Forman is that the experiences neophytes or adepts of the mystical journey go through need not be inexorably constructed by their established beliefs and expectations. Rather, in several instances, these individuals' experiences are contrary to their prior expectations.

Let me review what I have discussed thus far. In trying to unlock the nature of mystical union, I cited Theresa of Avila's account of union experience in which the faculties are unable to apprehend the content of that particular experience. The question I raised pertains to the possible reason for the faculties' inability. Is it because there is present to the subject an "object" encountered that far exceeds the subject's faculties' abilities to grasp it, save a conviction that the object is God? Or, is it because there is absolutely nothing in the mystic's consciousness for the faculties to apprehend? Could it be that mystical union is somewhat of a combination of both these possibilities? The mystic encounters "something" exceedingly immense, and there is no *conscious* distinction between itself and the object encountered. Also, whatever it is that the mystic confronts in her consciousness, that apparent "object" is devoid of determinate properties. Therefore, it *appears* as if the subject's consciousness is empty of content.

Forman's postulation of the mystic's pure consciousness event (PCE), which is a state of contentless waking consciousness, might just be the accurate picture of the nature of mystical union. Now, the received phenomenological presupposition is the "intentionality of consciousness" – consciousness must have an object; you have to be conscious of something (see Husserl 1907/2010, p. 43; Lyotard 1986/1991, pp. 54–55). The PCE contradicts this presupposition. Moreover, constructivists like

[30] Forman (1998, pp. 6 and 36 [footnote # 22]) relates an incident about a Zen master who had a profound Zen mystical experience before having had any sufficient familiarity with Zen Buddhism and any of its meditation practices. It was that spontaneous and unexpected initial experience that first instilled in the master an interest in Zen Buddhism. In this particular case, we can safely say that mystical experience was not constructed by any set of established concepts and expectations.

Katz assert the necessity of all experiences, and these include the state of consciousness in mystical union, being constructed by the subject's established set of concepts and expectations. How would the constructivists support their thesis for the contributing elements constructing the union state of consciousness when that state, according to PCE, is empty of content? (Forman 1990, pp. 21–22). PCE seems most congenial to a conception of God as infinite, without distinctions, and incorporative of all finite realities. However, this apparent congeniality is not without its problems, which I shall look at shortly.

Upon establishing what he feels is a reasonable defence for the plausibility of PCE and the failure of constructivism to demolish it, Forman (1990, pp. 30–34) proceeds to explore the possible causes for PCE. He firmly denies that everyone who practises a particular set of spiritual exercises and holds on to the beliefs associated with these exercises will automatically have a profound mystical experience peculiar to that spiritual system and similar for all its adherents. Forman (1990, pp. 30–34; 1998, pp. 9–12) believes that the mysticisms of Meister Eckhart, the author of the *Cloud of Unknowing*, as well as those of some Buddhist, Hindu, and Islamic systems propose a method of meditation that requires systematic forgetting. The obvious question to the PCE advocates is, should we not then allow for this method of forgetting to be the contributing cause of PCE and, hence, affirm the constructivist standpoint? Constructivism will be rendered suspect, I should think, when a person meditating on concepts is brought to a PCE, or vice versa, a person deliberately forgetting concepts is brought to a non-PCE state of consciousness. Forman, however, argues that the forgetting is so radical as to entail a forgetting of even the whole system of spiritual training of mind emptying. Regarding the state of PCE that is led into by the exercise of radical forgetting, he (1990, pp. 38–39) firmly explains:

> A state thus produced is not epistemologically "constructed" … As subjects cease thinking and sensing, they have not only ceased constructing sensually, they have ceased constructing anything at all. If to think is to construct thoughts, and to construct is to think, to cease thinking is to cease constructing. … In short, to temporarily forget everything includes forgetting even the very belief system which may have led to that forgetting.

I doubt that this explanation above successfully undermines the constructivist understanding that all experiences are constructed, for even the pure and empty state of consciousness is constructed by efforts at radical forgetting.

Forman (1990. p. 42) concludes:

> In sum, the inherently conservative linguistic constructivist model is ill-suited to account for the radically novel, radically nonlinguistic data of mysticism, especially the PCE. There is no causal prefigurement at work which shapes and constructs these quiet moments. Nor does language determine the form or content of these formless, contentless events. Rather, the only way it can be engendered is through a process of ceasing to think – ceasing, in other words, to use language. It is not brought on by imposing old, habituated categories but by forgetting them.

As we can see here, Forman does admit that the PCE is "engendered" or "brought on". Mystical experience is probably not completely constructed by conditioning of a particular faith tradition. This does not imply that absolutely no causal factors construct the experience. Beliefs and training of a specific tradition might have some influence on the experience, but there are, quite likely, other, perhaps "objective" factors involved.

Forman offers a solution to the problem of the possible "constructing causes" of PCE. His (1998, pp. 11–12) answer is that the ultimate contributing elements of mystical experience are innate, that is, naturally inherent in the human person, a being with consciousness. He (1998, pp. 7–12; 1990, p. 24) contends that the PCE is not an experience constructed by language and expectations; rather, there is a "deconstruction" of all linguistic and perceptual factors to unveil something which is already there – pure consciousness in itself. It would seem reasonable to assume that as conscious beings, consciousness in itself, that is, pure consciousness, minus its contents is a capacity innate in all of us. Since humans share in this capacity, there is an aspect of commonality in mystical experience. However, I would think that it is highly questionable whether, by the systematic and arduous method of erasing perceptions and thoughts, we are actually able to come into contact with our innate pure consciousness that is an *a priori*, transcendental capacity.[31] In any case, assuming that it is possible to experience one's *a priori*, transcendental pure consciousness, it may still be contended that the perception of ultimate reality is something entirely different.

Let us get into the heart of the PCE by inspecting a description of it. The following is extracted from a quote in Forman's (1990, p. 27) book. This quote is a report from a person describing his PCE:

> [A]nd then I would transcend, and there would just be a sort of complete silence void of content. The whole awareness would turn in, and there would be no thought, no activity, and no perception, yet it was somehow comforting. It was just there and I could know when I was in it. There wasn't a great "Oh, I am experiencing this." It was very natural and innocent. But I did not yet identify myself with this silent, content-free inner space. It was a self-contained entity that I transcended to and experienced.

What is interesting in this report is that the person admitted that there was no activity at all in the PCE, but there was something *comforting* in that experience. Self-awareness is reportedly absent in that experience – not even an identification of the self with the whole experience. It seems obvious that once self-awareness appears, PCE vanishes. Nevertheless, should not the comforting experience be considered a content of experience? Many mystics report experiences of happiness or love in mystical union. I think that comfort, equanimity, intense peace, happiness, love, and conviction do constitute *contents* of experience. The term "fruition" is frequently used by mystics such as John Ruysbroeck and Teresa of Avila to denote the enjoyment of this positive experience in the mutual immersion of self and the divine. Perhaps, PCE may be said to have a content described as fruition.

Underhill (1916, pp. xxx–xxxi) writes in her "Introduction" to Ruysbroeck's works:

> We are made part of His divine fruition or "content", the eternal satisfaction and eternal activity of Perfect Love; achieving thus the "union without distinction" though not union without "otherness". Henceforward we can participate in God's dual life of rest and work, transcendent fruition and immanent fruitfulness: abiding in restful possession of Him, yet perpetually sent down from the heights to serve the whole world.

[31] Analogously, it is highly unlikely that one's faculty of sight is able to see, directly and unaided by mirrors, itself, minus any other objects of sight.

In Ruysbroeck's (14th cent./1916, *Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage* 2nd bk. chp. 59, p. 129) own words, he describes fruition as consummate union and with the presence of spiritual love:

> In the fruition of this unity we shall rest evermore, above ourselves and above all things. From this unity, all gifts, both natural and supernatural, flow forth, and yet the loving spirit rests in this unity above all gifts; and here there is nothing but God, and the spirit united with God without means.

In Teresa of Avila's writings, "fruition" is frequently associated with that state of contemplative bliss. Describing this state, she (16th cent./2006, chp. 18: 2–3, p. 119) says:

> The senses are all occupied in this fruition in such a way that not one of them is at liberty, so as to be able to attend to anything else, whether outward or inward. The senses were permitted before, as I have said, to give some signs of the great joy they feel; but now, in this state, the joy of the soul is incomparably greater, and the power of showing it is still less; for there is no power in the body, and the soul has none, whereby this fruition can be made known.[32]

The fruition of contemplation includes a "joy of the soul". Despite Teresa's assertion that this immense joy cannot be expressed, either physically or verbally, to others, still, such a joy does indeed figure as a content of consciousness.

When we look up in the dictionary (Engineer and Gay, eds., 1991, s.v. "fruition", p. 632) the meaning of "fruition", what we get are two senses of that word – the physical bearing of a plant's fruit and the accomplishment or realization from effort expended, as in "his work came to fruition". Interestingly, the word has an etymological source in the Middle English word "*fruicioun*" and the Late Latin word "*fruitio*", both meaning "enjoyment" – by extension, the enjoyment of using or possessing something.[33] Supposing that elements associated with mystical fruition do accompany the PCE, then it is possible to posit intentionality to this form of experience and thereby question the claim that it is contentless.

During a PCE, there is no consciousness of the self. It is not overly difficult to accept the possibility of a particular state of consciousness whereby the self is absent from it. Just think of those times when you were so absorbed in an activity. If I were a weightlifter squatting with a heavy weight for three repetitions, I would only be able to focus on the task at hand and not be aware of myself as engaged in the activity. Jean-Paul Sartre (1957/1991, pp. 48–49) would say that reflective consciousness is absent during those moments, for the "me" is not explicitly in the person's awareness. The moment I say to myself "I do not think I can reach the third repetition of this squat", my attention is momentarily taken from my absorption in squatting – nonreflective consciousness – and redirected to myself, reflective consciousness.

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[32] In the version translated by Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (Teresa of Avila 16th cent./1976, chp. 18: 1, p. 157), the words "enjoyment" and "rejoices" are used for "fruition" (the division of sections is slightly different in this translation).

[33] Thomas Aquinas (13th cent./1990, part I of 2nd part quest. 11 artcl. 1–4, pp. 666ff.) too uses the term "fruition" as "enjoyment" in a general sense, and not restrictively in a mystical context.

Note that for Sartre (1957/1991, p. 47), there is a sense in which self-consciousness is present although one is not explicitly aware of oneself. I am *tacitly* aware of myself as having an experience. This is called *non-positional* (*non-thetic*) awareness of myself, and it accompanies *positional* (*thetic*) awareness of the objects of my consciousness.[34] For example, in having a visual perception of a stream of water, I am tacitly aware that I *am seeing* the stream and not that I *am* the stream. In this particular instance, I am not explicitly conscious of myself as seeing the stream, for if I were, then I would be engaged in reflective consciousness, which would momentarily take away my focus on the stream. Non-positional consciousness suggests an implicit consciousness of my having that visual perception. Nelson Pike (1992, pp. 31–32) offers an explanation of this non-positional awareness. He maintains that in being aware of an object, say a chair, one is also implicitly aware of oneself. This is because I am aware that the perceived chair in my conscious mind is other than me, and so, I am implicitly aware of myself in a non-positional way. Furthermore, Pike appeals to Kant's (1787/1991, pp. 170–171) idea that in order to be aware of myself as an enduring entity, I have also to be aware of that which is other than me. I would not be able to isolate myself for awareness if I am also not aware of that which is not me. In essence then, awareness entails a subject–object structure. With Sartre's and Pike's explanations in mind, we can question whether a complete dissolution of the subject–object distinction in consciousness is actually possible.

The foregoing discussion attempts to examine the possibility of a PCE that is contentless and devoid of subject–object distinction. I cited a report in Forman's book, which describes the PCE as comforting, and other reports elsewhere in which mystics speak of a union experience as fruition, which is accompanied by immense joy. Hence, this comfort or joy, I suggest, should be regarded as a content of the mystical consciousness. I then presented the view of Sartre's non-positional awareness that appeals to an implicit awareness of the subject–object distinction, whereby the experiencing subject is tacitly aware that she is having and not being the object experienced. If we assume that a PCE is contentless, then there would be no awareness of any object of consciousness and, hence, no awareness, not even implicitly, of the subject as distinct from the object of consciousness. Underhill informs us that in deep mystical union:

> the mystic sometimes says that he is "conscious of nothing". But it is clear that this expression is figurative, for otherwise he would not have known that there had been an act of union: were his individuality abolished, it could not have been aware of its attainment of God. (*M* p. 370)

It appears that Underhill dissents from the idea that mystical union is a state of contentless consciousness. For her, recognizing an encounter with God necessitates a subject–object distinction.

Having said all these, my perspective on the matter, however, takes a rather sceptical conclusion. I do not think a definitive answer is forthcoming as regards whether

[34] "Positional" or "theitic" has reference to the positing of an object, and in this context, an object of consciousness. By "non-positional", Sartre means that the self is not part of the objects of consciousness, but is experienced as taking a certain perspective on these objects.

PCEs are possible or that they represent any ideal form of mystical unitive experience. A fundamental disjunction exists between a spontaneous state of consciousness and a reflection upon it. For Husserl (1913/1983, p. 178), reflection alters the original spontaneous state of consciousness, a state which is inevitably prior in time to the reflected consciousness. This implies that whether the actual spontaneous state of consciousness that a mystic had was a PCE, or otherwise, is still open to question.

The PCE as a mystical union experience is undoubtedly appealing for it resonates well with the idea of a mystic's experience of consummate union with an all-inclusive infinite that has no determinations. If, in a PCE, the self is said to come into direct contact with its pure consciousness, which, for theistic mystics, is probably the access to ultimate reality, then we have another reason to link the PCE with the mystical union experience. Here again is the apparent paradox regarding the PCE-mystical experience – mystics claim they experience something though it *appears* like nothing; they encounter something though it *appears* as if the subject–object distinction expected in any encounter is absent. The mystical union experience is said to defy description and comparison with any other experiences. Mystics from diverse traditions agree that their respective mystical experiences are profound and deserve serious consideration. As Teresa of Avila affirms, in mystical experience, the mystic is utterly convinced of experiencing a profound union with "something" ultimate. One rarely can make such a claim when absorbed in reading a captivating novel or when struggling to complete three repetitions of a set of heavy squats. It is this encounter with an ultimate object that compels me to reject any form of constructivism that disregards the crucial role the object plays in experience.

Perhaps, mystical union, like the other phases of mystical development, harbours the dialectical and the sublime. Despite the claims of mystics of a consummate union experience, there is probably an aspect of difference between the self and other. This dialectic of union and difference is concomitant with the unique state of mystical union as an experience within the threshold of a finite being encountering the infinite, a threshold that is distinctively sublime on account of its marking of an inevitable incommensurability between the experiencing subject and the irreducible object.

5.3.2 Union Experience Versus Identity Experience

How are we then to structure the dialectic of union and difference in mystical experience? Absolute identity between experiencing subject and experienced object in the phenomenological realm is possible, yet problematic. The claim for absolute identity between a finite being and an infinite being in the ontological realm lacks rational defensibility. Underhill quotes from Plotinus, giving an apt image representing the dialectic of unity and difference: "[L]ike two concentric circles: concurring they are One; but when they separate they are two …" (*M* p. 372). Even this

imagery of concentric circles reflects a clear delineation of difference between the inner and outer circles, a difference which runs contrary to the notion of the circles collapsing into a unitive identity of "One".

Radical particularists challenge the possibility of God having an identical experience with that which the self undergoes. There are two forms of divine knowledge of events: (1) objective (or propositional) (God knows that Mr. X is sad) and (2) subjective (or existential) (God knows in a direct and immediate way, that is, God experiences Mr. X's sadness in the *identical* way in which Mr. X feels sad at that particular moment). Radical particularists assert that while objective knowledge is possible, the nature of God's infinite perspective and that of Mr. X's finite perspective vitiate the possibility of (2) subjective knowledge (see Simoni-Wastila 2002, pp. 4–5). Mr. X's particular experience of sadness within his finite perspective cannot be identical to God's experience of Mr. X's sadness within God's infinite perspective. This is due to an inevitable difference between part and whole. Underhill's distinction between universal being/soul and particular being/soul will perhaps be in opposition to the identity hypothesis. Therefore, by virtue of this experiential difference, there is no ontological identity between the soul and God. This is not to say that "union" is absent. We ought not to confuse union with identity.

Bernard of Clairvaux (1090/1-1153) offers a straightforward account for why the human–divine union at the ontological level is not one of identity. He (12th cent./1920, sermon 71, p. 338) tells us that while the three persons of the trinity share a common substance or nature:

> [t]he case is quite contrary as between God and the soul. For their union is not a unity of nature but of will. Therefore they may not be described as one thing (*unum*), although they can be said with truth to be one spirit (*unus*), that is to say, if they are really bound to each other by the bonds of love. But such a unity is produced, as observed before, by conformity of wills, not by any confusion of essences.

The difference of nature and substance between God and the soul is conceived as being so obvious that it hardly requires mentioning. Then again, a relevant question that we can ask is: did Bernard of Clairvaux learn of the ontological difference between him and God solely from his mystical experience? Or, is this knowledge doctrinal in origin? It is most probably a combination of both. Here is what Bernard (12th cent./1884, chp. 10, pp. 43–44) says in his exposition on the attainment of the highest degree of mystical love in which the mystic is immersed in God:

> When shall this flesh and blood, this dust and mire of which I am made, be able to go up there [God's abode]? When shall this soul of mine, entranced with love for God, look on herself as broken sherds, yearn after God, and lose herself in Him, for "He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit"? When shall she cry out: "My flesh and my heart have fainted away; Thou art the God of my heart, and the God that is my portion for ever"? Holy and happy is he who but once, for but one moment, has felt something like this in his mortal life; for this is no human happiness, it is life eternal so to lose oneself, as if one were empty of self, as if one were not.

Pike (1992, pp. 33–37) is aware of the phenomenological principle of intentionality – every act of consciousness has an object – but he leaves open the phenomenological veracity of Bernard's claim above on the supposed distinctionless union

experience. Pike interprets the experience above as distinctionless and *objectless* on account of the absence of the sense of self. The distinctionless union experience is similar to the PCE. Recall that for Pike (1992, pp. 31–33), consciousness entails a subject–object structure. This premise would imply that when the subject disappears from awareness, there is also the absence of the object of awareness because one cannot be aware of something other than oneself without at the least (non-positionally) being aware of oneself. Pike takes the mystical union experience to be one of identity, phenomenologically, but without implying an ontological subject–object identity. Still, I would think that if we are concerned about the truthfulness of our perceptions, then we ought to expect a correspondence, as best as possible, between our perceptions and the actual state of reality. Hence, on the basis of an actual or ontological nonidentity between self and God, I have attempted to impugn the phenomenal identity hypothesis of mystical union.

When I turn to Bernard of Clairvaux's account of four degrees of love, an interesting perspective on the mystical union experience emerges. Bernard's (12th cent./1884, chps. 8–10, pp. 37–43) four progressive degrees of love are love oneself, love God for the sake of oneself, love God for God's sake, and love oneself for God's sake. This arrangement is intriguing because the third degree of love is the love of God for God's sake. While one would ordinarily expect this third degree to constitute the ultimate form of mystical love, there is, proposes Bernard (12th cent./1884, chp. 10, p. 43), a higher and fourth degree of love – the person "loves himself only for God's sake". My interpretation of the difference between the third and fourth degrees is that while the third is directed to God without the self, the fourth is all-encompassing whereby the self is included in God.[35] I would imagine that an inclusive infinite–finite metaphysical presupposition underpins this highest degree of love. It is then arguable that Bernard's description of the union experience of the self losing itself in God may not actually suggest a distinctionless state of consciousness, as Pike assumes so. Experiencing the self as lost in God must somehow require an experience of the self. In Chap. 2, I said that an experience of a, b, and c, being part of a unifying entity (u), includes an experience of the distinctiveness of a, b, and c.

Bernard, like most mystics, affirms that the experience of mystical union is transient. While on earth, the experience, though unique and compelling, is not permanent. Even if we assume that the experience is phenomenologically of absolute identity, there are many other experiential moments in one's life that confirm for the experiencing subject the subject–object nonidentity. Moreover, a schema of infinite–finite inclusivity is not supportive of an ontological identity between finite and infinite beings. If we examine the following piece of writing by Bernard (12th cent./1920, sermon 74, pp. 378–379) on the union experience, we come across something quite different from the notion of distinctionless union:

> [T]he Bridegroom has condescended to pay a visit, and indeed not once but many times. But although He has often come into my soul, I have never been able to ascertain the exact

[35] The second degree of love takes into consideration both the self and God, but God is loved for the sake of the self. It is as if God is part of a larger being – the self.

> moment of His entrance. I have been conscious of His presence within me; I could afterwards recall that He had been present; sometimes I have even had a presentiment of His coming; yet I have never perceived Him either in the act of entering or in the act of retiring. Whence He comes to my soul, and whither He withdraws Himself on leaving me, and by what way He comes in, and by what goes out, – as to all these questions, I am still in ignorance, … Certainly He does not enter through the eyes, for He has no colour; nor through the ears, since He makes no sound; nor through the organ of smell, because His mingling is with the mind, not with the atmosphere … Neither does He gain admission through the avenue of the mouth, because He is not anything which can be eaten or drunk. The sense of touch is equally powerless to attain to Him, since He is altogether intangible. By what way then, does He enter? Or perhaps it would be more correct to say that He does not enter at all, inasmuch as He is not any one of those things which exist outside us? But neither can He be said to come from within me, because He is good, and "I know there dwelleth not in me that which is good." I have ascended to what is highest in me, and behold! I have found the Word to be higher still. Influenced by a pious curiosity, I have descended to explore the lowest depths of my being, only to find that He was still deeper down. If I looked to my exterior, I perceived Him beyond what is outermost. And if I turned my gaze inward, I saw Him more interior than what is inmost.[36]

This lengthy quote carries a number of interesting and relevant strands for our investigation. Bernard admits that he is not aware of the commencement of divine infusion in his soul, yet he is aware of this divine being's presence and its extension way beyond any part of him or outside of him.[37] Perhaps, the first few lines of this quote report Bernard's "experience" (though without knowing it at that precise moment) of the divine descent into his being. The last couple of lines speak of Bernard's ascent to the divine and this time he seems to be clearly aware of God. In what manner is Bernard able to perceive God, whether inside or outside himself, as "extending" beyond all things? Furthermore, to compound the problem, Bernard denies God's existing outside and inside himself, and yet he finds God in both these places. He also stresses that God, being nonphysical, cannot be perceived by the senses. Hence, when conscious and reflective, Bernard claims that he is *aware of God extending beyond anything he is aware of*. But the moment God infuses his soul, he appears to have lost consciousness of that event. How then can he be sure that a divine visitation did take place? It is probably the case that as regards the whole event of divine infusion, for Bernard, he was not aware of its starting and its ending, but he was aware of its middle or "during" part. And, this is not something exceedingly out of the ordinary, for when we look at sleep we do not have awareness of the precise moments we dropped off to sleep and when we awoke, but we know quite certainly that we did sleep. What is noteworthy in this particular report is that in God's visit to the soul, and the soul's ascent in search of God, the experienced contact is characterized by distinctions between the soul and God.

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[36] Bernard's analysis of the biblical Canticle of Canticles (or Song of Songs) speaks about the "Bridegroom" or "the Word" as God, who is mystically united with his bride, the soul.

[37] Note that there are other mystics who, quite unlike Bernard, claim to have been aware of the commencement of their divine union when directly encountering it. Pike (1992, pp. 23–25) mentions Angela of Foligno (1248–1309) as one such individual (see Angela of Foligno 13th cent./1909, treatise 3: 6th vision and consolation, p. 178).

Based on my delineation of the structure of the sublime experience, any experience of identity between subject and object cannot be regarded as sublime. A sublime encounter is one in which the object is experienced as overwhelmingly beyond the self. On this understanding, if any mystic's union experience is in actuality, one of identity, then during the exact moment of this monistic union, sublimity is absent. However, we do find Barbara Freeman (1995, p. 19) suggesting a form of sublimity present in a *merging of identities* in a union of love, which constitutes a theme implicit in Sappho's (a seventh-century BCE Greek poet) poems. This form of the sublime, she says, contrasts with the Longinian articulation of the sublime in characterizations of strife and domination. My contention is that if sublimity entails an encounter with an overwhelming other, an identity experience can be sublime on condition that a duality exists between the self and its identity experience. Consequently, a mystical experience of perfect identity is sublime, only when the *experience itself* is encountered by the self as an "other" that is utterly unique and elevating. It is the second-order perception of the first-order experience which is sublime.

Looking again at Bernard's text cited above, we can detect some of the features of dialectical negation and sublimity therein. Here is a mystic struggling to verbalize an undoubtedly unique experience. He employs words conveying spatial and sensorial depictions, but these words are accompanied by their own negations: not amenable to the senses, but can be seen; neither inside nor outside me, but is found inside and outside me. Indeed, the sensorial language employed is metaphorical in intent. Bernard is convinced he encountered a reality that, I would say, has the capacity to evoke in him experiences that correlate with the Kantian mathematical sublime. The modality of the sublime in Bernard's contemplative union is grounded in the "glimpse" of a nonphysical though real being, a being that stretches – I interpret this as encompassing and extending – beyond what the subject's faculties are able to grasp.

The reader might question my employment of Bernard's case as if it is paradigmatic of all mystical unions across the board. I refrain from making any such claim. For one, I contrasted the PCE with Bernard's experience. Notice that Bernard does not underscore any form of coming in touch with pure consciousness as the apex of mystical union. Secondly, I noted Pike's observation of the difference between Bernard and Angela of Foligno as regards knowing the inception of divine infusion. What I maintain is that in the context of Christian mystical union and especially in its representation in Underhill's works, mystical union is frequently described as a meeting with an infinite which includes and extends beyond the finite.[38] Incidentally,

[38] Stace (1961, pp. 310–318), on the other hand, views Christian mystical experience as actually and ideally one of unitive identity, but qualifies the identity, not without some ambiguity, by saying that this is an identity in difference. Harvey Egan disagrees with Stace. Egan (1984, pp. 14–16) enumerates what he sees as erroneous perceptions of Christian mysticism, which includes Stace's standpoint above. Egan maintains that mystical union in the Christian tradition is shaped by a form in which "two become one, yet remain two" (p. 15).

even Angela (13th cent./1909, treatise 3: 6th vision and consolation, p. 178) describes her intimate meeting with divinity as follows:

> Then were the eyes of my soul opened, and I beheld love [God] advancing gently towards me, and I beheld the beginning but not the end. Unto me there seemed only a continuation and eternity thereof, …

Angela's mystical encounter is equally described as being in touch with an infinite being.

I prefer the phrase "union and difference" to Stace's "identity in difference". I have attempted to cast some doubt on the actuality of an identity experience of mystical union, that is, at the level of phenomenology. Even the experience of the self being a part of the infinite and universal ultimate reality is, as I argue, not one of identity. The drop of water entering the ocean does retain its molecular individuality. However, what about the analogy used by John of the Cross – the burning wood transformed into fire – is this not a perfect analogy of complete identity? More importantly, if some form of identity is not required for mystical union, why should the mystic endure the transformative nights in order to bridge the huge chasm between self and God?

One of the chief advocates of apotheosis as prerequisite for mystical union is John of the Cross. Apotheosis or deification of the soul is regarded as a condition for human–divine union, and John (16th cent./1991) analogizes that process using the imagery of the burning log:

> We have an example of this in the activity of fire: Although the fire has penetrated the wood, transformed it, and united it with itself, yet as this fire grows hotter and continues to burn, so the wood becomes much more incandescent, and inflamed, even to the point of flaring up and shooting out flames from itself. (*Living Flame of Love* prologue: 3, p. 639)

> But once it [the soul] has attained the final degree, God's love has arrived at wounding the soul in its ultimate and deepest centre, which is to illuminate and transform it in its whole being, power, and strength, and according to its capacity, until it appears to be God. (*Living Flame of Love*, stanza 1: 13, p. 645)

For John of the Cross, God, like the fire, is the prime agent in transforming the soul to attain some degree of divine likeness. As presented here, contemplative union is the particular soul transformed into the divine, and it is this divine that loves the universal divine. The wood becoming flame is a better imagery than the drop of water in the ocean for depicting distinctionless identity. The wood that burns and becomes a flame is totally transformed without any trace of its original state. Despite the idea of identity that the imagery conveys, John does not endorse any notion of a perfect human–divine numerical identity.[39] In fact, the apotheosis mentioned above actually denotes a union at the level of spirit. John (16th cent./1991, *Spiritual Canticle*, stanza 39: 3, pp. 622–623) explains:

> By his divine breath-like spiration, the Holy Spirit elevates the soul sublimely and informs her and makes her capable of breathing in God the same spiration of love that the Father

[39] Underhill reminds us that "deification" indicates an expression of something which probably approximates the real object. Additionally, since we can never comprehend the fullness of the divine, hence, neither can we fathom the nature of a deified human person (*M* pp. 418–419).

> breathes in the Son and the Son in the Father … And this kind of spiration of the Holy Spirit in the soul, by which God transforms her into himself, is so sublime, delicate and deep a delight that a mortal tongue finds it indescribable, nor can the human intellect, as such, in any way grasp it … for the soul united and transformed in God breathes out in God to God the very divine spiration that God – she being transformed in him – breathes out in himself to her.

John's explanation of union does not convey a comprehensive identity between the self, including its physical reality, and the divine. The above quote tells us that union takes place in the spirit or will.

Now, what about at the experiential level; is there an intimation of the experience of identity between the self and God? When speaking of union using the metaphor of the flame, John of the Cross frequently describes that union and its main initiator as love – "O living flame of love!"[40] If we read the passages that describe the terrain of this high level of intimate union, we find John using sensorial words like "taste", "enjoy", and "divine touch". I would venture to say that the experience of intimately loving another, when examined in a phenomenological context, inevitably entails a subject–object distinction. There would be no experiential sense of loving another when both parties are collapsed into an indistinguishable identity. Also, the passages on the living flame of love (see especially *Living Flame of Love*, stanza 1: 13, p. 645) convey the claim that there are degrees of depth in this human–divine union in love. It is difficult to imagine varying degrees of love within a content of experiential consciousness in which there is no distinction between the engaged parties, for identity does not admit of degrees since there is only a single entity.

Returning to the question raised earlier and rephrasing it: would an *experience* of union (without a subject-object identity) between the self and God require the arduous path of the transformative nights? My quick answer is not necessarily so. Using mind-altering drugs, one can, in principle, initiate a broad range of experiences, including the union experience mentioned. The question, though, does betray an assumption that an identity experience of self and God would require the self to become more like or more identical to God, and this of course entails the arduous path of purification. Suppose that it is possible to concentrate extremely hard on seeing a rock until you experience yourself and the rock as a single indistinguishable entity. Does this mean that you have either come to realize a pre-existing identity of your essence and that of the rock or brought about the existence of such an identity? I seriously doubt it, on both counts. Consequently, an experience in consciousness of an identity between subject and object can quite likely be engendered, and this need not depend upon efforts, if possible, of closing the ontological gap between subject and object. Likewise, a nonidentity union experience need not as well depend upon such a closure of the ontological gap.

John of the Cross is convinced that the experience of the highest divine union can only take place after the self is purified through the dark nights. However, he does write that depending upon the nature of one's attachments to finite things, if such an

[40] For further explanation on this union in love, see John of the Cross (16th cent./1991) *Living Flame of Love*, stanza 1: 1–15, pp. 641–646.

attachment is not present in the faculty of will and reason, but at the lowest faculty, that of the senses, it is quite possible that union in prayer can be attained while the self temporarily keeps the attachments in abeyance.[41] Still, John (16th cent./1991, *Spiritual Canticle*, stanzas 20&21: 2, p. 551) appears to insist that the ultimate union can only be attained through purification: "In order that she reach him, it is necessary for her to attain an adequate degree of purity, fortitude, and love." The operative word here is "adequate". I would assume that what is adequate purification for one person may not be so for another. More importantly, I doubt that perfect and absolute purification is attainable. In opposition to what John of the Cross asserts, I do not think that an identity experience necessitates endeavours at creating a likeness between subject and object. If assuming that absolute subject–object identity in consciousness is possible, it can be produced through a systematic method of concentration, solely at the mental level, without a profound transformation of the entire self. It is also quite conceivable that the nonidentity "union in love" experience can also be contrived. However, such a complex dynamism of love is not just restricted to the level of feelings. There are perhaps features of love that extend beyond feelings, but still constitutive of the experiential content of a subject. Then again, whatever the constituent elements of love are, there is still the possibility that the whole complex of love at the *experiential* level can be simulated. Let us look at this trenchant piece of advice from Underhill (1915/1943, p. 125):

> Perpetual absorption in the Transcendent is a human impossibility, and the effort to achieve it is both unsocial and silly. But this experience, this "ascent to the Nought," changes for ever the proportions of the life that once has known it; gives to it depth and height, and prepares the way for those further experiences, that great transfiguration of existence which comes when the personal activity of the finite will gives place to the great and compelling action of another Power.

Not only does Underhill think that it is impossible to have an enduring mystical union experience, she also believes that pursuing it would be foolish and unsocial.

For Underhill, personality transformation, which very likely requires the scourges of purification, takes precedence over transient experiences. She staunchly affirms that true mystical love is not confined to transient experiences. Rather, it manifests itself through its fruits. Just as *fruition* signifies the enjoyment of mystical union, the authenticity of the mystical union of love, declares Underhill, is manifested in the *fruitfulness* of an enduring life lived in God (*M* p. 429).

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[41] John of the Cross (16th cent./1991, *Ascent of Mount Carmel* bk. 1 chp. 11: 2, p. 142) writes:

> To eradicate the natural appetites, that is, to mortify them entirely, is impossible in this life. Even though they are not entirely mortified, as I say, they are not such a hindrance as to prevent one from attaining divine union. … It will happen sometimes that while a person is experiencing an intense union of will in the prayer of quiet these appetites will be actually dwelling in the sensory part. Yet, the superior part of the soul, which is in prayer, will be paying no attention to them.

Given that our natural appetites will always remain with us as long as we exist as embodied persons, John of the Cross seems to concede that the presence of these appetites need not always pose an obstacle to mystical union.

5.3.3 The Enduring Unitive Life

I have tracked through such an extensive discourse on the union experience despite holding that mystical union is a component of a larger and more valuable enduring unitive life. My justification for doing so is that the essential issues of mystical union, which are grounded in phenomenology and ontology, have to be addressed in order to unravel the relation union experience has to unitive life. The transformative nights prepare the mystic for a stable unitive life, a life in which mystical union is a necessary, but insufficient contributing condition. While I cannot dismiss the possibility of engendering a mystical union from insufficient holistic purification, the stable unitive life entails an adequate process of transformative purification. I would argue that it is the mediating and individualizing dialectics that collaboratively account for a sustained mystical progress. The mystic's development in the direction towards universality and infinity involves a dynamic dialectical movement through the stages of light and darkness, concurrently with the dialectical movement of particularity–universality–individuality, i.e. a progression towards a larger orientation in life as well as a more holistic development of the self. Accordingly, mystical union experiences, regardless of their natures, are evaluated against their potential contribution towards this overall plan of mysticism. The ideal of "divine humanity" as proposed by Underhill signifies a continual dialectical relationship between humanity and divinity and, by virtue of its dialectical constitution, is antithetical to any system of monistic identity.

Underhill tends to use "unitive state" and "unitive life" to refer to the same permanent unitive relationship between God and the mystic. When discussing this enduring relationship, she does not use "state" to refer to something transient (see *M* pp. 81, 420, and 429). The unitive state or life consists of:

> (1) a complete absorption in the interests of the Infinite, under whatever mode It is apprehended by the self; (2) a consciousness of sharing Its strength, acting by Its authority, which results in a complete sense of freedom, an invulnerable serenity, and usually urges the self to some form of heroic effort or creative activity; (3) the establishment of the self as a "power for life", a centre of energy, an actual parent of spiritual vitality in other men. (*M* p. 416)

If the unitive life is indeed something enduring, can there actually be a sustaining state of the self's complete absorption in the interests of the infinite? The union experience is generally ephemeral, but is one or even several episodes of union experience capable of exerting a powerful transformative impact upon the self, leading it to a stable surrender of its will to the will of God? These are troubling questions for scholars on mysticism who define mysticism as centred fundamentally on the unitive life with ultimate reality. Life's complexities, uncertainties, and the unpredictability of all its active participants are not amenable to the shaping of a smooth permanent state of harmonious union of wills between a particular individual and God. I suspect that even amongst mystics truly advanced in the unitive life, there is no perpetual harmony of wills between God and them.

Underhill (1937, pp. 112–113) alerts us to another related problem when she writes:

> How are we to know, or find out, what the Will of God is? I do not think that any general answer can be given to this. In clear moral and political issues, we must surely judge and act by the great truths and demands of Christianity; and if we have the courage to do this, then, as we act, more and more we shall perceive the direction of the Will. That choice, cause, or action, which is least tainted by self-interest, which makes for the increase of happiness — health — beauty — peace — cleanses and harmonizes life, must always be in accordance with the Will of the Spirit which is drawing life towards perfection.

Religion's set of doctrines and moral guidelines appear to be crucial aids in discerning and acting upon the divine will. But these teachings have to be in line with a life directed at fulfilling the universal will of reaching perfection. Obviously, one can ask what exactly constitutes perfection. Assuming that each person will have to work out, through her daily existence, the will of God, is the self in the unitive life increasingly endowed with the predilection and predisposition to fulfil this will? Again, I have my doubts as to the image of a perfected mystic breezing through the trials of human life with the constant discernment of a sage, the efficiency of executing moral duties like a saint, and the equanimity amidst turbulence of an adept contemplative. Teresa of Avila, according to Underhill (1926/1999, p. 83):

> says that if anyone claiming to be united to God is always in a state of peaceful beatitude, she simply does not believe in their union with God. Such a union, to her mind, involves great sorrow for the sin and pain of the world, a sense of identity not only with God but also with all other souls, and a great longing to redeem and heal. (see Teresa of Avila 16th cent./1980, *Interior Castle*, 5th dwelling place chp. 2: 9–10, p. 345)

When instructing her sisters, Teresa does not hesitate to underscore the love for others as a necessary property of union. This love, she (16th cent./1980, *Interior Castle*, 5th dwelling place, chp. 3: 12, p. 353) believes, takes priority over comfortable consolations in prayer:

> that if we fail in love of neighbor we are lost. … When you see yourselves lacking in this love, even though you have devotion and gratifying experiences that make you think you have reached this stage, and you experience some little suspension in the prayer of quiet (for to some it then appears that everything has been accomplished), believe me you have not reached union.

When the infinite–finite relationship is perceived in the context of a process through the mediating and individualizing dialectics, then closeness or union with the universal infinite includes closeness or union with the other particular finites. Mystical development as seen through the dialectical modalities of mediation and individuality is an inclusive particular–universal participative process that involves a union of wills and retention of the separateness of individual wills. It is the retention of separation that probably accounts for the persisting presence of the many challenges that life throws at us. Bear in mind that as Teresa of Avila states, there is no divine union when love for the other participating members, one's neighbours, with all its myriad challenges, is absent. Furthermore, while the mystic may be a perfected being, the rest of the universe may be far from perfect. Hence, a lack of a blissful harmony persists even in this ultimate stage of mysticism.

For Teresa of Avila and Underhill, one cannot claim to have attained a genuine mystical union if the fruitful unitive life of universal love is absent. Alternatively, can the unitive life be reached apart from the experience of mystical union? I cannot justifiably assert that it is humanly impossible for someone to attain and manifest the traits of a positive unitive life without having any heightened experience of union. I have to entertain the possible event in which grace and divine initiative effect a transformation in a person towards all the virtues that make up the unitive life, without that person having had any mystical union of the emotionally explosive or ecstatic sort. There may be a form of mystical union that does not, in any conventional sense and expectation, constitute a heightened experience of a unique kind as described earlier. A person might have such a union experience that is life altering and yet not interpret it as a heightened state of consciousness. This is especially so, when, say, strenuous and regular meditation practices are not part of that person's life regimen. There may indeed be subtle variations in the experience of mystical union.

Arguably, there is a greater likelihood that the delineation of the economy of mysticism as comprising the fundamental elements of awakening, transformative nights, illumination, union experience, and virtuous unitive life are coherent in a sense of being mutually dependent on one another to produce that which we say fits into the definition of mysticism as presented by Underhill – a life of profound intimacy between the self and infinite reality. This general diagram admits of variations in instantiations of that intimacy though it can still justifiably insist on its coherence of elements. The self requires some degree of purification in order to love the universal infinite. A mystical union is as profound as its capacity to bring about significant and critical transformations in the self that is orientated to ultimate reality. Any form of "mystical union" that is strictly interpreted as a powerful experience, but devoid of any transformative capacity, may, in the context of the above definition of mysticism, be regarded as departing from the genuine article.

Coherence amongst the stages of mystical development does not imply that a smooth and harmonious fitting together of all the factors that can potentially contribute to this development always obtains in all mystical lives. As Teresa of Avila avers, we cannot expect a perfect and beatified life even after attaining the unitive stage. In general, the unitive life is characterized by absorption of the self in the infinite. It might be questioned whether in number (2) of the enumerated components of the unitive life quoted above, the self can be said to be free if it shares in the strength of the infinite and acts by this infinite's authority. Many places in *M* make explicit the bond between freedom and the unitive life:

> [T]he Unitive State is essentially a state of free and filial participation in Eternal Life. (*M* p. 416)

> [M]an, in this Unitive State, by this substitution of the divine for the "primitive" self, has at last risen to true freedom … (*M* p. 417)

> Many a time has the romantic quality of the Unitive Life – its gaiety, freedom, assurance, and joy … (*M* p. 440)

The apparent consonance between unitive life and freedom masks a string of difficulties associated with the definition of free will, and the clumsy compatibility between individual freedom and the consuming will of the infinite that the individual is united with. One way to resolve the hidden dissonance between freedom and unitive life is to assert the self's *free* assent to this unitive life. Says Underhill: "By this attainment, this lifting of the self to free union with the Real …" (*M* p. 437). The attainment she speaks of refers to the attainment of the unitive state/life through love. In other words, the self must freely agree and submit to the workings of the infinite. On the other hand, this free submission would imply that henceforth, *during* this profound unitive life, voluntary and responsible acts cannot be ascribable to the self. In another work of hers, Underhill (1933, p. 72) traces out the contours of a mutual interweaving of finite and infinite wills, and she asserts that "the Divine incitement stirs but never overrules Its creature's will – the soul's responsibility over against God is absolute". By absolutizing human autonomy and responsibility, Underhill actually compounds the aporia of this issue through making onerous the defence of this necessity of human freedom amidst its submission to the will of God.

We are now led to the second way to address this problem of reconciling the self's free will with a manner of functioning determined by divine impulsion. In contrast to a will propelled solely by self-interest, a will that shares in the will of the infinite may be said to act from a mode of being that is relatively free from restrictive self-interest. Perhaps also, when we speak of the unitive life, we imply that life in which the self's consciousness is transformed and expanded and thereby able to act from a broader engagement of faculties than the mere inclination of the senses. In the unitive life, the ordinary selfhood is said to be transformed into a "divine selfhood" that is plugged into an infinitely broad consciousness. Hence, unitive life is associated with a life purportedly free from the dictates of limited self-interest and limited engagement of faculties. I think it can be agreed upon that freedom does not mean freedom to do absolutely anything a person wants. An individual can be propelled by compulsions and selfishness, and this mode of functioning implies a lack of freedom. Nevertheless, the difficult issue confronting the unitive life is the question of whether the mystic in this mode of being is to be regarded as an *automaton* of God and therefore divested of individual free will.

In the following passage, Underhill hints at the loss of the self's individual will to the larger universal will:

> All the mystics agree that the stripping off of the I, the Me, the Mine, utter renouncement, or "self-naughting" – self-abandonment to the direction of a larger Will – is an imperative condition of the attainment of the unitive life. The temporary denudation of the mind, whereby the contemplative made space for the vision of God, must now be applied to the whole life. Here, they say, there is a final swallowing up of that wilful I-hood, that surface individuality which we ordinarily recognize as ourselves. It goes for ever, and something new is established in its room. The self is made part of the mystical Body of God; and, humbly taking its place in the corporate life of Reality, would "fain be to the Eternal Goodness what his own hand is to a man." (*M* p. 425)

It would be difficult to reconcile individual free will with the unitive life idealized above in which the self's will is submitted to the universal will of God. The last

sentence which Underhill lifts from a passage in *Theologia Germanica* (Anonymous author 14th cent./1854, chp. 10, p. 29) continues with an assertion that even the desire for submission to the universal will originates from that will itself. Its implication would be that freedom, as the primal free choice and action of submitting to the divine will, is itself compromised because the divine will is already assumed to have implanted the corresponding desire for submission.

If we look at the *Theologia Germanica* (14th cent./1854, chp. 10, pp. 29–30), that particular statement cited by Underhill is followed with an attempt to fit together freedom with submission:

> Moreover, these men are in a state of freedom, because they have lost the fear of pain or hell, and the hope of reward or heaven, but are living in pure submission to the Eternal Goodness, in the perfect freedom of fervent love.

This is a rather fascinating attempt at reconciling freedom with submission. Freedom is here qualified as freedom from the instinctive orientation to avoid pain and seek pleasure. The love that sustains the self's submission to God is here believed to be free from the instinctive propulsions of the self. Note though that this particular form of freedom is not stated in Underhill's text quoted above. For sure, the author of *M* is in accord with the many mystical writings she cites when she joins them in the chorus of affirming the arduousness and pain of detaching oneself from one's egocentric will. On the one hand, we have the self's desire to merge with the universal being and attain freedom from the drive to avoid pain and to seek pleasure. On the other hand, we have the self that clings tenaciously to its own will with its propulsions for pleasure and avoidance of pain. It is the former that represents a concurrent and mutually influencing free submission of the self to God in the dynamics of love and the freedom from the forces inflicted by the pain-pleasure drives.

To close this segment of my reflection, I wish to highlight a few points. If the unitive life, as Underhill describes it, is a life of intimate love between finite self and divine infinity, the dialectical tension between independence and submission will always persist. The mystic is not an automaton of God. Identity of wills, I suggest, has a close parallel to ontological identity. If there is ultimately only one reality, how would relationship, which necessitates, at the least, two separate individuals, subsist? By the same token, individual free will cannot be sustained in a structure in which two wills merge into one. In sum, the enduring unitive life does entail, in some degree or other, the ongoing dialectical relation of union and difference – of a union in love that is not one of absolute identity. Let us also grant the notion of sublimity as extendable beyond just snatches of momentous experience of ambivalence in the midst of an overabundant reality, to incorporate a stretch of the mystic's existence in which the unitive life unfolds in a profoundly intimate relationship between self and God. The sublime can also rightly be tagged onto the enduring unitive life. In fact, Kant does mention in *Observations* (1764/1960, pp. 51–52) that because the sublime experience is vigorous and intense, it cannot sustain itself, unless the experience of the sublime includes an experience of the beautiful. Here

we see that the element of the beautiful can help prolong a sublime experience. The enduring unitive life is justifiably sublime, but is more appropriately considered as beautifully sublime. In the next chapter, I shall speak a bit more about tying the beautiful with the sublime in mysticism.

As another approach to the above thesis of unitive love necessitating some element of duality, I reproduce below a passage from Underhill's (1937, pp. 25–27) exposition on the unitive life:

> You remember how Dante says that directly a soul ceases to say Mine, and says Ours, it makes the transition from the narrow, constricted, individual life to the truly free, truly personal, truly creative spiritual [or unitive] life: in which all are linked together in one single response to the Father of all spirits, God. Here, all interpenetrate, and all, however humble and obscure their lives may seem, can and do affect each other … And spiritual life, which is profoundly organic, means the give and take, the willed correspondence of the little human spirit with the Infinite Sprit, here where it is; its feeding upon Him, its growth towards perfect union with Him, its response to His attraction and subtle pressure.

The self's integrity as a free person is conserved in the union of spirit because, according to Underhill, there is no dissolution of personhood; rather, the self is now a transformed and broadened person. This diagram of the interpenetration of beings in an overall structure, in which all beings are orientated to the universal consolidating being, correlates with our dialectic of particularity–universality–individuality. The passage above, which includes the interpretation of spiritual life as *organic* development, is in tandem with the concept of *co-creativity*. Co-creativity between finite self and infinite being implies a wilful cooperation between the two parties in which the universal infinite includes and transcends particular beings. Therefore, instead of submerging the particular into a supposed one and only creativity of the universal, and thereby nullifying individual free will, the unitive life is a co-creative dialectical relation between the particular and the universal, a universal which is not to be perceived as solely transcending and pre-existing particular realities but as eminently immanent in its constitutive parts and harbouring the mysterious yet to be. Consequently, every step of the process is an evolution of cooperative, co-creative activity between the particular finite and the universal infinite. The unitive life is founded on the relationship of *mystical* love, a love that is as profound as it is open to divine mystery.

5.4 Chapter Conclusion

Through the light–darkness negation of negation in the second transformative night, the mystic is put through a process that works at a holistic purification of her faculties as well as leading her to a state of radical detachment of everything except the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love, as means to the unitive life. The unitive life, as argued above, constitutes an enduring union and difference of wills between the self and God. The mediating and individualizing dialectics, which are opposed

to any merging into a single entity, supports a co-creative and progressive infinite–finite relationship. The stages of mystical development are not boldly and neatly separated from one another. I would venture to say that it is possible to posit "minor" purificative junctures within the unitive life. Just as "adulthood" retains its status despite harbouring vestigial elements of adolescence, the status of the unitive life as mysticism's ultimate stage is not undermined by the presence of traces of the preceding stages.

Chapter 6
Conclusion

6.1 Sublime Beauty and Beautiful Sublime

In being faithful to the objective of this research, I have covered much ground that deals with sublimity's connection to theistic mysticism. However, the other aesthetic term, beauty, is frequently used to describe God.[1] Would it be possible then to develop a notion where beauty can be combined with the sublime? Underhill writes:

> Récéjac only develops this idea [of aesthetics as a mystical path] when he says, "If the mind penetrates deeply into the facts of aesthetics, it will find more and more, that these facts are based upon an ideal identity between the mind itself and things. At a certain point the harmony becomes so complete, and the finality so close that it gives us actual emotion. The Beautiful then becomes the sublime; brief apparition, by which the soul is caught up into the true mystic state, and touches the Absolute. It is scarcely possible to persist in this Esthetic perception without feeling lifted up by it above things and above ourselves, in an ontological vision which closely resembles the Absolute of the Mystics." (*M* p. 21) (see Récéjac 1897/1899, p. 72)

Beauty as an aesthetic concept is here associated with a harmony between the perceived object and the perceiving subject's faculties. The passage above tells us that the harmony of beauty is also capable of evoking the elevated feeling of the sublime. But the sublime, as understood thus far, is not fundamentally permeated by the quality of harmony. Moreover, contrary to Edouard Récéjac's (born: 1853) suggestion, the sublime experience, in the Kantian sense, is not initiated at the moment when perfect harmony between object and faculties has been obtained; rather, the heart of sublimity lies in the disruption amongst the cognitive faculties due to an encounter with the formless infinite (Kant 1790/2000, § 27, pp. 120–121). The two different

[1] The classical ideals of truth, goodness, and beauty are often invoked by Underhill as a set of qualities in reference to God (*M* pp. 21, 42, 96, 113, 341, and 433). Dionysius the Areopagite's *On the Divine Names* (5th cent./1920) has many statements referring to God as beautiful and as being more than beautiful (for instance, see p. 96).

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aesthetic categories, I believe, can be united to form the chiastic "sublime beauty" and "beautiful sublime", which are not explicitly developed by Kant.

Lyotard (1991/1994, p. 75) remarks that the "sublime feeling can be thought of as an extreme case of the beautiful." It is not absolutely clear what Lyotard means by that statement. Is he saying that at the extreme horizon of beauty, the sublime dawns? Since sublimity concerns experiencing the absolutely great, it may be conceded that extremely great beauty can be an instance of the sublime.

In an effort to shape the structure of sublime beauty, I shall seek the assistance of Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905–1988). Balthasar (1961/1982, pp. 320–321) identifies the experiences that major biblical figures like Moses and Paul the Apostle had of God as one in which the encountered object remained concealed, and it is this inevitable concealing that ironically produced the most fulfilling and heightened experience. He continues:

> In these and all other Biblical experiences of God, the element that impels the subject forward lies, precisely, in the superabundance of their content, as compared with man's limited capacity to grasp it; and the longing which they awaken and leave behind is not the yearning for something more which would be something different, but the longing for the Always-More that resides in what has already been bestowed. (p. 320)

Balthasar proceeds to say that the unique experience these biblical figures had is comparable to the experience one has of worldly beauty and that the experience of worldly beauty is not just a finite self-satisfying and reposeful contemplation. Rather, the apprehension of true beauty is akin to the phenomenon of having the beholder lifted towards something perpetually beyond. Balthasar affirms that "[t]he experience of sublime beauty is overwhelming and can be enrapturing and crushing" (pp. 320–321). Even erotic beauty, says Balthasar, "is always pointing beyond the sentiment that sighs 'Abide a while, thou art so beautiful!'" (p. 321).

The Kantian (1790/2000, § 9, pp. 64–65) beautiful produces a feeling of a fit between the object sensed and a harmonious operation of faculties especially imagination and understanding. Récéjac speaks of a kind of beauty that attains such a complete fit between object and cognition that it becomes sublime. Balthasar, on the other hand, describes true beauty, be it divine or natural, as containing the concealed or veiled perpetually more. I intend to direct these two different perspectives towards the notion of "sublime beauty". I shall begin by denominating divine beauty as *infinite* beauty and interposing it into those two accounts above.[2] In Récéjac's case, the harmonious reaches an infinitely complete state of harmony that it becomes a disharmonious harmony. In Balthasar's, the harmonious (beautiful) can be attained when the infinitely more (disharmonious) is contacted. For Récéjac's, assuming that infinitely complete harmony between object and cognition is possible, this structure reflects the response to infinite beauty. And, if this infinitely harmonious apprehension of the beautiful evokes a sense of agitation and disharmony in the perceiving

[2] The theorem that God possesses infinite beauty not only follows from this book's emphasis on the divine as infinite, it is also found in the writings of mystics such as John of the Cross (16th cent./1991, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, bk.1 chp. 4: 4, p. 125; *Spiritual Canticle* stanza 6: 1, p. 497) and Francis de Sales (1616/1997, chp. 12, p. 157; chp. 15, p. 164).

subject, then the subject can be said to have an experience of sublime beauty (disharmonious harmony). However, for Balthasar's account, it seems to me that the substantive encounter is in fact one of sublimity (that alludes to the infinitely "always more") than of beauty. Given that he sees this experience as beautiful, rather than label it, as he does, "sublime beauty", a more accurate name would be "beautiful sublime". In essence, Récéjac offers a cogently superior account of "sublime beauty" than Balthasar does. While Balthasar explicitly refers to divine beauty as sublime beauty, his description of it falls more appropriately under the label of beautiful sublime.

Balthasar is not alone in his evaluation of divine beauty. According to Francis de Sales (1567–1622), the enjoyment of divine beauty by the blessed has two conjoined aspects:

> [F]irst for the infinite beauty which they contemplate, secondly for the abyss of the infinity which remains to be seen in this same beauty. O God! How admirable is that which they see! But, O God! how much more admirable is that which they see not! (Francis de Sales 1616/1997, chp. 15, p. 164)

Again, divine or infinite beauty reveals itself to the beholder and at the same time points to the infinite content that is concealed. This specification by de Sales, like that of Balthasar, when analysed through the lens of Kant's contrast between beauty and sublimity, more aptly delineates the structure of the beautiful sublime. Apprehending the infinite is very much a sublime experience. Récéjac's sketch above of a complete harmony between object and cognition may appropriately apply to the contemplation of finite beauty, but not to a being with infinite content. Consequently, when the contemplation of infinite being is considered to be beautiful, such a response is indeed a response to the beautiful sublime.[3] While the paired chiastic terms above appear to have slipped beneath Kant's keen analyses, there are places in one of his works where the beautiful sublime may be distilled.

In *Observations* (1764/1960, pp. 47–48), Kant lists three kinds of sublime:

> The sublime is in turn of different kinds. Its feeling is sometimes accompanied with a certain dread, or melancholy; in some cases merely with a quiet wonder; and in still others with a beauty completely pervading a sublime plan. The first I shall call the *terrifying sublime*, the second the *noble*, and the third the *splendid*.

Does the kind of sublime Kant calls splendid align with our notion of the beautiful sublime? In the introduction to *Observations*, the translator interprets the splendid as referencing objects possessing both beauty and sublimity (p. 27). This interpretation does not firmly mean that with the splendid, sublimity is substantive, qualified by the beautiful as modifier, for it could just as well be a mere mixture of beauty and sublimity. To illustrate the splendid, Kant (1764/1960, p. 49) writes:

> St. Peter's in Rome is splendid; because on its frame, which is large and simple, beauty is so distributed, for example, gold, mosaic work, and so on, that the feeling of the sublime still strikes through with the greatest effect; hence the object is called splendid.

[3] Burke (1757/1764, part IV section 24, pp. 303–304) rightly judged that when the beautiful combines with the sublime, it is the sublime that overpowers the characteristics of the beautiful.

While sublimity radiates from the large and simple backdrop, beauty is found in bits and pieces embedded in this backdrop. By juxtaposing this Kantian splendid with Balthasar and Francis de Sales' beautiful sublime, a subtle distinction surfaces. For the latter two, the sublimity of infinity's veiling of the perpetually more is deemed beautiful. The splendid, on the other hand, may be viewed as an immense backdrop with its sublimity of immensity pushing through amidst contents deemed beautiful. Given that for Kant the splendid is a form of the sublime, sublimity is its substantive aesthetic quality. However, rather than perceive this whole structure as beautiful, beauty is here said to be distributed amidst this structure. This idea of the sublime being infused with some elements of beauty is consistent with another statement by Kant (1764/1960, pp. 51–52), which says that while the sublime is a stronger feeling than the beautiful, a sustained enjoyment of the sublime requires the gentler and more pleasant complementary feeling of the beautiful, either alternating with or accompanying the sublime. With the above considerations in mind, we can conclude that the beautiful sublime can be traced out as follows: (1) a beautiful experience of an overall sublime encounter and (2) the splendid – a predominantly sublime experience that is sustained by and tempered with a subordinate tinge of inherent beauty or by occasional alternations with the beautiful.

As pointed out, there are mystics and scholars who ascribe the quality of beauty to God. God as infinite evokes the sublime experience, but this sublime can also be beautiful. Although Burke (1757/1764, part III section 27, pp. 238–239) insists that the properties of sublimity and that of beauty render these two aesthetic qualities as contrary to one another – akin to the contrast between black and white – he does admit that objects can have a blending of the sublime and the beautiful. Burke (1757/1764, part I section 18, pp. 84–85) identifies the sublime experience as comprising the ambivalent emotions of positive pain (facing immense magnitude and power produces pain) and negative pleasure (the sense of being at a safe distance from the infinitely immense and powerful; perhaps, in mystical experience, there is a pleasure in not being overwhelmed by the *mysterium tremendum* infinite being).[4] He (1757/1764, part I section 18, pp. 85–86) regards the experience of beauty as involving positive pleasure (on account of the agreeableness felt in the subject, and which Burke associates with the passion of love) and negative pain (the pain of anticipating the loss of this appealing aesthetic experience). Drawing from Burke's ideas, I would infer that if divine infinity is *beautifully sublime*, then the sublime experience of negative pleasure is also positive pleasure (there are distinct receptions of positive happiness in mystical experience) and that of positive pain is also negative pain (the anticipated absence of God causes pain in the mystic; God's presence triggers an awareness of the huge gap between the self and God, and this is negative pain). With such a cocktail of emotions bursting forth within the mystic, it is no surprise that the heightened mystical experience beggars articulation.

[4] It may be argued that while the unqualified infinity with its abyss of the unknown does elicit terror, in the presence of infinite happiness, terror can quite likely be absent (see McCarty 2007, pp. 10–11).

6.2 Overall Summing-Up and Suggestions for Future Researches

My reading of *M* through the themes of dialecticism and sublimity was done in order to build a theoretical structure of mysticism and address some significant issues embedded within this distinct system of human vocation. While it is Hegel whom I relied upon to formulate my framework of dialecticism, Kant's construction of the sublime became my main instrument serving to elucidate areas in the mystical process that directly or analogically reflect the sublime. By bringing to the fore the dialectical structure of mysticism, some of the problems associated with contradictory statements that beset mysticism were alleviated. In essence, this book has vigorously argued that the apparently contradictory statements found in some writings of mystics do not actually report the authors' experience of God in a situation of contradiction because of the impossibility of such an experience. Instead, the mystical relationship is characterized by a dialectical relation of opposing qualities of different aspects within this relationship itself. Overall, the mediating and individualizing dialectics of mystical relationship reflect a unitive and synthetic dynamism that is also able to preserve the elements of mystery and open-endedness.

While dialectics function as a means to understand the seemingly contradictory mystical statements, the theory of the sublime serves as a helpful tool to address the question on the uniqueness of mystical experiences. The close parallels that I drew between the aesthetic theory of the sublime and some crucial concepts of mysticism have helped unveil possibilities of interpreting and understanding claims made by mystics in reference to their experiences. Some of these claims run into problems of epistemological justification. Inferring from Underhill's conception of mysticism, I defined mysticism as a dynamic system founded upon a whole life orientated to what is perceived as ultimate reality and that the mystic strives to attain profound union with this reality. Ultimate reality for Underhill is God understood as infinite being. If mystical experiences in their varied modalities are basically founded upon the intimate relationship between finite being and infinite being, then the uniqueness of mystical experiences, particularly the culminating experience of mystical union, has some affinities with the uniqueness of the experience of the sublime for they both concern experiences connected with the finite–infinite interface.

In Chaps. 2 and 3, I delineated the structure that underpins mystical development. This structure that overarches pertinent discourses within all the chapters of this study is *becoming–being–infinite being*, wherein each moment of this dialectical triad is immanent in and transcendent to the moment preceding it. God's transcendence of finite reality, I argued, takes the form of a divine infinity that includes–exceeds finitude, as well as having an aspect of itself that excludes finitude. I also argued that the dialectical pattern that configures processes within our finite world is also found within the internal structure of infinite being. This pattern within God is reflected as the dialectical economic trinity. Furthermore, I attempted to put forth the notion that, following from God's relation to the universe as derived above, God is better conceived as potential rather than actual infinity. By appealing

to the testimonies of mystics and by deploying Kant's epistemology, and aesthetics of the sublime, I worked at establishing some corroboration of the two models of infinite being's transcendence of our universe.

Chapters 4 and 5 were devoted to analysing and discussing *M*'s five-stage "Mystic Way". The dialectical metaphor that pervades these stages of mystical growth is the light–darkness pairing. After enumerating the many interpretations of the light–darkness metaphor and the possible ways in which these interpretations and the dialectical negation of negation are applicable to mystical development, I treated each mystical stage of *M* independently and highlighted the manifestations of these varied interpretations and patterns of negation. In addressing the issue pertaining to the tenability and integrity of Underhill's stage schema of mystical development, I pointed out that despite the presence of cases anomalous to the identified stages and sequence of progression, the five-stage schema offers us a cogent yet flexible guiding framework for conceiving mystical development. This development takes the form of a transformative and progressive alternation of the light–darkness metaphors from awakening (light) to purgation (darkness) to illumination (light) to purification (darkness) to union (light). Additionally, at each particular stage, light and darkness coexist and interact with one another through one or several of their metaphorical interpretations and applications.

When sublimity is said to involve the pleasure–pain ambivalent responses, the sublime can potentially be evoked in both the phases of light and darkness. In essence, the themes of dialecticism and sublimity complement each other in their applications to the analysis of mysticism. A general form of the dialectic as orientated to open-endedness rather than to a definite closure of discourse and an understanding of the sublime as predicated on an encounter with something characterized as overwhelmingly great resonate with the formulation of mystical relationship involving an infinite being that includes–exceeds and excludes finitude.

Prospective valuable and related researches to be embarked upon can revolve around comparative studies between the system of mysticism as developed here and another system of mysticism found in a non-Christian religious tradition. During the time of Underhill's writing of *M*, substantive and comparative scholarly works (especially the ones published in Western European languages) on the mysticisms of non-Christian faiths have yet to flourish. In view of current interests and studies in this area, undertaking such a comparative study would yield all sorts of valuable insights into the mystical dimension of religion. Another feasible research that I think would be interesting and worthwhile has to do with furthering the investigation into an evaluation and comparison of the cogency of classical theism and that of panentheism against a referential backdrop of recorded mystical experiences.

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