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Religious Pluralism
in the Philosophy of Mysticism

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to explicate standpoints concerning the unity (or diversity) of mystical experience within different religious traditions. Using the method of conceptual analysis, I classify eighteen main views on this issue. The classification is based on a series of oppositions like philosophical/theological, essentialist/ empiricist, material/formal, egalitarian/degree, etc. Almost half of them still do not have any representatives, while for others have there is at least one philosopher or theologian arguing for this particular belief. This paper could be therefore treated as a philosophical compass in the field of the philosophy of mysticism, showing both its main directions and its unknown lands.

Keywords: mysticism, religious pluralism, analytical philosophy of religion, religious dialogue

An essential part of classical philosophy of religion is, undoubtedly, the philosophy of mysticism: theoretical interpretation of the nature of mystical experience. At the same time, one of the most vivid and rapidly developing parts of contemporary philosophy of religion is religious pluralism: theoretical interpretation of the fact of religious diversity. The topic of this paper: a reflection upon the nature of mystical experience from a comparative perspective, is an intersection of those fields. I would like to show and classify the variety of stand-points among philosophers and theologians regarding that topic, not to attach a label of particular '-ism' to them, but in order to concretize those beliefs and to indicate some unknown lands or ideas that could be still developed. Such a variety of religious pluralisms in the philosophy of mysticism is of course a result of ineffable nature of mystical experience: it seems that as far as such unutterable

experience is concerned, almost everything might be said about it. But even if we agree with that statement, it is still unquestioned that such a diversity of beliefs reflects our (human) different ways in experiencing of what is usually named God(s), and further: differences in language we use to describe that extraordinary state. Hence, this kind of inquiry is extremely important from the perspective of globalization of religion, when it is no longer possible to believe in only one type of mystical experience, and post-secularism, which encourages for re-interpreting and modifying the traditional patterns.

The first and the most important question posed by religious pluralism in the philosophy of mysticism is: can we talk about the unity of mystical experience within different religious traditions? In other words: can we claim that mysticism is, in some sense, one and free from cultural conditioning? If we answer: "yes", we are **essentialists**. If we answer: "no", we are **empiricists**. Both essentialism and empiricism will be used in this paper only in that meaning.

Essentialism in the Philosophy of Mysticism

Firstly we have to distinguish **reference essentialism** (EsR). Supporters of EsR claim that mysticism is one, because it refers to the one Absolute:

$$[1] \ \text{EsR} \qquad \forall x[M(x)]: \exists!y[A(y)] \rightarrow \exists!x[M(x)]$$

Moreover, there are two variants of that kind of essentialism: **egalitarian** (EsRE), when it is maintained that all world religions offer the same kind of mysticism with the same sort of 'access' to the Absolute and **degree** reference essentialism (EsRD), when it is claimed that some of religions offer better (deeper, closer, etc.) kind of mysticism with closer (easier, ultimate) "access" to the Absolute:

$$[1a] \ \text{EsRE} \qquad \forall x[x \in M]: \exists!y[A(y)] \rightarrow \sim\exists x[x_1 > x_2]$$
$$[1b] \ \text{EsRD} \qquad \forall x[x \in M]: \exists!y[A(y)] \wedge \exists x[x_1 > x_2]$$

Putting forward some examples from contemporary analytic philosophy of religion: EsRE was represented by John Hick, while EsRD by S. Mark Heim.

Hick defines mystical experience as a "direct influence of the Real on human consciousness"[1]. The difference between salvation (after death) and mystical experience (in mundane life) looks as follows: while salvation could be identified with the unity with the Real (Hick's term for one God, Absolute), mystical experience is 'only' a modification of psyche. Of course, mystical experience stands in stark contrast to common religious experience, mediated by material environment. It concerns not only social forms of common religious experience, such as sacraments, but also

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[1] J. Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, London 1989, p. 156.

individual forms, for instance experience of the God's presence in performing every-day duties. Further, Hick describes mystical experience as a kind of extrasensory perception. He divides it into two main types: unitive and communitive[2]. Briefly, unitive experience is a contact between consciousness and the "Reality", tentative union between them; communitive experience is a message from Reality, mainly a vision, therefore it has a cognitive content. Nevertheless, answer to the Real's messages or description of the moment of union between the Real and human depends on our cultural and historical condition. Hick calls it "critical realism": mystical experience is real, because that is an experience of something Real, but at the same time we have to be careful, because big part (sometimes the most) of its content is a result of our particular conditioning. Hick puts forward many examples: for instance, Christians do not have vision of Krishna and Hindus do not have visions of St. Mary. Other example: Allah revealed Koran speaking to Mahomet in Arabic. Of course, according to Hick's critical realism these examples are only metaphors. They express our attitude to the Real rather than tell us something about the nature of the Real, which is ineffable. They are only phenomenal. However, majority of mystics were aware of this double – phenomenal and noumenal – character of their visions: Eckhart differs *Gott* from *Gottheit*, Isaak Luri – *Jahwe* from *En Sof*, al-Arabi – *Allah* from *al-Haqq*, Śankara – *Iświara* from *Brahman*, Buddhists – *Samboghakaya* from *Dharmakaya*, and so on.[3] They knew that their own visions are "to some extent" true, not knowing to which extent precisely. Hick states that all of their visions are true in different ways, but also true to some extent. Being phenomenal, they cannot be literally true: only their 'essential content' is true.

Heim starts with different point of view: his standpoint is a direct part of his own, original Trinitarian theology. He states that participation in the inner life of the Holy Trinity could have different degrees (levels). The first level consists of impersonal relations, the second level – of personal relations devoid of profound cognition, the third and the last one – of communion. Heim interprets Buddhist nirvana as one of the forms of participation in the inner life of the Trinity: it is like rooting in the emptiness, made by every person of the Trinity for other persons of the Trinity[4]. This view is therefore a sort of spin of religious experience from the perspective of Christianity, analogical view could be made by any other religion – Heim as a Protestant theologian does not go beyond his horizon of faith. He claims that condemnation rests upon incomplete communion with God: exceptionality of Christianity relies on the fact that it indicates a way to the full unification. One could say that such a belief resembles pure inclusivism. In fact, Heim puts a lot of

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[2] Ibidem, p. 170.

[3] All of the examples come from: J. Hick, *The Fifth Dimension. An Exploration of the Spiritual Realm*, Oxford 2004, p. 105-178.

[4] M. Heim, *The Depth of the Riches. A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends*, Michigan – Cambridge 2000, p. 187.

effort to demonstrate that his view is an alternative religious pluralism. He writes: "Every human response to any dimension of God's manifestation and revelation meets from God only affirmation, only God's 'yes' of grace"[5]. Heim claims that God, creating people, gave them freedom to choose their own paths, because every path will gain its purpose; moreover, these purposes (religious ends) are as different as those paths. At the same time some paths are easier or closer to God than others and some purposes guarantee more happiness than others: people have to make a choice between different patterns of mystical experience. While for Hick it does not matter whether one is a Catholic or a Buddhist, because all one has to do is to cleave to one's own faith, Heim insists that something more than growing in one's culture is needed: it is an individual act of decision, without which no real *metanoia* is possible.

The second sort of essentialism is **connotation essentialism** (EsC). Supporters of EsC claim that mysticism is one, only because there is a set of common features, describing mystical experience in different religions:

$$[2] \text{ EsC} \qquad \forall x[M(x)]: \exists_F[f_1,\ldots,f_n \in F] \leftrightarrow \exists x[M(x) \wedge F(x)]$$

There are two variants of that sort of essentialism: **material** (EsCM), when some particular features, collocating together, indicate that we deal with mystical experience and **formal** connotation essentialism (EsCF), when mystical experience implies some general features which constitute its definition:

$$[2a] \text{ EsCM} \qquad \forall x[M(x)]: \exists_F[f_1,\ldots,f_n \in F] \rightarrow \exists x[M(x)]$$
$$[2b] \text{ EsCF} \qquad \forall x[M(x)]: \exists x[M(x)] \rightarrow \exists_F[f_1,\ldots,f_n \in F]$$

The difference seems to be only conventional, but in fact it is quite remarkable. Formal essentialists discuss the definition of mystical experience trying to make it as general as possible in order to embrace a multitude of religious beliefs. Material essentialists put a lot of effort to find (discover) the discriminant of mystical experience, verifiable set of properties. Once having grasped that verifier, they do not have (in their own eyes) to presuppose the definition of mystical experience: one can just look at one's experience and conclude: "indeed, her experience is *a*, *b*, *c*, and *d*, *therefore* it is mystical." The most influential representatives of EsCM were William James and Henri Bergson, while among supporters of EsCF we can find W.L. Rowe and Mr. & Ms. Carmody.

James was a strong opponent of reductionism in describing mystical experience, which was very typical in his times. Such an experience is not materialist in its content, although it has an impact on material world. Mysticism is a domain of free will and the feeling animated by human will.[6] Mystical experience is therefore something radically subjective and individual. Environment or regime has nothing

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[5] M. Heim, *A Trinitarian View of Religious Pluralism*, "The Christian Century", 2001, Jan. 24, p. 14.

[6] W. James, *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*, New York 1957, p. 114-118.

to do with it. Feeling becomes experience when subject gains "immediate luminousness" of her feelings and points out that some unseen, divine power is an object of her unusual experience[7]. Hence that kind of experience is phased: from religious feeling through conversion to the sainthood, when mystical experience has a direct influence on one's life. In the last case it is clear that mystical experience is true, because according to the pragmatic concept of truth it tells us "what conduct we must prepare in case the object should be true"[8]. So as to differ immature feeling from real experience and truth from falsehood one has to know the features of pure mystical experience, as it is described in works and witnesses of mystics. James distinguishes four main properties:

1. *Ineffability*. This is a "negative state of mind," because no one can make clear to another who has never had a certain feeling what such experience looks like;

2. *Noetic quality*. Although not intersubjective, mystical experience is still a state of knowledge, a kind of insight into truths inaccessible to the intellect;

3. *Transiency*. Mystical states cannot be sustained too long;

4. *Passivity*. Mystic feels her will is grasped by superior power. Abeyance of free will is linked with openness to the revelation, just like in the case of prophecy.

"These four characteristics are sufficient to mark out a group of states of consciousness (…) called the mystical group" – concludes James.[9] Other features were proposed by Henri Bergson. Bergson argues that mystical state is extraordinary [1], conscious [2], direct [3], and open [4] in the sense of open morality and religion[10]. Mystical experience is a core of dynamic religion, which is independent from tradition, theology, and Church, thud there is (and there can be) only one true mysticism.

William Rowe looks for the definition of mystical experience. He states that mystical experience is an experience in which one senses the immediate presence of the divine[11]. Mysticism is therefore a domain of sensing the presence of the divine rather than believing that the divine is present. Secondly, by "the divine" he does not mean simply the theistic God, because there are many conceptions of the divine other than the God of theism. Religious experiences in which one senses the presence of the divine as a being distinct from oneself are called non-mystical religious experiences, while those experiences in which one senses one's own union with a divine presence are mystical religious experiences per se. There are also two types of mystical religious experience: extrovertive and introvertive. In the case of extrovertive mysticism, mystics find divine reality outside their souls, in the external world. In introvertive mystical experience one finds the divine in the soul's core[12].

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[7] W. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience. A Study in Human Nature*, New York-London 1917, p. 18.

[8] Ibidem, p. 445.

[9] Ibidem, p. 380-382.

[10] H. Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, London 1935, p. 210-215.

[11] W.L. Rowe, *Philosophy of Religion. An Introduction*, Belmont 2007, p. 72.

[12] Ibidem, p. 78-79.

Nevertheless, if someone has had a religious experience, there is still question whether the divine one has experienced exists or not. One may have a sense of the presence of an object even when actually there is no such object. Some of religious experiences are delusory and we cannot say which exactly[13]. Differently from EsCM, there is no verifier and some mystical experiences are false.

Denise Lardner Carmody and John Tully Carmody define mysticism as a "direct experience of ultimate reality." It is direct only according to the accounts of mystics themselves. Philosopher describing their narratives is aware that they are molded by particular culture and beliefs dominating in their age. Mystical experience is very often mediated through signs, sounds, positions of body, etc. But it is still direct in the sense that there is no religious institution or authority standing between mystic and ultimate reality. By "ultimate reality" the Carmodys understand the highest being which is unconditioned and independent from everything: God, Tao, nirvana, etc. In the East ultimate reality is usually conceived as impersonal power, connected with the cycle of nature, while in the West it is almost always transcendent and personal. Therefore mystics of the East eliminates their desires, while mystics of the West overcome their sin[14]. Nevertheless, mysticism as such is still one, relatively independent from religion.

Empiricism in the Philosophy of Mysticism

Generally speaking, empiricists claim that it is impossible to affirm or validate the thesis that there is only one mysticism. The first sort of empiricism is **over-religious empiricism** (EmO). Supporters of EmO claim that there is more than one mysticism, but particular types (paradigms) of mystical experience cannot be easily rooted in (and identified with) concrete religions:

[3] EmO $\forall x[M(x)]: \exists x\{M(x) \wedge \forall y[R(y) \rightarrow x \neq y]\}$

Over-religious empiricists simply try to find some general types of mysticism, provided by common features of different mystical experiences. In the case they distinguish only two types of mysticism, namely Eastern and Western, we deal with **simple** over-religious empiricism (EmOS). If there are more than two types, depending on featured sets of properties of mystical experience, such a view can be called **phenomenological** over-religious empiricism (EmOF). Sorting already described standpoints by virtue of the amount of accepted sets of common features of mystical experience, we can gain following sequence:

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[13] W.L. Rowe, *William Rowe on Philosophy of Religion. Selected Writings*, N. Trakakis (ed.), Burlington 2007, p. 91.

[14] D.L. Carmody, J.T. Carmody, *Mysticism. Holiness East and West*, Oxford 1996, p. 10-15.

$$EsC < EmOS < EmOF$$

Among representatives of EmOS there are i.a. Carl Gustav Jung and John Cobb. Probably the most famous representative of EmOF was Rudolf Otto.

In the sixth chapter of his famous *West-Östliche Mystik*, Otto distinguishes four different types of mysticism[15]:

1. *Illuminative mysticism* (*Illuminatenmystik*). This kind of mysticism is irrational, supernatural, and individual. Illumination is a form of vision, revelation or insight into the essence of world, incommunicable, and inaccessible for other people. Plotinus' mysticism had precisely such an illuminative character.

2. *Emotional mysticism* (*Empfindungsmystik*). Mystical union is emotional fruition, accompanied with the feeling of beatitude. Union is experienced, it is not a part of an intellectual cognition. Quintessential example was St. Theresa of Avila.

3. *Natural mysticism* (*Naturmystik*). Mystical feeling of union with nature, which is an experience of its unity and at the same time compassion with multitude of beings. Among examples of such mystics are Whitman and Schleiermacher.

4. *Philosophical mysticism* (*Philosophischemystik*). Not only experience but also mystical knowledge is available during "going to ground" of the Self. Reason is treated as an essential guide on that way, because it explains the nature of the soul and the Absolute. Main protagonists of Otto's work, Śankara and Eckhart, are the most important representatives of this current of mysticism.

Showing the differences between approaches of Śankara and Eckhart, Otto wants to look into the general possibility of the existence of distinctive mystical experiences. He decidedly champions the side of empiricism: although there is one notion of "mysticism", it is too general to say that there is in fact one mysticism; we have also one general concept of "religion", yet there is variety of different religions, discussions which sorts of movements can be counted into religions, etc. Otto writes: "Belief that mysticism, regardless of its root, is basically one and the same, and therefore eternal, not connected with any space, free from circumstances and any conditions is still very popular. But that belief clashes with the facts"[16]. As Otto points out, the supporters of what is called here essentialism commit an error of equivocation: defining mysticism as an experience of "divinity", these theories naïvely assume unambiguous understanding of the divinity in various religious traditions. The relationship of man to God defines mysticism no less than understanding of the subject matter of this relationship. Otto even says that if a person is not currently united with her Absolute, but lives in Its presence, e.g. her spiritual life is dominated by irrational numinotic factors, she deserves to be called a mystic. Otto notes that the greatest differences within mystic concern not human relation to the Numinosum, but rather how to understand it: is it God or soul; whether God is transcendent or

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[15] R. Otto, *West-Östliche Mystik. Vergleich und Unterscheidung zur Wesendeutung*, Gotha 1926, p. 95-104.
[16] Ibidem, p. 191-192. Translation mine.

immanent; if soul is substantial (Yoga) or non-substantial (Buddhism); or perhaps it is nature which is the main subject of mystical union (Daoism, Zen)[17]. Moreover, Otto never claims that some kind of mysticism is "deeper" than the other one: he is not a proponent of degree pluralism. He feels that such a hierarchy would require the adoption of an objective measure.

Simple over-religious empiricists differentiate only two sorts of mysticism: that of the East and that of the West. As we have already seen, the Carmodys are very close to EmOS, but they still hold their main thesis that mystical experience as such is still one. According to the supporters of EmOS, differences between these two paradigms of spirituality are actually too big to maintain such a standpoint. Going further, we can analyze two variants of EmOS: connotation EmOS and reference EmOS, depending on whether some features of experience or its denotation, provides justification for that "dualism" in the philosophy of mysticism:

[3aa] EmOSR $\forall x[M(x)]: \exists y[A_1(y)] \rightarrow \exists x[M_1(x)] \lor \exists y[A_2(y)] \rightarrow \exists x[M_2(x)]$

[3ab] EmOSC $\forall x[M(x)]: \exists_{F,G}[f_1,\ldots,f_n \in F, \ g_1,\ldots,g_n \in G] \leftrightarrow$

                                             $\exists x[M_1(x) \land F(x)] \lor \exists x[M_2(x) \land G(x)]$

John B. Cobb believes that without reference to reality one cannot talk about religious truth. In contrast to Hick, Cobb assumes two Realities (*Ultimates*): God and the creation, known in non-theistic religions as Tao, emptiness, etc. The link between the two finalities is Jesus Christ – the transforming power of creation. What's more, Cobb describes as the embodiment of Christ every transformation of creation in all religions. Religious dialogue is therefore discovering Christ outside Christianity[18]. In this way, Cobb combines inclusivism and religious pluralism, namely EmOSR.

Carl Gustav Jung was also convinced of the existence of two major types of mysticism, which cannot be reduced to a common denominator. According to Jung, the European man always escapes practical and vital dimension of the experience of Indian and Chinese mystics combined with the objective of detachment from the mundane world. Western mysticism, reversely, looks for realization of both soul and body (e.g. resurrection) by means of self-sacrifice and abnegation of mundane goods. Both types of mysticism refer to different types of archetypes. Someone who has been raised in the European culture, wants to emulate the experience of mystical masters of the Far East, will fall into neurosis[19]. Without any doubt, it is hard to imagine a more radical dualism in the philosophy of mystical experience.

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[17] Ibidem, p. 193-197.

[18] M. Suchocki, *Divinity and Diversity. A Christian Affirmation of Religious Pluralism*, Nashville 2003, p. 20-21.

[19] C.G. Jung, *Commentary*, in: *The Secret of the Golden Flower. A Chinese Book of Life*, tr. by R. Wilhelm, London 1931, p. 77-82

Second broad type of empiricism is **religious empiricism** (EmR). Supporters of EmR claim that every religion is a ground and the basis for different kind of mysticism:

[4] EmR $\qquad \forall x[M(x)]: \forall x \forall y[M(x) \land R(y) \rightarrow (x=y)]$

There are two variants of this kind of empiricism: **egalitarian** (EmRE), when it is claimed that all religions offer equally valuable kinds of mysticism, and **degree** religious empiricism (EmRD), when it is maintained that some religions offer better (deeper, closer, more mature, etc.) form of mysticism:

[4a] EmRE $\qquad \forall x[x \in M]: \forall y[R(y)] \rightarrow \sim \exists x[x_1 > x_2]$
[4b] EmRD $\qquad \forall x[x \in M]: \forall y[R(y)] \rightarrow \exists x[x_1 > x_2]$

EmRE was represented by Gerschom Scholem, while EmRD is a standpoint of e.g. Bernard Lonergan.

Gerschom Scholem argues forcefully that "there is no such thing as mysticism in the abstract. There is no mysticism as such, there is only the mysticism of a particular religious system, Christian, Islamic, Jewish mysticism and so on (…) The various historical aspects of religious mysticism are often treated as corrupted forms of an, as it were, chemically pure mysticism which is thought of as not bound to any particular religion[20]". This attitude is evident in all Scholem's works.

As Bernard Lonergan observes, mystical experience should be treated as a part of more general religious experience. Obviously, there are different experiences because of the different traditions. Differences in mysticism are due to cultural diversity and the level of intensity or understanding of a particular religion. Only Christianity offers full religious experience and the other religions, not recognizing the grace of God, offer roundabout way. Nevertheless, he claims that differences between particular kinds of mystical experience have rather quantitative than qualitative nature[21]. His version of EmRD is therefore very close to EsRD, i.e. to the standpoint of Mark Heim. Both these views are degree pluralisms, subsuming other religions from the perspective of 'the most appropriate' religion – Christianity.

Between Philosophy and Theology

Our basic classification seems to be done: essentialist and empiricist views are explained, explicated and exemplified. But there is still one big criterion which has to be adopted to our map of beliefs. We have not still answered the question: whether unity or diversity of mysticism(-s) is the result of God's action or follows

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[20] G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, New York 1946, p. 5-6.
[21] B. Lonergan, *Philosophy of God and Theology*, Philadelphia, 1973, p. 20.

a structure of human cognition? This is a question of fundamental importance. If current map of beliefs concerning mysticism is more than map of beliefs, rather *the nature* of mystical experience as such and God's intent, this is a **theological** pluralism. If this is only our cognitive or cultural conditioning, it should be called **philosophical** pluralism.

Firstly, we can distiguish **theological essentialism** (Es-T) and **theological empiricism** (Em-T), respectively. Supporter of Es-T claims that God 'wants' one mysticism and mysticism is actually one because God created it in that way. One of the most famous representatives of Es-T was Śri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. He preached that Brahman is essentially unknowable and devoid of quality (*nirguna*): no religion fully captures the way it is. But at the same time it means that each religion does so in a partial manner; in the extent to which this occurs every religion is right and true. All religions lead to one and the same God, all worshipers pray to the same God, although under different names[22]. Openness to other religions has become a proposal of one of the religious movements: it was not limited to the theory, but contained a number of practical recommendations, which made reliable proclaimed views. Ramakrishna wrote: "I had to practice each religion for a time – Hinduism, Islam, Christianity. Furthermore, I followed the paths of the Saktas, Vaishnavas and Vedantists. I realized that there is only one God toward whom all are travelling; but the paths are different"[23]. His theological essentialism was thus something more than an academic view.

An interesting form of theological empiricism can be found in the theology of Ibn al 'Arabi. Ibn al 'Arabi believes that God's revelation assumes various forms and degrees tailored to each individual believer. According to Mehmet Reçber, while in the religious pluralism of John Hick God is conceived as the Reality variously recognized by the people (passive approach), in Ibn al 'Arabi's thought God himself takes different forms, sparing himself in such a way that individual beings are able to grasp Him. This revelation of God takes the noumenal (*ghayb*) and phenomenal (*shahadah*) form. Any conviction describing the Reality (*al-Haqq*) limits Its infinity to one dimension. Ibn al 'Arabi writes further that every religion is knowledge of God, provided that the knower is aware that religions are different manifestations of one hidden behind them Reality. None of partial beliefs is true, true is only such a description that connects all of the particular perspectives, characterizing the Reality from "all sides". This is, after all, practically impossible, what means that God is fundamentally incomprehensible[24]. For al 'Arabi such a mysterious God is a source of different patterns of mystical experience, adapted to each believer, therefore

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[22] Ramakrishna, *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Mahendranath Gupta (ed.), tr. Swami Nikhilananda, New York 1942, p. 123.

[23] *Ibidem*, p. 142.

[24] M. Reçber, *Ibn al 'Arabī, Hick and Religious Pluralism*, "Asian and African Area Studies", 2008, no. 7, p. 151-154, with translated fragments of al 'Arabi's *Fusūs al-Hikam*.

"skipping" from one way to another, just like in the case of Ramakrishna, is not possible or eventually appropriate. Different ways are really different and none of them itself is true: that is his empiricism.

Finally, we can distinguish **philosophical essentialism** (Es-F) and **philosophical empiricism** (Em-F). Supporters of those standpoints try to find rather transcendental than transcendent foundation of the unity or diversity of mystical experience within different religious traditions. The main object of their interest is the relation between mysticism and religious tradition. Philosophical essentialists state that despite different religious traditions there is still one tradition of mysticism. Such a view was represented by famous esoteric René Guénon. Guénon argues that the term "religion" is difficult to apply strictly outside Abrahamic religions and that "tradition" is a better name. All traditions, from Judaism, through Hinduism to Daoism, have common denominator: the Tradition. He called it also "metaphysics" understood in quite peculiar manner as absolutely unlimited knowledge of the Universal[25]. Treated as an opposite of modern science and conceived as radically esoteric, "metaphysics" could be actually identified with mysticism, especially with the philosophical mysticism in the sense given by Karl Albert, constituting the very core of ancient and medieval philosophy, so-called *philosophia prima*[26]. According to Guénon, such ideas are still familiar to the Orientals, but no to the Westerners: from the end of the eighteenth century essential immutability has been supplanted by ideas of evolution and social progress. Nonetheless he rigidly defends the union of mysticism within those traditions and hopes for its comeback.

Looking for philosophical justification of mystical experience, philosophical empiricists substantially agree with supporters of Es-F on the issue that escaping from theology we cannot fall into the hands of purely sociological description, namely that we have as many mystical traditions as world religions. The difference between them is the same as the difference between essentialism and empiricism in general: there is multitude of mystical traditions and faiths. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, author of the famous *The Meaning and the End of Religion*, is typical representative of this current. Smith also wants to demonstrate that a single concept of religion is an inadequate tool to describe non-European religious phenomena. The content of any revelation was not to establish a new religion, but the love of God, the truth of liberation, etc.; similarly, no founder of what was later called a religion did not preach a new religion (rather some truth). What has been called "religions", is actually the active and ongoing response of the people[27]. "Religion" is a term created from the perspective of an outside observer, not a participant. However, there is also some inner quality, primordial and independent from any religion, present in the personal

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[25] R. Guénon, *Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines*, London 1945, p. 110.

[26] K. Albert, *Einführung in die philosophische Mystik*, Darmstadt 1996.

[27] W.C. Smith, *The Meaning and the End of Religion*, New York 1962, p. 113.

lives of people, called faith[28]. Faith embraces whole spiritual life of the people, including mystical experience. It does not need to be only private: a man can respond to the faith of a community with his own faith, which is an expression of this tradition and thus prolong its duration. A finite number of religious traditions is therefore an expression of the infinite number of individual faiths[29].

Naturally, theological pluralisms are usually reference pluralisms, because of the person of God as a source of the nature of mystical experience. At the same time, philosophical pluralisms are generally connotation pluralisms. Notwithstanding it is still possible to create some variants of connotation theological pluralism or reference philosophical pluralism. In fact, criterion of philosophical or theological character is additional, because essentialist or empiricist approach is clinching there. As such it can be added to every kind of standpoint we have already elucidated. By doing it, we can get a whole table of possible views concerning unity of mystical experience within different religions and only some of them currently have their representatives.

In fact, we can distinguish at least eighteen standpoints concerning the unity of mystical experience within different religious traditions. Almost half of them do not have any representatives (as yet), while some of them have more than one philosopher or theologian arguing for this particular belief. My paper could be therefore treated as a philosophical compass in the field of the philosophy of mysticism: it does not show only directions, but also some unknown lands. It seems that as far as the debate on mystical experience is concerned, a lot of discussions and new views are still ahead of us and this part of philosophy of religion will be under development for next decades. The results of our explication prove that analytical philosophy of religion is voluminous enough to embrace even mystical experience, obviously if we are careful and still remember that was is researched here is always not the experience itself but the way it is described and divided in language. For those who think we can abandon all language differences and sail around the world of mysticism, it could be really disappointing that all philosophers can do is just to create standpoints which have not already been evoked. But actually that is all they can do and they have never done anything else.

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[28] Ibidem, p. 155.
[29] Ibidem, p. 170.

Figure 1. Possible standpoints concerning the unity of mysticism within different religions

Essentialism Es	Reference EsR	Egalitarian EsRE	Theological EsRE-T		Ramakrishna
			Philosophical EsRE-F		Hick
		Degree EsRD	Theological EsRD-T		Heim
			Philosophical EsRD-F		?
	Connotation EsC	Material EsCM	Theological EsCM-T		?
			Philosophical EsCM-F		James, Bergson, Guénon
		Formal EsCF	Theological EsCF-T		?
			Philosophical EsCF-F		Rowe, Carmody
Empiricism Em	Over-religious EmO	Simple EmOS	Reference EmOSR	Theological EmOSR-T	?
				Philosophical EmOSR-F	Cobb
			Connotation EmOSC	Theological EmOSC-T	?
				Philosophical EmOSC-F	Jung
		Phenomenological EmOF	Theological EmOF-T		?
			Philosophical EmOF-F		Otto, Smith
	Religious EmR	Egalitarian EmRE	Theological EmRE-T		Ibn al'Arabi
			Philosophical EmRE-F		Scholem
		Degree EmRD	Theological EmRD-T		Lonergan
			Philosophical EmRD-F		?

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