

Introduction

What is madness? What is mysticism? Are these two questions linked in some way? Who decides? These will be the important questions this essay attempts to address.

To a modern audience living in this age of unprecedented technological advances, with thick lengthy 'objective' and 'scientific' knowledge on 'mental illness', the question of madness should be easily answerable. Certainly there will be borderline problems – where does one illness end and another begin? At what point do we insist on compulsory medication or hospitalization? But these are not philosophical problems. The psychiatrist, needle in hand and armed with years of text book reading and personal 'experience' within this contemporary system has little use for philosophical speculation. The term 'madness' has been outdated – no longer politically correct and potentially insensitive – she injects the drug into the 'client'. This client may have lost his right not to be medicated. This right, like the right to not be detained (hospitalized), is not decided in a court by a jury nor a judge but, at least initially, is left to the psychiatrist to decide. We give criminals a court of appeal. Clients can be medicated and hospitalized on the spot. This uncomplicated procedure is a case of addressing the issue of 'mental illness'. Just as our body can suffer physical illness - the doctor explains 'objectively' then so too can our brains suffer illness, that is, mental illness. The term 'madness' has been replaced with 'chemical imbalance'. Potentially all problems of imbalance can be addressed with the appropriate technological substance, or drug, to re-balance these chemicals in the brain. To the ordinary psychiatrist there is no question as to what is madness, there is only a problem of correctly 'identifying' the particular strain of mental illness and fixing it with the drug that works best with the client.

But to some of us this is not good enough.

To some of us, the subject of insanity is full of metaphysical, moral and mysterious question marks. To some of us hearing the voice of God, seeing visions of Angels, or the intense experience of an overwhelming and intoxicating feeling of love cannot be quickly reduced and politely explained away as symptoms of mental illness which need to be treated with medicinal substances. This respect and longing for the spiritual, moreover, is not limited to the religious. Many atheistic and agnostic secular humanists likewise find value in what the psychiatric text books label pathological.

Many of us drink deeply from verses of inspired 'revelations' - works which are celebrated as containing Ultimate Truths recorded from the sights, hearings and feelings of prophets and seers – not the sickly and deluded. Why is it that many voluntarily bow down in sincere devotion at the feet of the 'enlightened', while others are avoided, derided, or even hospitalized when they claim similar powers and experiences? This question is not easily answered. It has concerned thinkers and stimulated thought from the beginning of recorded history and even today, in a world of pills and labels, it remains a subject of fascination for deep and thoughtful minds. So what is madness? And what is mysticism? Against the strict textbook analysis, which fails to offer a distinction between either, we must search elsewhere

This thesis is *not* a complete history of ideas arrived at in a chronological order from ancient times to the present. Rather it is an exploration of different schools of ideas, chosen as they provide fascinating insight into our topic and problematize popular shallow notions. The Ancient Greeks may have lived over two and a half thousand years ago, yet their ideas on the nature of truth retain their validity even into the modern age in spite of revolutionary advances in science and technology. Furthermore, if one is to class madness as a retreat from reality we must have some idea on what reality actually consists of. But as far back as the Pre-Socratic's, the first recognized philosophers in the

western tradition, notions of reality have proven to be problematic.

The second chapter deals with Plato, and at some length. It is difficult to underestimate the importance of this thinker, particularly when it comes to the subjects of madness and mysticism.

Plato's influence on Christianity in Western culture was immense and we will be examining some favoured mystics of the Church to record what they have to say about mysticism and its possible relation to madness. Following this we will briefly examine some Eastern thought.

Next, we leap into the period of modernity. Most of our thinkers fit in or around this period which I have chosen on account of its richness in insight and radical re-evaluation of what it means to be a human (including the aspects of madness and mysticism). This essay will explore the thought of Wittgenstein, Otto, Underhill, Nietzsche, Freud, Jung, Kierkegaard, Sartre, Bataille, Artaud, and slightly more modern thinkers including Maslow, Winnicott, Becker, John Schumaker, R.D. Laing, Cohen, Huxley, Zaehner, Murdoch, Tuan and Simone Weil.

Now the question may well be asked - why these thinkers and not others? A case could be made for including Daoism, Gnosticism or any other religion. I must confess to a certain partiality in the choice of these thinkers and traditions. There is much here that is challenging, creative and insightful and while it is difficult to say exactly what unites these disparate voices - we might point to a certain courage. Whether it be the bravery of Socrates, the stinging fly, or the existential heroics of Sartre, or even the courage of faith and duty exhibited by saints east and west, all of our chosen figures exhibit the tendency of being honest with themselves, passionate about uncovering truth and courageous enough to publish their views without concern for their personal well-being.

Now the terms mysticism and madness are vague concepts which can cover various ideas. Included in the wide array of theories posited in this essay, mysticism has been considered to be a method on inquiry, contemplation of truth, psychic balance, the notion of the good, psychic health, social impacts, love, obsession and fear. Also, just as there is much diversity in ideas on mysticism, so too is their diversity on the subject of madness. We will examine these ideas of psychic imbalance, lack of social integration, failure to be loved, obsession, inflation, a lack of creativity and an absence of courage. We also wish to explore what Plato termed 'madness as a blessing' and whether there is a possible relationship between madness and mysticism.

Chapter 1: Ancient Greek Philosophy

One of the interesting facts about the topics of mysticism and madness is that they have both been subjects of fascination throughout all times and all cultures. From the more 'primitive' religions to the most sophisticated of contemporary thought, human beings have always considered the idea that outside of our own limited sensory perceptions lies an unseen world - an Ultimate Reality. Furthermore, so much of what we consider to be important in our lives depends on this idea. Do we perceive the real world? Is it possible that some can but most don't? What are we to make of those unusual individuals who claim that the Real lies outside our sensory experience and can only be reached by transcending our selves and our cultural prison? These mystics – what can we make of them? Are they the mad ones? What are we to make of their claims that most of us, most of the time, live a life of fiction and that the world we comprehend through our senses is illusory? This may strike everyday people with their useful commonsense as something bizarre; crazy even. Is it not, rather, these 'mystics' who have lost their sense of reality? Who is correct? For this answer we must be able to give an answer to the question of what is reality? And what is insanity or madness?

From the beginning of Western Philosophy itself all the way up until today, these important philosophical questions have been of interest throughout history and have inspired cultures wherever they are found. Nevertheless it has been suggested that Western Philosophy approaches these questions differently in that they utilize the tool of reason as a means of thinking as opposed to fanciful speculation or unsupportable dogmatism. To some, the advent of Western Philosophy marked the beginning of reason over fancy. The Pre-Socratic philosophers are, on this view, the first to utilize reason in contemplating the truth of existence, including its mystical and mad aspects. When it comes to mysticism and madness it is difficult to define them. In fact, because of this difficulty I will not be

defining either. Instead I will focus on what is *meant* when people write of 'the mystical' and 'the mad' and in chapter three I will propose a Wittgensteinian approach to this subject. For now let me just repeat that discourses on, and ideas about, the 'mystical' and the 'mad' have been with us for some time.

The questions may well be worth asking – what is a mystic? And what is a mad person? These questions are, to repeat, difficult to define but we might loosely suggest that a mystic is concerned with experiencing or embracing Ultimate Reality while madness entails being 'out of one's mind' or 'losing touch with reality'. However, if we are to adopt this suggestion then we must first be able to answer the question what is reality? The Pre-Socratic philosophers, held with their religious and poetic contemporaries, a belief that mysterious forces play their part in the world and not everything is visible or accessible to our ordinary states of consciousness and/or, our sensory experiences. We cannot see with our eyes, or feel with our touch the proposal that water is the material cause of all things. However, the fact that our senses are not reliable when it comes to Absolute Truth need not mean we give free reign to our fancy and proclaim all forms of nonsense. Instead, these early speculators asserted that we should utilize the faculty of reason and with this tool we should try to make sense of our awesome existence in a logical and coherent manner. Thus what most of us, most of the time, regard as 'the real world' is really an illusion – or at least this seems to be the position offered by many of the Ancient Greek thinkers.

But is this at all possible? It is one thing to suggest that the words of the poets cannot be relied upon when it comes to Absolute Truth and another to suggest that Reason alone can bring us this certainty so many of us seem to crave. Interestingly when we examine some of the Pre-Socratics themselves, we find that although all claimed to have relied purely on the tool of reason, they were led to very different conclusions. Thales claimed that the earth floats on water and water is the material cause of all things (Burnet, 1930: 47-48). Anaximander believed life was formed by the war between

opposites, an 'injustice' (Burnet 1930: 57). Anaximanes taught that it was the element of air 'that pervaded the world' (Burnet 1930: 73). Heraclitus held that fire was the primary substance of existence (Burnet 1930: 134). All of these celebrated thinkers, and more, claimed to have been experts in reasoning yet they were all led to different conclusions. Are we to believe that only one, or even none of them, properly utilized the tool which they claimed was the foundation of their proposals? How else can we account for their differences of opinion unless we suggest that reason, in itself, cannot deliver us the truth when it comes to these deep metaphysical issues? This is the conclusion reached by those philosophers who are known as sceptics.

Now it seems that both the Ancient poets and philosophers held that Absolute Truth could not be apprehended through our senses alone. The poets held that through the process of inspiration by the muses, the truth about gods, the natural world and the human condition could be made sense of. However the early philosophers, which we mentioned above, questioned this idea arguing that the truth of existence could only be made sense of by utilizing the tool of reason. What does this suggest about our knowledge of Absolute Reality? Well we could suggest that there is an Absolute Truth only it is inaccessible to us. This is the position offered by Xenophanes. He claimed:

There never was nor will be a man who has certain knowledge about the gods and about all the things I spoke of. Even if he should chance to say the complete truth, yet he himself knows not that it is so. But all may have their *fancy* (my italics) (Burnet 1930: 121)

I have underlined the word 'fancy' because it is important. The claim of the early Pre-Socratics (prior to Xenophanes) was that reason, alone and supported, could unravel the mysteries of existence. This faculty of reason, it was likewise held, triumphed over the fancy of the poetry and mythology the

ordinary Greek held to be the truth. Enter courageous Xenophanes, father of scepticism, brazenly rejecting the divine powers of reason and instead claiming that even reason itself was but one more road to fancy. Perhaps one of the significant ideas of Xenophanes was that since we can never really know the truth we should instead engage in humility and find consolation from this instead of attempting to capture the answers to unanswerable philosophical speculations.

Xenophanes may well have been one of the first to preach against projectionist desires and the errors of anthropomorphism – he insightfully noted:

If Oxen had hands, and could paint with their hands, and produce works of art as men do, horses would paint the forms of the gods like horses, and oxen like oxen, and make their bodies in the image of their several kinds (Burnet 1930: 119).

Xenophanes, like Socrates after him, preached the good and when it came to the good, according to Xenophanes, 'to give reverence to the gods is ever good' (Burnet 1930: 117). Xenophanes, an early monotheist, taught that there was 'one god, the greatest among gods and men, neither in form like unto mortals nor in thought' (Burnet 1930: 119). This idea seems to refute the scepticism Xenophanes' earlier passage suggested and maybe it is not really possible to be a complete sceptic all of the time – or at least it may be very difficult to be so. In place of the desire for an unknowable truth one may instead subscribe to social convention – a pragmatic approach wherein one can get on with one's neighbours and live a reasonable sort of life without ever experiencing Ultimate Truth. 'There is an epistemological moral here,' notes one respected Ancient Greek scholar, 'our beliefs – or many of them – are explicable in terms of our own circumstances; they do not, therefore amount to knowledge' (Barnes 1979: 142). Xenophanes was wise enough to realize how much our knowledge depends upon our experiences and how our bodily make-up influences our understanding and why, therefore, it

cannot give us certain knowledge.

However Xenophanes was more than just a sceptic, he was also a stern moralist and in a way we could interpret him as being a precursor to Plato's Socrates. Wisdom and goodness are not to be gained from idle speculation. Instead one should engage in humility. Knowing that the author of the universe can never be reached by reason alone, and our reason itself is but a part of our idiosyncratic natures and limited understanding. Xenophanes, like Socrates, instead pointed to a moral aspect in the pursuit of knowledge, or wisdom. Practices of piety and goodness – it is these qualities that lead to wise understanding – not isolated and idle reason acting within an amoral vacuum. The importance of ethical practices, combined with the focus on humility, will be found in some of the most revered later mystical texts. While Xenophanes was not really a mystic, some of his ideas can be found throughout mystical texts particularly his attack on anthropomorphic beliefs, his disgust with materialism and egotism and his insistence that the nature of the deity was something wholly other whose presence transcended the materialistic gratification of selfish desires.

Now it may seem that all avenues have been exhausted before we have really begun. Is it the case that Truth can be experienced via the senses, divine inspiration (fantasy/imagination) or by reason? The only other avenue that seems to be left is that of scepticism – that we simply cannot experience Ultimate Reality at all. This attitude was best expressed by Protagoras when he wrote:

As to the gods, I have no means of knowing either that they exist or that they do not exist. For many are the obstacles that impede knowledge, both the obscurity of the question and the shortness of human life (Smith, 1956: 60).

So is this all that can be said? Well there may be one way of escape. Perhaps we might speak of a sort

of 'mystical feeling' which is not irrational and arises from a spiritual relationship the mystic has with the world around her. Perhaps this is the intuition arrived at by Xenophanes. If this is the case then something must be said on the nature of the mystic and the world she inhabits. The ancient Greek thinker Demokritus went so far as to suggest that our knowledge of things depends upon 'the condition of our body and of the [influences] that reach and impinge on it' (Smith, 1956: 40). The idea that all of our beliefs and behaviour are dependent upon both our body and our culture, as we shall find, saturate modern thought and lends itself readily to the theory that through affecting changes in one's own makeup, one can become aware of, or in touch with, a mode of understanding which transcends that of the ordinary being and her ignorant consciousness in her ordinary everyday life. Now different cultures champion different ways of achieving this, drug usage and meditation, for instance may invoke the mystical as indeed any practice which involves sensory deprivation and sensory bombardment. There is, however, a tradition which may date back to Heraclitus and was possibly influenced, to some extent, by Xenophanes, where the creation of a permanent change of the individual is believed to be possible and this involves both reason and the cultivation of a higher morality or purification of the psyche.

Heraclitus

Now in some ways Heraclitus may not appear to be a traditional moralist. Nevertheless he would influence the thoughts of the first recognized empirical psychologist, Alkmaoin, as well as more modern psychologists like Nietzsche and Jung with his insight. Heraclitus held that 'most men are unable to understand what they are doing when awake, even as they forget what they do in sleep' (Burnet 1930: 133). That is – people are really unconscious of what they do and the path of philosophy necessarily must involve a cultivation of self-awareness and self-discipline.

Heraclitus held importance in the moral conduct of individuals when it came to the truth and he

suggested vice and moral corruption were responsible for an ignorant outlook on the world. Heraclitus found ugly pride even among the best of people who choose 'immortal glory among mortals' (Burnet 1930: 140). To Heraclitus, madness is but the extreme of this ignorant vanity and pride. He passionately railed against religions that promoted 'unholy mysteries' and he held in contempt those who 'vainly purify themselves by defiling themselves with blood, just as if one who stepped in the mud were to wash his feet in mud. Any man who marked him doing thus, would deem him mad' (Burnet 1930: 140). Heraclitus, then, is highly important to our question of what is madness for he is the first Greek to provide a theory in this area. His words suggest that he held madness to be the product of ignorant minds hell bent on vain pleasure seeking. Also, to repeat, Heraclitus held that the mad, like the vain, were *unconscious* of their behaviour. He taught the binary nature of existence, how opposites attract and how wisdom consisted of the 'attunement of opposite tensions, like that of the bow and the lyre' (Burnet 1930: 136). The wise soul realizes 'what is at variance agrees with itself' (Burnet 1930: 136). The mad soul, then, is unconscious, unbalanced and out of tune. There is something mystical about this idea of the binary nature of existence and the idea of the union of opposites. This idea, found in Eastern thought, is likewise recognized by modern western psychologists. It seems to rely less on the faculty of reason rather than intuition and feeling and in this way is often characteristic of mystical discourse itself. Similar to the idea of the Taoist symbol of Yin and Yang, it has relevance not only to the idea of cosmic balance but includes the individual psyche as well, it being like a reflection of the cosmos. Or, to phrase it differently – the individual psyche is like a reflection of the Divine. Attunement of the self, then, is the reconciliation of differences such as reason and the emotions, body and soul and the feminine and masculine. This idea, found in both the ancient east and west, would influence the romantic tradition as well as thinkers like Nietzsche and Jung. The latter's concept of 'Individuation', or the highest level of awareness human beings can possibly achieve, is very much grounded in the idea of integrating the parts of the self into a harmonious whole.

Orphicism and The Pythagoreans

The work of Heraclitus and Alkmaion expressed the idea that unity is health, but it is also truth. In other words they meant that inner psychic balance is also mystical reality. It follows, then, that mystical awareness has more to do with attunement than it does with isolated reason. This will become central to the thought of Plato and indeed the entire Platonic and Neo-Platonic tradition. First, however, the theme would be made explicit in the Pre-Socratic school of Orphicism and the mysterious religion of the Pythagoreans.

When it comes to Orphicism the movement from 'what is the nature of existence', to, 'how does the nature of existence affect the human condition' is completed. Or to put it differently; philosophy became more concerned with Ontology than it did with Metaphysics. Existence was felt, by these schools, to be essentially tragic and this *feeling* had less to do with reason than it did with immediate experience and intuition. Like Buddhists, these Pre-Socratics aimed to move beyond the sorrowfulness of life by escaping from the "wheel of birth" in which many sought 'to secure release' from 'by purity and abstinence' (Burnet 1930: 200). Thus it is up to human beings to develop a harmonious relationship within (the psyche) and without (nature or the environment). By uniting itself with love rather than leading a life of disharmony and ignorance, one lives life in tune with the Divine as opposed to succumbing to the cycle of sorrow, ignorance and madness. This theory of Orphicism was developed and extended by the Pythagoreans.

The mystical teachings of Pythagoras involved the idea that human beings could be united with the Divine by both cleansing the soul of its impurities and maintaining a balance within and without. Divine harmony could be apprehended by the indisputable truth of mathematics, the indescribable beauty of music and the indefatigable pursuit of purity and abstinence.

Another trait emerges from our brief examination of the Pre-Socratics, that being, courageous thinking and outspokenness. Initially this took the form of radical new ideas on the nature of the universe which flew in the face of the popular notions inspired by the fancy of the poets. Like Pre-Socratic's, like Xenophanes, Heraclitus and Pythagoras, took a passionate interest in rethinking spiritual and moral practices. This policy of bold reflection and outspokenness would find its fullest expression in the figure of Plato's Socrates.

Chapter 2 - Plato

When it comes to wisdom few figures emerge more majestically on the Western Philosophical stage than that of virtuous Socrates. With his benevolent teasing manner; his insatiable quest for wisdom and perfection, combined with a rarely matched power of argument, wit, morals, mental penetration, to say nothing of his heroic courage, Socrates was far more than just a thinker. Rather he stands as one of the great heroic religious leaders and saints this world has ever produced. As a historical figure he has been given life mainly through the loving worship of his greatest pupil Plato and there is evidence to suggest that Plato's Socrates may be, to a more or less extent, an idealized figure; attempting to find the 'true' Socrates (if indeed this is at all possible) is beyond the scope of this paper. We are, here, only concerned with Plato's literary construction of his beloved master.

One of the changes which Plato's Socrates brought about in Greek thinking was a withdrawal from thinking about the material make-up of the universe. Socrates taught that we as human beings should not be concerned with what we cannot know, but only with what we can - namely our own nature and how we can improve it. His quest was not just for the truth, but also for the good and this was thus a highly moral quest. In *The Republic* we learn that virtue involves 'simplicity' (Plato 1987: 108). In *The Philebus* Socrates explicitly teaches that we must learn to know ourselves and from that we will learn what is good or bad for our being. If we are discerning and wise, Plato proposes, we are left with an ascetic ideal, brought about by the realization that our bodily desires are 'maddening pleasures' which are destructive. In their place, Plato urges 'health and self restraint' (Plato 1968: 253). This leads to a separation of body and soul. Plato's view on the nature of the soul changed over time but one teaching remained constant - his belief that the soul was immortal and resembled God, unlike the body which lives in a constant state of flux, can easily be corrupted with its bestial desires and must eventually die. Thus Plato championed the purity of soul over that of the impure and mortal

body. Socrates explains in *The Symposium* one should ‘set a higher value on the beauty of the souls than on that of the body’ (Plato 1968: 306). The joys of the soul are celebrated while the excessive pleasure of the body is condemned, for, as he writes in *The Phaedo* ‘... the body fills us with loves and desires and fears and all sorts of fancies and a great deal of nonsense ... wars and revolutions and battles are due simply and solely to the body and its desires’ (Plato 1969: 111). This teaching would become extraordinarily influential in Western thought.

The good life, as Plato asserts and reasserts throughout his work, consists of four virtues - ‘courage, restraint, justice and wisdom’ (Plato 1970: 525). The most important aspect of Plato’s and his representation of Socrates’ morality is that you are not here for your own amusement but rather:

... you exist for the sake of the universe. Every doctor, you see, and every skilled craftsman always works for the sake of some end-product as a whole; he handles his materials so that they will give the best results in general, and makes the parts contribute to the good of the whole, not vice versa (Plato 1970: 437).

Plato, like Heraclitus and others, held an elitist position that philosophy was only for the few for in the wrong hands it could lead to ‘appalling harm’ (Plato 1987: 290). Plato's Socrates warns against teaching the young philosophy for it could easily lead to inflation. ‘You must have noticed,’ he writes, ‘how young men, after their first taste of argument, are always contradicting people just for the fun of it’ (Plato 1987: 291). Thus philosophy in the hands of the misguided or those who lack virtue, ceases to be a tool for wisdom but instead becomes a dangerous weapon. Philosophy, for Plato, is much more than just knowledge like science or mathematics; instead it should involve a strong moral and disciplined element which is difficult to achieve. Indeed we might even make a suggestion that this is Plato's distinction between genuine philosophy, which is concerned with the Truth, and that of

sophistry, which is concerned with self-empowerment. As we have seen Plato had his precursors and as we shall see we likewise find these ideas throughout the history of mystical discourse into contemporary times. Like the Pythagoreans, Plato held that true knowledge entailed the essential element of virtue. Plato writes explicitly in *The Phaedo* ‘in fact, it is wisdom that makes possible courage and self-control and integrity or, in a word, true goodness’ (Plato 1969: 115). This moral aspect will be very important to our understanding of mystical discourse.

Like many of the ancient philosophers, Plato disparaged the senses as being misleading when it came to contemplating True Knowledge. In *The Phaedo* Socrates claimed ‘that we neither hear nor see anything accurately’ and moreover when the soul ‘tries to investigate anything with the help of the body, it is obviously led astray’ (Plato 1969: 109). Truth, in this dialogue, can only be reached by ‘pure and unadulterated thought’ (Plato 1969: 110), which is the faculty of the immortal soul. Further, in *The Laws* Plato wrote, ‘reason is the supreme power among the heavenly bodies’ (Plato 1970: 525). Indeed Plato held that ‘the philosopher's occupation consists precisely in the freeing, and separation of soul from body’ (Plato 1969: 113). Like the Pythagoreans, Plato held philosophy to be a form of ‘purification’ (Plato 1969: 112). The philosopher, during his life, attempts to do what naturally happens at death – a separation of soul from body and thus ‘true philosophers make dying their profession’ (Plato 1969: 113). When the soul investigates without the body:

.... It passes into the realm of the pure and everlasting and immortal and changeless; and being of a kindred nature, when it is once independent and free from interference, consorts with it always and strays no longer, but remains in the realm of the absolute, constant and invariable, through contact with beings of a similar nature. And this condition of the soul we call wisdom (Plato 1969: 131).

Because of the soul's immortality and ability to think purely the 'soul resembles the divine, and body the mortal' (Plato 1969: 131). Or, in other words, the soul is championed over the misleading and maddening nature of the body. For Plato's Socrates, both vice and ignorance stemmed from the same cause; the body and its sensual and carnal obsessions. In fact it is possible that Plato conceived of the 'unconscious' nearly two and a half thousand years prior to Freud. In *The Republic* he wrote of 'unnecessary pleasures and desires' (Plato 1987: 330) which are present in 'our fierce bestial nature' (Plato 1987: 331). Plato claimed that, 'even in the outwardly most respectable of us there is a terribly bestial and immoral type of desire, which manifests itself particularly in dreams' (Plato 1987: 331). Plato even recognized, like Freud, that madness has its origins in what the latter dubbed 'the unconscious'. Comments Plato, 'under the tyranny of the master passion he becomes in his waking life what he was once only occasionally in his dreams, and there's nothing, no taboo, no murder, however terrible, from which he will shrink' (Plato 1987: 334). To repeat, Plato held that these drives and obsessions came from the perishable body and are thus 'due to our feelings and unhealthy cravings' (Plato 1987: 155). To the contrary, a good person must necessarily overcome this aspect of his or her nature with 'self-mastery and order' (Plato 1987: 161).

Instead of sliding into unconscious self-indulgence where we are at the mercy of irrational forces, Plato's Socrates, instead, challenged persons to a conscious, rigorous and rational self-examination. This recognition of our true selves, Socrates suggested, would lead to a knowledge of the gods and therefore to wisdom and virtue; for we will be able to recognize what we lack and thus begin to cultivate it. On the other hand, Plato importantly claimed that those who remain unconscious and ignorant of the Gods will never 'be able to offer a reasoned account of happiness or misery in life' (Plato 1970: 440).

After examining Plato's proposal that the soul and the body should be separated, for the former

leads to reason and wisdom, while the latter leads to ignorance and sickness, we might be inclined into taking the intuitive leap of holding that madness is caused by bodily obsession leading to ignorance; a suggestion we have found prior to Platonism. This is both true and untrue. In fact, Plato's theory on madness is complex and highly interesting. If we look at the character of Socrates himself, with his inner demonic voice and his lapses into what today psychiatrists would 'recognize' as catatonia, unwashed bare-footed Socrates in spite of his power of reason, does seem to be a somewhat 'mad' character. Even in his own time he was held up by the comic-poet Aristophanes as a figure of ridicule due to his eccentricity. In fact, at times in Plato's work he admits to being mad (whether this be honestly or ironic one can never be certain). In *The Phaedrus*, Socrates admits that he was arguing like a madman when it came to the dialogue on love, for, 'love was a kind of madness' (Plato 1973: 80) and Socrates was in love with wisdom. So how can Plato, with his limitless admiration for the power of reason be reconciled with Socrates' madness, the madness of love? Well, he manages this dividing madness into two types, 'one arising from human disease, the other when heaven sets us free from established convention' (Plato 1979: 80). This he calls madness as a 'blessing' (Plato 1979: 46). Plato is suggesting that it is possible to free ourselves from our own culture and even our bodily makeup. This somewhat controversial claim is both interesting and important and, as we shall find, it is poetically represented in his famous myth of the cave, found in *The Republic*. We shall explore this later.

When madness is a human disease it is born out of ignorance and/or bodily corruption which, as we have seen, is the opposite of wisdom. In *The Republic* Plato suggests that wisdom is developed by self mastery which draws upon the power of reason. Thus it follows that ignorance involves a lack of reason, a lack of self-restraint, or some sort of combination of both. In fact, Plato suggests that madness could involve an excess of virtue. For instance, in *The Statesman*, a stranger arrives in Athens and is pleased to help educate a young Socrates. The stranger proposes that an excess of courage

without proper self-restraint, 'in the end blossoms forth in utter madness' (Plato 1968: 329). Madness, then, involves a deficiency of character - a lack of self-restraint. But the stranger's idea also seems to echo the ideas found earlier in Heraclitus and the Pythagoreans of madness being caused by imbalance.

Why, whatsoever is sharper than the occasion warrants, or seems to be too quick or too hard, is called violent or mad, and whatever is too heavy or slow or gentle, is called cowardly and sluggish; and almost always we find that the restraint of one class of qualities and the courage of the opposite class, like two parties arrayed in hostility to each other, do not mix with each other in the actions that are concerned with such qualities (Plato 1968: 324).

The stranger instead asserted that both classes should mix and that both can profit by learning the qualities the other possesses. To the stranger, as was the case with some of the Pre-Socratics, wisdom involves an 'attunement' or balance. What is good for someone is her opposite. In the case of the courageous soul, she needs her opposite, self-restraint and of course, vice versa.

In the introduction to *The Republic* (1987), we are exposed to an idea that sits easily with what we have already encountered - Plato's asceticism. The great playwright Sophocles is mentioned on the subject of sex and whether he can still, at an advanced age, make love to a woman. Not only is it likely that Sophocles is impotent, but furthermore, instead of him leaping for some sort of primitive Viagra, he counts his impotence as a blessing. He is now free from 'a lot of mad masters'. The message of the sermon is obvious - lusting for bodily gratification leads to madness. It might even be said that bodily desire is itself a form of madness. Later on, when it comes time for Socrates to dissect and condemn imperfect societies, he is unequivocal in his attack on liberty. Freedom leads to 'complete license' and this in turn leads to 'a master passion' of bodily desire (Plato 1987: 332).

Then the master passion runs wild and takes madness into its service; any opinions or desires with a decent reputation and any feelings of shame still left are killed or thrown out, until all discipline is swept away, and madness usurps its place (Plato 1987: 332).

This passage reflects the twin devils Plato holds responsible for madness as a disease - excess of bodily desire and an absence of self-control. But when it comes to what is believed to be Plato's last work *The Laws*, we find a more compassionate view of those who suffer this 'disease'. He explained that 'there are several kinds of madness, brought on by several causes' (Plato 1970: 482). While he didn't delve into the causes he did hint at what today we would recognize as a biological factor, 'an unfortunate natural irritability', which he claims is 'made worse by poor discipline' (Plato 1970: 482). Nevertheless, the mad are banned from Plato's utopia, like that of our own society up until recently and even to some extent today. Plato writes, 'Lunatics must not be allowed to appear in public; their relations must keep them in custody in private houses by whatever means they can improvise' (Plato 1970: 482). Plato's reason for this has to do with efficiency and is consistent with his views on the sick and the aged. Everybody has a job to do and if someone cannot do this job, for whatever reason, there is no place for them inside the ideal Republic. Our modern society does not seem to have this ideal as a dominating factor. We look after the old with pensions and support, so too those with disabilities. But we still lock up the 'mad' – why? Plato's *Laws* provide a genuine reason for this, to do with what he calls 'abuse'. *The Laws* ban abuse and defamatory remarks on the grounds that they involve 'primitive savagery' which is uncivilized and un-conducive to peaceful relations. Importantly, this is the reason the 'mad' are banned from society. But surely anyone who has had dealings with what today we call 'mental illness' will be aware that there are many people locked up in hospital who do not defame and abuse others. So what justification is given for this practice? This ethical issue is something we will look at later but it is worth asking the question now, would Socrates, today, unwashed like a derelict,

with his inner voices and spasms of catatonia be something very different from the spiritual and moral crusader of ancient Athens he was taken to be in his own time? Would Socrates be locked up in hospital until he was deemed healthy? Is this so very different from giving him the death sentence? Would Socrates, the 'stinging fly', the disrupter of society and its values, flourish in the modern western world or would he be medicated to the extent of having his 'mad' voice silenced?

We have seen that the wise and virtuous Socrates is not immune from symptoms that today are recognized as pathological. We have also mentioned Plato's differentiation between madness as a human disease and madness as a blessing. In *Phaedrus* Plato writes 'If it were true without qualification that madness is an evil, that would all be very well, but in fact madness, provided it comes as the gift of heaven, is the channel by which we receive the greatest blessings' (Plato 1973: 46). Plato goes on to detail four types of divine madness explaining that the highest form is akin to that of mystical experience. In both *Phaedrus* and *The Symposium*, love is understood as being a sort of madness which in its highest form leads to wisdom. Diotima, a female philosopher whom Socrates credits with great wisdom, explains that the lovers of wisdom 'are in love with what is immortal' (Plato 1968: 304).

When it came to *The Republic* Plato developed a complex theory, known as the theory of forms, which has repercussions for both wisdom and truth. We will examine this shortly. For now let us just note that behind what we perceive with our senses lies the heavenly forms - the perfect image of all things. In his famous discussion on what is known as the myth of the cave, found in *The Republic* (1987). Socrates explains:

I want you to ... picture the enlightenment or ignorance of our human condition somewhat as follows. Imagine an underground chamber like a cave with a long

entrance open to the daylight and as wide as the cave. In this chamber are men who have been prisoners there since they were children, their legs and necks being so fastened that they can only look straight ahead of them, and cannot turn their heads. Some way off, behind and higher up, a fire is burning, and between the fire and the prisoners and above them runs a road, in front of which a curtain-wall has been built, like the screen at puppet shows between the operators and their audience, above which they show their puppets (Plato 1987: 256).

Because of our ignorant senses we ‘believe that the shadows of the objects we mentioned were the whole truth’ (Plato 1987: 257). The path of the lover of wisdom is to find the perfect heaven and the true reality which exists outside of this puppet show. Plato noted:

... the final thing to be perceived in the intelligible region, and perceived only with difficulty, is the form of the good; once seen, it is inferred to be responsible for whatever is right and valuable in anything, producing in the visible region light and the source of light, and being in the intelligible region itself controlling source of truth and intelligence. And anyone who is going to act rationally either in public or private life must have sight of it (Plato 1987: 260).

This sight of the real in the region of light - this transcending of false puppet shows - leads the seeker of wisdom into the realm of the forms and is, in fact, a kind of mystical experience. But how does it relate to madness? Well firstly, we learn from the same source *The Republic* that most of us live in a deceptive world or what Plato, as we have seen, metaphorically refers to as being ‘like a cave’ (Plato 1987: 256). But the man who catches a glimpse of the truth behind the puppet show would no longer be able to take the mirage seriously and would instead ‘be likely to make a fool of himself’ (Plato

1987: 259). Even more dramatically, the ignorant who have never emerged from the cave ‘would kill him if they could lay hands on him’ (Plato 1987: 259). This gives us a clue as to the differentiation Plato makes between madness as ‘disease’ and madness as ‘divine’. The former involves an excess of ignorance (the disease is a larger manifestation of ignorance than that found in ordinary people) while the latter involves Ultimate Truth, something which transcends the understanding of the ordinary ignorant. This is enlarged upon in *Phaedrus*: ‘Because he (the ‘mad’ mystic) stands apart from the common objects of human ambition and applies himself to the divine, he is reproached by most men for being out of his wits; they do not realize that he is in fact possessed by a god’ and because of this divine experience, ‘he fixes his gaze on the heights to the neglect of things below’ (Plato 1973: 55-56). Furthermore, because of this, they, the initiated, ‘are beside themselves and lose all control, but do not realize what is happening to them because of the dimness of their perceptions’ (Plato 1973: 56). Their experience fills them with ‘dread’ and ‘if he were not afraid of being thought an utter madman, he would sacrifice to his beloved as to the image of a divinity’ (Plato 1973: 57). In addition, ‘in his frenzy he cannot sleep at night or remain still by day, but his longing drives him wherever he thinks that he may see the possessor of beauty’ (Plato 1973: 58).

The philosopher as lover of wisdom, then, experiences the divine in a mystical experience which resembles that of a lover or that of a madman. When Socrates speaks of this phenomena as madness what he means is that one becomes inspired by the divinity which is distinctly different from that other madness – madness as a disease. This latter madness involves being possessed by bodily and carnal obsessions. Now we should note an important change in Plato's thinking from the earlier Socratic dialogues to that of *The Republic* when it came to inspiration and possession by the Gods. In *Ion* and *Meno* Socrates suggests that the wisdom of poetry and the practice of virtue, in fact, has nothing to do with reason at all but instead is brought about by divine inspiration and this is good. However we must note an important point made in *Meno* which may have repercussions for a later

Plato. In this dialogue he notes a subtle distinction between the virtue of True Knowledge and that of correct opinion. While in practice they both may have the same results in that a good person will appear the same regardless of how he becomes so, Plato suggests that the former does so by pure thought, whereas the latter is inspired by a God. In *Meno* Plato suggests that inspiration (correct opinion) is somewhat inferior to the position arrived at via the discipline of reason – True Knowledge. We will examine the importance of this distinction later. For now let us acknowledge that Plato's view on inspiration changed between the period of these early dialogues and that of *The Republic*. What remained constant, however, was his insistence that inspiration, or possession by a God, could not properly be said to be a form of Knowledge. In *Ion*, Socrates questions a young and boastful rhapsode (Ion) who claims to be 'able to speak about Homer better than any man' (Plato 1953: 103). Through Socrates' method, his dialectic, it emerges that Homer nor any poet can truly be said to have True Knowledge of what they write of for each art belongs to the specialist of that field (we find the same argument repeated in *The Republic*). Thus the charioteer and the physician are the ones who truly understand the art of charioteering and medicine, respectively, and not the poet who who composes poems about them. For, as Socrates explains, 'every art is appointed by God to have knowledge of a certain work; for that which we know by the art of the pilot we shall not succeed in knowing also by the art of medicine' (Plato 1953: 111). Socrates, utilizing his method, forces Ion to admit that Homer really knows nothing about what he writes of, for this knowledge is known only by those whose trade it is. However, Ion in a desperate attempt to rescue his hero from the truth of Socratic insight, abandons all reason and instead passionately announces that Homer has a profound knowledge of war, and Ion as his interpreter, would make a fine army General if he was ever given the opportunity. Socrates, being a wise man, makes a few ironic remarks and lets the self-proclaimed great man Ion go, probably realizing that he hasn't the honesty of self-insight, nor the discipline, to follow pure thought to its logical conclusion. What is important is that here, although Socrates finds inspiration (or what he terms correct opinion) to be inferior to that of True Knowledge, he nevertheless has a genuine respect for

both. The difference between them is that True Knowledge is a science which can be learned by following the principles of reason, whereas inspiration is a divine possession; a blessing bestowed on the subject by the gods (or God) when she is out of her wits and has thus lost her reason. Socrates says:

... all good poets, epic as well as lyric, compose their beautiful poems not by art, but because they are inspired and possessed. And as the Corybantian revellers when they dance are not in their right mind, so the lyric poets are not in their right mind when they are composing their beautiful strains: but when falling under the power of music and metre they are inspired and possessed (Plato 1953: 107-108).

This, then, is madness as a blessing. Socrates continues:

.... the poet is a light and winged and holy thing, and there is no invention in him until he has been inspired and is out of his senses, and reason is no longer with him; no man, while he retains this faculty, has the oracular gift of poetry (Plato 1953: 108).

To repeat, in this dialogue while Socrates finds this inspiration of the poets to be inferior to that led by reason and resulting in True Knowledge he nonetheless finds it to be useful, important and advantageous to society. For, after all, 'God himself is the speaker, and through them he is addressing us' (Plato 1953: 108).

Like *Ion*, *Meno* is a dialogue about True Knowledge and inspiration with the difference that the latter has to do with the element of virtue. In the latter dialogue *The Republic* Socrates goes into detail on how virtue can be taught, whereas in the former he doubts whether it can be taught at all. In fact he goes even further, and although we should be on our guard against his irony, he tells Meno, 'I confess

with shame that I know literally nothing about virtue' (Plato 1953: 265). Socrates does admit that he finds that some people have virtue but as he contemplates all those good men who have spent so much time, energy and money in educating their own children, he wonders if virtue can be taught at all. He found so many men of virtue, full of resources, who spare no expenses or time in educating their children in the arts, in riding horses, in throwing javelin and yet fail to teach them virtue (Plato 1953: 294). To repeat, this differs dramatically from the Socrates of *The Republic* who not only deduces what virtue is but also explains how it can be taught (Plato 1987: 265-286). In *Meno* 'virtue cannot be taught' and 'there are no teachers of virtue to be found anywhere' (Plato 1953: 296). Virtue can be found but it comes, like poetry, via the gift of inspiration – madness as a blessing. This possession of virtue, then, to repeat, is not really Knowledge, but rather, 'true opinion' and 'true opinion is as good a guide to correct action as knowledge' (Plato 1953: 297). Again divine inspiration is praised as being good. Now it is unclear in this book, whether one can access real knowledge of virtue but there is the suggestion that if real knowledge exists it must be superior to that of the maddening inspiration of 'true opinion'. Why? Well real knowledge can be 'fastened by a chain' unlike true opinions for 'while they abide with us they are beautiful and fruitful of nothing but good, but they run away out of the human soul, and do not care to remain long, and therefore they are not of much value until they are fastened by a reasoned understanding of causes (Plato 1953: 298). To repeat, the virtues when they come to us like poetry and not by reasoned argument, (which in this dialogue seems to be the majority of cases if not all) cannot be accepted as Genuine Knowledge. Rather these blessed individuals 'say many things truly when they are inspired, but they know not what they say' (Plato 1953: 300).

Now Plato famously banned poetry from his ideal *Republic* - the question we must ask is why? If Socrates found poetry to be the work of God then how could he outlaw it? He has several reasons but one is a highly moral charge which has to do with its 'terrible power to corrupt even the best characters, with very few exceptions' (Plato 1987: 374). The problem with poetry is, since it inspires us

and thus leaves us without reason, it can mean that we can be 'carried away by our feelings' (Plato 1987: 374). Poetry, then, is much more than just the works of gods but is also made up of our unconscious and corporeal desires. Plato notes:

... the poet gratifies and indulges the instinctive desires of a part of us, which we forcibly restrain in our private misfortunes, with its hunger for tears and for an uninhibited indulgence in grief (Plato 1987: 374).

Furthermore:

... poetry has the same effect on us when it represents sex and anger, and the other desires and feelings of pleasure and pain which accompany all our actions. It waters them when they ought to be left to wither, and makes them control us when we ought, in the interests of our greater welfare and happiness, to control them (Plato 1987: 375).

In other words poetry can affect both our higher and our lower nature and it is here wherein Plato makes his important distinction between that of the soul and that of the body. In *The Symposium* Socrates refers to the wisdom of Diotima who suggests that love and wisdom could begin with love of 'one particular body' but if it is to aspire to real knowledge, the lover must pass to find 'beauty in form' by becoming 'a lover of all beautiful bodies'. But the final step involves finding the beauty of soul. Now because the soul's beauty is immortal and is closest to God, while the body is finite and therefore corrupt, the true philosopher must then 'set a higher value on the beauty of souls than of that of the body' (Plato 1968: 306). Finally she must 'contemplate the beautiful as appearing in our observances and our laws, and to behold it all bound together in kinship and to estimate the body's beauty as a slight affair' (Plato 1968: 306). Now the lesson is obvious; the lover who cannot transcend bodily desire and

is driven mad by his obsession is ignorant for he lusts for temporary sensual gratification. However, the lover of soul, the lover of wisdom, is in love with what is immortal and perfect. That is, she is in love with the True as opposed to the deceptive. Now, unfortunately, because poetry affects both our soul and our bodily elements, this is one reason it is banned from the Republic. This problem is complicated by the fact that our lesser bestial side may not even recognize the Higher Truth revealed by poetry – especially when we are young and inexperienced. Plato comments on the poets that:

whether their intention is allegorical or not, children cannot distinguish between what is allegory and what isn't, and opinions formed at that age are usually difficult to eradicate or change (Plato 1987: 74).

Now this important observation of Plato's is relevant to the way so many later mystical texts have been interpreted. Some have found the metaphors and allegories of spiritual works to be filled with the sensual and erotic – the product and desire of our corporeal nature (like Freud and Bataille for example). However this interpretation may say more about the interpreter than the interpretation. Instead of it being food for the soul, in the hands of the ill-disciplined, ignorant and/or indulgent, it becomes a disease of the body – a weakness and a corruption.

Plato has a further reason, apart from this moral consideration, for the banning of poetry from *The Republic* and this has to do with his notion of Truth. In Part Ten of *The Republic* Socrates equates Ultimate Reality with his original ideas on the forms. His basic idea is that there is an ideal form of everything in the world which was created by god and everything we see in this world is a reflection of this. However, this is not all. It is also possible that what we experience is not only a copy of the form but a copy of a copy which, because of this, must be both inferior to both the form and the copy. This complex theory requires some explanation.

To begin, Plato uses the example of the ideal bed which 'exists in nature' and 'was made by god' (Plato 1987: 362). Now 'the bed the carpenter makes is a shadowy thing compared to reality' (Plato 1987: 362). This is also known as the form of the bed. Although the carpenter's bed is inferior to the heavenly, or form of the bed; it is, however, superior to an artistic representation. This is because 'the artist's representation stands at third remove from reality' (Plato 1987: 363). Now because the artist does not copy the real bed (the form of the bed), but rather from a 'superficial appearance' then 'the art of representation is therefore a long way removed from truth' and the artist copies 'without understanding' the craft she assigns herself to. This craft has its dangers as the artist may deceive others, especially 'children or simple people' into believing it to be the truth (Plato 1987: 364).

This second consideration of Plato's, then, has to do with the notion of Truth. When it comes to poetry the poets 'representations' are 'at the third remove from reality, and easy to produce without any knowledge of the truth because they are appearances and not realities' (Plato 1987: 365). Furthermore 'if he [the artist] really knew about the things he represented, he would devote himself to them and not to their representations' (Plato 1987: 365). This means that 'we *have* a right to cross-question Homer when he tries to deal with matters of such supreme importance as military strategy, political administration and human education' (Plato 1987: 365).

Now important to our topic is the idea that philosophy is somehow superior to poetry when it comes to transcendental knowledge. Plato writes of the importance of reason, but seems to equate it with more than just thinking and elevates it as a divine force for subduing our lower natures. In short he suggests Truth has a moral element. We shall find that the true philosopher, who cultivates reason and self control, directly experiences Divine Truth outside of the puppet show whereas the poet, who is often at the mercy of his or her lower nature, is guilty of perpetuating ignorant and unhealthy fictions.

After discussing poetry and its relationship with truth Socrates concludes 'we may assume, then, that all the poets from Homer downwards have no grasp of truth but merely produce a superficial likeness on any subject they treat, including human excellence' (Plato 1987: 367). The poet persuades others he has knowledge by his 'poetic colouring' and the natural 'magic of poetry' (Plato 1987: 367). Since s/he does not have this knowledge of the forms (the ideal heavenly world) it follows that the poet 'has neither knowledge nor correct opinion about the goodness or badness of the things he represents' (Plato 1987: 367). The artist does not know what 'is good or bad' and consequently 'what he will represent will be anything that appeals to the taste of the ignorant multitude' (Plato 1987: 369).

Socrates continues his theme of goodness and truth and the existence of our lower nature (both in ourselves and society at large) which must continually be controlled by 'reason and principle' as well as 'restraint'. Socrates advises:

... we must learn not to hold our hurts and waste our time crying, like children who've bumped themselves, but to train our mind to cure our ills and rectify our lapses as soon as it can, banishing sorrow by healing it (Plato 1987: 373).

According to Plato, due to a combination of populism and the difficulty in representing 'the reasonable element and its unvarying calm' (Plato 1987: 373), he suggests that the evils of poetry are more than just due to their 'low degree of truth' but also affect and excite the 'low element in the mind' (Plato 1987: 373). The poet, then, is banned from the ideal Republic because 'he awakens and encourages and strengthens the lower elements in the mind to the detriment of reason' and 'produces a .. bad state of affairs in the mind of the individual, by encouraging the unreasoning part of it, which cannot distinguish greater and less but thinks the same things are now large and now small, and by creating images far removed from the truth' (Plato 1987: 373-374). Now we have already examined Plato's

ethical argument against poetry but let us quickly repeat it here. Socrates goes on to claim that 'the greatest charge against poetry still remains. It has a terrible power to corrupt even the best characters' (Plato 1987: 374). This is because '... the poet gratifies and indulges the instinctive desires of a part of us, which we forcibly restrain in our private misfortunes, with its hunger for tears and for an uninhibited indulgence in grief' (Plato 1987: 374). Furthermore when it comes to our 'desires and feelings of pleasure', poetry and art, 'waters them when they ought to be left to wither, and makes them control us when we ought, in the interests of our own greater welfare and happiness, to control them' (Plato 1987: 375).

To return to our main theme; the difference between madness as a 'disease' and madness as a 'blessing' is acute. While both are out of their minds, the former are shut up as prisoners of their bestial bodies and victims of 'primitive savagery', living their lives ignorant of Ultimate Reality and the heavenly forms. Instead they experience, through poetry and artistry, a reality three times removed from truth. Furthermore, even if they were to utter truth, or behave morally, this would be an accident of divine possession and not something arrived at via the aids of reason and restraint. To the contrary, when it comes to the witnesses of truth - the divine mystics – a necessary cultivation of one's higher nature is necessary for virtue, truth and divine wisdom. They are still, in a way, mad and may appear the same to the ordinary ignorant who have no appreciation of this distinctive difference. Yet their 'madness' is, in fact all to the good; whereas to the diseased, it is all bad; a constraining bondage to bodily desire - a complete lack of restraint or control with no cultivation of our higher nature. This enormous gulf of difference between the two forms of madness which Plato recognized so many years ago – has it, in any way survived in the modern theatre of thought? We will examine this later.

We have witnessed, that to Plato, mysticism can be a form of madness as divine inspiration – possession of a god. However, when it comes to higher truth the mystic must have cultivated reason

and developed the practices of a strong ethical and moral commitment. If we were to compare Plato's theories on mystical truth between the periods of *Meno* and *Ion*, with that of *The Republic* it would look something like this. It is possible for anyone to become possessed by god (or the gods) and utter divine truth but they themselves have no real understanding of what they utter (this resembles the theory of Xenophanes). Thus they may utter something completely untrue and dangerous to society at large. Furthermore, if they not be strong morally and partakers in reason, their words may well excite the lower, or bestial, side of our nature. To the contrary, the true mystic is likewise possessed by a god but because she has carefully developed restraint and virtue, our higher nature, she is, therefore, a witness to Ultimate Truth. For to Plato, Ultimate Reality is good, beautiful and true and while some unrestrained lower member of society may have some glimpse of it – the genuine mystic fastens it with reason. This must be contrasted with his theory of madness as disease. This, we have suggested, is due to extremity of passion, vanity, imbalance and may have a possible biological foundation – mostly it is a product of our lower natures. In fact, apart from the true philosopher which we find in *The Republic*, who can realize true knowledge by following the principles of reason, we are all according to Socrates, at times, perhaps mostly, out of our minds. In fact the true self-realized philosopher, if he can ever be found, must be a rarity in his utilization of the tool of reason and his cultivation of self-mastery (at least in an ordinary sick society). For everyone else, the charge of madness cannot easily be evaded. Is this all we need say on the topic of madness and mysticism?

Actually, we might add that even if mystical experience is generated through the utility of reason, it must transcend reason itself since it is an experience which absorbs the entire self, including the emotional side. In spite of Plato's attack on our suspicious *feelings* the divine must be an intense experience even if it be guided by reason and ascetic practices, for it is everywhere reported as something which affects the soul so profoundly that it shatters our everyday experiences to their very core. The Ancient Greek scholar T.V. Smith, suggests that the true Platonic philosopher has a 'half-

logical, half-mystical bent' and while the study of wisdom must involve reason, in reality mystical experience involves the 'pursuit of beauty on higher and higher levels, until, as in a sudden flash, its ultimate and all rewarding essence is revealed' (Smith 1968: 264).

To Plato, 'man was a partaker of a divine portion' (Plato 1968: 366) and soul is a 'prime mover' that 'does not come into being' and therefore must be 'indestructible' and is 'uncreated and immortal' (Plato 1973: 49). Because soul is immortal it must have learned much before this life and therefore learning is really 'simply the recollection of the things which our soul once perceived when it took its journey with a god' (Plato 1973: 55). Ignorance, which is spawned from vanity and excessive desire, leads us away from reunion with God; whereas, the utilization of reason, self mastery and contemplation of the divine forms leads one 'into the pure mystic vision,' where 'a man can become perfect in the true sense of the word' (Plato 1973: 55). The pure philosopher, then, recollects the 'beatific vision' when:

Whole were we who celebrated that festival, unspotted by all the evils which awaited us in time to come. And whole and unspotted and changeless and serene were the objects revealed to us in the light of that mystic vision. Pure was the light and pure were we from the pollution of the walking sepulchre which we call a body, to which we are bound like an oyster to its shell (Plato 1973: 56-57).

In summary, the mystical experience of *The Republic* involves a recollection of the journey we made with god, when we were pure without body, prior to being flung into the 'sepulchre'. It can be reached by utilizing reason, the development of self-mastery and contemplating the forms which are immortal, beautiful, and true. In earlier Socratic dialogues mysticism is described as coming to us as a mad blessing bestowed upon us by God (or the gods). Plato, however, finds this to be inferior as it involves

a loss of all reason – a condition of being 'out of one's mind'. Because of this it can only be temporary as opposed to the permanence a cultivation of our higher nature, virtue, and reason can offer. Without this self-mastery, inspiration is most likely to affect us all to the bad and gratify our lower and corporeal nature. This is what Plato refers to as madness as a disease.

Chapter 3: Mysticism – Ancient and Modern

As we have seen, from the beginning of Western Philosophy the question of the true nature of existence has entertained the most brilliant and celebrated thinkers throughout recorded thought. The early Pre-Socratics held that Ultimate Reality cannot be apprehended by the senses alone but could only be understood by utilizing the faculty of reason. The sceptics went further and claimed that Ultimate Reality cannot be reached by mere reason either. Plato's Socrates', in *The Republic*, famously drew a picture of truth and ignorance in what is known as the Myth of the Cave. The idea was that we are all born into an environment of illusion, passed off as truth and exceedingly difficult to escape from. Plato claims that it is like a puppet show. According to Plato the true philosopher is one who transcends this fiction. This is the mystical element in Greek thought – the idea of being able to truly apprehend the mysteriousness of Ultimate Truth. When it comes to the mad aspect, some of the Ancient Greeks, including Plato, suggest that bodily desire and the seeking for personal glory can lead to insanity. Also, both Plato and other ancient thinkers, held that imbalance can also lead to madness. For some of the more mystically minded of the Ancient Greeks there appears to be a strong ethical and moral component to the contemplation of Truth - a belief that goodness is a strong factor in cultivating wisdom, or True Knowledge. This was contrasted with the element of vice which could, in fact, lead to madness. Two of the more important themes which will concern us throughout this next section will be the idea that the actual character of the contemplative could, according to some, be crucial to mystical awareness. This means that the true mystic must be humble, selfless and virtuous. She also must cultivate a reverence for goodness and beauty. Not all share in this belief and this will also need to be addressed – does mysticism necessarily entail a strong ethical component? Does the seeker of truth need have a strong commitment to social justice or to be a highly moral individual? Are truth and morality in some way interwoven as Plato suggested?

The other important aspect of Plato's – the metaphor of the cave – even today, in terms of its ideas, continues to guide our ideas on the nature of truth and illusion. Is it really the case that most of us live in the cave of illusion? Does this mean that the majority of us cave dwellers are really mad? Further, is Plato correct in his optimism that we truly can leave our crazy illusions and escape from the cave into an Ultimate Truth which is both good and beautiful? Also, is society in some way responsible for our illusions and our shared madness? Is it possible to have a society which is more in tune with the truth? Or is it really the case that due to our blind and bestial natures only the exceptional can ever truly escape our condition? Furthermore if God truly is the divine author of these occurrences does it then make any difference what the social environment consists of? These questions cannot be answered easily. For now let us turn to more contemporary times and see what light more modern authors have thrown on this fascinating subject.

To begin with we should ask the question, what is mysticism? William James in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* lists four characteristics which he holds encapsulate the mystical experience. 'Ineffability', the first mark, suggests that the experience cannot be properly explained (James 1957: 371). The 'noetic quality' means that the subject experiences what she feels to be the Ultimate Truth, or in James' Language, 'truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect' (James 1957: 371). James goes on to explain that the last two characteristics are 'less sharply marked, but are usually found'. These are 'transiency' and 'passivity'. The former characteristic means the experience normally lasts but a short burst of time and the latter suggests that it is a submissive experience of being acted upon by the cosmos itself (James 1957: 372).

However, because mystical experience is said to be ineffable it is very difficult to actually define it, or as Owen explains, mysticism is 'a many sided word' and 'no definition of it is satisfactory'

(Owen 1982: 148). Yet, just as we can recognize and talk about 'madness' we can likewise communicate 'the mystical' without recourse to an all embracing definition. When we speak of madness and mysticism we may communicate our ideas as if they were a 'picture' of our topic, thus removing our need to plunge into a war of definitions. This important idea was suggested by Wittgenstein in his *Philosophical Investigations* (1984). Wittgenstein suggested that we examine what he called the different 'language games' we find in the world. Against the conservative idea of finding an essence via the aid of definitions, Wittgenstein asked, 'what is common to them all? ... look and see ... you will not see something that is common to them all, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that. To repeat don't think, but look' (Wittgenstein 1984: ss 66).

Let us accept Wittgenstein's advice, then, and take a 'picture' of mystical discourse by looking at six exhibits, noting both differences and also similarities.

(1) Plotinus writes about the highest spiritual experience of persons to be that of being filled with, 'wonderment and a delicious trouble, longing and love, and a trembling that is all delight ... this longing to break away from the body and live sunken within the veritable self' (Plotinus 1952: 23).

(2) Richard Rolle writes:

Those people can ... be called 'rapt' who are wholly and completely wrapped up in their saviour's will: they deserve to rise to the highest contemplation. They are enlightened by the uncreated wisdom and deserve to feel the warmth of that Light by whose beauty they have been seduced (Rolle 1991: 56).

(3) In the *Svetasuartra Upanishad* we read, 'when a man knows God he is free from all

bondage. He is the creator of all, everliving in the mystery of his creation. He is beyond beginning and end, and in his glory all things are one' (Mascaro 1965: 94).

(4) The Romantic Poets seem to write about similar things. Wordsworth, in the poem 'Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey' from *Lyrical Ballads* wrote of :

... that blessed mood,
 In which the burthen of the mystery
 In which the heavy and the weary weight
 Of all this intelligible world
 Is lighten'd: - that serene and blessed mood,
 In which the affections gently lead us on,
 Until, the breath of this corporeal frame,
 And even the motion of our human blood
 Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
 In body, and become a living soul:
 While with an eye made quiet by the power
 Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
 We see into the life of things (Coleridge and Wordsworth 1969: 113).

(5) Could we also include the poet Artaud, the troubled rebellious French poet of the early part of the last century who spent nine years in a mental asylum? Along with juggling Platonic ideas like the idea of the forms and that of illusion and reality, Artaud also considered the 'void', a concept found in many mystical texts. He differs in his experience of the void, while it is usually experienced as bliss, it is herein Artaud finds a cause for suffering. He writes in his poem, 'The New Revelations of Being':

For a long time now I have felt the Void, but have refused to throw myself into the Void.

I have been as cowardly as all that I see.

When I believed I was refusing the world, I know now I was refusing the Void.

For I know that this world does not exist, and I know how and why it does not exist.

My sufferings until now consisted in refusing the Void.

The Void that was already in me.

I know there has been a wish to enlighten me by the Void and I have refused to let myself be enlightened.

If I was made into a pyre, it was intended to cure me of being in this world.

And the world took from me all I had.

I struggled in my attempt to exist, in my attempt to consent to the forms (all the forms) with which the delirious illusion of being in the world has clothed reality.

I no longer wish to be a Believer in Illusions.

Dead to the world; dead to that which is for everyone else the world, fallen at last, fallen, uplifted in this void that I once refused, I have a body that submits to the world, and disgorges reality (Artaud 1965: 85).

(6) Finally, can the existential hero of Sartre's *Nausea* be a kind of mystic? There seems to be something mystical when he writes:

... existence had suddenly unveiled itself ... the diversity of things, their individuality, was only an appearance, a veneer. This veneer had melted, leaving soft, monstrous masses, in

disorder – naked with a frightening, obscene nakedness (Sartre 1965: 183).

Some of the recurring themes of mysticism involve the belief in an uncovering or an unearthing of a truth which is inaccessible to our senses, and some claim, our reason as well. One of the criticisms directed against reason and logic is that so many of our experiences are not reducible to the propositions of logic. Rather these *feelings* contain our full embodied consciousness, that is; our emotional wants, needs, fears and desires. So much of our experience of life is neither logical, nor illogical – it transcends that of pure reason. Wittgenstein wrote of this in his *Philosophical Investigations* (1984). We are born into a culture where we are taught from within a conventional framework that we can never really break out of. Nevertheless the mystical may very well involve a highly natural 'feeling'; a change of consciousness which one experiences in the depth of her being. The idea of the 'subconscious' or the 'unconscious' faculty wherein one experiences spiritual truth will be discussed later. For now, let us merely repeat the idea that discussion of mysticism is somewhat difficult owing to the problem of ineffability and the differences of 'language games' in different cultures. One way we may be able to access the mystical is by looking at the character of the mystic – are there types of persons who are more in tune with the mystical? Also, what about the actual content of the experiences which seem to differ depending on the culture which is its home? For example, a Buddhist is not likely to experience the crucified Christ, yet cross culturally we find this idea of the 'feeling' of reaching Ultimate Understanding. Does it, then, make sense to focus on the actual *feelings* of the subject, rather than on the intellectual content of the experience? This was the approach made by Otto and to some extent, James as well, who likewise held that mystical experience was a universal phenomenon. James accounts for the differences in discourse as due to 'a great variety in the thoughts that have prevailed there'. However, he believes that, 'the feelings on the other hand and the conduct on the other are almost always 'the same'. James asserts that 'you must look to the feelings and the conduct as being the more constant elements' (James 1967: 494). Like Otto and James, the nineteenth

century Christian thinker Feuerbach, also found in the feelings the very force which leads us to God, for, to Feuerbach, '... feeling is the noblest, the most excellent, i.e., the divine in man' (Feuerbach 1957: 9). Furthermore, 'God is pure, unlimited, free feeling' (Feuerbach 1957: 10-11). As God's creation, human beings, including their bodies, are intrinsically good and 'to deny man is to deny religion' (Feuerbach 1957: 44). Nor do we need to look outside of ourselves to experience the divine – that is we need not cultivate paranormal or supernatural ideas to explain the divine for 'Love is God himself' (Feuerbach 1957: 48). Feuerbach is even critical of those who seek to 'remove God far from nature' (Feuerbach 1957: 90). Both Otto and Wittgenstein shared this idea that spiritual experience is natural and we need not, then, search for supernatural explanations. Let us next turn to these important thinkers.

Chapter 4: Mystical Feeling - Otto and Wittgenstein

Rudolph Otto, championed the idea that mystical experience is essentially the same regardless of where it appears. He claimed that mystical experience does not 'depend on authority, teaching, ecclesiastical tradition, the scriptures, the miracles, or historical authority, but on a particular principle in a man's inner self' (Otto 1931: 33-34).

Now Otto need not deny the claim that the content of mystical experience differs depending on where it is found. The Christian may have an encounter with the crucified Christ or the Hindu an experience of Brahman. What Otto contributes to this fascinating subject is a belief that the emotional content, one's *feelings*, remain consistent in all experiences in all cultures at all times.

This idea of *feeling* is crucial to our understanding of Otto for he asserts that we are creatures of spiritual feeling, not merely creatures of reason. This spiritual tendency, however, is 'differentiated' according to national and individual character (Otto 1931: 61). The essential and universal criteria for spiritual experience, according to Otto, is what he calls 'Ahnung':

... an idea which has ever and again made itself felt with immediate force, especially in religion, in sentiment and obscure conception ("Ahnung"), and has captured the human mind with its mysterious spell. Vividly present in the immediate feeling, it has come to full expression in the profoundest and most emotionally effective poetry, mythology, and eschatology. From it derives the arresting force which every simple and natural person finds in the most crude notions of the "end of the world", of "heaven" and the day of judgment, of the "Twilight of the Gods" and "last things"; for they all are the temporal-spatial elaboration and disguise of this "Idea", and through feeling we become aware of

the *Truth* hidden within them, to which the spirit in the heart “within us” bears witness (Otto 1931: 82).

What Otto is proposing is that there is a universal disposition which arises out of a universal *feeling* at the mystery of life. This is something Wittgenstein may have very well agreed with. Perhaps it is worth examining some of what Wittgenstein has to write about the mystical.

The young Wittgenstein at the end of his *Tractatus* wrote, 'It is not *how* things are in the world that is mystical; but that it exists' (Wittgenstein 1961: 6.44). In other words it is natural to have a mystical awareness, and this awareness doesn't stem from some after-worldly fancy, but rather the existence of the world itself is enough to fill us with this mystical *feeling*. D. W. Winnicott, also held that the natural everyday world in itself was the scene for experiencing the mystical. Wittgenstein claimed, 'to view the world *sub specie aeterni* is to view it as a whole – a limited whole. *Feeling* the world as a limited whole – it is this that is mystical (my italics) (Wittgenstein 1961: 6.45).

Like Otto, Wittgenstein writes about the 'feeling' which comes upon persons when they behold the majesty and beauty of the world as it is. Wittgenstein continues by speaking of the ineffability this feeling has upon one, 'there are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They *make themselves manifest*. They are what is mystical' (Wittgenstein 1961: 6.5). But at this stage of his career, Wittgenstein as positivist concluded 'what we cannot speak about we must consign to silence' (Wittgenstein 1961: 151).

The later Wittgenstein would move on to develop ideas of 'language games' and 'forms of life' and break out of the chains that his earlier positivism had enslaved him in. In the *Philosophical Investigations* we find a new thinker who is ready, and even eager, to tackle religion, culture, morality

and more. In the interim, between these books, Wittgenstein delivered his celebrated 'Lecture on Ethics' in which he considered the relationship between ethics, religion and the feelings of the mystical. Wittgenstein claimed that there existed a strong relationship not only between the mystical and the religious, but also with the ethical as well. That is, he stressed an ethical or moral component to mysticism. This idea we not only found in Plato but in other thinkers as well and will be of prime importance when we examine the relationship between mysticism and madness. However, for now let us return to Wittgenstein's lecture. In this lecture Wittgenstein spoke of the 'feeling of wonder' and the feeling of being 'absolutely safe' (Wittgenstein 1929: 4). Now these feelings he recognized as religious feelings and when it came to the limitations of positivist philosophy, they were, in the end 'nonsense' (Wittgenstein 1929: 4). That is, as positivist knowledge, they made no sense. Wittgenstein always had a respect for mystical feelings, as we discovered in his *Tractatus*, but in terms of logic, at this period of his thinking, Wittgenstein concluded that these feelings involved a misuse of language and went on to claim that the 'misuse of our language runs through all ethical and religious experiences' (Wittgenstein 1929: 5). Importantly Wittgenstein, in this essay, drew a distinction between the scientific and the religious way of understanding existence. He wrote, 'the scientific way of looking at a fact is not the way to look at it as a miracle' (Wittgenstein 1929: 6). He added that the man who experiences the feeling of 'wonder', has 'the experience of seeing the world as a miracle' (Wittgenstein 1929: 6). In the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein wrote about having to consign to silence all talk of the mystical. This is most likely due to the problem of the ineffability of mystical experience. Just as in the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein here felt uncomfortable with the idea that philosophy had anything meaningful to say claiming that 'all we can say about the absolute miraculous remains nonsense'. For to speak of 'ethics' or 'religion' is to 'run against the boundaries of language' (Wittgenstein 1929: 6).

Like Wittgenstein, Otto wrote about the idea of mystery as being the major component to mystical awareness. He wrote:

... religion itself is an experience of mystery ... the sensible mystery of all existence in Time as a whole – eternal reality breaking through the veil of temporal existence to the unlocked heart, there is the truth which underlies all “mystical” excess and imagination; here is the seat of the mystical element in all religion (Otto 1931: 93).

Again, like Wittgenstein, Otto argued that the scientific and the religious ways of looking at things are completely different. Yet both 'forms of life', Wittgenstein claims in his *Philosophical Investigations*, can be rational and make sense from within their culture. Science can answer facts but cannot touch the world of *feeling or wonder*. Otto wrote of, 'the general feeling of the unfathomable depth and mystery of existence, which in spite of the most exhaustible explanation and comprehension of Nature by law and cause, asserts itself unchanged, the same as ever' (Otto 1931: 137). Furthermore, science can teach us nothing when it comes to the realm of Beauty. Plotinus wrote about mystical experience as involving 'awe and rejoicing', as well as an appreciation of the 'spirit of beauty' (Plotinus 1952: 23). For Otto, in this realm, 'understanding is utterly powerless; there *Feeling* is the sole dictator' (my italics) (Otto 1931: 174). There is a difference between the facts of science and the truth of religion. The spiritual person needs not the proofs of logicians for 'the foundation of truth for man is the life of God within him' (Otto 1931: 220). This awareness, once more, 'comes to life in Feeling' (Otto 1931: 229). Now Otto and Wittgenstein are not alone in their belief that there exists different types of truth, or language games. Inge wrote, 'faith must be allowed to speak its own language, which is not the language of science' (Inge 1947: 80). Inge suggested that the language of 'myth' must be considered as both important and truthful. 'Myth', claimed Inge, 'is the poetry of religion, and poetry, not science, is the natural language of religion' (Inge 1947: 100). This is because, 'spiritual truths cannot be adequately set forth in the language of science, nor established by logic' (Inge 1947: 112). He wants us to consider the possibility that the mystical and religious may 'be at least as real as the world described

by science' (Inge: 1947: 112). The Ancient Greek scholar B. Jowett (1953) claimed that Plato, himself, developed ideas and concepts which went beyond pure reason. Instead Jowett claimed that Plato wrote 'parables, prophecies, myths, symbols, revelations, aspirations after an unknown world', transcended mere reason and instead his ideas, derive their origin from a deep religious and contemplative *feeling*' (my italics)(1953: 259) .

Now Otto developed his ideas on the *feelings* and asserted that mystical awareness 'cannot be taught, it can only be evoked, awakened in the mind; as everything that comes 'of the spirit' must be awakened' (Otto 1936: 12). Otto may well have shared the Socratic position suggested in *The Symposium, Ion* and *Meno*, that love, poetry and ethics, respectively, are all inspired by God. He seemed to have had a profound respect for the mystery of existence and this can be seen most clearly in his conceptualization of the '*Mysterium Tremendum*'. Mystical experience, to Otto, arises in coming into contact with the 'wholly other', where one encounters a being which leaves us with a feeling of 'blank wonder' and 'astonishment' (Otto 1936: 26).

We might ask the question, what does any of this add to our subject? Well, firstly, it looks as if Ultimate Truth, like many of the Ancient Greeks claimed, can not be reached by the senses alone, nor by reason, alone, either. But while the Pre-Socratic sceptics claimed that true knowledge could never be reached at all by human beings, Otto and Wittgenstein suggested that spiritual truth could be experienced, even if it remained ineffable, but it was to be felt and encountered through one's *feelings*, not through disembodied reason or logic. To Otto, it was through one's inner being that the mystery of existence was to be apprehended. Likewise, to Wittgenstein, the feelings of wonder and awe dwell within the souls of those rare beings who are capable of genuine mystical awareness. However, we may well ask what does the work of these two celebrated thinkers have for the subject of madness?

Now many of the mentally ill or the clinically mad are people of deep feeling and we often find many of them deeply interested in spiritual matters and often frequently claim to have experiences at least similar to those reported from within religious discourse. To return to the question posed at the beginning of this thesis – why is it that some are credited, or even worshiped as partakers in the divine mysteries, while others are compulsorily hospitalized and medicated even against their own wishes? Otto and Wittgenstein point out a possible beginning when it comes to mystical awareness but there are questions we may wish to ask them. Firstly, would drug use effectively quicken our feelings of wonder and awe? Or, is a psychotic episode the same thing as a mystical experience? What is the relationship between drugs and madness when it comes to mysticism? We will examine this issue when we come to the work of Cohen, Huxley and Zaehner. For now let us but note what these thinkers who wrote prior to the psychedelic movement thought on the issue. It is uncertain what Otto would say, but Wittgenstein, showing in the pure manner in which he lived his life, makes it seem unlikely that he would believe drug usage could be equated with genuine spirituality. Wittgenstein was famous for his ideas of *showing* rather than thinking and himself lived a virtuous and ascetic existence while remaining within a secular community. It is this aspect of virtue which we should consider when it comes to the issue of madness. In his *Lecture on Ethics* Wittgenstein suggested a possible relationship between religion, mysticism and ethics and found that all three were, in a very real sense, interwoven. The ethical commitment of his philosophy may well have importance to our subject of madness and mysticism. What value would a drug addict or a psychotic have for a society even if she claimed to have had a divine experience? Celebrated mystics like St. Francis of Assisi, St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross lived exemplary lives filled with the virtues of courage, humility, charity as well as moral purity. How different, then, is this state of affairs with the confused schizophrenic, paranoid and distrustful, awkward, ego-centric and unable to look after herself let alone contribute meaningfully to a society? Do we have here a clear way of distinguishing between the mad from the genuinely mystical?

Chapter 5: Does Mysticism have a purpose?

In the last chapter we suggested that Wittgenstein with his experience of the mystery of existence, his courage and humility, his rejection of wealth and glory, might be considered a modern mystic. But how do we decide this? It is important to note that some thinkers would not be happy with applying the word 'mystical' to atheists or agnostics. For them, mysticism is a god-centred activity and must transcend that of the non-religious regardless of how virtuous they are. On this view, mysticism is initiated by God to tie himself or herself more closely with the subject and in doing so, to society at large – a sort of 'proof' of God's love and compassion. It is interesting that this school was very much inspired by Neo-Platonism and thus we are once again faced with the idea of 'possession of a god' – only now it becomes possession by *the* God. We might dub this the 'supernatural' explanation. On the other hand, the mainly modern position seems to hold the mystical as entirely 'natural'. Thus it is held that the purpose of mysticism is to inspire and prepare the subject for the altruistic service of others – a biological perspective. Now this need not mean that the former (the supernatural) view holds no belief in charity and service; but rather this charity and service begins and ends with God. To serve others is engaged in as part of the service to God.

However many modern thinkers criticize this God-centric ideology. Some twentieth century secular humanist thinkers held that mysticism was a 'natural' phenomenon, that it was beneficial to society at large and that it could be reached by the many (as opposed to the elitist beliefs of earlier periods) and need not depend on God at all. Often we are faced with an apparent agnosticism; God may or may not exist, this cannot be proven either way, however what is important is the effect spiritual experience has on both the individual and the society she lives in. Abraham Maslow, for instance, when it comes to the experience of the mystical claims that 'these experiences are quite naturalistic' (Maslow 1976: 60). Thus, they need not be thought of as supernatural or paranormal but

do in fact grow out of nature; they have a biological function. They arise out of being 'mature and evolved' and being, 'fully human' (Maslow 1976: 60). The distinction, then, between madness and mysticism must rest on how useful these persons are to society. The 'mad' are the sick – the unfortunate beings alienated and possibly hospitalized. The self-actualizers, on the other hand, are the healthy and are granted transcendental experience as a gift from nature to themselves which they in turn will offer as a gift to the world around them. Maslow distinguishes between the sick schizophrenic who is paralysed by his experiences and the productive, inspired experiences of the self-actualizer.

It is interesting to compare these views with the Pre-Socratic's Xenophanes, Heraclitus and Pythagoras who all seemed to hold the idea that the mystical is about wholeness – a psychic balance brought about by virtue and self-discipline. This seems to be something quite different to the notion of Inspiration (possession by a god) and being out of one's senses. Indeed Heraclitus even warned about practices which encouraged this experience, believing it to be a form of madness. Nevertheless the modern authors we have mentioned are not identical to these past masters and may well have been influenced by the early 20th century writer, Evelyn Underhill and her suggestion that a genuine mystic moves beyond the experiences of her own mind and engages in important work in the world around her. Thus, unlike earlier thinkers, Underhill added social justice to the attributes of a genuine mystic. On this view, a true mystic is not only courageous in thought and action, honest and ethical in their dealings, but also committed to making the world a better place through selfless service to others. An authentic mystic, according to Underhill, then, must be sharply separated from both the apathetic and the ill. For her, mysticism is something substantially different from both a mere experience of an altered state of consciousness, and/or, an attunement of the self. Instead, to repeat, she held that the occurrence must have some value to society at large if it is to be considered genuine. On this subject she wrote of the mystics:

... their vivid first-hand experience urges them to a total consecration to the service to God and of men. In them the life of prayer informs the life action: their contemplation of Reality makes all they do more real (Underhill 1975: 12).

We may contrast the genuine mystic, then, with the sick, lethargic and the self-centred on the grounds of this selfless service to others. The genuine mystic demonstrates 'an astonishing access of energy and endurance, a power of dealing with persons and events far beyond the self's "natural" capacities (Underhill 1975: 27). One of the important themes of her book is to show just how outstanding these mystics are when it comes to charity, love, humility and service to others. Underhill is at pains to stress that the extraordinary works of these religious geniuses is not only far beyond the contributions of the sick and insane, but also outside of the ordinarily sane as well. It is this she points to as proof of the authenticity of their experience.

As examples of the health, vitality and social improvements made by the genuine mystics we may mention a few which Underhill lists in her book *Mystics of the Church* (1975). She praises Richard Rolle for his 'strong, sane and well-nourished spirituality' and his 'robust and practical moral sense' (Underhill 1975: 118). Walter Hilton is credited with 'a deep, wide, tender, yet delicately discriminative mind' (Underhill 1975: 124). He is likewise credited with condemning a 'spirituality which neglects practical tasks – care of children, servants, tenants and the poor – in order to luxuriate in contemplation: calling it bluntly, as St. Augustine had done, "tending God's head and neglecting His feet" (Underhill 1975: 126). She goes on to contend that 'common sense ... is always a mark of the real mystic' (Underhill 1975: 127).

Underhill was eager to mention some of the important contributions women of the church have made throughout history. She writes of St. Catherine of Sienna that she was so filled with love and

empathy for her fellow human beings that she had the ability to 'read their hearts, turned them from evil, trained them in the spiritual life, and herself did penance for their sins. The power of human character has seldom been more strikingly exhibited' (Underhill 1975: 155). St. Catherine was, apparently, so full of the divine that 'during the last years of her life, wherever she appeared, people flocked to her, and were often brought to repentance 'merely by the sight of her face' (Underhill 1975: 157). Underhill's own belief was that the 'test of spiritual health is the soul's ever-growing capacity for seeing things as they really are' (Underhill 1975: 161).

Another of her favourite Saints, St. Catherine of Genoa, is credited with remaining grounded in the face of the most intense spiritual activity. According to Underhill she:

... managed with skill and devotion the affairs of the hospital. Her accounts were never a farthing wrong, nor was she ever known to fail in her duties through absorption in spiritual joy. When the plague came to Genoa, she was the centre of a devoted band who went through the city nursing the victims, and in many cases sacrificed their own lives (Underhill 1975: 164).

Underhill claimed that service to others was essential to the mystic project – but why not go one step further and get rid of the religious element altogether? James, seemed to have recognized the potential conflict between the religious and secular schools and he could see both sides of the argument. James was repulsed by the cold asceticism practiced by some of the celebrated saints of the church (James: 1957: 304) Yet, when it came to the utility of religion he also recognized that 'it would seem illogical to try to measure the worth of a religion's fruits in merely human terms of value. How can you measure their worth without considering whether the God really exists who is supposed to inspire them?' (James 1957: 321).

James did not hold that religion was sick or insane; he did, however, believe that some its saints and practitioners were 'distinctly pathological' (James 1957: 304). For James spirituality (including belief in the supernatural) was an important aspect of our lives as human beings and not something to be stripped bare by a psychological reductionism which fails to account for our natural longing and supernatural desire for a life beyond this one.

We have found, then, some important differences of opinion when it comes to the religious model and the modern psychological model which we will go into in detail at a later stage. What we want to say here is that in spite of the differences in interpretation between these two models both groups want to claim that mysticism, itself, is not a form of madness although all are agreed that some mystical subjects can become unhinged. Generally speaking both groups realize the dangers of the mystical path, in particular, the possibility of it all ending in madness. Also it may be that the contemplative may face the possibility of this danger before she reaches the final stage of her journey. Both schools of thought; the ascetic/religious and the secular/humanist school write about a 'transformative period'.

If we are to continue into the perplexing subject of mysticism it may be helpful to return to the Ancient Greeks and Plato in particular. Plato's insightful myth of the cave gives us a clue where to look when we wish to contemplate mysticism. It may be that both the religious ascetics and the secular humanists share with Plato the idea that most of us, for most of the time, live in a world of ignorance and illusion. We are witnesses to a puppet show but, and this is important, it is possible, according to Plato, for some of us to transcend our ignorance and reach Ultimate Reality. Now, just as Plato suggests, the path to reaching this enlightenment is difficult and full of dangers. Difficult because one needs to disengage from her cultural home and dangerous because of the mocking and scornful

treatment by the ignorant who are chained to their ignorance. Remember the strong words of Plato – the possibility that the mystic may even be murdered by her fellow women and men, like Socrates was. Now, importantly Plato also pointed out the possibility of madness and the care one must take in her pursuit of truth. One must cultivate self-restraint and adhere to the principles of reason, cultivate a balanced life and be in tune. We also remember Plato's belief that philosophy and the pursuit of truth involves a separation of body and soul for bodily desires are 'mad masters'. Finally let us recall his idea of two types of madness – the unhealthy madness which leads to illusion and misery and the madness of the mystic philosopher – the frenzy of longing for absolute beauty where one forgets the lies and illusions of the puppet show.

Let us look at the religious thinkers first. Now the ascetic mystics are full of discussion on the issue of madness. Most of the Christian mystics warn against the temptations of the devil who is adept at confusing contemplatives – even the most pure and saintly. The devil's influence is found where the would-be mystic's vices are found; pride, inflation, love of glory and even love of the creature above the love of the Lord – all of these vices can lead to illness and madness. We find the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* advising that 'you must ... guard your spiritual windows and doorways against enemy attacks. If you are willing to do this, you need only to lay upon God humbly in prayer, and he will soon help you' (1961: 52). He continues:

... a word of warning. It is quite possible for a young disciple, inexperienced and untested spiritually, to be deceived. Unless he is alive to the situation, and has grace to stop what he is doing and take advice humbly, he may be distracted physically and get fantastic ideas spiritually. And withal be proud, and materialistic and inquisitive (1961: 105).

However, the distinction between God and Satan can be a very difficult one. For instance, St. Teresa

of Avila was accused by some church authorities as being the tool of Satan and not the Lord. They claimed that she was deceived and deluded. It was only her virtue, piety and charitable actions that decided her beloved was really the Perfect Light and Truth and not the manifestations of the wholly Evil and Deceptive One. Still, St. Teresa admitted times when she was confused as to what powers were at work. St. Augustine, another favoured child of the church, admitted that it was possible for Satan to pass '*for an angel of light*' (St. Augustine 1961: 250). St. John of the Cross, with his famous discussion on 'the dark night of the soul' offers important insight into the hazardous journey of the mystic.

It will happen that while an individual is being conducted by God along a sublime path of dark contemplation and aridity, in which he feels lost, he will encounter in the midst of the fullness of his darkness, trials, conflicts, and temptations. Someone who, in the style of Job's comforters [JB. 4: 8-11], will proclaim that all of this is due to melancholia, or depression, or to some hidden wickedness, and that as a result God has forsaken him.

Therefore the usual verdict is that, since such trials afflict this person, he must have lived an evil life (St. John of the Cross 1973: 71).

We find in these words of the saint a clear demarcation between illness (melancholia or depression) and the difficult 'trials' of the genuine mystic. For many of these Christian contemplatives madness and sickness was the domain of the Devil and we find throughout their work many warnings of his dark doings and his chief interest in separating God from from his children. Modern humanists, on the other hand, have an altogether different explanation for suffering and confusion. Briefly, psychoanalysis speaks of trauma (natural not supernatural), psychic imbalance, or the chaotic workings of the Collective Unconscious (Jungian theory). Jung challenged the dichotomy of good and evil. Instead of aiming for perfection (all goodness) and escaping the works of the Evil One, Jung instead

wrote of completion or what he called 'Individuation'. Let us recall that we initially uncovered this idea in the work of Heraclitus and was all about psychic balance and the reconciliation of opposites whether they be masculine and feminine, dark and light, or even 'good' and 'evil'. For Jung, the so called 'evil' aspect in our nature, what he referred to as the shadow, had an important instinctual significance – a purpose which could at times be necessarily invoked. As for the existentialist - suffering exists because existence is bleak, absurd and living with others is exceedingly difficult. This can be summed up in Sartre's witty maxim; 'Hell is other people'. All suffering, even the so called 'spiritual', arises out of this cruel, meaningless and chaotic existence which will one day end in death. What all these three schools have in common is the conviction that psychic imbalance has little to do with the lack of reason.

One of the important differences between the religious/ascetic response and the secular/humanist is that the former finds that through suffering one becomes holier and closer to God. Meister Eckhart writes on the contemplatives that 'when they are in darkness or in suffering, then they will see the light' (Eckhart 1963: 75). It is through this suffering that one becomes a witness to the truth and hopefully, eventually, one will taste the bliss of the Lord's love. Even so, one must travel through the intense and hazardous transformative period before one becomes fully integrated with God and the world around her. Richard Rolle wrote about the period prior to being fully transformed and this kind of 'madness'.

... when he tries to speak he can only stammer because he is slowed down by the abundance of his inner happiness and the peculiar nature of this song. Something that previously would have taken him an hour, he can scarcely finish it in half a day (Rolle 1991: 49).

How alike this is to the mad mystic of Plato – the lover of Wisdom! This theory runs, though, that the

absent-mindedness only lasts for a short duration. Zaehner, a champion of the 'theistic' tradition (Christianity, Judaism and Islam), claims it to be like 'drunkenness', where the lover is 'bound to exclaim all sorts of nonsense that makes no sense to the sober minded' (Zaehner 1957: 158). However, one doesn't need to believe that God orchestrates this intense drama to believe in the transformative period. R. D. Laing, also wrote about this dangerous stage of the mystical voyage. 'In this journey,' he claimed, 'there are many occasions to lose one's way, for confusion, partial failure, even final shipwreck: many terrors, spirits, demons to be encountered, that may or may not be overcome' (Laing 1967: 101). Madness, to Laing, then, is becoming lost after travelling the spiritual path. But, he adds, 'madness need not be all breakdown. It may also be break-through. It is potentially liberation and renewal as well as enslavement and existential death' (Laing 1967: 110). That is, he also seems to share Plato's distinction between madness as an illness and madness as a blessing. Laing goes on to suggest that during the transformative period, a person may indeed behave like a crazy person, but, he insists, this is but for a short period of time. This idea is also found in mystical texts. St John of the Cross asserted:

... in the beginning, when this union is in the process of being perfected, a person cannot but experience great forgetfulness of all things ... owing to the absorption of his memory in God, a person will show many deficiencies in exterior behaviour and customs. He will forget to eat or drink, or fail to remember whether or not he performed some task, or saw a particular object, or said something – all because of the absorption of his memory in God. Yet once he has the habit of union – which is a supreme good – he no longer experiences these lapses of memory in matters concerning his moral or natural life. Rather he will possess greater perfection in actions which are necessary and fitting (St. John of the Cross 1973: 216).

Laing cited an example of this 'transformative period' and the permanent change which followed. The acquaintance of his was said to have gone on a 'journey' and was hospitalized for three months. The words he uttered after his 'return' are well worth recording:

... when I came out (of hospital) I suddenly felt that everything was so much more real than it – than it had been before. The grass was greener, the sun was shining brighter, and people were more alive, I could see them clearer. I could see the bad things and the good things and all that. I was much more aware (Laing 1967: 136).

Just as Plato warned against the murderous cave dwellers, R. D. Laing wrote about the dangers of others and when it comes to succeeding in these most difficult of trials:

... those who survived have had exceptional qualities – a capacity for secrecy, slyness, cunning – a thoroughly realistic appraisal of the risks they run, not only from the spiritual realms that they frequent, but from the hatred of their fellows for anyone engaged in the pursuit (Laing 1967: 116).

Now perhaps this last quote suggests something importantly different from the modern thinkers with those traditionally religious. According to Zaehner and others, the traditional 'monistic' (Judaism, Christianity & Islam), religious thinkers are highly moralistic in their thinking and very much concerned with perfection; as well as loss of the self in union with their beloved Lord. Psychology has a somewhat different explanation for the mystical. Rather than an obsession with morality, humility, and death of the self; generally speaking the psychologists are rather partial to self-empowerment, psychic balance and secular success. Like Maslow, they may also hold a belief that self-actualization involves a strong social justice element – service to others. This, however, is the modern western

tradition. What about other cultures and other religions – do they offer different suggestions to those of Neo-Platonism and Christianity?

Chapter 6: Mysticism and Other Religions

The traditions of Neo-Platonism and Western mysticism are important and interesting but we need to repeat that ideas and concepts on mysticism and madness can be found throughout the world and these other religions and philosophies, being insightful and profound, have influenced our modern philosophy. There are so many different religions with mystical ideas and it has been, to some extent, arbitrary in choosing Hinduism and Tibetan Buddhism. Nevertheless, both compliment and challenge western ideas. Both traditions also contain the courageous or heroic aspect of spirituality. Hindu saints, in their being out-of-the-world, challenge the rational presuppositions of every day existence. Their eccentric behaviour can have a disturbing or unsettling affect on our religious ideas. We have recognized in the past few decades much courage exhibited by Tibetan monks in their peaceful protest against the Chinese invasion. We can recognize two types of courage – self-sacrifice and the courage of peace and optimism. This latter type is revealed in the figure of the Dalai Lama, who was awarded the nobel prize for peace and has remained unshakeable in his Ghandi-inspired patience and is an inspiration for genuine peace loving people everywhere.

Hinduism, to begin with, provides a startling example of just how different religious understanding can be when it comes to ideas about Ultimate Reality. Unlike the systems derived from Platonism, Hinduism holds no belief that the world is ordered by the principles of reason, nor that there are forms or gods that are regulated by reason either. By human standards of rationality both the gods and the Hindu saints often exhibit signs of 'divine madness'. They seem 'chaotic, seemingly uncontrolled' and 'unpredictable' (Kinsley 1974: 273). The gods are sometimes 'antagonistic to the world' and also 'agents of disrupture' (Kinsley 1974: 276). Thus they reveal 'the nature of the world to be ephemeral, impermanent, and only tenuously ordered' (Kinsley: 1974: 283). A conviction shared by

Sartre and the existentialists. When it comes to the 'ultimate vision of the real ... the will or reflex that creates, sustains and governs the world infuses it with a wild, unpredictable, tumultuous quality that seems pointless and clearly underlies the unstable, apparently aimless change that characterizes the world' (Kinsley 1974: 285). If this is the real nature of existence we should, then, not be surprised to learn that even the most revered gods are sometimes 'described as being drunk with wine or drugged up with hemp' (Kinsley 1974: 277) and that when it comes to their behaviour, 'it is mad in its radical freedom' (Kinsley 1974: 283). Furthermore, 'it is abundantly clear that one of the traditional marks of a Hindu saint is madness' (Kinsley 1974: 286).

This view of existence as inconstant, wild, unpredictable and even insane is radically different from Plato's theory of the forms and his well ordered cosmology. Nevertheless they both share a belief that madness can be a blessing – this involving both an intoxication by the divine and a rejection of all worldly values. Kinsley wrote of the famous Hindu saint Caitanya that:

Caitanya, particularly in the latter part of his life, seems out of control. He cannot contain his intense, emotional feelings for Krsna, he is rent by conflicting moods that make him laugh in delight or weep in pain, he repeatedly falls to the ground in swoons of stupor, his emotions rack his body, he sings and dances continually and he can barely take care of himself. He is out of this world, immersed almost in that other world of Krsna where he longs to be continually (Kinsley: 1974: 292).

Nevertheless Caitanya retained enough connection with this world to be able to look after himself and not require institutionalization. We should note, however, the importance a culture plays here. Unlike our modern western ideas, Hinduism is more open to the possibilities of divine madness and more supportive of their unique mad mystics.

Perhaps one way we could distinguish between madness as an disease and madness as a blessing may have to do with the individual herself. Mental illness is a sickness marked by alienation, loneliness, delusions and so forth. Whereas, according to Kinsley, divine madness can be recognized as a pattern, with different gods revealing themselves in different ways and 'the nature of a saint's madness seems to be determined by that presence which possesses him' (Kinsley1974: 299). Thus their 'madness' can be made sense of from within the system which is their home. In terms of Hinduism it is a case of a god manifesting itself in a human being, a presence who exists in their doctrine and social practices and can even be recognized as such. This 'madness', then, actually makes sense from within, and even has an important part to play, in the culture which is its home. This is the point Walsh makes in his studies of Shamanism where he distinguishes between the shattering experiences of the ill and the experiences of Shamans which involve a 'complex and coherent' universe which is 'highly structured, meaningful' and 'consistent with the Shaman's learned cosmology' (Walsh 1993: 750). Walsh adds that the experiences of the Shaman's usually become useful in 'serving the community', whereas 'schizophrenics rarely make major contributions' (Walsh 1997: 113).

Authentic mysticism, then, regardless of where it appears, necessarily involves a connection with a system of sorts and usually a contribution to society at large. Swami Akhilanada writes:

... many cases of paranoia and schizophrenia can be traced to certain religious sentiments.

However, it would be extremely unreasonable to say that just because some abnormal persons give expression to certain religious ideas that mysticism is pathological (Akhilanada 1948: 90).

Akhilanada distinguished between the authentic mystical experience and the illusory. The latter, he claimed, disintegrates the subject, whereas 'mystical experiences improve the personality and

increases the fund of knowledge, a statement which is capable of verification'. Akhilanada went on to claim that 'a mystic by his spiritual life is an inspiration and a blessing to the world' (Akhilanada 1948: 93). He also held a position on the drug and mysticism debate. He wrote:

Some thinkers conclude that a kind of mystical state can be produced by nitrous oxide and other drugs, but the effect of the state produced proves that it is not a mystical experience because there is no change in the personality (Akhilanada 1948: 90).

For Akhilanada, mystical experience is much more than just a subjective, emotional experience. He held that the mystic emerges from the experience as a new person, 'with direct and immediate knowledge of God. His knowledge expands immensely. In fact he knows that Being which he did not know until then' (Akhilanada 1948: 90-91). True mystical experience leaves 'a lasting effect in transforming a person's life' (Akhilanada 1948: 93).

According to Akhilanada, true mystics are always altruistic and even the contemplative mystics who differ to the active ones in their services to others, still do 'an immense amount of good to human society' (Akhilanada 1948: 91). For, 'his altruism becomes evident in good wishes, loving expressions and dynamic feeling for humanity' (Akhilanada 1948: 91). Indeed, Akhilanada writes, 'we happen to know that the most deplorable men and women have been transformed by the very presence of great mystics' (Akhilanada 1948: 93)

This 'very presence' or ability to inspire others must be contrasted with illness which weakens and alienates. Raab writes about the controversial Hindu saint Ramakrishna who was held by many to be insane and exhibited signs which modern psychiatry would 'recognize' as 'affective disorder' and 'schizophrenia' (Raab 1995: 325). Raab comments:

... if Ramakrishna's visions had been solely the product of a sick psyche, it is doubtful that his teaching would have retained such a wide appeal among respected persons of both eastern and western traditions (Raab 1995: 326).

Raab goes on to contrast madness as an illness with its divine counterpart asserting:

... mystical experiences have particular beneficial effects on the mind, emotions and behaviour of the mystic over an extended period of time. The experiences transform her or his personality in a positive way and lead to particular spiritual insights. Sometimes these insights are not recognized during the lifetime of the mystic, and consequently many mystics have been considered unbalanced by their contemporaries (Raab 1995: 332).

Raab also mentioned the importance a culture has in respect of its 'mystical' or 'mad' members. He wrote, 'Ramakrishna's world view was not considered psychotic because it was shared by his culture' (Raab 1995: 332). Thus he also held importance in the mystical path for, according to Raab, 'the mystic's tradition provides the material out of which the experience is constructed' (Raab 1995: 328). Nevertheless we must admit that due to the peculiar nature of Hinduism there remains a curious pattern of madness and mysticism we rarely find elsewhere. Raab comments:

As a guru of "crazy wisdom", Ramakrishna was both saint and insane. Yet to use Ramakrishna's own insight, to be both is also to transcend the categories of holiness and lunacy. We are left with the alternative that perhaps he embodied (Raab 1995: 338).

Tibetan Buddhist Mysticism

One of the more intriguing and also popular religions today is Tibetan Buddhism. It seems to consist of a fascinating blend of common sense and the mysterious – these forces are likewise said to reside in the human psyche itself. For Llama Govinda the mystical is not a rational exercise for 'it is ... that irrational quality which stirs up our deepest feelings, elevates our innermost being, and makes it vibrate with others' (Govinda 1974: 17). This is 'stronger even than reason with all its logic' and can only be fully appreciated by following a path. Now although these *feelings* are non-rational, Govinda is adamant that true spirituality is neither an illness nor a drug. He held major importance in the following of a path and the cultivation of self-discipline. Govinda was adamant that true spirituality is neither an illness, or a drug – it is not escapist. He comments on Buddha that 'his way was not to escape suffering, but to *conquer* it' (Govinda 1974: 278). On the nature of genuine spiritual experience, Govinda asserted:

This is not a matter of emotional ecstasy or unrestrained imagination, but a consciously directed creative process of realization, in which nothing is left to chance and in which there is no place for vague emotions and confused thinking (Govinda 1974: 93).

Furthermore Govinda shared with many mystic's a profound conviction that Ultimate Truth has a moral core and thus involves two important practices; namely humility (or loss of the ego) and the cultivation of love.

On the nature of humility Govinda wrote, 'the more we lose our ego and break down the walls of our self-created prison, the greater becomes the clarity and radiance of our being and the convincing power of our life' (Govinda 1974: 42-43). Govinda continued, 'all discrimination of "own" and "other" is illusion, and that we first have to destroy this illusion by penetrating to the universal consciousness

within us, before we can accomplish the work of liberation' (Govinda 1974: 46). He held the view that the cosmos is a unity and everything is held together in a Divine Unity. He wrote against 'the illusion of egohood', instead claiming 'that no thing and no being can exist in itself or for itself, but that each form of life has the whole universe as its basis and that therefore the meaning of individual form can only be found in its relationship to the whole' (Govinda 1974: 247). Govinda claimed that Nirvana '... is the liberation from passion – dictated will, a will struggling in vain against self-imposed barriers; it is the freedom from a will which is not in accordance with reality' (Govinda 1974: 272).

Now the other side of this humility and loss of the ego is the cultivation of pure love:

For nowhere is the inner unity of all beings felt more deeply than in the emotions of love (*maitri*) and sympathy, in the sharing of others' sorrows and joys (*karuna-mudita*), out of which grows the urge to give, not only one's possessions but oneself (Govinda 1974: 89)

Govinda wrote of a love 'which is free from possessiveness, but consists in an unlimited and undivided active sympathy' (Govinda 1974: 231).

Humility is one factor and love is another but the Tibetan ideal of mystical truth also follows the 'attunement' model. Govinda asserted that 'where the great synthesis of heart and head, feeling and intellect, highest love and deepest knowledge have taken place, there completeness is re-established, perfect Enlightenment is attained' (Govinda 1974: 97). Govinda continued:

This All-Accomplishing wisdom consists in the synthesis of heart and mind, in the union of all-embracing love and deepest knowledge, in the complete self-surrender to the highest ideal of human striving, which finds the force for its realization in the fearless

acceptance of life's sufferings (Govinda 1974: 280).

Now because of the importance Tibetan spirituality (as much other spirituality) holds in moral virtue and the cultivation of pure love; reason is not held to be the only faculty revered as leading to Ultimate Truth. Govinda claimed:

The Buddha, certainly, was no enemy of logical thinking, of which indeed he made the fullest use, but he perceived its limitations and therefore taught what goes beyond it: the direct awareness of spiritual vision (*dhyana*) which surpasses mere ratiocination (*vitarka-vicara*) (Govinda 1974: 110).

Reason is not the sole faculty when it comes to Ultimate Truth and nor is it the sole faculty when it comes to madness. Jung's ideas on the 'Collective Unconscious', must surely have been influenced by this most thorough and profound philosophy. Govinda wrote:

Just as the primordial forces, locked up in the atom, can be utilized for the benefit as well as for the destruction of humanity, so the forces, which dwell in the human body, may lead to liberation as well as to bondage, towards the light as well as into utter darkness. Only with perfect self-control and clear knowledge of the nature of these forces, can the Yogi dare to arouse them (Govinda 1974: 139).

These dark unconscious forces, then, can lead to both enlightenment and annihilation. Govinda therefore warns against releasing these forces without a proper grounding and self-discipline (just as Jung did). The Lama writes about 'restoring the disturbed equilibrium':

This can only be achieved through a relaxed, serene, and blissful state of body and soul, but not through self-mortification, asceticism or artificial methods of creating aversion like those of wrongly understood contemplation of corpses, through which sensuality is not overcome, but only suppressed or through violation of body and mind by way of artificial breathing exercises and strenuous efforts to fetter the mind to preconceived ideas (Govinda 1974: 170).

Importantly, then, Govinda held supreme importance in the actual character of the potential mystic. He warned that 'to the spiritually unprepared, immature mind, the nature of reality, of unveiled truth, therefore appears in terrible form' (Govinda 1974: 176). Furthermore 'in its pure unmitigated form – i.e. without being combined with the qualities of compassion and love – acts upon man as a deadly poison' (Govinda 1974: 176). Now 'what caused fear to the worldly minded, filled the Yogi with tranquility and determination, and became a source of strength and an incentive to proceed on the path of realization' (Govinda 1974: 192). To repeat, what Jung dubbed the 'Collective Unconscious' can be both liberating and annihilating. Govinda wrote, 'the worldly man does not see tools of liberation, but weapons of destruction, which annihilate all that belongs to his world' (Govinda 1974: 201).

Fear, annihilation and illness, then, rest on the actual character of the subject and her ability (or inability) to be integrated or 'Individuated'. Govinda pointed to the supreme importance of following a path for it, alone, could offer a real chance of purging and purifying the soul of its unhealthy obsessions and its messy confusion. Govinda noted, 'in mentally and spiritually undeveloped beings, governed by blind urges and subconscious drives, this lack of knowledge leads to confusion, hallucinations and delusion' (Govinda 1974: 238).

Ultimate Truth, according to Govinda, involves carefully following a path of many dangers and

by succumbing to these dangers a subject can easily become unhinged. According to this account, any view of the world that is not experienced as liberation is a form of 'maya'. Maya need not mean pure illusion, but rather, it is 'a reality of a lesser degree which, compared with the highest reality, (accessible only to a perfectly enlightened one), has no more existence than the objects of a dream, a cloud formation or the lightning flashing up within it' (Govinda 1974: 215). This seems to resemble Plato's analogy of the cave. Govinda wrote on the nature of Ultimate Truth, 'such a feeling of incredible reality, that compared with it, the reality-content of our sensuous and mental everyday world fades away and evaporates' (Govinda 1974: 219).

These two religions, Hinduism and Tibetan Buddhism are both radically different from each other and also our western tradition. Nevertheless there are some binding aspects. A Hindu saint may seem to be so outside of the world that they even transcend the morality of the world around them. However, we also learn that the genuine mystic is one who is full of love for the gods. Love is also an integral aspect of Tibetan spirituality. It is considered an essential aspect of truth and a weapon against maya. To love is to be courageous. To break down the barriers between self and other (whether human or divine) is a virtue celebrated everywhere but is it an essential aspect of mysticism itself? Is it possible to be Individuated (proposed by Jung and Heraclitus) or the perceiver of Ultimate Truth and not have love, or morality or an agenda of social justice? Some modernist thinkers have considered this very possibility and no one more forcefully than Friedrich Nietzsche who claimed that spirituality should be 'beyond good and evil'.

Chapter 7: Nietzsche

Friedrich Nietzsche took what he wanted (or needed) from both the west and the east. In the process he created a body of work, bold, brilliant, profound, daring – and at times disturbingly hilarious. Nietzsche's courage consisted of his radical rethinking of everything philosophical and his optimism that spirituality would become harder, stronger and more liberated now that 'God is dead'. This revolutionary thinker anticipated, in some ways, the schools of psychoanalysis, analytical psychology and existentialism. Nietzsche held spirituality to be physiological and psychological - not supernatural. Life, for Nietzsche, as well as the existentialists who followed, was ultimately meaningless in itself. Yet this should not lead to quietism or despair, but rather passionate frenzy, untamed joy; an occasion for laughter and self overcoming. He is often described as an enemy of Christianity but he was also an enemy of all Platonic systems of thought and cultural practices. He offered a return to the Pre-Socratic teaching of Heraclitus - life is war, existence is fire and he hailed that Individuation was to be sought by the reconciliation of opposites – an attunement. But for Nietzsche this was just the beginning

Nietzsche, the thinker who claimed to be the only author to have been born posthumously, was one of the most original and brilliant of all thinkers. This courageous philosopher, in his works, encouraged one to challenge everything one holds as sacred with his ferocious and, at times, frightening free-thinking. Let us, then, turn to Nietzsche and what he thought about the mystical.

Nietzsche had much to say about the human condition including its mystical and mad elements. To begin with, he wrote against the idea that reason was the unique and most important property of humankind. Instead he held that human beings were made up of desires and instincts which, if repressed, could make the psyche sick in its removal from nature and limit its extraordinary potential.

Nietzsche asserted:

... man is sicker, less secure, less stable, less firmly anchored than any other animal; he is the *sick* animal. But has he not also been more daring, more defiant, more inventive than all other animals together? - man, the great experimenter of himself, eternally unsatisfied, vying with the gods, the beasts, and with nature for final supremacy (Nietzsche 1956: 257).

Nietzsche's human animal is sick because she is both in nature, as a creature, and also outside of it in her subjectivity and artistry and/or her defiance and inventiveness. The character of persons with their courage and creativity, offers hope for self-transcending, or in Nietzsche's language, 'Individuation' and 'Redemption'.

Like Plato, Nietzsche believed that madness could be something both 'divine' and 'healthy'. This, however, is about the only point of agreement with these two thinkers. Nietzsche held no faith in Plato's notion of the immortality of the soul, nor in the power of reason as being the main ally when it came to the fastening of truth. In fact Nietzsche had no belief in Ultimate Reality at all. His celebration of the creative had nothing to do with either truth or happiness, but rather with power. For Nietzsche nature, including human nature, was all about empowerment and enchantment. Mental health, then, was not to be measured by the accuracy of reason, the ability to be compliant and normal from within a culture or society, nor even by an attempt to become one with God. Rather it was to be measured by the strength and knowledge generated from within the individual and the creative way she engages with her environment. In his earlier work, *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche raised the possibility that the ancient Greeks, in their 'frenzy', may have experienced 'endemic trances, collective visions, and hallucinations' (Nietzsche 1956: 8). This, to Nietzsche, was not a form of mental 'illness'.

Rather he believed it to be 'a neurosis arising from *health* from the youthful condition of the race' (my italics) (Nietzsche 1956: 8). James also wrote about this neurosis of health, finding that spiritual people often exhibit 'pathological features' which, instead of affecting them in a negative manner, rather invest them with 'religious authority and influence' (James 1957: 8) James wrote about the power of 'enchantment' as being the most important element in our religious and spiritual lives (James 1957: 47). Yet this idea of enchantment need not mean that the spiritual is merely illusion, or delusion. In fact, James taught that 'religious happiness is no mere feeling of escape' (James 1957: 49).

Nietzsche suggested that human spirituality and cultural practices involved an entire physiological and psychological response to life. Consequently he thought poorly of morality and religion when it became obsessed with reason and suffocated the soul out of its highest joys and its deepest suffering – that is – anything which chokes the power out of life. 'Art', wrote Nietzsche in this same book, 'is the highest human task ... true meaningful activity' (Nietzsche 1956: 17). It is not reason which brings us joyful wisdom but rather it is non-empirical, pure and subjective creativity which both asks and attempts to answer the issues we hold so important in our all-too-human hearts. It is feeling and art which brings us knowledge and strength, not reason or empirical science. Like other thinkers Nietzsche held that culture and society could themselves become 'sick' or 'ill'. If a culture fails in its artistry to bring power and joy to its citizens then it has failed and is therefore sick. He claimed that, 'man is aware everywhere of the ghostly absurdity of existence' (Nietzsche 1956: 51). For Nietzsche there was no world of the forms, no platonic heaven. Nor was there any real, objective, ontological meaning in life either. For this reason when someone contemplates his own existence, 'nausea invades him' (Nietzsche 1956: 52). This nothingness of life, this absurdity, can only be transcended by the power of art and creativity – the great stimulus to life. It operates like hypnotism and suggestibility. 'Enchantment', wrote Nietzsche, 'is the precondition of all dramatic art' (Nietzsche 1956: 56). Religion, likewise has this function. On primitive religion, Nietzsche notes that the artistry of the 'sorceress'

saves man by turning his nausea, 'into imagination with which it is possible to live' (Nietzsche 1956: 52). Like Jung, Nietzsche understood myth to be essential to human existence, for myth is a sort of artistry of the instincts. Nietzsche wrote, 'every culture that has lost myth has lost, by the same token, its natural healthy creativity' (Nietzsche 1956: 136).

Instead of mystical transformation, some writers equate mysticism with 'Individuation' but what do they mean by this? Well to different philosophers it seems to mean different things. To Nietzsche, with some qualification, Individuation is a spiritual experience which includes the mystical. He does, however, understand Individuation to be something quite different theoretically from what many of the mystics and theologians celebrate. In the *Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche wrote about 'the pains of individuation' adding that 'individuation should be regarded as the source of all suffering' (Nietzsche 1956: 66). Individuation is not a 'holy' thing for Nietzsche, nor is it a 'moral' one, both of these dispositions he reacted to with disgust. He also asserted that Individuation had nothing to do with happiness or Ultimate Reality either, instead, as we have seen, Individuation is all about power. In his *Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche claimed that 'life's collective purpose is to create greater power constellations' (Nietzsche 1956: 298) and went on to assert that 'the path I am speaking of does not lead to 'happiness', but to power, to the most energetic activity, and in a majority of cases to actual unhappiness' (Nietzsche 1956: 242).

Nietzsche did, however, share with many of the mystics some beliefs. He was in agreement with the elitist position of those mystics who claim that mysticism is only for the few. He also agreed that the path is thick with danger. Nietzsche, the master of paradox, claimed that his idea of the 'gay science'; or joyful Individuation, was the 'reward of a long, courageous, painstaking, inward seriousness, which to be sure is not within every man's compass' (Nietzsche 1956: 156). We see here another different way in which Nietzsche understood spiritual experience. To the Christian a mystics

experience could only be given as a grace by God himself. Nietzsche, on the other hand with his passionate atheism, asserted that experience is dependent on the character of the individual herself and has nothing to do with God at all. Some of the mystics claimed that the contemplative should abandon all power, for, as St. John of the Cross preached, ' a person's attitude toward this knowledge should be one of resignation, humility, and passivity ... the union is produced passively in the soul' (St. John of the Cross 1973: 213). Nietzsche wanted nothing to do with either passivity or union with God, although he did want to hold on to the spiritual, even if he found in it a physiological response to the human condition which had nothing to do with the supernatural or even the moral. His experience of the spiritual was accompanied with a belief, like that of other mystics, that spiritual experience is ineffable. In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche wrote, 'our true experiences are not garrulous. They could not communicate themselves if they wanted to: they lack words' (Nietzsche 1990: 94). Nietzsche is also in agreement with the Hindu mystics who claim that spiritual experience goes beyond good and evil.

Nietzsche's writings are filled with the idea of power and he claimed that even the most 'humble' of beings are obsessed with it. Ascetic practices, according to Nietzsche, like self-flagellation and fasting have little to do with punishing bodily sins but rather are engaged in as a means of freeing the soul in the same way other cultures and religions encourage drugs, meditation or deep breathing in order to experience the mystical. Furthermore the cultivation of ascetic ideals means that one can contemplate the spiritual without being distracted by sensual activities like fine wine, women and dining - all of this interrupts thought and contemplation. To quote, 'a strict yet high-spirited continence, is among the necessary conditions of strenuous intellectual activity as well as one of its natural consequences' (Nietzsche 1956: 247). Paradoxically Nietzsche went so far as to suggest that the mystic is naturally amoral, or even immoral. Nietzsche:

It is enough to rehearse the traditional motivations and virtues of the philosopher; his bent toward skepticism, toward negation, toward suspension of judgment, toward analysis, toward neutrality and objectivity. Has it ever been fully realized that for the longest time all these tendencies ran counter to the requirements of accepted ethics? (Nietzsche 1956: 248).

Now we have mentioned that Nietzsche believed human spirituality was a physiological or corporeal phenomenon and that it had its roots in nature. In his *Anti-Christ* Nietzsche asserted that man is the most powerful animal because of his cunning and 'his spirituality is a consequence of this' (Nietzsche 1990: 136). Thus so called 'paranormal phenomena' are not what many consider them to be. To Nietzsche they are not supernatural but rather physiological. Spiritual experience arises from reactions in the body of persons, such as those reactions which take place in the presence of sensory deprivation and sensory bombardment, epilepsy and so forth. Such things as visions and ecstasy are spawned from nature and the body. He even wrote of the possibility of 'endemic trances, collective visions, and hallucinations' (Nietzsche 1956: 8). These experiences, according to Nietzsche, have no claim to being the work of God nor some other ethereal being. Thus it is no surprise Nietzsche believed that, 'the subjects own explanations of these phenomena have always been extravagantly false' (Nietzsche 1956: 269).

Nietzsche has even more intriguing ideas when it comes to mysticism. We have seen that he regarded the spiritual as having a biological basis. He also believed that desire was an essential element of our human experience. He was therefore in agreement with those who claimed that the actual experience of mysticism depends, in part, on the actual character of the individual herself. Now we have seen that he understands 'sickness' to be the reaction of a being who has lost touch with her instincts, and culture, and religion can also be 'sick' when they fail to bring respite from the nausea of

the human condition. In particular, Nietzsche found Christianity to be a sick religion, to be decadent, to be destructive towards the urge to life itself. In his most passionate attack against Christianity, his *Anti-Christ*, Nietzsche wrote, 'sickness belongs to the essence of Christianity' and 'the typical Christian 'faith', *has* to be a form of sickness' (Nietzsche 1990: 181). Like the later philosopher, Sartre, and his concept of 'bad faith', Nietzsche claimed that Faith means 'not wanting to know what is true' (Nietzsche 1990: 181) and a 'desiring *not* to see what one sees' (Nietzsche 1990: 186). Faith in God, then, is an unhealthy escape as opposed to a higher creativity consisting of greater courage, higher integrity and more self-empowerment. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche's prophet, Zarathustra, cries 'this cowardly devil urges you, "There is a God"' (Nietzsche 1976: 292).

We have seen that Nietzsche attacked Christianity on the grounds of its self deception, or in Sartre's words, its 'bad faith'. But he had another reason for regarding Christianity as a 'madhouse' (Nietzsche 1990: 179). This was his belief that Christianity is a form of nihilism or decadence and a revolt against the impulse of life itself. He is disgusted by the ascetic ideal which he regards as, 'a will to nothingness, a revulsion from life' (Nietzsche 1956: 299). He also wrote passionately against the 'priestly aristocracy' who are 'turned away from action' (Nietzsche 1965: 166). Now many mystics talk about reality as being a confrontation or experience of the void. To Nietzsche this experience was universal, but not a good thing, nor an experience of Absolute Reality. Instead he supplied a psychological reason for its occurrence; he calls it 'nihilism' and suggested that many religious people are nihilistic in their outlook. Nihilism is universal and emerges out of a desire to escape the horror and chaos of life itself. Nietzsche asserted that, 'the desire for a mystical union with God is nothing other than the Buddhist's desire to sink himself in nirvana' (Nietzsche 1956: 166). He also felt that this is the case with the other major religion we have mentioned - Hinduism. Nietzsche wrote, '... weary souls, too weary even for dreaming, prize deep sleep – deep sleep standing for the entry of the soul into Brahma – the accomplished mystical union' (Nietzsche 1956: 230). Even Plato could be criticized in

the same way when he wrote, 'true philosophers make dying their profession' (Plato 1969: 113). Nietzsche asserted that people are animals who seek meaning and are more than ready to suffer for it. Nihilism is still a form of seeking out meaning. Nietzsche quipped, 'our will requires an aim; it would sooner have the void for its purpose than be void of purpose' (Nietzsche 1956: 23). Nietzsche refused to 'become as nothing', in the way that Eckhart preached (Eckhart 1963: 100). Nor does he wish to journey the path St John of the Cross prescribed, the way of 'denial and rejection of natural and supernatural apprehensions' (St. John of the Cross 1973: 215). This is, in fact, the very reason Nietzsche attacked the project of religious mysticism and its claims to being an experience of Ultimate Truth. Nietzsche found it to be a *disease* to turn against nature in the way St. John of the Cross and many others prescribe as being necessary to experiencing Absolute Reality. Why should nature be considered misleading or an illusion? And why should this revolt against everything that is enchanting and powerful be anything but a revolt against life itself? Nietzsche found this 'nihilism' to be sacrilegious and nothing but an escape for the sick. Thus, in a way, Nietzsche championed that which Plato denigrates; the carnal and the corporeal *feelings* of the human animal, including both its instincts and its desires – for this, according to Nietzsche, is what truly living is all about. It is the forces of fear and nihilism which annihilate the life force and exchange it for a childish morality and a self-deceptive religious program. These, for Nietzsche, are the real driving forces behind the religious program and thus have nothing to do with the wishes of a (fictitious) transcendental deity. Many of the religious and moral properties most celebrated both today and in the past, then, are brutally attacked by Nietzsche as being 'sick' and 'mad' in their denial of nature and instinct. In the *Genealogy of Morals*, he wrote:

What a mad, unhappy animal is man! What strange notions occur to him; what perversities, what paroxysms of nonsense, what bestialities of idea burst from the moment he is prevented ever so little from being a beast of action! ... here no doubt is sickness, the most terrible sickness that has wasted man thus far (Nietzsche 1956: 226).

In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche attacked 'holy lunacy' and asserted that all those who deny life are 'diseased' (Nietzsche 1990: 56). Furthermore, 'everything *good* is instinct' (Nietzsche 1990: 56). Morality, in particular that morality which is spawned from Christianity, 'weakens' and makes 'sickly'. 'Sick, miserable, filled with ill-will towards himself; full of hatred for the impulses towards life, full of suspicion of all that was still strong and happy. In short, a 'Christian' (Nietzsche 1990: 63). This belief is felt more and more strongly as Nietzsche's intellectual career progressed. By the time of his *Anti-Christ*, his revulsion towards Christianity had reached obsessive levels of disgust. 'Christianity desires to dominate beasts of prey,' he wrote, 'its means for doing so is to make them sick' (Nietzsche 1990: 144). Nietzsche includes in this theme of the unhealthiness of Christianity a corresponding contempt for its most celebrated mystics and leaders:

... the 'highest' states which Christianity has hung up over mankind as the most valuable of all values are forms of epilepsy – the church has canonized only lunatics or great impostors in *majorem dei honorem*' (Nietzsche 1990: 179).

Let us next turn to Nietzsche's insight into the nature of love. We have recognized that the theme of love is an integral virtue in many mystical traditions. Nietzsche makes two important and interesting observations on this issue which are well worth noting. First, according to Nietzsche, love is not a moral quality at all. In *Beyond Good and Evil* he wrote, 'what is done out of love occurs beyond good and evil' (Nietzsche 1976: 444). Love, when it comes to Nietzsche's subtle paradoxical ideas, is held to be a virtue but not a moral quality. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* he attacks the Christian idea of God being love claiming:

Whoever praises him as a god of love does not have a high enough opinion of love itself –

Did this god not want to be a judge too? But the lover loves beyond reward and retribution (Nietzsche 1976: 373).

Sartre, as we shall find, suggested that much of what falls under the banner of 'love' arises out of a feeling of incompleteness and need. Much more is in fact a deceit and a hypocrisy - a form of 'bad faith'. Nietzsche also held that Christian love cannot be separated from a desire for vengeance and is therefore really a form of self deception:

Love grew out of hatred as the trees crown, spreading triumphantly in the purest sunlight, yet having, in its high and sunny realm, the same aims – victory, aggrandizement, temptation – which hatred pursued by digging its roots ever so deeper into all that was profound and evil (Nietzsche 1956: 168)

Nietzsche condemned those who spoke of love when their true feelings were of hatred; and wrote out against their cunning lies and their mean-spirited hypocrisy. He found there to be no moral core in nature, none naturally in humans and since he held no belief in either a God or a Platonic ideal or form, he held no faith in morality whatsoever. What then was morality? Well, for Nietzsche it was an artificial device of the weak, who bandy themselves together in a herd, in order to protect themselves from the strong. He therefore despised this state of affairs and instead preached (in a most anti-preacher, or even ironic, fashion) a return to nature. He found in nature a higher morality, just like Heraclitus had found. Nietzsche championed man and woman, the sick animals, as potential birds of prey – eagles and serpents. Life, for Nietzsche, was all about power and joyful wisdom and, as we have seen, he claimed even the so called saintly and ascetic were really all about power – even if they had to steal it from God.

Nietzsche believed in and cherished nature, including the potential for a human nature unmolested by a sick escapist agenda condemning bodily reality and the passionate intensity of human *feelings*. Nietzsche found both power and a higher morality stemming from pursuing natural and healthy desires - transcending our corrupted notions of reason and asserting that this authentic type of spirituality to be our highest good. In spite of our deep pangs of spiritual sufferings, 'Individuation', Nietzsche's term for a godless mysticism, is something to be prized above all else and especially celebrated above the ridiculous sickness, illusion and self-deception he found in Christian and Neo-Platonic faith and humility.

Now it is interesting to note that while Nietzsche condemned morality as such (the concepts of good and evil) he nevertheless maintained a great reverence for virtue – including love and courage, for it is these qualities which are essential in our mystical lives – our self overcoming and liberation. So even to this thinker who set himself up as defying Platonism and all of its derivatives, Nietzsche retained respect for the traditional virtues of love and courage. It remains to be seen whether latter western thinkers hold onto these virtues.

Chapter 8: Psychoanalysis and Analytical Psychology

Many ideas grew out of the work of Nietzsche including the derivatives of psychoanalysis and analytical psychology. These brave new fields, unapologetically agnostic and wildly controversial, entertained new ideas on old phenomena in relation to 'the unconscious'. This mysterious aspect of our ancestral and instinctual minds was held responsible for not only those experiences which have normally been dubbed as 'mad', but also offered new theories on that which we call 'mystical'. We should add that the idea of the unconscious may really have been around for a considerable time and we have suggested that Plato, himself, did in a way make use of it. However, the psychoanalysts went much further and made it central to their thought. Like Plato they found it to be an element of nature enormously powerful, but unlike this ancient Greek and more like modern Nietzsche, they found it to be something which should be acknowledged and cultivated - not smothered away with anti-natural sentiments. In fact, in the case of Jung and some others, the unconscious was held to be not only good and useful but also a site for divine inspiration.

Now while it is not the case that the faculty of 'love' is retained everywhere in modern psychology, the element of courage is very much retained. It took some bravery for Freud and Jung to publish their controversial ideas of human nature and its barbaric forces which overrule our limited capacity for reason. So too does it take some courage for the subject herself, the human animal, to confront in full consciousness the hidden taboo and monstrous desires. Let us begin with the work of Freud.

Freud

The self recognized father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, revolutionized thought on mental

illness, culture and religious practices. His book *Civilization and its Discontents* (1946) has much relevance to our topic of religious experience and mental illness, along with his essay 'Obsessive Actions and Religious Practice' (1959).

For Freud, as for later thinkers like Schumaker and Becker, religion was considered to be a form of organized illusion – an attempt to console or contain all of the human animal's instincts and urges. In Freud's words this meant the 'pleasure principle'. When it comes to persons, according to Freud:

... they seek happiness, they want to be happy and remain so. There are two sides to this striving, a positive and a negative; it aims on the one hand at eliminating pain and discomfort, on the other at the experience of intense pleasures (Freud 1946: 27).

In short, 'it is simply the pleasure-principle which draws up the program of life's purpose' (Freud 1946: 27).

Before we continue it may be worthwhile recording Freud's own experience of the 'religious' or the spiritual and his self-proclaimed empiricism, or 'scientific analysis'. Early in his book *Civilization and its Discontents* he mentions a certain 'friend' who wrote to him to explain what he considered the 'religious' to consist of. Significantly this friend of Freud's did not write of dogma, doctrine, superstition or the supernatural at all. Instead he shared with the those two thinkers we mentioned earlier, the widely celebrated Wittgenstein and Otto, a belief that the religious 'consists in a peculiar *feeling*' (my italics) and 'one may rightly call oneself religious on the ground of this oceanic feeling alone, even though one reject all beliefs and all illusions' (Freud 1946: 8). Now importantly neither this Wittgensteinian sentiment, nor Otto's 'Ahnung', was ever shared by Freud at all. He is honest enough to admit, 'I cannot discover this 'oceanic feeling' in myself' and 'it is not easy to deal scientifically with

feelings' (Freud 1946: 8). It may be interesting to note that Wittgenstein held that spirituality and religion were incommensurable with science. Wittgenstein also held that psychoanalysis was not really a science at all but rather it worked like a 'charm'. But to return to our topic we might ask the question of why we should bother at all with the work of a man who openly admitted he had never experienced the religious? Do we ask someone who has never watched a cricket match for coaching practice in cricket? Or is it the case that an outsider may sprout an idea to us arising out of his or her outsider perspective? Freud's lack of sympathy when it came to religious 'feeling' could well be the result of a grave distrust of the honesty of the human species in her need to survive emotionally and psychologically in a world which is at once both meaningless and malignant. This may also have been reinforced as a result of the considerable time he spent with the 'sick'. In a passage which sounds like it is laced with a Nietzschean tinge Freud concludes that culture, including its religious elements were really the product of:

... the struggle between Eros and Death, between the instincts of life and the instincts of destruction, as it works itself out in the human species. This struggle is what all life essentially consists of and so the evolution of civilization may be simply described as the struggle of the human species for existence. And it is this battle of the Titans that our nurses and governesses try to compose with their lullaby-song of Heaven! (Freud 1946: 103).

When it came to religious feeling (including the mystical presumably), Freud understood it to be a physiological eruption of the senses – an illusory consolation arrived at in the face of the tragedy of existence. Now instead of finding the spiritual element in the mature and the wise (something often claimed by mystical writers), Freud instead held that religious feeling is spawned by neediness – a helpless feeling of trauma first experienced in childhood. Freud writes, 'the derivation of the religious

attitude can be followed back in clear outline as far as the child's feeling of helplessness' (Freud 1946: 21).

Now Freud, interestingly, in this same book spoke of the experience of love which he felt to be in some way transcendental (in the sense of transcending the ego) and yet also be something which could not properly be called mental illness. He wrote:

... towards the outer world at any rate the ego seems to keep itself clearly and sharply outlined and delimited. There is only one state of mind in which it fails to do this – an unusual state, but not one that can be judged as pathological. At its height the state of being in love threatens to obliterate the boundaries between ego and object. Against all the evidence of his senses the man in love declares that he and his beloved are one, and is prepared to behave as if it were a fact (Freud 1946: 10-11).

Apart from love, Freud can only find in ego transcendence the pathological and the illusory. He writes 'from pathology we have come to know a large number of states in which the boundary lines between ego and outer world become uncertain, or in which they are actually incorrectly perceived' (Freud 1946: 11). This confusion begins, according to Freud, as a baby. He contends 'when the infant at the breast receives stimuli, he cannot as yet distinguish whether they come from his ego or from the outer world. He learns it gradually as the result of various exigencies' (Freud 1946: 11-12). This idea of Freud's will be important when we reach the contribution of Winnicott.

Now, the infantile feeling of helplessness – a 'strong need', in fact, 'is not simply carried on from childhood days but is kept alive perpetually by the fear of what the superior power of fate will bring' (Freud 1946: 21). For Freud, all spirituality is illusory and spawned from insecurity and a feeling of

helplessness. We have also mentioned Freud's hypothesis that childhood trauma can leave a permanent scar on the individual. For Freud, then:

... that feeling of oneness with the universe which is its ideational content sounds very like a first attempt at the consolations of religion, like another way taken by the ego of denying the dangers it sees threatening it in the external world (Freud 1946: 21).

To repeat, Freud held all spirituality and culture to be a form of escapism. For 'life as we find it is too hard for us; it entails too much pain, too many disappointments, impossible tasks. We cannot do without palliative remedies' (Freud 1946: 25). Mysticism, itself, for Freud has a 'physiological foundation' (Freud 1946: 22). Illusions, artistic or religious, 'affect our body' and 'alter its chemical processes' (Freud 1946: 25). Thus the need for intoxicants, where people, 'can at any time slip away from the oppression of reality and find a refuge in a world of their own where painful feelings do not enter' (Freud 1946: 31).

For Freud, the human animal is one who unconsciously suffers 'wild, untamed craving' (Freud 1946: 32) but who must live in the world of others who are also full of this desire. Society, for Freud then, is a set of organized practices which tries to find a balance between satisfying cravings and protecting its citizens from the unwanted carnal and murderous activities of others. This necessarily entails a curbing of sexual desire, or in Freud's words, 'libido displacement'. He explains, 'the task is then one of transferring the instinctual aims into such directions that they cannot be frustrated by the outer world' (Freud 1946: 33). This idea seems very much like the Nietzschean theory that morality is the faculty of the weak against the strong. Freud suggests that by redirecting this libidinal urge, one may be inclined to 'mental and intellectual work', but, unfortunately, due to the fact not all are blessed with this gift, this form of satisfaction 'is only available to the few' (Freud 1946: 33). A more

accessible example of libido displacement is artistry where 'satisfaction is obtained through illusions' (Freud 1946: 35). However, art, likewise has its limitations. Freud writes, 'art affects us but as a mild narcotic and can provide no more than a temporary refuge from the hardships of life; its influence is not strong enough to make us forget real misery' (Freud 1946: 35).

We have seen that art for Freud was a limited tool which could enable us to suffer less by way of escapism. Freud also held that madness, itself, was a project of escapism and he also held that it was something which affects society at large. Freud contends, 'each one of us behaves in some respect like the paranoiac, substituting a wish-fulfillment for some aspect of the world which is unbearable to him, and carrying this delusion through into reality' (Freud 1946: 36). Freud added that a society could become sick and full of 'mass-delusions' (Freud 1946: 36). 'Needless to say,' wrote Freud, 'no one who shares a delusion recognizes it as such' (Freud 1946: 36).

Although Freud recognized the importance of art as a means of transcending suffering, he admitted that 'there is no very evident use in beauty; the necessity of it for cultural purposes is not apparent, and yet civilization could not do without it' (Freud 1946: 38-39). Yet we must mention that this, the first of all Freudian's, couldn't help but add that when it comes to beauty, 'its derivation from the realms of sexual sensation is all that seems certain' (Freud 1946: 39).

Freud, like many thinkers who are held as pessimistic but who really think of themselves as realistic, claimed that the human condition is an unhappy one, with moments of joy being only transitory. Freud asserted, 'the goal towards which the pleasure-principle impels us – of becoming happy – is not attainable; yet we may not – nay, cannot – give up the effort to come nearer to realization of it by some means or other' (Freud 1946: 39). Furthermore, the purpose of religion for Freud was to escape the misery of the human condition. Its aim is to promote 'a single way of

achieving happiness and guarding against pain', yet religion in reality is really 'distorted like a delusion' and leads to 'mental infantilism'. Freud held that as, 'mass delusion – religion succeeds in saving many people from individual neuroses. But little more'. As we shall see this sounds very much like the position offered by Becker and Schumaker. Freud has some more interesting things to say about our disgust with dirt, the human body and the obsessions of hygiene (Freud 1946: 55-56). 'Civilization', comments Freud, 'is built upon renunciation of instinctual gratifications' (Freud 1946: 63).

On the subject of love, so prized by so many mystics, Freud was likewise sceptical. He held that universal love was both impossible and even undesirable. It has its roots in sexual love, yet at the same time it is an attempt to escape from it. This is what he meant by libido-displacement and he asserted that this means it is an 'inhibited aim' (Freud 1946: 70). Freud wrote against the desirability of universal love for two reasons. He claimed that, 'a love that does not discriminate seems to us to lose some of its own value, since it does an injustice to its object. And secondly, not all men are worthy of love' (Freud 1946: 70-71). Freud attacked the religious and the secular humanists on the grounds of their blindness to the carnal and bestial animal who governs the unconscious life of the human form. He wrote:

... a powerful measure of desire for aggression has to be reckoned as part of their instinctual endowment. The result is that their neighbour is to them not only a possible helper or sexual object, but also a temptation to them to gratify their aggressiveness on him (Freud 1946: 85).

Freud claimed that deep down men and women are 'savage beasts' (Freud 1946: 86). He held religious teachings of universal love to be something both unnatural and impossible. Freud held that, 'nothing is so completely at variance with original human nature as this' (Freud 1946: 87). Repression of instincts

can lead to psychological problems and unhappiness. Freud remarks on the life of one of the most influential Catholic Saints that:

Once the apostle Paul had laid down universal love between all men as the foundation of his Christian Community, the inevitable consequence in Christianity was the utmost intolerance towards all who remained outside of it (Freud 1946: 91).

Freud criticized the Christian commandment to 'love one's neighbour as oneself', because, 'the command is impossible to fulfil: such an enormous inflation of love can only lower its value and not remedy the evil' (Freud 1946: 139). Is this the case even for a saint? Freud claimed that to ask too much of a person then 'one produces revolt or neurosis in individuals or makes them unhappy' (Freud 1946: 139).

Freud eyed the world around him with deep distrust and unhappiness at what he recognized as 'our present of civilization' (Freud 1946: 92) and desired that another would one day take its place which would be 'more satisfying to our needs' (Freud 1946: 93). Nevertheless with his pessimistic (or realistic?) outlook he admitted that 'there are certain difficulties inherent in the very nature of culture which will not yield to any efforts at reform' (Freud 1946: 93). Freud felt that not everything centered on the sexual issue for he also recognized 'non-erotic aggression and destruction' (Freud 1946: 99). But he also felt little faith in the power of reason. Against the blind and feverish instinctual life of the human animal – the unconscious – Freud held reason to have little power over lives. Thus Freud suggested that when it came to social interaction, 'masses of men must be bound libidinally; necessity alone, the advantages of common work, would not hold them together' (Freud 1946: 102).

When it came to the subject of morality Freud held some interesting and controversial ideas.

We have already noted his belief that some morals, like universal love, could lead to illness and unhappiness. He also found a 'peculiarity' in the individual recognized as a moral one. 'The more righteous a man is,' wrote Freud, 'the stricter and more suspicious will his conscience be, so that ultimately it is precisely those people who have carried holiness farthest who reproach themselves with the deepest sinfulness' (Freud 1946: 109). Freud proposed two theories when it comes to conscience which he holds are 'both justified' and 'do not contradict each other' (Freud 1946: 114). Psychoanalysis teaches that 'conscience is the result of instinctual renunciation, or: denunciation (externally imposed) gives rise to conscience, which then demands further renunciations' (Freud 1946: 114). The second theory is that 'conscience is formed in the beginning from the suppression of an aggressive impulse and strengthened as time goes on by each suppression of the kind' (Freud 1946: 116). Freud added, 'we cannot disregard the conclusion that man's sense of guilt has its origin in the Oedipus complex and was acquired when the father was killed by the association of the brothers' (Freud 1946: 118).

... guilt is the expression of the conflict of ambivalence, the eternal struggle between Eros and the destruction, or death instinct. This conflict is engendered as soon as man is confronted with the task of living with his fellows (Freud 1946: 121).

Guilt, both in the individual and in society can be 'completely unconscious' and only recognized by 'an unconscious seeking for punishment' (Freud 1946: 125). It is in fact, 'an aggression which has turned inward' (Freud 1946: 130).

Next we will look briefly at Freud's essay, 'Obsessive Actions and Religious Practices' (1959). In this essay Freud examines neurotic obsessive actions and compares them with the practices found in religious institutions. He finds both important similarities and differences between the two. Due to the scope of this essay we cannot go into detail except to say that Freud notes the secrecy of the private

disorder compared with the public nature of the latter. He asserted:

... while the minutiae of religious ceremonial are full of significance and have a symbolic meaning, those of neurotics seem foolish and senseless. In this respect an obsessional neuroses presents a travesty, half-comic and half-tragic, of a private religion (Freud 1959: 119).

Another important difference for Freud was 'the strongly marked sexual nature of the private practice' (Freud 1959: 120). Whereas he contended that religious actions are less so, generally being 'self-seeking, socially harmful instincts', yet he noted that 'they are usually not without a sexual component' (Freud 1959: 125). He also claimed that the motives behind both are 'unknown to them' (Freud 1959: 123). That is say, they are unconscious. Involved in this unconscious repression both the private neurosis and the public religious ceremony involve:

... a renunciation of the activation of instincts that are constitutionally present; and the chief difference would lie in the nature of those instincts, which in the neurosis are exclusively sexual in their origin, while in religion they spring from egoistic sources (Freud 1959: 126-127)

Freud, as we have seen, admitted to having never experienced the oceanic feeling of the religious. For Freud, life is essentially tragic and all, (not just the mad) are, to some extent, victims of both their own unconscious desires and the instinctual carnality and cruelty of others. The most one could hope for would be some sort of recognition of one's own complexes and when it came to spirituality, to repeat, Freud held that there was no such thing as an authentic experience.

However, we might ask, does the fact that Freud himself had no experience of religious feeling and his insistence that spirituality is in truth a form of wish fulfilment for the mentally unstable really convince us that mysticism is pathological? His one time close associate and friend, Carl Jung, thought differently.

Jung

Carl Gustave Jung, the enigmatic Swiss analytical psychologist has heavily influenced the popular 'new age' movement where he has been heralded as a mystic, a sorcerer and a wise old man. However his influence on academia; in psychology and philosophy has been less well marked. Frances Gray notes:

... Jung has been systematically overlooked in 'legitimate' academic and political discourses. His work has been trivialized as unworthy of serious academic consideration, the less worthy brother of Sigmund Freud (Gray 2008: 16).

To the contrary, Gray locates Jung as belonging to the Western Philosophical tradition, and if anything, more worthy philosophically than Freud who had little interest in the history of ideas. Gray also claims that Jung was heavily influenced by Plato and goes so far as to suggest that Jung's ideas of the 'archetypes', mirrors Plato's concept of the 'Forms' (Gray 2008: 140).

Jung was, and still is, considered by many to be a mystic, but he himself repudiated this label (with its connotations of irrationality). Instead he claimed to be an empiricist and a scientist. Gray

finds in Jung's work important ideas on the nature of consciousness and the unconscious. Like Plato who held that our normal existence is one of illusion, Xenophanes who held that our knowledge was contingent on our bodies, and of course Heraclitus who held that most of us are unaware of what we do even when we are awake, Gray writes, 'our habitation of the world is primarily *unconscious*: we are only momentarily conscious. Consciousness itself is an effect of limitation' (Gray 2008: 24). And what are we limited by? Gray suggests that Jung, '... recognizes that the body, the living body, is in time and space, and that time and space are an aspect of the restricting function of the body over consciousness' (Gray 2008: 27). That is to say, it is our body which limits our understanding of the cosmos. However, unlike Plato who wished to separate the body from the soul, Jung held this to be both impossible and undesirable. In fact, he wrote that both soul and body are 'really one and the same thing' (Jung 1997: 99). Gray holds that 'our meanings arise from our embodiment' (Gray 2008: 28). Jung claimed:

... since man – or his ego consciousness – is a living body, his body is ultimate reality.

And that is right: it has to go its own path. It is a good path, and any deviation from it is wrong, just morbidity – wrongness in the biological sense (Jung 1997: 95).

For Jung, the body is an important aspect of our being and one which should be nurtured for else psychological disasters may occur. He wrote against those who have 'lost the body', as being 'only two-dimensional' (Jung 1968: 23). More controversially Jung asserted that originally Christ was complete with a body and a dark side, or what he referred to as 'the shadow'.

There can be no doubt that the original Christian conception of the *imago Dei* embodied in Christ meant an all embracing totality that even includes the animal side of man.

Nevertheless the Christ-symbol lacks wholeness in the modern psychological sense, since

it does not include the dark side of things but specifically excludes it in the form of a Luciferian opponent (Jung 1959: 41).

Jung goes on to assert that 'Christ is our nearest analogy of the self and its meaning' (Jung 1959: 49). Yet he also held that today 'Christ lacks the shadow that properly belongs to it' (Jung 1959: 53). Jung interprets Nietzsche as teaching the importance of maintaining a 'conscious relationship to the body' (Jung 1997: 48). After all 'we are made of earth' (Jung 1997: 46). Thus the self includes the body and in fact 'the body is the truest thing' (Jung 1997: 92). Jung held that 'since there is no consciousness without body, there can be no meaning without the body' (Jung 1997: 94). He even directly challenged the views of those who claim they wish to be free from the body. Even for 'those otherworldlings,' he remarked, 'the body is the absolute thing, even they believe most in the body' (Jung 1997: 99). In short, the body, for Jung, as it is for Feuerbach and Nietzsche, is essential to our spiritual lives and our quest for Individuation and wholeness. Being out of touch with one's body could also lead to serious mental trouble - even madness. Jung mused on the problem of the body:

Why has the self created the body? I don't know why we are not wind; we might be forms made of air and beyond sex or appetites or digestion and such nuisances, but it is a fact that we have bodies which have been created by the self, so we must assume that the self really means us to live in the body, to live that experiment (Jung 1997: 120)

Not all Christian thinkers held the body in contempt. Feuerbach held that the body was, in fact, a good thing as well as an essential element in our spiritual lives. Reason does not answer the questions we as human beings yearn for. Once more, we are creatures of *feeling* and these feelings, Feuerbach claimed, have their origin in our bodily makeup. Blood and bone are championed by this passionate man, but he also asserted that our body delivers us a personality

and brings us virtues like compassion and sympathy. The championing of love is a championing of humanity (Feuerbach 1957: 49).

Jung was likewise a champion of the body as the site for the spiritual. He likewise seemed to have borrowed the concept of *Individuation* from Nietzsche, and also shared with the philosopher a celebration of nature. Jung held that 'the unconscious is nature, and nature never lies' (Jung 1968: 186). Now we remember Gray's suggestion that Jung's archetypes equate with that of Plato's forms, what we need mention, however, is that Jung held his archetypes to be significantly different in some respects to Plato's Forms. Plato held that his Forms were good, beautiful, true and rational, unlike Jung who again and again claimed his archetypes had nothing to do with reason and could not be judged by the same criteria of goodness and beauty, that most of us employ in our ordinary conscious lives. Jung claimed:

... the collective unconscious is a very irrational factor, and our rational consciousness cannot dictate to it how it should make its appearance. Of course, if left entirely to itself, its activation can be very dangerous; it can, for instance, be a psychosis. Therefore, man's relation to the collective unconscious has always been regulated; there is a characteristic form by which the archetypal images are expressed, for the collective unconscious is a function that always operates, and man has to keep in touch with it. His psychic and spiritual health is dependent on the co-operation of the impersonal images. Therefore man has always had his religions (Jung 1968: 181).

I have included this lengthy passage because it contains some important ideas. First, Jung claimed that nature, or the Unconscious, cannot be properly understood by reason for it surpasses this limited faculty. Second, Jung suggested that a confrontation with these archetypal forces can lead to psychosis - that is, madness. Finally, he asserted that grappling with the Collective Unconscious is a

religious struggle and no matter how 'rational' we may think of ourselves, we are always at the mercy of these overpowering and irrational forces. Instead we must face them creatively through engaging in mythology, dreams and artistry.

The purpose of religions, according to Jung, has little to do with facts or metaphysics. Rather they are to be prized as 'therapeutic systems' (Jung 1988: 181). Reason, to repeat, when it comes to nature, and the Unconscious, is really powerless. Jung held that, 'the archetypal images decide the fate of man and not what we think and talk in the brain-chamber up in the attic' (Jung 1968: 183). He pointed to Nazi Germany as proof that even the most rational of people could be washed away, or drowned, by the forces of the Collective Unconscious (Jung 1968: 104). All of us, according to Jung, can become victims of this madness and our conscious minds, like our reason, offers little resistance. Jung held that 'we depend entirely upon the benevolent co-operation of our unconscious. If it does not co-operate, we are completely lost' (Jung 1968: 193).

Now although a confrontation with the Unconscious could lead to psychosis, it could also, more positively, lead to a mystical encounter. It could be both 'a great experience', as well as 'a catastrophe' (Jung 1997: 285). Jung explicitly stated that 'mystics are people who have a particularly vivid experience of the process of the Collective Unconscious. Mystical experience is experience of archetypes' (Jung 1968: 39). We find in Jung's seminar on Nietzsche a sentiment which seems to echo Nietzsche's 'neuroses of health' and Plato's 'madness as a blessing'. Jung suggested that Nietzsche, when he composed his *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, was in 'a condition of possession', adding that, 'it was as if he were possessed by a creative genius that took his brain and produced this work out of absolute necessity and in a most inevitable way' (Jung 1997: 11). Jung asserted that, 'we are not creating. We are only instrumental in the creative process: it creates in us, through us' (Jung 1997: 44). Jung held up Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* as a prime example of possession by the archetypes. He asserted, 'everything

happens quite involuntarily, as if in a tempestuous outburst of freedom, of absoluteness, of power and divinity' (Jung 1997: 25).

This idea of creativity and the power of the imagination in realizing the archetypes is essential to Jung's thought. Instead of finding in fantasy an easy escape from the pressures of reality, Jung found deep spiritual value and creative artistry in the imagination. 'Fantasy,' wrote Jung, 'can be the highest expression of the unity of man's individuality' (Jung 1971: 428). He went on to write:

Fantasy as imaginative activity is, in my view, simply the direct expression of psychic life, of psychic energy which cannot appear in consciousness except in the form of images or contents, just as physical energy cannot manifest itself except as a definite physical state stimulating the sense organs in physical ways ... Fantasy as imaginative activity is identical with the flow of psychic energy (Jung 1971: 433).

Jung elsewhere drew a distinction between 'fantasy' and 'imagination'. He told an audience in a seminar:

... if you take the correct meaning of this definition, fantasy is mere nonsense, a phantasm, a fleeting impression; but imagination is active, purposeful creation. And this is exactly the distinction I make too (Jung 1968: 192).

Jung went on to note that 'fantasy' is 'your own invention', whereas 'imagination' has to do with images which 'have a life of their own and that the symbolic events develop according to their own logic – that is, of course, if your conscious reason does not interfere' (Jung 1968: 192). This idea of not interfering with the creative process is essential to Jung's thought, for if one is to identify with the archetypes one

can suffer 'inflation' (Jung 1997: 27). Inflation can become highly serious if it 'does not come to pass' and could end up as a 'pathological symptom' (Jung 1997: 39). In order to avoid this psychic catastrophe Jung suggested one should remove her ego from the creative process and not identify oneself with the archetypal image. Jung asserted of the archetypes and consciousness that:

If he allows himself to be thoroughly possessed by them without questioning, without looking at them, there is no inflation, but the moment he splits off, when he thinks "I am the fellow", an inflation follows ... you must be quite naive (Jung 1997: 40).

Jung comments on the divine madness of Nietzsche, 'if Nietzsche had been more unconscious of what he did, he would have been able to come down to earth' (Jung 1997: 43).

Another important aspect of Jung's archetypes, which differ to Plato's forms, is their amorality, or immorality, at least in the traditional sense. Instead Jung promoted an embodied morality and claimed that goodness is what is good for the psyche and evil, that which upsets or sickens it. On the nature of the psyche and the issue of morality, Jung claimed;

If you do something which disturbs the experiment you will be punished, much more severely than in a police court. And if you do something which rather serves your experiment, you will have the blessing of heaven and the angels will come to dance with you. You are helped along. You have ungodly health, and you develop powers which you have not had before because you have obeyed, not the ego, but that will of the self (Jung 1997: 120).

Jung held that most of our existence is really decided by the Unconscious, and like Heraclitus

and Freud, he asserted that we are not really conscious of what we do (Jung 1997: 201). He believed we should cultivate the self, as something much more than our ego, even if that means we must 'wrestle with the archetypes', rather than, as can often happen, collapsing in 'fear' and becoming 'a mess' (Jung 1997: 239), or losing touch with the everyday world around us in the megalomania of egocentricity (inflation).

When it comes to the subject of love – a topic we have repeatedly come across - Jung was aware that much of what is asserted as such is really a corruption. He did, however, hold that true love existed even if it is rare. This '100 percent pure gold', he contrasted with the more prevalent and impure examples which he admitted could be explained away as 'instinctiveness, falsehood, selfishness, egotism and unconsciousness' (Jung 1997: 246). This false love often emerges from a psychological complex, and, according to Jung, many or most westerners really suffer from some sort of complex. He claimed that the majority of westerners to be unbalanced and have very little 'earth'. He went so far as to claim that 'we have all the characteristics of more or less mad people' (Jung 1997: 271). Western civilization, he asserted, had 'deviated from nature' and is marked by 'indefinite megalomania coupled with the feeling of inferiority' (1997: 271). Jung, nevertheless, drew a distinction between ordinary madness and 'psychosis' wherein the centre splits and the ego fragments (Jung 1968: 10-11). Jung also held the view that 'as long as he (the patient) can explain himself to me in such a way that I feel I have contact with him that man is not crazy. To be crazy is a very relative conception' (Jung 1968: 37). He went even so far as to claim that:

It is not an absolute increase in insanity that makes our asylums swell like monsters, it is the fact that we cannot stand abnormal people any more. So there are apparently very many more crazy people than formerly (Jung 1968: 38).

Jung's ideas of human being is that we all, even if we are not conscious of it, aim to complete ourselves and both dreams and neuroses are an attempt to do this. This meant 'recognition of and responsibility for his whole being, his good and his bad side, his superior as well as his inferior functions' (Jung 1968: 180). Jung held that completion is something quite different from perfection and even warned people against striving for the latter (Jung 1968: 110). Jung's idea on completion (or individuation) is really about the health of the individual and society at large and he refused to be drawn on whether the mystical was a divine affair (supernatural) or merely a psychological experience (natural). While he held that this experience was the highest spiritual enterprise known to humanity and could be found universally regardless of history and culture. Publicly he remained agnostic holding that individuation does not prove either way the existence of a deity. He wrote, 'psychological truths are not metaphysical insights; they are habitual modes of thinking, feeling, and behaving which experience has proved appropriate and useful' (Jung 1959: 27).

Maslow

Many psychologists are like Jung in their writing about ontological 'psychological truths' and their reluctance to engage in discussions on metaphysics. Abraham Maslow was first to coin the term 'peak experiences' which he held to be the highest spiritual experience human beings were capable of. While Maslow never mentions the Divine Creator, we have no doubt that his 'peak experiences' were mystical in nature.

There is universally reported a seeing of formerly hidden truths, a revelation in the strict sense, a stripping away of veils, and finally, almost always, the whole experience is experienced as bliss, ecstasy, rapture, exaltation (Maslow 1976: 60).

Maslow held that these experiences were entirely natural and belonged to being a human. He wrote of the importance of 'creative play' and the health of the psyche, 'which is a kind of permission to be ourselves, to fantasy, to let loose, and to be crazy privately' (Maslow 1976: 82).

According to Maslow we are all capable of achieving peak-experiences and failure to experience 'is a failure of culture and upbringing' (Maslow 1976: 220). When it comes to madness, the pathological begins when the creative '*has been walled off*' (Maslow 1976: 85). Mental illness can be recognized when the subject has lost control of her creativity (Maslow 1976: 152). Maslow also recognizes the role parents, friends and society have when it comes to the creation of the pathological subject (Maslow 1976: 55-68).

Winnicott

H.P. Winnicott shared with Maslow a profound belief that 'the creative' is the source of both the mad and the mystical – a question of 'ordinary living and the universals of individual development in a given society' (Winnicott 1974: 78). He was aware of the possibility of a 'pathological community' (Winnicott 1974: 80), wherein a society fails to encourage living creatively and instead enforces a strict compliance that adds up to a 'sick basis for life' and one which 'is not worth living' (Winnicott 1974: 76). To the contrary, love is recognized as the vital ingredient for both the health of the psyche and the site of the mystical. He claimed that, 'a baby can be fed without love, but lovelessness or impersonal *management* cannot succeed in producing a new autonomous human child' (Winnicott 1974: 127).

According to Winnicott human life, in itself, is mystical. As babies, with our experience of our mother's breast, we become aware of both a 'unity' and a 'duality'. Like Freud Winnicott accepts the supposition that, by adult standards, we are, in a way, insane as babies in our illusion 'that we have

magical control over our mother's breast' (Winnicott 1974: 12-13). We just wish for it, make a movement and there it is in front of our mouths. Growing up is a growing out of this crazy stage and our infantile faith in magical powers. 'Madness', writes Winnicott, 'only becomes true madness when it appears in later life' (Winnicott 1974: 83). Nevertheless, for Winnicott, there is something much more poignant to the human condition than just this. According to Winnicott there is something both powerful and deeply meaningful in our experience as babies. Against the purely negative claims of Freud, Winnicott proposed that a positive experience of confronting this duality (the experience of the mother's breast), coupled with the recognition of this singularity (the self that experiences the mother's breast), could be to experience something so moving, so beautiful and so profound that it is truly 'mystical' – and this 'religious' experience could well prepare the infant for a deep and meaningful life. Winnicott, then, found something deeply life-affirming, expressive and significant within our ordinary lives as human beings in which Freud never seemed to recognize, although both recognized that infant trauma, the experience of not having a 'good enough mother', could affect one for life. Winnicott wrote about the role of the psychoanalyst in helping the patient to live creatively, joyfully and meaningfully.

... the patient will find his or her self, and will be able to exist and feel real. Feeling real is more than existing; it is finding a way to exist as oneself, and to relate to objects as oneself, and to have a self into which to retreat for relaxation ... it is not easy and it is emotionally exhausting (Winnicott 1974: 138).

Tony Lynch finds in Winnicott's thought a 'radical change' from that of the Freudian enterprise (Lynch 2003: 2). Unlike Freud who could only think of the mystical in his 'rationalism' as being an 'illusion', Winnicott opened up the mystical as being an important aspect of our lives as human beings. Thus he makes no claims as to the 'supernatural' but rather he is making a statement about our own 'inner reality'

(Lynch 2003: 9). Lynch writes of 'subjective truth' which he relates to Winnicott's concept of the True Self. Lynch claims that as human beings it is up to us to create, and recreate our own world (Lynch 2003: 4). This involves an embodied reason, or what Lynch calls 'practical reason' – an experience of the self where 'no purely theoretical reflection reaches it' (Lynch 2003: 4). It is the experience that transcends 'mere *'knowing'*, and, as it were, *'knowing with one's soul'*" (Lynch: 2003: 4).

Winnicott and Lynch draw a distinction between the words and deeds of the True Self and the mad mutterings and irrational behaviour of the ill. The former, 'the person who speaks in a mystical idiom wishes to be understood' and also 'wishes to understand themselves' (Lynch 2003: 6). Lynch asserts that 'we must be able and permitted to make sense of our condition, so to find ourselves and the world' (Lynch 2003: 13). In order for us to do this we need to feel secure and hold 'a sustaining belief in a benign environment', it is only then that 'can we start to feel real, and feeling real ourselves, are we ready for the external world' (Lynch 2003: 19). The mystical, according to Lynch, is about following a middle path between the madness of 'utter subjectivity' and the impersonal 'withdrawal into total objectivity' (Lynch 2003: 11). Feeling real means 'finding the world as our world' (Lynch 2003: 14). Furthermore 'what lies at the heart of our sense of a real world is *only* that which is in our power' (Lynch 2003: 15).

Winnicott, Maslow, Jung and Freud although they may all loosely fit into the humanism of modern psychology, all had different ideas on the nature of reality, the mystical and madness itself. Freud understood reality as being made up of corporeal instincts and urges. Blindly we grope about unconscious that the whole of our life's purpose is really driven by the 'pleasure principle'. To confront this takes courage, just as it took courage for Freud to challenge the dominant political and religious ideology of his time. According to Freud, spirituality is really a case of 'libido displacement', yet he admitted the faculty of love, and the property of beauty, do not neatly fit into 'the struggle of the human

species for existence' (Freud 1846: 103).

Jung's world picture included love and beauty as aspects of human civilization and spirituality. For Jung there is much more to our psychology than blind and instinctual urges. He developed his spiritual ideas in his system of the Collective Unconscious. Whereas Freud offered no explanation for the mystical than the project of mere escapism, Jung held that mysticism was an experience of completeness - a union of opposites, or a psychic integration (the theory offered by Heraclitus). Its failure is a failure to complete being – it is a psychic abortion which can lead to madness. If pushed Jung would probably express the same sentiment as Maslow, namely that the mystical is a natural phenomenon which arises out of creative human potential. Maslow called this 'peak experience'. Against the 'self-actualizers', Maslow claimed that mental illness begins where the creative has been walled off and like Freud, Jung, and Winnicott, he held that culture, family and acquaintances could produce a mad or sick individual.

Winnicott, another 'naturalist', found that the mystical could be found in ordinary living. Winnicott, like Maslow, was a believer that love is essential to our psychic well-being and the mystical. Its absence, a possible trigger for psychic sickness. Truth, love and the mystical, for Winnicott, were all related to the human experience of 'feeling real'.

Chapter 9: Existentialism

One of the difficulties of writing about 'the mystical' is that different cultures and indeed different people themselves report different experiences. Now it could be that while Ultimate Reality remains the same wherever it occurs; individual perspectives due to different cultures and different personalities ultimately affects one's experience. Plato held there to be an Ultimate Reality outside of our ordinary experience which is beautiful, good and true. Wittgenstein and Otto experienced a sense of mystery and wonder. Freud admitted he had never experienced the religious 'oceanic feeling' at all. While other psychologists like Maslow, Winnicott, and Jung held the mystical to be a natural experience for human beings which can profit both the individual and society at large. What we next wish to address is the existence of negative experience which we find in the philosophy known as 'existentialism'; in particular its French version. There were many interesting and creative individuals in this school but for our purposes we will be only examining the contributions of Kierkegaard, Sartre, Bataille and Artaud.

Although they all held important differences between them, what we can suggest is that when it comes to our subject of mysticism and madness, all four held (like the Hindus) that our everyday existence, and Ultimate Truth itself, are maddening. Furthermore it takes courage to confront this. Also, all four write of the complexity and ambiguity of love and its relation to the mystical. Let us begin with Soren Kierkegaard.

Kierkegaard

One of the most important influences in the existentialist tradition was the Danish born Soren

Kierkegaard. This complex thinker was both an existentialist and a Christian. Due to the scope of this essay we cannot go into all of the original and daring ideas of this influential figure. What we will say is that Kierkegaard held that religion (in particular Christianity) was a kind of madness – 'a passion' (Kierkegaard 1985: 79). Thus, once more, spirituality is held to involve something other than mere reason. Elsewhere he noted Plato's distinction between madness as a blessing and madness as a disease (Kierkegaard 1962: 267). In *Fear and Trembling* (1985) Kierkegaard celebrated what he held as the great strength of the patriarch Abraham in the latter's willingness to sacrifice his only son when God commanded him to do so. Abraham's obedience, according to Kierkegaard, entailed the 'outward form' of 'insanity' (Kierkegaard 1985: 16). Kierkegaard went on to explain that the condition of the religious is one of 'anguish' (Kierkegaard 1985: 29) and most importantly, faith itself, requires the utmost 'courage' (Kierkegaard 1985: 55). One of the important aspects of Kierkegaard's thought is his insistence that Christianity has nothing to do with utility or social usefulness. To the contrary, genuine Christian ethos must be completely God-centric to the extent of reaching absurdity – as the story of Abraham and Isaac illustrates. Kierkegaard comments, 'Abraham is great through an act of purely personal virtue' (Kierkegaard 1985: 69). In this manner he praises the virtue of the 'single traveller' (Kierkegaard 1985: 90). This celebration of the single one profoundly influences the school of French existentialism. According to Kierkegaard, the single traveller 'humanly speaking ... is insane and cannot make himself understood to anyone' (Kierkegaard 1985: 91). Furthermore, Kierkegaard attacks the practice of secular ethics as 'really nothing but vanity' (Kierkegaard 1985: 96) and that 'absolute faith', on the other hand, requires 'absolute humility' (Kierkegaard 1985: 114). The nature of this humility – this work of love – is so outside what most worldly and comfortable Christians practice it appears as 'absurd' (Kierkegaard 1985: 38) and 'humanly speaking', is a manifestation of 'madness' (Kierkegaard 1962: 116).

In addition to his challenging ideas on Christian spirituality, Kierkegaard also had some

interesting and important ideas on love. When it comes to love, 'only he who abides in love can recognize love, and in the same way his love is to be known' (Kierkegaard 1962: 33). As a Christian, Kierkegaard asserted, 'you ought to love' and this love is the 'origin of all tasks' and the highest 'ethical task' (Kierkegaard 1962: 64). Now importantly Kierkegaard asserted that there were three types of love; 'erotic love', 'friendship' and pure Christian love. When it comes to the first two Kierkegaard held that they were 'really another form of self-love' (Kierkegaard 1962: 65). He called these impurities the 'enchancing illusion of love' which he contrasted with the love which is 'indeed affection and devotion' (Kierkegaard 1962: 113). This pure love has 'the requirement of a sacrifice which the merely human conception of love does not suspect' (Kierkegaard 1962: 119). Furthermore 'a true sacrifice must unconditionally be without reward' (Kierkegaard 1962: 123). Pure love is 'self-renouncing love' and it is self-renunciation which discovers that God is' (Kierkegaard 1962: 333). 'In self-renunciation', wrote Kierkegaard, 'one achieves the ability to be the instrument by inwardly making himself nothing before God' (Kierkegaard 1962: 336).

Kierkegaard, like the existentialists who followed, attacked escapism and self deception (Kierkegaard 1962: 158-159). Kierkegaard claimed that 'the world does not understand what love is' (Kierkegaard 1962; 123) and really 'what the world honours and loves under the name of love is group selfishness' (Kierkegaard 1962: 123). Pure love is something entirely different and it is 'the most astonishing undertaking' (Kierkegaard 1962: 207). Furthermore when someone fails to love purely 'he has deceived himself out of the highest good and the greatest blessedness' (Kierkegaard 1962: 225). This pure love is the highest form of truth and must, consequently, be contrasted with that of delusion. Kierkegaard asserted:

Delusion is always floating; for that reason it sometimes appears quite light and spiritual, because it is so airy. Truth takes a firm step, and for that reason sometimes a difficult

one, too (Kierkegaard 1962: 16).

Truth, then, is the highest and only pure form of love. It demands humility, selflessness and sacrifice and because of its rarity and its difficulty it is perceived as eccentric and insane. Next we will examine Sartre and his ideas on Ultimate Truth.

Sartre

Earlier in our piece we pointed to a passage of Sartre's from his existential novel *Nausea* and openly wondered if his protagonist, Roquentin, was a mystic of sorts. On the one hand he writes of an unveiling and disclosure of a reality outside our usual human consciousness. On the other hand this experience was neither pleasing nor was it good. He noted:

... existence had suddenly unveiled itself ... the diversity of things, their individuality, was only an appearance, a veneer. This veneer had melted, leaving soft, monstrous masses, in disorder – naked with a frightening, obscene nakedness (Sartre 1965: 183).

His experience, in other words, was profoundly negative. Sartre's protagonist is in some ways like Kierkegaard's 'single traveller', with this important difference, Roquentin is Godless and this Godlessness not only separates him from Kierkegaard but also from some of the more traditional authorities which may well deem it 'diabolical'. However, Sartre is not at all swayed by this attitude. His Roquentin continues:

The *real* sea is cold and black, full of animals; it crawls underneath this thin green film which is designed to deceive people. The sylphs all around me have been taken in: they

see nothing but the thin film, that is what proves the existence of God. I see underneath (Sartre 1965: 179).

Now according to 'traditional authorities' in the Christian and Neo-Platonic tradition; Sartre's negative experience could be explained away by such factors as inexperience, pride, materialism, inquisitiveness, or even the devil. This is the express view of the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* (1961: 105). However Sartre would have rejected this. Instead he would have claimed that these authorities have fooled themselves into believing that Ultimate Reality is benevolent and good – that life has an intrinsic meaning and that we as human beings have purpose. Sartre wrote:

... by definition, existence is not necessity. To exist is simply *to be there*; what exists appears, lets itself be *encountered*, but you can never *deduce* it. There are people, I believe, who have understood that. Only they have tried to overcome this contingency by inventing a necessary, causal being. But no necessary being can explain existence: contingency is not an illusion, an appearance which can be dissipated; it is absolute, and can consequently perfect gratuitousness. Everything is gratuitous, that park, this town, and myself (Sartre 1965: 188).

In other words Sartre claimed that many people may have experienced this sad state of affairs but have not been able to courageously face up to it. Instead they have conjured up for themselves a 'necessary, causal being' (Sartre 1965: 188). They do this to protect themselves from the horror of existence – they engage in illusion. Sartre dubbed this type of self-deception 'bad faith' and claimed that it 'can even be the normal aspect of life for a great number of people. Person's can live in Bad Faith' (Sartre 1969: 50). It is possible that Sartre may have accepted the first aspect of the Platonic forms, that being, that we, in our 'bad faith', are witnesses to a puppet show. However he could not have accepted the second

suggestion – the higher plane of existence with its divine and heavenly form. Instead he would have thought that this was really just another example of bad faith. Importantly he would also refute everyone else who writes of 'mystic feelings' whether they be Wittgensteinians or psychologists. In fact Sartre rejected 'feelings' altogether claiming that they, themselves, are a means of escape – a conduct of bad faith. He claimed feelings are 'magical' and are utilized as a 'major recourse against a situation too urgent' (Sartre 1969: 61). Sartre continued, 'the goal of bad faith ... is to put oneself out of reach, it is an escape' (Sartre 1969: 65).

Sartre's argument in short, then, is that the so-called 'mystical' when it is experienced as sublime, beautiful, delightful and so on, is really an illusion – a form of bad faith. Sartre held that there was no purpose to life at all. He claimed that, 'the universe is bleak, and it is precisely in order to protect ourselves from its frightful, illimitable monotony that we make some place or other into a 'shelter' (Sartre 1971: 69). Feelings, as we have already noted, were held by Sartre to be a form of escape and thus does he likewise reject the idea that the universe, or human beings themselves, are full of love. Love can be explained away as bad faith or arising out of neediness and insecurity. The idea of the Divine can be explained away the same way. People engage in 'projects' because they are incomplete, they lack being and yet they are constantly striving for it. Sartre went further and claimed, 'the best way to conceive of the fundamental project of human reality is to say that man is the being whose project is to be God' (Sartre 1969: 566). The project of religion itself can be understood as the attempt to realize this desire. Sartre:

Whatever may be the myths and rites of the religion considered, God is first “sensible to the heart” of man as the one who identifies and defines him in his ultimate and fundamental project ... God, value and supreme end of transcendence, represents the permanent limit in terms of which man makes known to himself what he is. To be man

means to reach towards being God. Or, if you prefer, man fundamentally is the desire to be God (Sartre 1969: 566).

Thus, Sartre delivers to us here a psychological reason behind mystical experience – the desire to be God. Sartre then shares the idea of the feelings - 'God is first “sensible to the heart” of man' (Sartre 1969: 566). Wherein we find the difference of opinion between the mystic and the atheistic existentialist – is that the latter finds in the *feelings* only illusion and bad faith. As opposed to the spiritual person who finds truth, knowledge and beauty. Who is correct? Is there even a way in which we could go about deciding who is right? Sartre, if he was not so antagonistic towards the possibility of a pure and true love, may have found in Kierkegaard a solution to his problem. Kierkegaard, we remember, shared with Sartre a belief that ordinary love (that of friendship and the erotic) was really a form of selfishness, escapism and deception. However Kierkegaard held on strongly to a belief in a higher love - divine love - which was both good and true, although rare and difficult to achieve. It is herein the French existentialists part ways with one of their most significant influences, Soren Kierkegaard. Sartre's existential hero was filled with anguish, but unlike Kierkegaard's 'Knight of Faith' (Kierkegaard: 1985), had no recourse to assuage his agony. Camus, another influential Existentialist (who unfortunately we cannot go into due to the scope of this essay) was likewise persuaded by Kierkegaard that life is essentially absurd. But like Sartre, he held no faith in a higher consciousness consisting of divine love. Camus' absurd hero resembles Sartre's Roquentin both in his disbelief that there is genuine meaning in life and his passionate clinging to life regardless of its lack of purpose. Camus sets out his philosophy in his essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1975). Now what does any of this do with madness? Well, Sartre's existentialist, Camus' absurd hero and Kierkegaard's single traveller, seem to share some similarities with Plato's protagonist Socrates. In particular they all share the idea of integrity, authenticity and a vigorous attack against the lies and self-deception of society. We have witnessed this 'morality' in Kierkegaard's work but it is also an outstanding feature of Sartre's

contribution.

Kierkegaard's single traveller may seem insane by our ordinary human standards (or at least this seems to be the suggestion made by this most challenging of thinkers). However it is possible that Sartre's Roquentin is more than just eccentric, he may well be, to some degree, clinically unwell. This seems to be a possibility when he writes of seeing 'underneath', appears confused and lives his life as a lonely outsider with no real connection with anything (material, human or godly), yet he also seems to be lucid enough and live life with an honesty outside of the lies and hypocrisy of society. He, almost alone, lives life with an integrity at odds with the illusions and bad faith of the world around him. Now one thing we may consider is that Roquentin is not mad but he may very well be sick. Yet the whole purpose of this novel seems to be to show that sickness is more authentic and more courageous than health. Roquentin's sickness is born out of a heroic struggle for honesty and truth and as we have seen from Plato onwards, disbelieving in the illusions of the puppet show may make one seem ill or crazy to the ordinary ignorant. However, we must repeat that it is this godless neurosis which separates Kierkegaard from the French existentialists who followed. Kierkegaard not only held on (if desperately, or even absurdly), to the Divine but he also suggested that the actual character of the subject conditions his or her view of existence. Thus 'a confused person certainly thinks that existence is a rather muddled setting' (Kierkegaard 1962: 216). Kierkegaard's work can never be underestimated, like Nietzsche he was at times almost clairvoyant in his appraisal of the times to come. Kierkegaard looked towards a future 'when God is dismissed' and wherein 'men will come closer and closer to transforming all existence into doubt or confusion' (Kierkegaard 1962: 120). This future, one might suggest, began with French existentialism. For many, this period was marred with the darkness of godlessness – a gloomy world of suffering and meaninglessness. Its supporters, however, held it to be a period of optimism and enlightenment marked by a heroic struggle for integrity and authenticity. This 'essence' of existential godlessness can be found in the work of our next existential thinker,

Georges Bataille.

Bataille

Sartre's contemporary, Georges Bataille, shared with Sartre the unhappy outlook that there is no meaning (or rather we have to create our own meaning) in life itself and thus there is no Ultimate Reality – like Plato proposed, wherein there is beauty, goodness and order. Bataille claimed that 'the world is mad, profoundly so and without design' and it is the subject's realization of this madness 'which throws him at the throat of God' (Bataille 1988: 153). When it comes to the mystical, or what Bataille called 'inner experience' we are faced with feelings like anguish, torment, eroticism or laughter – not the usual emotions celebrated by traditional mystics – but, then again, Bataille was far from the usual mystic. His wild adventure, delivered in disturbing and upsetting language, fascinates the reader into reconsidering her ideas on madness and mysticism.

To put it simply, Bataille shared with Sartre the idea that most of us are really escapist in our response to the bleak universe which surrounds us. When it comes to the mystical, Bataille shares not the feelings of wonder, awe, love, compassion and so forth. Again Bataille could be looked upon as a 'diabolical' mystic warned about by 'traditional authorities'. Yet, once more like Sartre he would have rejected this theory and instead claimed authenticity – living life with integrity and honesty at odds with the rest of the escapists. Bataille refused to believe that 'inner experience' truly led to tranquility, rest and indisputable truth. When he was young he spent some time in a Catholic monastery, but he turned against Christianity and instead wildly embraced his own mystical adventure – an experience without dogma, doctrine, guidance or even a path. Bataille sought the mystical alone, on his own terms and without faith in a happy ending, nor indeed without any belief in an ending or 'harbour' at all.

In the tradition of the French existentialist's Bataille contended that existence was bleak, terrifying and without design. He also held that most of us, most of the time, attempt to escape this miserable condition. Where Sartre wrote of 'bad faith', Bataille claimed we indulge ourselves with intoxicants to flee from the horror of existence. Bataille, in the introduction to his *Inner Experience*, asked the question, 'what happens to us when, disintoxicated, we learn what we are?' He went on to assert 'the self-acknowledged suffering of the disintoxicated is the subject of this book' (Bataille 1988: xxxii).

In a way, then, Bataille is not dissimilar to Sartre's Roquentin in his heroic attempt to abandon intoxicants, or bad faith, in order to face the 'extreme limit of the "possible"' (1988: 39). Bataille wrote:

... I have of the divine an experience so mad that one will laugh at me if I speak of it. I enter into a dead end. There all possibilities are exhausted; the "possible" slips away and the impossible prevails. To face the impossible – exorbitant, indubitable – when nothing is possible any longer is in my eyes to have an experience of the divine; it is analogous to a torment (Bataille 1988: 33).

Bataille experienced anguish - 'the passion of the soul' which 'seeks an object'. However this object '... is not God', for 'I have created it – but for the same reason it is not Nothingness' (Bataille 1988: 73). Now although in some ways Bataille's 'inner experience' is a lonely and terrifying one, he has access to the important and very human experiences of laughter and eroticism which are something different, according to Bataille, than the intoxicants of escapism (it is herein we have the main point of disagreement with Sartre and Bataille which unfortunately due to the scope of

essay we cannot go into). Bataille, unlike Sartre, found truth in these aspects of spiritual experiences – a genuine mysticism without self-deception and he also held controversial ideas on traditional mysticism, including the Christian:

I'm free to regard it as part of a single impulse that encompasses erotic and criminal transports. More than any believer, Christian mystics crucify Jesus. The mystic's love requires God to risk himself, to shriek out his despair on the cross. The basic crime associated with the saints is erotic, related to the transports and tortured fevers that produce 'a burning love in the solitude of monasteries and convents' (Bataille 1992: 31).

Later Bataille explained what he understood to be the erotic factor in mysticism and how it lends itself to ecstasy.

In this annihilating freedom, giddiness is transformed into rapturous calm. The strength that lovers have (or their movement toward freedom), their violence, their fears, their ever-present expectation of making love, their skittish intolerance, these all contribute to dissolving them into a void (Bataille 1992: 61).

Bataille asserted that 'there is no wall between eroticism and mysticism'. He even held that they, 'use the same words, deal in identical images and they refuse to recognize it!' (Bataille 1992: 131). Perhaps we should note what we mentioned earlier with respect to Plato: namely the possibility that those possessed by the bestial and the corporeal may misunderstand what is meant for the spiritually pure. Is it the case that Bataille is misinterpreting the words of spiritual texts owing to his own obsession with the sensual and his impurity of soul? This, once more, is not easily answerable so let us return then to what he writes on laughter.

When it comes to laughter, Bataille writes of a laughter that illuminates and causes one to tremble (Bataille 1992: 55). We have already found this idea in the work of Nietzsche – a powerful influence on Bataille's thought. Bataille contends that, '... the intensity of Nietzsche's feelings made him laugh and tremble at the same time. He wept too much: these were tears of jubilation' (Bataille 1988: 154). Like his great influence, Bataille's ideas are likely to be considered at the least, controversial and at the most, absolutely blasphemous to those of traditional piety. According to himself, Bataille is no blasphemer, writing, 'I don't in the least hate God – I know nothing at all about him' (Bataille 1992: 96). To repeat existentialism is concerned with what can be experienced authentically and is dismissive of supernatural and metaphysical ideas. For the existentialist what we truly experience, when we are without crutches, intoxicants and bad faith, is anguish, chaos and the fear of death. We, nevertheless, often find impiety in their work. Bataille found humour in the extreme torments of the crucified Christ. 'What could be funnier', laughed Bataille, 'to the point of being crazily profound? Jehovah untangling himself, nailing himself to a cross!' (Bataille 1992: 132).

Bataille wrote a lot about laughter, although one finds little wit or hilarity in his work. Perhaps what he meant by the transports of humour, so brilliantly executed by Nietzsche, was that it could reveal the profound absurdity of existence and yet enable us to carry on with cheer and joy. Existence cannot be explained rationally and the powers of reason, when it comes to experience, are like nothing compared with the elevating passions of eroticism and laughter. Bataille wrote, 'I live by tangible experience and not by logical explanation' (Bataille 1988: 33). If one is to consider the tale of the crucified son of God who had to become man and be tortured, mocked, misunderstood and finally put to death in the most abominable manner, then one is confronted by what could well be deemed as madness. As Kierkegaard recognized, the themes involved in this extremely popular religion are far from rational and neither are human beings for that matter. What truly moves us, according to Bataille,

is not the workings of the rational but rather the elevating powers of eroticism and laughter.

Bataille, Sartre and Nietzsche not only shared a profound dismissal of an ordered, loving and benevolent divinity – they also rejected the idea that moral purity could lead us to an experience of the higher cosmos. These thinkers rejected traditional morality and while they are often accused of immorality or amorality, they themselves, held their own moral sensibility and it had all to do with authenticity. Authenticity is about being true to oneself, avoiding bad faith and facing up to the bleak nature of existence and one's fear of death. Nietzsche asserted that many so called morals, or ethics, had more to do with selfishness and fear than being good in themselves and engaged in because they were right, true or rational (this view was likewise held by Freud, and to some extent Jung). The 'love of the neighbour', for instance, may well be an example of pretending to love so that one can be loved in return (vanity) or be left alone (fear). These are examples of bad faith. Now Bataille claimed that just as our 'inner experience' is governed by eroticism and laughter, so too is all human behaviour including that considered the most spiritually 'pure'. The latter, according to Bataille is really a fiction and therefore another example of self-deception.

Bataille wrote about sacrifice and the vital role it plays in our spiritual/mystical lives. Today, while we no longer make human sacrifices, as in more primitive times, we retain the same passions and desires of our ancestors. Now, however, 'symbols (or fictions) have replaced reality' (Bataille 1992: 32). Yet we still engage in sacrificing 'a sole individual' who will 'die in the place of all the others' (Bataille 1988: 98). This is sometimes related to the erotic as well as sometimes being accompanied by laughter. Yet, Bataille maintained, it remains true that 'sacrifice is immoral' and 'poetry is immoral' (Bataille 1988: 137). Bataille asserted that 'poetry ... is the perversion of language even a bit more than eroticism is the perversion of sexual function' (Bataille 1988: 150). In short:

Meditational subjects have taken the place of real orgies, drunkenness, and flesh and blood – the latter becoming objects of disapproval. In this way there remained a summit connected with desire, while the various violations of existence related to that summit no longer were compromising, since now they have become mental representations (Bataille 1992: 32).

Thus, that other aspect of the mystic: purity and moral sensibility celebrated by so many is likewise rejected by Bataille. Nor did he aim to be integrated with that of society like those mystics who profoundly effected the lives of others through acts of charity, devotion and love. Bataille cannot be said to be like one of these saints, neither in service to others nor in clarity and inner peace. He may be seen by some to be some sort of diabolical mystic – an uncaring eroticist and a laughing lunatic. He, himself, went so far as to admit, 'my friends avoid me. I frighten, not because of my cries, but because I cannot leave anyone in peace. I simplify: haven't I often given good pretexts?' (Bataille 1988: 41). In his book, *On Nietzsche* (1992), Bataille wrote of his experience of the second world war:

The issue of the fighting in Paris.

I experience relief imagining untold excesses of suffering instead of an expectedly swift liberation. Sometimes we prefer dealing with horror to being patient (Bataille 1992: 160).

Obviously this type of attitude sets him completely at odds with those loving contemplatives celebrated throughout the history of higher spirituality. Bataille also acknowledged his extreme vanity which is considered a vice in most spiritual traditions. There is a thematic flavour, here, of deliberate, Nietzschean, anti-Christianity. He wrote of '... a feeling of unbearable vanity' which he recognized as 'the core of all this (as humility is the core of Christian experience)' (Bataille 1988:

81). Yet there is, here, a sense of the existential commitment of authenticity – being true to oneself and avoiding illusions. Likewise there is something Socratic about this in terms of both self-insight and provocation to society at large. Bataille preaches his own moral code, that being, 'taking risks and chances' (Bataille 1992: 93). Interestingly, according to Bataille the pursuit of chance has its own moral attributes, 'patience, love and letting go' (Bataille 1992: 111).

It should be stressed that Bataille did not deny that we experience mystical 'feelings', nor did he suggest that they are unimportant. He did, however, give them a different interpretation from that given by more traditional authorities. His ideas on love, for instance, are interesting. He was a believer in love but never found in it a force which joins us together or unites us with the Divine Creator. Rather, he experienced in love an 'ultimate collapse' and it was by experiencing this collapse that he claimed to have gained 'access to the extreme limit of what is possible' (Bataille 1988: 120). He asserted, 'we cannot conceive of ultimate collapse in a way other than in love. At this price alone, it seems to me, I gain access to the extreme limit of what is possible ...' (Bataille 1988: 120). Love is the passion that leads to anguish and ecstasy but love, for Bataille, doesn't lead to the fulfilment of desire for the Divine, or Bliss or Nirvana, celebrated by so many of the traditional mystics. Rather, there is no possibility of 'satisfaction in love' owing to the bleak nature of being, or existing. Bataille wrote, 'there is deep down in a man's heart so much uneasiness that it is not in the power of any God – nor of any woman – to allay it (Bataille 1988: 123). Life, including love, is essentially tragic. Bataille suggested, 'is it not a tragedy itself that man cannot live except by destroying, killing, absorbing? And not only plants, animals, but other men' (Bataille 1988: 132). Thus, even his ideas of love are unique, bizarre even. He claimed, 'THE GREATEST, most certain love doesn't prevent you from being the butt of infinite laughter. Such love can be likened to an utterly demented music, to ecstatic lucidity' (Bataille 1992: 61). In the end, for Bataille, love is 'infinite anguish' (Bataille 1992: 105). One might ask if Bataille is in

love with neither God nor woman nor himself – then who or what is he in love with? Bataille himself is confused asking himself:

... when there is nothing. What was I desperately in love with? A glimpse, an open door. A sudden impulse and an irrepressible need – these annihilate the heaviness of the world (Bataille 1992: 61).

Thus love is a human longing arising from the anguish of the human condition. Perhaps this is the case of friendship and eroticism, suggested by Kierkegaard who nevertheless maintained faith in a higher love – pure love. What Kierkegaard proposed, however, neglected the very mysteriousness of love - something which Bataille seems to have suggested in the above passage.

Artaud

The poet Artaud shared with both Sartre and Bataille a profound conviction that life is bleak, that in the face of the terrors of existence we become full of anguish and that 'we are hemmed in on all sides by mountains of problems from 'which we cannot, on good conscience, ever escape'. Artaud wrote that 'nature, herself, is anti social in her soul' (Artaud 1965: 61) and when it comes to human existence 'man is miserable', 'the soul is weak', and 'there are men who shall always get lost' (Artaud 1965: 62). Much of Artaud's work is concerned with suffering, wisdom and insight and the possible relationship between them. In a letter to a friend and publisher he wrote, 'I am a man who has greatly suffered in mind, and as such I have a *right* to speak' (Artaud 1965: 12). Paradoxically for Artaud, the lucid witnesses of the truth are labelled as mad and carefully locked away by a society which is really sick. Rather than the misguided idea of attempting to make them better, he instead preached the idea of attempting to drive everyone into insanity. 'I want to make a book', Artaud wrote, 'that will derange

men, that will be like an open door leading them where they would never have consented to go. A door simply ajar on reality' (Artaud 1965: 26). Again we are reminded of Bataille and his celebration of 'despair, madness, love ...' (Bataille 1988: 37). Artaud, like Bataille and Sartre, held no faith in the perfect order and goodness celebrated in the Neo-Platonic tradition, yet he did seem to share with these men a belief that most of us live life in a cave and will go to all lengths to avoid confronting the illusions a society is founded upon. According to Artaud, the mad are the divine seers in their perceiving all that is false. They are 'above life', 'have pains which the ordinary man does not know' and consequently when confronted with the ordinary person, they are 'the dissolvers of their stability' (Artaud 1965: 64). Perceiving the truth and avoiding illusion is highly difficult and the perceiver is bound to suffer for it. This spiritual disappointment and despair is never clearer than in Artaud's poem 'A Journey to the Land of Tarahumas' (Artaud 1965: 69-83) where he recounts an experience he had with the religion of Native Americans.

... having come so far, to find myself at last on the threshold of an encounter and of this place I had hoped so many revelations from, and then to feel so forlorn, so empty, un-crowned. Had I ever known a state other than this grief cracking up and pursuing me through the nights? Was there anything for me that was not at the door of agony and should I contact at least one body, one single human body safe from my perpetual crucifixion? (Artaud 1965: 73).

Artaud was very much interested in the body and was a great critic of those who sought to flee it. Let us recall Plato's dismissal of the body, in favour of the soul, on account of its 'maddening' obsessions. Those influenced by Nietzsche, on the other hand, champion the body as being the site of truth; the soul, as something separate from the body, being an illusion. Artaud, however, was not as optimistic as Nietzsche was when it came to the body yet he held with him a profound contempt for those who seek to flee from it. Artaud attacked those 'ascending into the sky as a spirit instead of descending deeper

and deeper as a body into hell, that is, into sexuality, soul of all that lives' (Artaud 1965: 82). Yes, the body is the site of loneliness (Artaud 1965: 123) but, as Artaud makes clear in the above passage, it is also the site of truth and the authentic must come to grips with its undeniable presence. Artaud held that our body was really where our spirituality takes place. He claimed that, 'whatever's been made with blood, we've made a poem of. And what do you think the gregorian chant comes from, that interrupted rape of an emulsion of blood?' (Artaud 1965: 131). Artaud seemed to hold that the most insightful and courageously honest of persons are also the most feared and despised. In 'Van Gogh: The Man Suicided by Society' (Artaud 1965: 135-163), he held up the famed painter as a prime example of the seer/madman. Van Gogh is praised as being a 'sensitive butcher', and, continued Artaud, 'in every demented soul there is a misunderstood genius who frightens people and who has never found an escape from the strangling life has prepared for him, except in delirium' (Artaud 1965: 144).

Artaud, then, not only blamed society for 'suiciding' Van Gogh, he also held it responsible for shattering the mind of the seer. Society, out of fear of having its illusions destroyed, must silence the voice of the mad subject. In this way, the mad person is like Socrates the 'stinging fly' whom Athens sentenced to death. Now today we find such practices barbaric and morally reprehensible. Artaud (like Bataille), however, held that our fears and passions remain the same and perhaps we continue to attempt to silence the Socratic voice by such means as compulsory medication and hospitalization. Artaud asked the question 'what is a genuine lunatic?' and answered, 'he is a man who prefers to go mad, in the social sense of the world, rather than forfeit a certain higher idea of human honor' (Artaud 1965: 137). Artaud continued:

... that's how society strangled all those it wanted to get rid of, or wanted to protect itself from, and put them in asylums, because they refused to be accomplices to a kind of lofty swill.

For a lunatic is a man that society does not wish to hear but wants to prevent from uttering

certain unbearable truths (Artaud 1965: 137).

Here, once more, Artaud seemed to suggest that the mad voice, like the voice of Socrates, is also the voice of divine and mystical truth which society is everywhere trying to silence because it finds it too unbearable and would rather protect itself with lies. Artaud claimed:

.. reality is terribly superior to all history, to all fable, to all divinity, to all surreality.

All that is needed is the genius to interpret it,

which no painter before Van Gogh had done ... (Artaud 1965: 143).

Those geniuses who can interpret reality are also, according to Artaud, the ones who suffer the most. In his view, 'no one has ever written or painted, sculpted, modelled, built, invented, except to get out of hell' (Artaud 1965: 149).

The existential movement problematized notions such as spirituality, morality and ordinary living. All four of our thinkers, I think, would conclude that the majority of people live (metaphorically) in a cave (Plato's suggestion). However the idea of possibly emerging from this ignorance and darkness into a world of light, beauty and truth is far from clear. Kierkegaard had faith in a higher truth and like so many mystical thinkers, claimed that it could be reached by the power of love. This, however, must be differentiated from self-serving and impure forms. By dwelling in anguish, self-denial, and even madness itself, Kierkegaard's solitary traveller was a rare and courageous individual. Our other three existentialists maintained faith in this solitary courage but they all had different ideas of Ultimate Truth and love itself. Sartre held love to be nothing more than self-deception and escapism - for Bataille – as the source of ultimate collapse (far from more traditional ideas of delight, beauty and sublimity) and in Artaud's lonely and isolated world it hardly seemed to

appear. Although the existentialists are often accused of amorality or immorality, they nevertheless retained a morality of their own which had nothing to do with religion, utilitarianism, Kantianism and so forth. This was the morality of authenticity – or being true to oneself. Reality exists but it is difficult to perceive because of our self-deception and escapism. Furthermore, it is far from the sublimity sung by so many – this experience itself of the divine is, in itself, a form of 'bad faith' where the mystic procure's for herself a safe and loving harbour (God) in order to rest from existential terror, the finality of death and utter meaninglessness, not to mention the 'hell' of other people. To face this truth, to repeat, takes enormous courage.

Chapter 10: Post Psychoanalysis and Existentialism

For various reasons the schools of psychoanalysis and existentialism have become, to some extent, dated. However, some of the ideas still retain a strong hold on more modern thought especially when it comes to the topic of the human condition, the limitations of the faculty of reason, the nature of mental sickness (or illness) and the importance of the imagination as a tool in our creative and mystical lives. Let us then turn to three influential psychologists who came after the initial period of psychoanalysis, analytical psychology and existentialism. All three were influenced by these ideas, yet also, in a sense, moved beyond them to forge their own contribution to the issues of mysticism and madness. These men were Ernest Becker, R. D. Laing and John Schumaker and what united them was a profound conviction that the so called 'mad' are first and foremost human beings. All three rejected the psychiatric agenda finding that everyone, or at least most of us, are crazy to some degree and even the clinically mad should be understood from the point of view of their humanness and their relationship with those around them, rather than labelled away under the diagnoses of illness and chemical imbalance. All three seem to share some of the ideas we have already discussed and were keen to point out just how difficult living really is. Becker, for instance, held that we are all alike in our desires, just as Freud claimed, no matter how 'mad' we are. Becker also held that our greatest desire is that of 'heroism' (Becker 1973: 4). This ideal of living truthfully, or authentically, is once more the ideal of living courageously.

Becker & Laing

Becker, R. D. Laing and Schumaker all held that reason (or the lack of it) had nothing to do with madness. In fact Becker asserted that 'there is no one more logical than the lunatic ... madmen are

the greatest reasoners we know' (Becker 1973: 201) The problem of life is no mathematical equation, but rather affects our feelings. Existence is frightening, absurd and chaotic thus, 'man cuts out for himself a manageable world' (Becker 1973: 23). The occurrence of madness or mental illness has to be related to this. It is a 'project' which seeks to make simpler and easier to manage, even if it replaces the chaos and absurdity of life with an unhealthy alternative. The problem is that humans are dualistic. Becker's idea of the dualism of human existence is that we are free in our use of symbols but are fated to limitations, like our own mortality, due to our body (Becker 1973: 45). His or her ability to make use of symbols makes her capable of creativity but also, in Becker's pre-politically correct language 'brings him sharply out of nature' (Becker 1973: 26). Thus human existence is exceedingly difficult – one has to try to harmonize these polar opposites and recognize how strongly culture has shaped us out of our natural character and instincts. Becker, and later Schumaker, claimed we all need illusions in order to survive. He wrote, 'I believe that those who speculate that a full apprehension of man's condition would drive him insane are right, quite literally right' (Becker 1973: 27).

Sartre wrote about 'bad faith' and how prevalent it is amongst human beings. Freud wrote of how we are all at the mercy of our unconscious drives and thus must remain, to various degrees, neurotics. Becker went even further and asserted that most of us, if not all, are truly mad. Our culture introduces us to 'social games' and 'psychological tricks', which are in essence, 'forms of madness – agreed madness, shared madness, disguised and dignified madness, but madness all the same' (Becker 1973: 27).

Now we have seen that the existentialists' championing of integrity and authenticity meant an isolation or alienation from the mad practices of the world around her/him and due to this separation these rare individuals may well appear pathological. This relationship between sickness and truth was clearly articulated in the work of Artaud. Artaud despised what he perceived as the sickening madness

of the world around him with its lies, illusions, and inertia. He held that the unveiling of this untruth could in fact make one ill. Or rather, society in its desperate attempt to hold onto the illusions of the puppet show make the seer sick.

Thus society is mad and society is also responsible for the clinical madness of its inhabitants. This is a point which R.D. Laing, a famous revolutionary psychiatrist or anti-psychiatrist concurs whole heartedly with. He wrote:

... we are all bemused and crazed creatures, strangers to our true selves, to one another, and to the spiritual and material world – mad, even, from an ideal standpoint we can glimpse but not adopt (Laing 1967: 12).

R.D. Laing also thought that, 'our collusive madness is what we call sanity' (Laing 1967: 62). He believed that a society can become sick and drive people to madness (Laing 1967: 87). He asserted that, 'our society may itself have become biologically dysfunctional, and some forms of schizophrenic alienation from the alienation of society, may have a socio-biological function that we had not recognized' (Laing 1967: 99).

Becker and Laing asserted the rather unscientific existential hypothesis that madness depended on the subjective relationship the patient, or client, had with other human beings. Becker:

... when his life begins to show damaging effects on him or on people around him and he seeks clinical help for it, or others seek it for him. Otherwise we call the refusal of reality “normal” because it doesn't occasion any visible problems. It is really as simple as that (Becker 1973: 179).

In fact Becker was highly critical of 'normal average men' who he asserted were those very beings 'who like locusts have laid waste to the world in order to forget themselves' (Becker 1973: 187). R. D. Laing suggested that we should aim to transcend our ordinary conscious insanity and instead try to acquire 'true sanity'. Laing wrote:

True sanity entails in one way or another the dissolution of the normal ego, that false self competently adjusted to our alienated social reality: the emergence of the 'inner' archetypal mediators of divine power, and through this death a rebirth, and the eventual ... reestablishment of a new kind of ego-functioning, the ego now being the servant of the divine, no longer its betrayer (Laing 1967: 119).

Schumaker

John Schumaker, the author of two thought-provoking books, followed Becker and R. D. Laing in holding that all of us are really crazy for we all, instinctively, cling to illusions. Schumaker wrote:

Cynics ... throughout the ages, have made sweeping claims to the effect that everyone is insane. Yet this is exactly the case if we adhere to a strict definition of mental health as a reflection of reality content ... our bearings on reality are skewed and erroneous in both small and large ways (Schumaker 1995: 29).

The role of culture is to feed us with useful fictions which make life easier and/or meaningful. Schumaker claimed, "“Out of touchness” with reality is a very normal thing' (Schumaker 1995: 24). And to Schumaker, it is also a good thing, a beneficial thing, which helps us to better survive, for,

'reality, it seems, is depressing' (Schumaker 1995: 26). Thus, 'we fare better emotionally if we can generate unrealistic conceptions of ourselves' (Schumaker 1995: 27).

Like Freud, Schumaker held that religion is important not because it helps us to realize a higher truth, but because it assists us in escaping from the chaos and misery of life - together. That is, by uniting people into a religious organization we can achieve more productive illusions than if we were alone. Schumaker claimed, '... without cultural sanction, most or all of our religious beliefs and rituals would fall into the domain of mental disturbance' (Schumaker 1995: 29). Let us recall that Heraclitus and Freud held that many people are really unconscious of the meaning behind their actions. Nevertheless these practices may have benefits for our mental *health* and peace of mind even if we don't really understand them. Following in the footsteps of Nietzsche and James, Schumaker asserted that all of us need a certain amount of 'mental disturbance in order to be "healthy"' (Schumaker 1990: 30). The difference between the healthy and the sick has to do with the ability to share crazy belief systems and, once more, has nothing to do with the notion of reason. Schumaker wrote, 'once most people are doing or believing something, it no longer matters how crazy it is. In fact, once this normalizing of behaviour takes place, true sanity is usually seen as insane since it falls outside the boundaries of a culture's patterning' (Schumaker 1990: 70).

For Schumaker madness and mysticism are closely allied in their 'transcendental' aspects – both, however are illusions. Mysticism has no claim to Ultimate Reality, for, to Schumaker, most of us can experience such an illusion provided we are subjected to a certain amount of sensory deprivation or sensory bombardment. Mysticism can be made possible by hypnotism. Thus mystical experience is a bodily or physiological reaction which can be explained away as a chemical reaction in the brain. It is nothing but an illusion and all talk of Ultimate Reality is invalid. Furthermore, so much of our belief system is really governed by our culture and unlike Plato, Schumaker held little faith that we could ever

really transcend its clutches. Schumaker asserted that:

... we are products of culture far more than we are products of any single force that shapes our behavior, specifically, we are products of the cultural suggestions that bombard and mold us (Schumaker 1990: 63).

Furthermore we have 'very little freedom when it comes to culture' (Schumaker 1990: 66). Culture is both our 'refuge' and our 'prison' (Schumaker 1990: 70).

To Schumaker everyone is crazy as we all 'respond to suggestions that warp reality' (Schumaker 1995: 69). However, Schumaker drew a distinction between the ordinary crazy person and the clinically insane. The difference, he suggested, is that the illusions of the clinically insane, 'are a private affair' for the normal person 'would be regarded as completely insane (i.e. removed from reality) when judged by criteria from other cultures' (Schumaker 1995: 76). This conviction was also held by Freud when he wrote, 'while the minutiae of ceremonials are full of significance and have a symbolic meaning, those of neurotics seems foolish and senseless' (Freud 1959: 119).

If Schumaker is correct then it must follow that mental illness is, to some extent, a social phenomenon and when a society fails to care for the mental health of its members then it can itself become sick. Schumaker complained that our own modern existence is, 'unable to promote a workable degree of dissociation' (Schumaker 1995: 122). In a sense we have too much knowledge. Science, with its laws and promises has in many ways trampled all over our spirituality. He is thus, in profound disagreement with Otto's and Wittgenstein's outlook. According to Wittgenstein science and religion are different language games and could exist beside each other as the discourse of science, whatever its discoveries, could never impinge upon our spiritual *feelings* of awe and wonder. Schumaker held that

our extraordinary knowledge of science means that today we have too much knowledge to be able to accept religious and spiritual ideas in the manner we may did once upon a time. The blinding light of Paul's conversion, for instance, today would be treated as an epileptic fit and consequently robbed of the metaphysical and religious interpretation the saint and his world attached to it. Instead we would promptly provide him with some medication to prevent him suffering any more fits. Yet, in his own day, the culture recognized that he had a divine experience and this made it possible for them to find meaning and purpose in their lives. A psychiatric assessment not only robs the individual of the spiritual content of her experience, it also robs society at large of finding meaning in the episode. Or, to use the words of Schumaker, this is now no longer a workable 'illusion'.

However, we might ask is it really the case that science has trespassed upon our spiritual territory? We might agree with him that it is possible Saul suffered an epileptic fit yet this doesn't mean the episode didn't have spiritual meaning. That the experience can be explained by natural reasons, namely epilepsy, doesn't rule out the possible spiritual element. This, once more, is the position offered by Wittgenstein. For isn't it possible that God created the natural world, in all its complexity, including the chemicals in the brain? Ninian Smart claimed that 'is not God, as continuous creator, and sustainer of the world, not the cause of NF?' (Smart 1979: 177). By NF he meant natural factors. Nevertheless Smart did concede the point we raised earlier, namely, that the powers of scientific reductionism can be highly 'deflationary' and rob persons of the importance of their experiences. Smart wrote:

If certain sorts of religion are, for instance, diagnosed as the result of failing to solve living problems, as infantile, as due to epilepsy or whatever, there is created a presumption that they are not blessed as they claim (Smart 1979: 177).

There is another point we need to make. St. Paul made sense of his experience as a spiritual event and not as a physiological problem. From that day on he became the fearless and passionate missionary he is celebrated as being today. That is, the event sparked off a marked and permanent change of behaviour. In this way Paul's epiphany must be contrasted with the experiences of the sick or the drug user, in that his experience led him to lead a life of extraordinary merit and thereafter he was a major contributor to the world around him.

Finally we might note that even though manipulations of the senses can lead to transcendental experience, many mystics themselves have not made use of them and, in particular, Christian mystics regard with abhorrence these practices. Their concern is with the real and not the fictitious (no matter how similar the fictitious experience may appear).

However for Schumaker, the existentialists and the Freudians, all mystical and mental occurrences can be explained away as being a retreat from existence. According to this theory people suffer depression, paranoia, schizophrenia or obsessive/compulsive disorders – and these can be compared to the spiritual experiences of the most celebrated gurus. All are alike in their escapism and indeed the most selfless service to others, or the most rigorous so called 'purging' of the soul may likewise be considered merely ways of escape. We engage in projects, 'to reduce the size of the subjects world' (Schumaker 1995: 190) and even the most painful disorders bring with them meaning, the only difference between the loftiest and the most negative is the joy or pain they bring – that is what is meant by health and disease. Most of the private disorders are purely negative, whereas the more popular and healthy illusions usually contain both 'positive and negative' aspects (Schumaker 1995: 205).

Schumaker, R.D. Laing and Becker all held that everyone, first and foremost, is a human being

and that it is wrong to engage in a scientific reductionism which strips the subject of her humanity and her being in the world. It may well be that the subject has chemical reactions in their brain but this, in itself, does not account for either madness or mysticism. Instead each of these thinkers insisted that a subject's experience must be made sense of from within the culture which is her home. Schumaker argued that mental illness is a 'problem of religion'; that is, it cannot be easily dismissed as an aberration of nature. Instead, he wrote, 'I believe a "religious" understanding of mental illness offers great promise for a reworking of the clumsy ways in which we now try to understand the abnormal' (Schumaker 1990: vii). Thus, once more, we have a perceived relationship between madness and mysticism. Although Schumaker claimed that they are both forms of illusion, one is much more productive and healthy than the other. Both are likewise natural and need not be explained by supernatural forces. Schumaker wrote that our 'need for religion' has a biological basis (Schumaker 1990: 22-23). When we evolved we were given greater intelligence but with this gift came the burden of our knowledge of death, thus the need for paranormal belief. But death awareness is not the only thing that frightens us: reality, according to Schumaker, is 'nothing short of chaos' (Schumaker 1990: 23). The task of religion is to turn 'chaos into imagined order. That kept us from the ultimate madhouse and allowed us to use our magnified brain capacity to our advantage' (Schumaker 1990: 25).

We have seen that on Schumaker's view there is no higher reality as the mystics claimed. Instead reality shows us to be 'sad caricatures that act out fictions in a translated world' (Schumaker 1990: 91). Thus we have a need for religion to infuse us with hypnotism and suggestibility, something which we find little of on the psychoanalytic lounge but can be found in abundance in some other cultures, like those 'primitive' cultures which practice witchcraft (Schumaker 1990: 134). Dramatic differences in cultural reactions to such things as visions and hallucinations may also have a profound effect on both the individual and the culture which is its home. It could be the difference between being a valued and important member of a tribe and being shut up in a psychiatric ward (Schumaker

1990: 137).

When it came to spirituality and morality Schumaker shared with his existential predecessors a conviction that both belief in a higher supernatural order and the faculty of love are really illusions and ways of escape. However, just as these thinkers questioned traditional ideas on the mystical and the mad - so may we question them. Now Schumaker, Becker and Laing differed from Sartre in that they held life has a purpose in as much as it evolves. Schumaker suggested that as we evolved we were given greater intelligence. But why can't we go one step further, just as Jung did, and be open to the possibility that nature has also provided us with more than this, namely, archetypal meaning and the capacity for love? Furthermore these experiences so many people report may be physiological and need not depend on some paranormal or supernatural faculty.

Neither instinct, nor love, nor any spiritual *feeling*, need be considered illusions, although it may be, as Xenophanes suggested, that they do not amount to Absolute Knowledge. Let us examine instinct first. There are many who hold belief in phenomena like premonitions; some even claim that animals have this ability and exhibit unusual behaviour prior to events like storms and so forth. Premonitions can be extremely useful for creatures, including ourselves, when it comes to surviving in our habitat. This instinct may also be entirely natural and need not depend upon the supernatural or paranormal at all. Why then does Schumaker insist that such things as premonitions are illusions? The so-called paranormal need not be thought of as illusory. Jung claimed to have seen much of 'anticipatory dreams, telepathic phenomena, and all that type of thing' was 'convinced that they exist' and that 'intuition is a very natural function' (Jung: 1968: 15). Likewise, why does Schumaker claim that feelings like love are also illusions? Love can, in some circumstances, be an illusion, an intoxicant or a project of bad faith but need it always be so? Many other thinkers, like Feuerbach and Kierkegaard, held that true love was quite the opposite to the illusory. Instead they found in love a powerful force

which can potentially bring us spiritual fulfillment – something quite different from a mere way of escape (a corruption of love), but rather, an experience of the most prized and sought after to be found all over the world, in many different eras and in many different cultures – the experience of the Divine, or Ultimate Reality in all its splendid glory.

Now both Becker and Schumaker held with Sartre and the French existentialists a belief that the religious impulse is born from the imagination and is posited, as such, out of a *feeling*, or yearning, we all have for meaning. Feuerbach, was a passionate champion of the body, as well as the imagination and yet he was also a pious man of faith. He concurs with these thinkers on this point. He wrote, 'all religious cosmologies are products of the imagination' (Feuerbach 1957: 80). Yet his ideas on the imagination, from this point on, differ profoundly from theirs. Feuerbach held that the imagination itself was 'divine' and was 'the absolutely subjective, unlimited will' (Feuerbach 1957: 101). According to Feuerbach, the fact that we have desires given to us by nature - feelings for love and the longing for completion – this suggests that there is a God and that God is Love. God is encountered through our desire, through 'the love that satisfies our wishes, our emotional wants' (Feuerbach 1957: 121).

Feuerbach challenged the proposition that our imagination is but a tool for escapism. Instead, he held that imagination is a powerful force that unites the creature with her creator. To those who find no reality outside of the cave that is absolutely true and good, imagination is felt to be nothing more than a device to escape from the horror and chaos of existence and to flee from the fear of death. Both have different opinions on the nature of imagination and that of spiritual *feelings*. Who is correct or, at least, who is closest to the truth? From here we will take a brief look at the existence of imagination and how it is sometimes distinguished from that of 'fancy' or 'fantasy'.

Chapter 11: Imagination and Fancy

In this chapter we will examine some ideas on the imagination and the fanciful, mainly taken from the work of Iris Murdoch, to see what light these ideas might have for our subject of mysticism and madness.

Murdoch

Murdoch, throughout her work, stressed, (like Jung), an important distinction between 'imagination' and 'fancy'. In a published interview with Brian Magee on 'Literature and Philosophy', she remarked:

It may be useful to contrast 'fantasy' as bad with 'imagination' as good ... fantasy is the strong cunning enemy of the discerning intelligent more truly inventive power of the imagination, and in condemning art for being 'fantastic' one is condemning it for being untrue (Murdoch 1997: 11).

This distinction may be a useful way of attempting to make sense of the spiritual life and the important issues of madness and mysticism. Against the charge of 'escapism', to the contrary, mystics themselves have claimed that their experiences are really the Highest Reality and the Highest Truth. Now false mystics, drug users and insane people may be said to be examples of 'fantasy' and not partakers of the higher faculty of the 'imagination'. Fantasy, to Murdoch, involves narcissism and obsession and this false misleading view of the world she contrasts with what she called 'true vision' (Murdoch 1997: 14). She shared the same opinion of Becker, Sartre and Schumaker up until a certain point, that being, that

most of our life is governed by falsity and fantasy. Or, to quote Simone Weil, a strong influence upon her philosophy, 'the facts prove that nearly always men's thoughts are fashioned – as Marx thought – by the lies involved in social morality. Nearly always, but not quite always' (Weil 1974: 37). In spite of this, Murdoch held that through the power of the imagination, the highest artistry, it is possible to transcend our private obsessive ego-centric sham of an existence. Reading Plato, Murdoch found that the virtuous program of the true philosopher, hailed by the ancient genius as leading to Ultimate Reality could, ironically, be achieved through the power of great art. Murdoch praised true art as the great 'liberator', for it, 'enables us to see and take pleasure in what is not ourselves' and 'art is informative' (Murdoch 1997: 14-15). Murdoch went so far as to claim that 'the great artist sees the marvels which selfish anxiety conceals from the rest of us' (Murdoch 1997: 29).

Murdoch was interested in existentialism, Wittgensteinianism and romanticism. At the beginning of chapter three we quoted Wordsworth and suggested that he may have been a type of mystic. We could also have quoted Blake or any of the other men and women who praised imagination as the highest good and highest truth. David Daiches in his book *A Critical History of English Literature: Vol 4* claims that 'the poet escapes from his fellows to find man through nature' (Daiches 1960: 862). The romantic poet, then, does escape but his escape is from human *culture* which she understands as being unnatural and artificial (a point existentialism also claims). Now the major difference between the 'mysticism' of Wordsworth and Blake is that the latter held 'all knowledge came through the exercise of the imagination' (Daiches 1960: 873. Whereas 'the whole point of poetry for Wordsworth was that the poets mind and the external world came together' (Daiches 1960: 878). Thus the former hold imagination to be the site of the mystical, the latter, in the words of Wordsworth himself, "relationship and love" - a union between nature and the human mind' (Daiches 1960: 880). Daiches continues:

... joy or him was a central principle of the universe and the recognition of the correspondencies between the mind of man and external nature was bound to be a pleasurable experience. The poet "considers man and nature as essentially adapted to each other, and the mind of man as naturally the mirror of the fairest and most interesting properties of nature" ' (Daiches 1960: 880)

Nature and the imagination are held to be divine. 'There is both beauty and terror in the elemental forces of nature' (Daiches 1960: 869) or the awe and wonder honoured by Wittgenstein. But how is it that our minds are adapted to nature (Wordsworth) or our imagination as being the site for Ultimate Truth? Is this but more wishful thinking? - more self deception? Murdoch comments the existentialist, 'regards nature as the brute and meaningless scene into the midst of which man is inexplicably cast. The existentialist tends to find nature absurd' (Murdoch 1997: 111-112). We have, in fact, found this belief not only in Sartre, but also in the works of Bataille and Artaud. However could it not be that the existentialist, herself, has missed out on the grand vision through stubbornness or ignorance? Murdoch writes, 'the worlds in which they live are without magic and without terror. There is here none of the enticing mystery of the unknown ' (Murdoch 1997: 114-115). This lead Murdoch to to complain that 'this fact alone, that there is no mystery, would falsify their claim to be true pictures of the situation of man' (Murdoch 1997: 115). Furthermore she is critical of Sartre's presumption that love should be avoided for it can only lead to disaster and turmoil. She asserted that, 'love is not necessarily fruitless' (Murdoch 1997: 149).

Murdoch, in her study of spirituality, held imagination to be essential to the mystical. She asserted, '... experience of the void is a spiritual achievement, involving the control of the imagination, that 'restorer of balances'. Spiritual *progress* is won through meditation' (Murdoch 1997: 159). Thus she held importance to following a mystical path in order to gain the necessary discipline. Murdoch

claimed that imagination, like playing, is an active process. She wrote, 'imagining is *doing*, it is a sort of personal exploring' (Murdoch 1997: 199). Furthermore, she suggested that imagination is highly 'natural' for people and is of much more sway and importance than 'pure reason' (Murdoch 1997: 202). A conviction we have repetitively found throughout this essay.

Another popular conviction, when it comes to genuine mysticism, is the idea that love is essential to genuine mystical experience. Murdoch claimed that love is the foundation not only of religious experience, but also of both morality and the highest form of art. 'Love', she wrote, 'is the perception of individuals, Love is the extremely difficult realization that something other than oneself is real. Love, and art and morals, is the discovery of reality' (Murdoch 1997: 215). It is for this reason that Murdoch believed that the enemies of art and morals were also the enemies of love. These enemies were, she claimed, 'social convention and neurosis' (Murdoch 1997: 216). She went on to assert that 'Love' is 'an exercise of the imagination' (Murdoch 1997: 216). This faith in love and the imagination – this creative force – is why she holds true art in such esteem. She went so far as to suggest that 'great art is able to display and discuss the central area of our reality, our actual consciousness, in a more exact way than science or even philosophy can' (Murdoch 1997: 240). When it came to the imaginative and the fantastic, she wrote, 'imagination, as opposed to fantasy, is the ability to see ... nature, reality, the world' (Murdoch 1997: 255). Once more, in simple language, imagination is a powerful tool enabling us to feel love and perceive the real. Fantasy, on the other hand, is the servant of neurosis – it is narcissism and ego-centric obsession. Following fantasy can lead only to falsehood and alienation. We have here, then, an interesting, lucid and rational theory with repercussions for our subject of madness and mysticism. Mysticism, with its use of the lofty imagination and the faculty of love can be contrasted with madness – the neurotic world of private obsession and the loveless exercise of egotism and fantasy.

Murdoch explored theories on the notions of morality and virtue. One of her criticisms which she levelled at her contemporaries was their lack of discussion on love. We have found that love is essential to Murdoch's thought. In some ways her philosophy may be considered a rebellion against the loveless enterprises of her fellow philosophers and a return to the mysteriousness of love found in Plato's more engaging work. This was, as we have seen, one of her major attacks against existentialism but it may also have been a complaint she had with Freud. His psychoanalysis held no real value for her for she claimed it to be 'a muddled embryonic science' (Murdoch 1997: 320). Murdoch proposed that 'we need a moral philosophy in which the concept of love, so rarely mentioned now by philosophers, can again be made central' (Murdoch 1997: 337).

Murdoch developed her own theory on art, truth, fantasy and the imagination. She accepted 'that human beings cannot bear too much reality' (Murdoch 1997: 352). She also admitted that 'almost all art is a form of fantasy-consolation and few artists achieve the vision of the real' (Murdoch 1997: 352) and that it is but rare for us to see the real world at all (Murdoch 1997: 352). However, true vision is possible and 'it is in the capacity to love, that is to *see*, that the liberation of the soul from fantasy consists. The freedom which is a proper human goal is the freedom from fantasy, that is the realism of compassion' (Murdoch 1997: 354).

Murdoch, as we have seen, admitted that human nature 'is reluctant to face unpleasant realities' (Murdoch 1997: 364) and this is the reason for the success and excessive outpouring of bad art. In spite of this, Murdoch had faith that True Art, 'both in its genesis and its enjoyment it is a thing totally opposed to selfish obsession. It invigorates our best faculties and, to use Platonic language, inspires love in the highest part of our soul' (Murdoch 1997: 370). Murdoch explained that, 'we use our imagination not to escape the world but to join it' (Murdoch 1997: 374). We have found this idea in Feuerbach but we also find it in the work of W. R. Inge. Like Murdoch, who contrasted the life-

affirming truth of the 'Imagination' with selfish, obsessive 'Fantasy'; Inge claimed, 'the faculty which .. sees the divine in nature is Imagination' (Inge 1947: 87). Inge found a difference, and an important difference, between the true mystics who claim to experience the Ultimate Reality and those who sink in the mire of illusion. Inge wrote, 'a journey through the unreal is an unreal journey' (Inge 1947: 49). Both Murdoch and Inge found the existence of illusion in everyday happenings and they also found the existence, however rare it might be, of Truth and Ultimate Reality.

Yi-fu Tuan suggests that 'imagination, detached from the realities of human existence, turns into fantasy' (Tuan 1989: 8). He goes on to note 'if we take imagination to be an attentive mode of inquiry, a vigorous engagement with the real, then fantasy, by contrast, is rudderless delusory imagination, an easy way to fulfil desires' (Tuan 1989: 143-144). Tuan provides an insightful example of how the two operate in his analysis of the serious-minded truth-seeking thinker John Stuart Mill and the self indulgent Madam (Emma) Bovary – taken from Flaubert's novel *Madam Bovary*.

Mill used his mind to inquire. The image he conjured had sufficient integrity and force to administer a shock. His imagination gained for him new self-knowledge. By contrast, Emma produced fantasies the effect of which was to sink her deeper into self-delusion (Tuan 1989: 144).

We could apply this useful distinction to Plato's work as well. While technically his dialogues are not works of 'fact' as such, they can clearly be distinguished from other works of fiction, based on fantasy and not concerned with the uncovering of truth.

Murdoch profoundly admired the philosopher Plato and went so far as to write her own 'Platonic' dialogues featuring some of the same characters and ideas we find in this influential

poet/thinker. Her witty and entertaining arguments were all about putting Plato's ideas into a modern environment and rethinking ancient ideas for a contemporary audience. One of Murdoch's most important contributions was her attempt to rethink Plato's Myth of the Cave. Murdoch interprets this myth as meaning that, 'the self, the place where we live, is a place of illusion. Goodness is connected with the attempt to see the unself, to see and to respond to the real world in the light of a virtuous consciousness' (Murdoch 1997: 376). Thus we return to the Platonic idea that in order to experience the higher truth one must purify oneself, cultivate virtue and perceive the existence of the world outside of our own existence.

Murdoch held that mysticism is 'a kind of undogmatic prayer which is real and important, though perhaps also difficult and easily corrupted' (Murdoch 1997: 383). She praised virtues like humility for, 'the humble man, because he sees himself as nothing, can see other things as they are' (Murdoch 1997: 385). To repeat, like Plato, Murdoch united morality with truth and held that the immoral - 'obsession, prejudice, envy, anxiety, ignorance, greed, neurosis, and so on *veil* reality. The defeat of illusion requires moral effort' (Murdoch 1997: 426).

Truth or Illusion?

This essay has been concerned with the question of what is madness, what is mysticism and what possible relationship could exist between the two. For some, namely those who think like the Freudian psychoanalysts or the Sartrean existentialists, mysticism is really a form of escapism and thus is a form of madness in that it is illusory and sick with self-deception. We have, however, attempted to show that there is something more to mysticism than merely that of falsity and lies. The Myth of the Cave, Plato's metaphor of the difference between truth and illusion, has been repetitively revisited as it suggests a profound insight into the nature of the mystical. Many philosophers and psychologists agree

with the suggestion that most of us, most of the time, live lives of fiction and illusion. In Plato's language, we live in a cave and are forced to observe a puppet show. Where the major difference of opinion occurs is the next step – the possibility of seeing outside the puppet show and finding that this Ultimate Reality is good, beautiful and truthful. For others, including some of Plato's predecessors, True Knowledge is either impossible due to the nature of our existential make-up (Xenophanes) or it is far from what we naturally think of as good (Heraclitus). Philosophers, like Otto and Wittgenstein and poets like Coleridge, Wordsworth and Blake, have suggested we can *feel* the spiritual even if there are question marks over whether the actual content of these experiences are universally shared. Otto and others, like Underhill, assert that spiritual truth is proven through action and virtue. On this view, people like St. Paul in ancient times and Simone Weil, more recently, proved the truth of their spirituality by living lives of love and devotion to both the divine and her creatures. Many, if not most, can admit that some experiences transcend those of our ordinary self-conscious existence - but the big question remains - are these unique occurrences really experiences of Ultimate Reality as the mystics propose? Or cases which generate greater mental *health* via useful fictions and are thus really illusions like the Freudians and existentialists assert?

The question of whether mystical experience be a case of Ultimate Reality or another case of further illusion is exceedingly difficult to prove either way. Even for Andrew Greeley, who researched so much data that he hoped would prove how widespread he felt the spiritual experience to be, even he realized he couldn't prove whether the occurrence really was an experience of Absolute Truth. On the subject of the mystical, Greeley wrote:

Either it tells us something that is extraordinarily hopeful about the universe and about human life, or it is one more cruel joke being played by a Reality that is not only capricious and random but ultimately malign. It grows increasingly necessary to make a

choice (Greeley 1974: 130).

Another contemporary philosopher of religion, D. Butler asserted:

... the great problem of mysticism, the crucial question, is: whether this claim be objectively true? Does it express the reality, or is it a delusion of those that believe they have enjoyed such experiences? On the answer to this question depends the place of mysticism as an object of religious study (Butler 1966: 14).

If the mystical is not considered to be Ultimate Truth, then it can easily be apprehended as a form of escapism. Tuan's analysis seems to hold some weight, however, he also recognized that 'as visualizing, thinking, and dreaming animals, the distinction between imagination and fantasy is always fuzzy' (Tuan 1989: 143). When it comes to our ordinary everyday experiences there is much that is disagreeable and it seems that as human beings we naturally attempt to escape from this suffering. Or in the words of William James:

We divert our attention from disease and death as much as we can and the slaughter houses and indecencies without end on which our life is founded and huddled out of sight and never mentioned, so that the world we recognize officially in literature and in society is a poetic fashion for handsomer and cleaner and better than the world that really is (James 1957: 89).

Nevertheless, James respects the mystic's own claims of finding Ultimate Reality. This *feeling*, it must be repeated, strikes the subject at the very core of her being and is not experienced as some cheap fantasy but rather as an Absolute Truth. For instance St. Augustine writes in his *Confessions*, 'I might

more easily have doubted that I was alive than that Truth had being' (St. Augustine 1961: 147).

One of the more unusual of the modern mystics, Simone Weil had never even considered the mystical prior to her experience. As a child of irreligious agnostics Weil was shocked when she was struck by something she had never thought of, nor even read about. She disclosed that she felt:

.... a presence more personal, more certain, and more real than that of a human being: it was accessible both to sense and to imagination, and it resembled the love that irradiates the tenderest smile of somebody one loves. Since that moment the name of God and the name of Christ have been more and more irresistibly mingled with my thoughts (Weil 1986: 262).

James claimed that when it comes to the experiences of the mystics they 'cannot help regarding them as genuine perceptions of truth' and that 'they are, as a rule, much more convincing than results established by mere logic ever are' (James 1957: 72). Underhill held, without reservation, the belief that mysticism is an experience of Ultimate Reality.

Chapter 12: Underhill – Mysticism and Virtue

We have found many thinkers assert that spirituality is really a form of illusion – a fiction engaged in for the purposes of escaping life's overwhelming suffering. Underhill, however, was adamant that mysticism is concerned with 'the truth' and mystics, far from being escapists are really 'devout lovers of reality' (Underhill 1930: 3). She persistently argued against the idea of mysticism being a form of escapism, especially Christian mysticism which she felt is full of 'most ardent labours' (Underhill 1930: 50). Underhill held that much good could come out of these occurrences and this goodness could be a way of distinguishing between the genuinely mystical and the invalidly pathological which 'depresses rather than enhances the vitality, the fervour, or the intelligence of its subject: and leaves behind it an enfeebled will, and often moral and intellectual chaos' (Underhill 1930: 362). She cited St. Teresa of Avila as an example of this:

... her practical genius for affairs, her immense power of ruling men, drew its strength from the long series of visions and ecstasies which accompanied and supported her labours in the world (Underhill 1930: 174).

She also quoted from the saint's own work *Interior Castle* in distinguishing the genuine from its inferior counterpart. St. Teresa claimed, "works are the best proof that the favours which we receive have come from God" (Underhill 1930: 429).

Now the issues which surround madness and mysticism are, however, not as simplistic as this. We must remember that St. Teresa, herself, one of the favourite daughters of the church, experienced negative rapture and what are called 'temptations' at times in her celebrated career. She learned to distinguish between what she believed was God's work and that of the Evil One (Satan). St. Teresa was

far from the only religious mystic to have experienced what Underhill refers to as 'unhealthy' mysticism (Underhill 1930: 27). Underhill admitted that 'both kinds of ecstasy, the healthy and the psychopathic, are sometimes seen in the same person' (Underhill 1930: 362). She put this down to two possible reasons and interestingly the existence of the devil is not one. Underhill understood so called Satanic intervention as really a result of 'exhaustion and temporary loss of balance' (Underhill 1930: 271). The second reason for 'unhealthy' experience is put down to what we have recognized as the 'transitional period' wherein it may take some time for the soul to regain its balance after its initial overwhelmingly intense experience. Underhill, borrowing the words from St. John of the Cross, refers to this as 'The Dark Night of the Soul'. She explained:

... psychic fatigue sets in; the state of illumination begins to break up, the complementary negative consciousness appears, and shows itself as an overwhelming sense of darkness and deprivation. This sense is so deep and strong that it inhibits all consciousness of the Transcendent; and plunges the self into the state of negation and misery which is called the Dark Night (Underhill 1930: 382).

Underhill also noted that 'such an interval of chaos and misery may last for months, or even years, before the consciousness again unifies itself and a new centre is formed' (Underhill 1930: 387). Now at this stage there is no guarantee that all will turn out well. Underhill asserted:

... many succumb to its dangers and pains. This "great negation" is the sorting house of the spiritual life. Here we part from the "nature mystics", the mystic poets, and all who share in and were contented with the illuminated version of reality. Those who go on are the great and strong spirits, who do not seek to know, but are driven to be (Underhill 1930: 393).

Underhill also claimed 'all these types of “darkness”, with their accompanying and overwhelming sensations of impotence and distress are common in the lives of the mystics' (Underhill 1930: 393). In her book *Mystics of the Church* (1975) she repeats this idea using the experience of Angela of Foligno's as an example:

“Every vice was reawakened within me ... at times I was thrown into a most horrible darkness of spirit ... me thought I would have chosen rather to be roasted than to endure such pains” (Underhill 1975: 106).

Now the important point is that Angela, and others, move beyond this. What have we to say about those who couldn't? Are they lost Artaud's or impossible Bataille's? Returning to Underhill, 'For Angela, the beginning and end of true wisdom was “to know God and ourselves” - a level of Reality which few human beings achieve' (Underhill 1975: 107).

Underhill noted that in this 'dark night' it is possible for the contemplative to experience 'negative rapture, an ecstasy of deprivation' (Underhill 1930: 394). Indeed, she added, 'the intense and painful concentration upon the Divine Absence which takes place in this “dark rapture” often induces all the psycho-physical marks of ecstasy' (Underhill 1930: 394-395). Fortunately, for many there is light at the end of the tunnel:

The various torments and desolations of the Dark Night constitute this last and drastic purgation of the spirit; the doing away of separateness, the annihilation of self hood, even though all that self now claims for its own be the Love of God (Underhill 1930: 396).

Now we should state that there could be two meanings of 'darkness'. The one just mentioned, the Dark Night of the Soul, could well be an essential and necessary part of the path towards the Ultimate Truth – a purging of the old self in preparation for the rebirth of the new. This darkness, then, is not diabolical and while it may be highly unpleasant for the mystic herself, it is nevertheless a necessary part of the whole process. This need not be exclusively Christian either for many celebrated mystics, east and west, have been reported as going through a period of great sorrow, confusion and suffering prior to experiencing 'enlightenment'.

The second type of the darkness of mysticism, then, is something different. This is the darkness the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* meant when he wrote, 'I tell you truthfully, that the devil as well as God has his own contemplatives' (1991: 105). This is a state of impurity and possession of the bestial – the madness of materialism, inflation and sensuality. St. John of the Cross wrote of the Dark Night of the Soul as something quite different; 'to deprive oneself of the gratification of the appetites in all things is like living in darkness and in a void' (St. John of the Cross 1973: 76). He also claimed that passing through this period was a 'necessity', and it meant, 'the mortification of the appetites and the denials of pleasure in all things' (St. John of the Cross 1973: 77). So the sufferings of the Dark Night differ to the sufferings of the ill and immoral who are intoxicated and unconscious in their pursuit of pleasure. As opposed to those corporeal feelings, St. John of the Cross wrote about the pangs of the soul that, 'its greatest suffering is caused by the knowledge of its own miseries; that it is full of evil and sin as clear as day and even clearer for ... God is the author of this enlightenment in the night of contemplation' (St. John of the Cross 1973: 71).

Now if all goes according to plan the subject experiences a rebirth and transformation where 'there is a final swallowing up of that wilful I-hood, that surface individuality which we ordinarily recognize as ourselves. It goes on for ever, and something new is established in its room' (Underhill

1930: 425). This is the experience of 'Perfect Love' (Underhill 1930: 427). St. John of the Cross asserted 'in the state of divine union a man's will is so completely transformed in God's will, and in all and through all is motivated by the will of God' (St. John of the Cross 1973: 96).

Underhill shared with this Saint a belief in a permanent change and not merely some temporary shift of consciousness, although she is aware of some of the popular tools for transcendence like 'dancing, music, and other exaggerations of natural rhythm' (Underhill 1930: 58). However, she insisted:

Such artificial and deliberate production of ecstasy is against the whole instinct of the Christian contemplatives; but here and there amongst them also we find instances in which ecstatic trance or lucidity, the liberation of the "transcendent sense" was inadvertently produced by purely physical means (Underhill 1930: 58).

The author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* likewise shares this conviction that authentic mysticism is much more than this hedonistic spirituality. He wrote of the false contemplatives:

Because they lack grace and are proud and censorious, they strain in such crude, material ways that in no time at all they become hysterical, exhausted or fall into an unhealthy lethargy. To find relief of body and soul they try to escape into some useless exterior sensual or material pleasure (1991: 105)

The author went on to claim that this 'false type of contemplation' is due to 'abuse of the body' and 'many evils are caused by this self-deception: hypocrisy, heresy and error'. This, moreover, is 'false knowledge in the devil's school' (1991: 105). Likewise, St. John of the Cross asserted, 'the man who

does not conquer his desires is evil' (St. John of the Cross 1990: 86).

Underhill also held that the psychotic or hysteric differed from the genuine mystic in that the latter's experience is *rational*, while the former is spawned from imbalance, ignorance or vice. Furthermore, Underhill asserted that 'true ecstasy is notoriously life-enhancing' and 'the subject is himself more real' (Underhill 1930: 61). She continued, 'the subliminal mind of the great mystics ... is not disorderly. It is abnormally sensitive, richly endowed and keenly observant – a treasure house, not a lumber room – and becomes, in the course of its education, a highly disciplined and skilled instrument of knowledge' (Underhill 1930: 66). This desire for spiritual knowledge, this longing for divine love is, according to Underhill, universal. She asserted 'though we may seem to escape God, we cannot escape some form of this craving; except at the price of utter stagnation' (Underhill 1930: 68). Underhill also claimed that the reason why many of the mystics were accused of madness was due to their 'struggling to disclose great matters by imperfect means' (Underhill 1930: 104). This 'struggle' may be like the struggle Plato wrote about, when it came to the seer of the truth attempting to explain life, to the cave dwellers, beyond the puppet show. Plato spoke of this as a tremendous difficulty – how can one explain an unknown world to someone who had never seen it for herself? St. John of the Cross also spoke of this ineffable problem and held Divine Reality transcended, 'sight, hearing, imagination, and everything comprehensible to the heart' (St. John of the Cross 1973: 113). Even Nietzsche claimed that our deepest experiences cannot be communicated. But Neo-Platonic theory may mean something more – namely that beyond the difficulty of finding words to translate this experience – it may even be the case that we cannot properly fathom the experience like that of other sources of knowledge. Perhaps this is what is meant by *The Cloud of Unknowing* – or the experience of St. John of the Cross when he wrote, 'a man must advance to union with God's wisdom by *unknowing* rather than by knowing' (my italics) (St. John of the Cross 1973: 80). Thus the truth is revealed to the initiate and can be recognized by her virtue. This theory holds that there exists a 'true'

or 'pure' mysticism, as well as inferior versions like 'nature mysticism' – the mysticism of the romantic poets, which is not only held to be of lesser value but possibly even 'diabolical' or 'knowledge in the devil's school'.

Chapter 13: The Drug Debate

Now we have seen a clash of opinion when it comes to mysticism and this clash is nowhere more apparent than when it comes to the drug debate. We might argue that there are two camps, one who finds that the drug experience leads to an awareness of a Higher Reality and the other who proclaim it as a means of fictitious self deception – or a way of escape. Once more, the insightful philosopher William James was astutely aware of the complexity of this manner. He asserted, 'I know more than one person who is persuaded that in the nitrous oxide trance we have a genuine metaphysical revelation' (James 1957: 378). Yet he also admitted that it could all be an illusion. James wrote about a drug experiment with a subject who, at the time, felt himself experiencing a 'long dateless ecstasy of vision', however, returning to his self consciousness he was dismayed to discover that it was all a fiction. 'I', he wrote, 'had been tricked by the abnormal excitement of my brain' (James 1957: 382).

Cohen

By the 1950s white America had discovered the hallucinogenic qualities of the Native American substance peyote and modified it as mescaline and LSD. The discovery of these drugs at the time was like the finding of another planet and one which was far superior spiritually to our own. This 'discovery' inspired the lives of spiritual gurus, psychoanalysts and creative writers. But the explosion of spiritual feeling would, for many, fizz out to being just another example of humanity's need for the spiritually meaningful paid for at the expense of truth - the latest way of escape. It was this theme, S. Novak wished to explore in his essay on Sidney Cohen – one of the original 'prophets' of this most strange of movements. This article provides an informative guide to the history of the psychedelic movement.

Novak claimed that in the early days of LSD, before its connection with mystical spirituality, it was widely assumed to be an experience identical to a temporary psychosis. Novak followed Sydney Cohen and his changing opinions of psychedelic drugs and the research which accompanied them.

When Cohen first experimented with LSD he was expecting to find 'perceptual errors,' 'loss of concentration' and 'regressive behaviour', all of the trademarks typically identified with 'schizophrenia or paranoia' (Novak 1997: 91). Instead Cohen exclaimed:

“I was taken by surprise. This was no confused, disoriented delirium, but something quite different”. His subsequent report described feeling an elevated peacefulness, as if “the problems and strivings, the worries and frustrations of everyday life vanished; in their place was a majestic, sunlit, heavenly inner quietude ... I seemed to have finally arrived at the contemplation of eternal truth” (Novak 1997: 92).

This unexpected result made Cohen reconsider the aspect of the idiosyncratic subject and how her or his unique psyche could dramatically contribute to the drug experience and possibly even the mystical. He conducted tests on ordinary subjects and found that most of them reported negative experiences, once more in tune with the 'temporary psychosis' hypothesis. So he instead tried the drugs on some psychoanalysts, 'supposed experts on the unconscious'. Surprisingly, 'they either blocked the drug effects or had bad reactions' (Novak 1997: 93). If the psychoanalysts and the ordinary people felt little that was positive in their experiences, creative writers like Gerald Heard and the celebrated Aldous Huxley would report, “a shift of consciousness”. Heard, a delighted 'human guinea pig', would echo Cohen's own experience asserting, “so clearly similar to the accounts given by the mystics that none of us feel able to deny that this is in fact the experience which we undergo” (Novak 1997: 83). This same

feeling was also reported by Osmond who wrote, “my experiences with these substances have been the most strange, most awesome, and among the most beautiful things ... *these are not escapes but enlargements, burgeonings of reality*” (my italics) (Novak 1997: 95).

This difference between subjects and their experience of drug taking may well be an important one. If full blown mysticism is a rare experience than it may be that those few who experience it in such a way may well be more 'mystical' than others and more in tune with creative living and profound spiritual attunement. Also of importance here is that subjects were tested in a special environment, outside of the maddening chaos of society and in the hands of experts. Hallucinogenic drugs had been used for centuries by the Native Americans but not as some sort of party drug. To the contrary, drug usage was accompanied by profound spiritual ritual and ceremony. While Huxley and Heard cannot be properly said to have taken the drugs as a part of their religion, they must be separated from the recreational drug usage that went on outside of the protected environment of the clinic. In other words, the environment, like the actual character of the subject, is an important factor when it comes to the mystical. Drugs, then, do not in themselves automatically set off a mystical or a maddening experience but operate more like tools in the same way meditation, in itself, does not normally entail an immediate full blown spiritual occurrence.

Now just as today we prescribe drugs for physical illness, hallucinogenic drugs began being experimented with for healing mental illness. Where Freud had used talk therapy to explore the unconscious, some psychiatrists tried to “enter” the subconscious by injecting their patients with drugs such as sodium amytal or causing them to inhale nitrous oxide (Novak 1997: 95). These drugs were considered to be both mystical and therapeutic (healthy agents). Cohen and Eisner 'treated twenty two patients suffering from minor personality disorders ... with a 73 percent improvement rate' (Novak 1997: 96). Eisner would later write, “I feel, and think that Sid does too, that the best possible

therapeutic LSD experience is one in which a subject glimpses the unity of the cosmos” (1997: 96). During this period some were claiming the drug to be a cure for alcohol, while others, like Maslow, suggested it offered an opportunity for 'Peak experiences' (Novak 1997: 98).

Cohen (and others) shared the idea that mysticism (whether it be drug-induced or not) should be considered a blessing so long as it contributes to the mental well being, or *health*, of the subject. However when the experience ceased to improve the psyche and instead produced negative affects – Cohen spoke out against it. In a sense much of the debate on both mysticism and drugs is centred on this issue. Nevertheless there may well be differences of opinion when it comes to what is healthy and what is not.

Due to the growing number of negative experiences and episodes of ill health, Cohen became increasingly alarmed as the drug was taken out of the controlled conditions of the clinic and into the wild world of party entertainment. He was likewise highly uncomfortable with the emergence of backyard laboratories and their production of LSD. He wrote in 1962, “the dangers of suicide, prolonged psychotic reaction, and anti-social ... behavior exist” (Novak 1997: 107). Eventually Cohen turned his back on the psychedelic movement altogether, finding that drugs can not, really, lead one to spiritual knowledge or Ultimate Truth. 'Though the effects produced by a dose of LSD felt tremendously significant, Cohen suspected that this was mainly self-deception' (Novak 1997: 110). By the end of his life he went so far as to reject drugs altogether, instead asserting, “I would like to commend the sober mind to you” (Novak 1997: 110).

Once more we are confronted with the possibility that our spiritual experiences (in this case the drug-induced) are spawned from self deception, or what Sartre called 'bad faith'. Now we must note that even if drugs result in better health this need not necessarily entail that the experience is one of

experiencing Ultimate Reality or the phenomenon of completion or Individuation. Can drugs lead to the transcendental or is it really the case that the user is really fooling herself in the illusory? Aldous Huxley, famous author and 'drug mystic' made his own contribution which is worth examining.

Huxley

The existentialists warned and fought against intoxicants and escapism, while psychologists have made claims that changes of consciousness, however they have been brought about, could be biologically useful and therefore healthy. Aldous Huxley offered his own complex (and perhaps at times inconsistent), contribution to the drug and chemical debate.

Huxley drew on Jung's work and his theory of the Collective Unconscious. In his lecture 'Natural History of Visions' (1978) Huxley claimed that there exists deep in our minds, deeper than both our ordinary or personal unconscious and the collective unconscious, the world of the visionary, something he claimed is 'profoundly different' from both (Huxley 1978: 222).

Huxley began his lecture by asking a question, 'why are precious stones precious?' (Huxley 1978: 216). For, after all, 'precious stones in themselves don't help us in any basic way' (Huxley 1978: 217). Yet people will go to all extremes, take huge risks and lay down fortunes for them – why? Well, Huxley suggested, 'there must be something in the precious stone to which the human mind responds in a very obscure and, on the face of it, rather unaccountable way' (Huxley 1978: 217). Huxley's answer – perhaps it reminds us of the world of visions – the 'ideal world' we find celebrated in Plato's *Phaedro*.

Now according to Huxley we all 'carry around at the back of our head this mysterious other

world which I have called the world of visions' (Huxley 1978: 235). And we can gain access to this world under 'certain favourable circumstances' (Huxley 1978: 220). The experience, he adds, is not only 'very exciting' but 'also very therapeutic' (Huxley 1978: 220). Thus Huxley seemed to hold that drug usage and mystical experience could lead to better health and well being for the psyche.

Huxley advanced the theory that our minds are limited in such a way as to be biologically useful, but this deeper consciousness - this world of visions, can be reached by means of hypnosis and reverie noting that some can get at this area of the preconscious mind very easily' (Huxley 1978: 221). Now while some may not have the creative ability to re-create this experience artistically, 'they nevertheless do have this capacity for entering a very, very strange world of the mind' (Huxley 1978: 223).

Huxley noted an important difference between the past when 'the capacity to have visions was regarded as extremely creditable' and today when these seers are more 'apt to keep their mouths shut for fear of being sent to the asylum' (Huxley 1978: 223). Huxley asserted that, 'there is nothing intrinsically unhealthy about having visions' (Huxley 1978: 223). Instead he proposed that 'a person who has visions reaches the point of insanity only when he doesn't know he is having visions and mixes them up with real life – or is so obsessed with his visions that he can't get back into real life' (Huxley 1978: 223-224).

Huxley, then, made two important observations. First he drew a distinction between a time when spirituality encompassed certain phenomena which today people are institutionalized for. Instead of being isolated from the general public and dismissed as pathological, there was a time when a person who experienced symptoms of 'mental illness' really had an important role to play in the spiritual lives within her society (as indeed is also the case with some other cultures today). Related to this idea is

Huxley's suggestion that certain mental phenomena are not in themselves pathological, but rather illness or health rests on how the subject interprets and integrates her experience with the world around her.

Huxley moved on to claim that even ordinary people can reach the visionary world through practices like 'complete isolation', 'fasting, breathing exercises' or encouraged in 'psychological laboratories' (Huxley 1978: 225), or partaking in drug usage (Huxley 1978: 226). Huxley believed that the world of visions 'is literally another world' (Huxley 1978: 229) and the reason we find such pleasure in precious stones has to do with its relationship with 'the brilliant and luminous quality of the world of visions' which is 'somehow reflected in our world in luminous things such as fire' (Huxley 1978: 228). Huxley wrote, 'I think they (precious stones) are precious because they are the objects in the external world which most nearly resemble the things which people see in the visionary world' (Huxley 1978: 232).

In his *Doors of Perception and Heaven and Hell* (1959) Huxley suggested that that there exists outside of us an Absolute Reality which is beautiful and wonderful but usually inaccessible, on account of our brains which produce only the 'biologically useful'. According to Huxley, spiritual experience is biologically useless and if we were to live the life of an ecstatic visionary, full time, we would never, in fact, do anything at all, so caught up would we be in the visionary and the mystical. It seems, according to Huxley there is a profound reality outside of our normal consciousness, but there is also a natural desire for us to escape our biologically useful, but ultimately dull and monotonous lives. Our urge to escape may take the form of ascetic and other less ascetic types of practices, like dancing and drug taking, which could lead to transcendent, or transcendental experience. However the idea that the mystical is shut off from us because it is biologically useless and would result in non-participation with society at large is highly questionable as we have already noted from the work of Underhill and others.

Huxley held that a strong relationship exists between madness, drugs and spiritual experience all to do with chemistry. The real reason for ascetic practices, according to Huxley, had to do with a change of consciousness. Chemical change of consciousness have nothing to do with purity nor the intervention of God. He wrote, 'mortification of the body may produce a host of undesirable mental symptoms; but it may also open a door into a transcendental world of Being, Knowledge and Bliss' (Huxley 1959: 119). Huxley held that ascetic practices, like self flagellation, could infuse 'large quantities of histamine and adrenalin' (Huxley 1959: 120), thus changing one's consciousness. Huxley proposed that:

... in one way or another, *all* our experiences are chemically conditioned, and if we imagine that some of them are purely 'spiritual', purely 'intellectual', purely 'aesthetic', it is merely because we have never troubled to investigate the internal chemical environment of the moment of their occurrence (Huxley 1959: 121).

Now from this one might mistakenly take the intuitive leap into thinking Huxley was a materialist with no belief in the spiritual. This, after all, was a man who filled himself with L.S.D. on his deathbed. In fact it is quite possible that Huxley shared the same belief as many religious people in holding that existence itself is spiritual. Huxley suggested the thesis offered by the philosopher C. D. Broad on the possibility of their being an Absolute Reality outside of our ordinary consciousness. Huxley quoted Broad and his idea of their being a 'mind at large', which is capable of, 'perceiving everything that is happening everywhere in the universe' (Huxley 1959: 21). However, since we need to survive in the world, to live as creatures, we have lost our ability to be visionary. In Huxley's words, 'to make biological survival possible, Mind at Large has to be funnelled through the reducing value of the brain and nervous system' (Huxley 1959: 21). This has importance in relation to Huxley's ideas on

drug-taking. Against the idea that drugs are merely ways of escape, Huxley, to the contrary, claimed that drugs can potentially remove the false consciousness, the ordinary perception devised by nature purely as a biologically useful mechanism. By removing this obstacle to perception, all can potentially experience the world of the visionary. While contemplating an ordinary vase, a drug induced Huxley recorded his experience. 'I was not looking now at an unusual flower arrangement,' he wrote, 'I was seeing what Adam had seen on the morning of his creation – the miracle, moment by moment, of naked existence' (Huxley 1959: 17). He went on to write about 'a repeated flow from beauty to heightened beauty, from deeper to ever deeper meaning, words like Grace and Transfiguration came to my mind' (Huxley 1959: 18). Huxley also wrote of the Beatific Vision, bliss and the experience of timelessness (Huxley 1959: 18-20). Now it is not just drug taking that can reveal the visionary beauty in life, human beings, according to Huxley, have a 'highly developed colour sense, which he calls a 'biological luxury', which is, 'inestimably precious to him as an intellectual and spiritual being, but unnecessary to his survival as an animal' (Huxley 1959: 24). Mescaline merely 'raises all colours to a higher power' (Huxley 1959: 25). This means that the drug doesn't actually add anything to what is already there, rather, it heightens the Glorious Reality which already exists and which we normally fail to perceive due to the biological necessity of living in *this* world. Huxley claimed:

What the rest of us see only under the influence of mescaline, the artist is congenitally equipped to see all the time. His perception is not limited to what is biologically or socially useful. A little of the knowledge belonging to Mind at Large oozes past the reducing valve of brain and ego into his consciousness (Huxley 1959: 29).

Perhaps this is like the suggestion offered by Artaud on the nature of great artists like Van Gogh. Artaud claimed this troubled genius was a true seer into reality and stood out against society's lies and illusions. Unfortunately the painter's experience, like Artaud's, emotionally and

psychologically, crippled him in ways unbeknown to the ordinary person.

Huxley held great respect for this spiritual dimension of the human psyche. However, like Zaehner, he had his reservations especially when it came to drug-induced spiritual experience. These reservations basically boil down to moral issues and the necessity of living in *this* world, alongside other people. Huxley wrote, 'if one always saw like this, one would never want to do anything' (Huxley 1959: 30). Furthermore, he wrote 'what about human relations?' (Huxley 1959: 30). Huxley admitted 'this participation in the manifest glory of things left no room, so to speak, for the ordinary, the necessary concerns of human existence, above all for concerns involving persons' (Huxley 1959: 31). This, we shall find, is the major complaint of Huxley's great critic, Zaehner.

We must note here that many others, including Underhill, considered genuine mysticism to be the exact opposite. Instead of living outside of society, a true mystic (however rare she may be) necessarily develops an active and meaningful relationship with the outside world. To the contrary, a true mystic has energy and ability not only beyond the ill, but beyond the ordinary individual as well. A true mystic can be recognized as a saint in almost every culture. Usually highly moral, full of love and compassion for all, she can be recognized by her amazing zest of spirit and ability of mind – the exact opposite of the ego-centric drug induced mystic offered by Huxley.

Nevertheless if Huxley's drug mystic fails to resemble the rare individual of limitless love and energy, he did claim his mystic has virtue of sorts. He wrote, 'there is no form of contemplation, even the most quietistic, which is without its ethical values' (Huxley 1959: 36). Huxley went on to propose that 'when all things are perceived as infinite and holy, what motive can we have for covetousness or

self-assertion, for the pursuit of power or the drearier forms of pleasure?' (Huxley 1959: 37). He left the door open for the possibility of 'some beneficent influence', like the divine perhaps, to inspire the contemplative.

If all experiences are chemically based then so must the experiences of the mad, and at one stage during his mescaline experience, Huxley felt he was going crazy. He wrote about negative experiences of mescaline stemming from both physical health (like jaundice) and mental health (periodical depressions or chronic anxiety). Huxley also suggested that madness may be akin to the negative experiences recorded by mystics. He wrote about feeling 'overwhelmed' and full of 'pains and terrors' which 'come, too suddenly, face to face with some manifestations of the *Mysterium Tremendum*' (Huxley 1959: 46).

Mysticism, it seems, is an intense experience and Huxley's short burst of negative terror may tell us something of the nature of this higher spirituality. Could it be the case that part of the reason Huxley found himself overwhelmed by '*Mysterium Tremendum*' was due to a spiritual short cut into that most strange of realms? Huxley held that all transcendental practices are *really* devices to jolt ourselves out of our ordinary consciousness but perhaps he was mistaken in this. Perhaps, as described by Govinda and Underhill (to cite but two), ascetic practices form part of an intensive inner path designed to prepare the mind for the overwhelming confrontation with Absolute Reality. It may be the case that a self-disciplined mystic is more likely to retain her sense of equilibrium than someone who has not prepared herself fully – her drug taking, then, becomes dangerous for it involves a short cut, wherein genuine spiritual experience usually entails a long and painstaking process. But let us return to Huxley who did not seem to have considered this possibility.

When it came to creativity, madness and the mystical, Huxley held that the only real difference

between the artist and the mad person comes down to a question of talent or, perhaps more accurately, an ability to share the experience with others. Huxley wrote 'the untalented visionary may perceive an inner reality no less tremendous, beautiful, and significant than the world beheld by Blake; but he lacks altogether the ability to express, in literary or plastic symbols, what he has seen' (Huxley 1959: 39). And Huxley also held that a sick person, or a schizophrenic, has an 'inability to take refuge from inner and outer reality' and to share 'symbols and socially acceptable conventions' (Huxley 1959: 47).

Huxley, then, seemed to recognize the deep need of the mystic to share her experience with others. Perhaps Huxley may not have recognized this idea in its fullness, although others seem to have realized that the necessity of sharing once more points to mysticism as being something much more than private glory and ego-centric chemical reactions. Often the subject seems painfully aware that, as embarrassing as it may be to communicate such experiences with others, it is indeed necessary. There are even reports of psychological disturbance experienced when subjects keep their spiritual occurrences to themselves only to find themselves restored to full health upon sharing it with others.

The next important quality of the experience reported by Huxley is the necessity that the mystical event be a transient one for, if such intensity were to be without relief, the possible mystic could become mentally crushed by its overwhelming force. Huxley wrote 'the schizophrenic is like a man permanently under the influence of mescaline and therefore unable to shut off the experience of a reality which he is not holy enough to live with' (Huxley 1959: 47). Maslow proposed that the schizophrenic has neither the control to begin nor to conclude her experience. Huxley wrote, 'many schizophrenics have their times of heavenly happiness; but the fact that (unlike the mescaline-taker) they do not know when, if ever, they will be permitted to return to the reassuring banality of everyday experience causes even heaven to seem appalling' (Huxley 1959: 111).

Huxley's views on drugs and spiritual experience are complex and ambiguous. On the one hand he suggested the visionary experiences Ultimate Reality (or what he calls Mind at Large), on the other hand he admitted drug-taking and other consciousness changing activities derive from an 'urge to escape' and 'there have always been chemical intoxicants' (Huxley 1959: 51-52). For, according to Huxley, 'the urge to transcend self-conscious self-hood is ... a principal appetite of the soul' (Huxley 1959: 55). We have found this tendency already in the work of Tuan and Murdoch. Because of this desire, Huxley proposed 'what is needed is a new drug which will relieve and console our suffering species without doing more harm in the long run than it does good in the short' (Huxley 1959: 53). Huxley went on, somewhat surprisingly, to admit that drug-taking will not, in fact, reveal the 'ultimate purpose of human life', like 'Enlightenment' and the 'Beatific Vision'. He merely hoped it would be 'helpful' (Huxley 1959: 60) and may provide some 'illumination' (Huxley 1959: 64). Yet, at the same time he also hoped it may transform one into a new person (Huxley 1959: 65). Huxley suggested that our ancestors remained 'relatively sane' on account of their practices of 'periodically escaping ...' (Huxley 1959: 102).

It is difficult to understand what Huxley exactly meant here and perhaps he himself was unclear on this (in this book at any rate). If we do need to escape from existence then wouldn't this mean that the mystical is not biologically useless? To the contrary wouldn't it mean that it is biologically useful in terms of helping us to get through our mundane lives? Furthermore what are we to make of the fact that on the one hand he claimed the drug-induced mystic experiences Ultimate Reality (Mind at Large) and his contrary statement that it is not really enlightenment at all? Acknowledging this inconsistency let us now take our leave of Huxley and examine one of his greatest recognized critics, Zaehner.

Zaehner

In his book *Mysticism: Sacred and Profane* Zaehner took up the challenge of attacking Huxley's assertion that drug use was a legitimate tool when it came to experiencing the mystical. Zaehner divided mystical experiences into two – the 'theistic' and the 'monistic' and asserted that both experiences could be found everywhere, that is to say, they are universal. 'Monistic' mysticism, which includes 'nature mysticism' involves the transcending of 'space and time' (Zaehner 1957: 41) and Zaehner argued that there was a 'definite connection between nature mysticism and lunacy' (Zaehner 1957: 51). He explained the difference between 'monistic' mysticism, which included 'nature' mysticism and 'theistic' mysticism, arguing that the latter is 'mystical religion proper' (Zaehner 1957: 149). Zaehner wrote:

... the mystical state at which the religious man aims is the reverse of the natural mystical experience: it is the cutting off of one's ties with the world, the settling in quietness in one's immortal soul, and finally the offering of that soul up to its maker (Zaehner 1957: 149).

Theism, the authentic mysticism of divine union and love (Zaehner 1957: 168-169), includes a strong ethical and moral component wherein the mystic, 'will show to the world ... the holiness of his life ... by an abiding humility' (Zaehner 1957: 193). Whereas, 'in monism there can be no love' (Zaehner 1957: 172). In fact, monistic experience, 'however agreeable the manic state may be to the individual who undergoes it, it is obvious that it can be an intolerable nuisance to society at large' (Zaehner 1957: 106). Significantly, then, Zaehner echoes the Platonic belief (and the one offered by Underhill) that genuine spirituality, the awareness of an Ultimate Reality outside of the puppet show, in some way contains the essential component of virtue and social justice. As well as the element of love celebrated by so many. Madness, nature mysticism and drug intoxication are thus disqualified as genuine spirituality on the

grounds of their being private fantasy and out of touch with the world at large. Perhaps we have, once more, the distinction Plato made between 'madness as a disease' and 'madness as a blessing'.

Plato's views on the good, madness, and divine inspiration are complex and somewhat unclear. We noted that 'madness as an illness' is a crippling and unhealthy sickness, whereas 'madness as a blessing' is really a good thing wherein the subject abandons self-glory and other egotistical projects. Instead the mystic is in love with the beautiful and the good, not the sensations of the body but rather an absorption of the soul. Perhaps the initial period may be marked by a sort of chaos. But there is no doubt that the lover of the immortal and the perfect is an especially good person and has an important part to play in the world once her psyche has stabilized. In Plato's language she will be able to 'contemplate the beautiful as appearing in our observances and our laws' (Plato 1968: 306). When it comes to the good, 'anyone who is going to act *rationaly* either in public or private life must have sight of it' (my italics) (Plato: 1987: 260). It seems clear that the true lover of wisdom and the good truly is a rational person even if she appears crazy in her dismissal of secular honours.

Now Zaehner has been criticized as being 'too simplistic' in his conceptualization of there being two independent types of mysticism (Smart: 1978: 13-14). Smart claims that Zaehner 'should not have two but many baskets – or alternatively, one, ascribing differences of description to doctrinal interpretation' (Smart 1978: 14). In support of Zaehner, however it may be said that his ideas on love and the contribution to society deciding the differences between 'true' mysticism as compared with the selfishness of inferior types, is a valuable one. Zaehner puts emphasis on the idea of a permanent change which is invaluable for society at large. This 'integration of the personality' (Zaehner 1957: 110) he contrasted with the drug user and the manic who experience only a temporary pleasure and one which, 'in the long run,' will only 'lead to further disaster' (Zaehner 1957: 110-111). The psychologist Buche held passionately to the idea that virtue, morality and social justice were essential elements to

the authentic mystical experience. He wrote, '... were the intellectual illumination *not* accompanied by moral exaltation, these men would undoubtedly be in effect so many demons who would end by destroying the world' (Buche 1951: 100).

Many mystics themselves are at pains to communicate the importance of the ethical component to mysticism. St. John of the Cross claimed that, 'if an experience fails to engender humility, charity, mortification, holy simplicity, and silence, etc., of what value is it?' (St. John of the Cross 1973: 205). The difference, then, between the mad experience and that of the mystic, according to Zaehner, lies in the creation of something permanent – the creation of a new being, That is, 'a transformative function' which leaves a permanent mark on the individual and is valuable to society at large through her contribution of selfless love and care for others.

According to Zaehner true mysticism involves an important moral aspect that contrasts sharply with mental illness and the drug user. We have added that this also seems to be the position held by Plato. Nevertheless just about all scholars of mysticism will concur that one need not have spiritual experiences in order to be moral, ethical, religious or a champion of social justice. Is there, then, a point to mysticism? It is here that we discover an important difference between the religious and the secular schools of thought. While both are in agreement that mystical experience is something different from the experiences of the mad, they both offer different theories as to what, in fact, it is and what use it is for. The religious claim that mysticism is a God-centered activity, while the humanitarian writers find it to be a useful and powerful affirmation of human existence. The religious reject this belief asserting that all should be done to please the Lord and not the creature, except in pleasing the creature for the sake of the Lord. One must serve God absolutely and only serve one's fellow person as a means of serving God. St. Teresa of Avila even warns against this type of Godless humanitarianism, asserting 'charity is a great thing, and so is a constant care for souls, so long as it is

undertaken simply and for God's sake' (St. Teresa 1957: 107). We likewise find this sentiment shared in Islam where we find a Muslim Saint admonishing his friend for his humanitarian-centered activity complaining, 'all that you did in Baghdad you did for my sake, I did what I did for God's sake' (Attar 1990: 198).

We find, nevertheless, many recorded cases of saintly individuals filled with love for their fellow women and men. Some of these loving individuals have wrestled with this paradox of serving God and one another. St. Catherine of Genoa, for instance, experienced a pleasing resolution:

“... thou dost command me to love my neighbour”, she once exclaimed in prayer, “and yet I cannot love anything but Thee, nor can I admit anything else to be mingled with Thee. How then can I act?” And she was answered inwardly: “He who loves me, loves all that I love” (Underhill 1975: 165).

Mystical experience in religions is usually hailed as a rare and important event and one of the great charges the religious sometimes level at the agnostic is that in holding mystical experience to be common and natural they cheapen genuine spirituality. This is the complaint Knowles made when he wrote of the modern 'tendency among spiritual writers to lower unduly the threshold of contemplation', on the grounds that 'such a degradation sooner or later produces a disregard, even a distrust of the true mystical life, and there is always a danger of “quietism”' (Knowles 1961: 19-20). For these reasons Knowles wished to reserve mysticism for the religious and not the secular humanists or romantics. 'The true mystic', he remarked, 'is taught and led of God, not of man' (Knowles 1961: 46). In other words, true mysticism cannot occur outside of God's domain, that is, it cannot be considered a human or even natural centred experience. He wrote, 'all genuine mysticism is ... the direct action of God bestowing knowledge and love of Himself' (Knowles 1961: 134). For Inge, God's most outstanding

creations are difficult to find and 'the greatest contemplatives are as rare as great poets, musicians, scientific discoveries' (Inge 1947: 28).

Cohen, Huxley and Zaehner lived in age when psychedelic drugs were (at least in the West) in their infancy. All three reached different conclusions as to their relationship to the mystical.

Cohen began with the presupposition that drugs like mescaline and LSD trigger off experiences similar to schizophrenia. When he experimented on himself he was surprised to find it to have affected him more like mysticism than insanity. Nevertheless he realized that not all were affected in the same manner he was and it was rare individuals who were affected in this way. Cohen eventually turned on the drug critical of back yard laboratories and usage of the drug for shallow entertainment and concluded that the sober life is the best path to follow for the authentic, rather than that which is chemically induced.

Huxley believed that we carry around with us, in the back of our minds, a powerful and mysterious world of visions. Artists, Huxley suggested, were more in tune with this world than others but through drug taking we could all, potentially, experience the mystical. Huxley also suggested that the reason most of us do not have easy access to this 'mind at large' was due to the biological necessity of living in this world. Prolonged experience could lead to insanity for we require time out from the intensity of the mystical. In addition, Huxley asserted that drug taking could send one to hell, rather than heaven, if the subject suffered from physiological or mental distress. Huxley believed that the history of humanity was replete with examples of practices wherein subjects engage in practices designed to change their consciousness. He dreamed of a day when the perfect drug would be manufactured so that its benefits would far outweigh its side effects. Huxley had his critics who claimed genuine mysticism is far beyond a mere chemical shift brought about by drug taking. Zaehner

was such a critic. Zaehner argued that drug taking, while it may chemically affect ones' mind, such 'monistic' experience is something altogether different from the 'theistic'. The 'theistic', according to Zaehner, is a genuine experience of the Divine. This pure spirituality, Zaehner claimed, was but for the few and involved a permanent integration of the personality.

Now this contention of Zaehners' is shared by many; whether or not they believe mysticism to be natural or supernatural, these writers and mystics hold that a genuine mystic can be recognized by her or his selfless service to the community at large and her or his relationship with others. R. Jordan is but one more example of this position. He reflected on the clinical psychologist Wilson Van Dusen, who recognized apparent similarities between drug use, madness and the genuinely mystical. In the end Dusen held the mystical to be something categorically different from the mad.

Van Dusen ... indicates that unique experiences such as his must be distinguished from the feelings of the schizophrenic who thinks he is God. The schizophrenic experiences an ego-inflation which cuts off communication and isolates him from the common place. In Van Dusen's experience it was clear that all other people are also of divine nature, with the result that "one inclines to a more humble respect of others" (Dusen 1963: 119).

Chapter 14: – Mysticism and Social Justice

Love, humility and service to others – as we have seen Zaehner and Dusen are not the only ones who draw a distinction between true mysticism and its maddening counterparts based on the idea of transformation of the individual, being born anew, and living a life devoted to addressing the problems of misfortune and injustice. According to James it makes no sense to speak of the spiritual experience of finding God as a mere illusion, for, as he noted, 'God is real since he produces real effects' (James 1957: 507). The fact is that a life of service must be contrasted with the selfish or helpless lives of drug-addicts and the mentally ill. As Inge comments:

.... the greatest mystics were strong and healthy persons, many of them long-lived, and some of them gifted with remarkable organizing capacities. Nothing can be further apart than the lives of the great mystics and those of drug-addicts (Inge 1947: 28).

We might say that a drug-addict engages in self-deception in her inflated state of power. Inge, nevertheless, recognized that there is 'an element of escapism in all higher religion' (Inge 1947: 145). He did, however, propose that there is a 'real way of escape' which contrasts with the usual escapism of illusion. He writes about the:

... escape from our lower selves and from the false objects created by our lower selves. All the truth and beauty of the external world are not lost to us; they are restored to us in their true meaning, as reflections of the truth and beauty of the creator (Inge 1947: 148).

The possibility of an unconscious or subconscious element to our existence in which our spirituality is experienced is also addressed by Inge. He claimed that the mystic 'cares nothing for

states of consciousness. His business is with the ultimately real. He aspires to the vision of God, and believes that this vision is within his reach' (Inge 1947: 152). Inge then seemed to draw another distinction between genuine mysticism which is about Ultimate Truth and inferior experiences which depend on altered states of consciousness whether they be the product of drug usage or that of illness.

Weil

Simone Weil held that the difference between truth and illusion could be discovered in the sensual appetite (or desires) of the individual. To Weil, we engage in illusion by projecting our desires onto the world at large. She claimed:

The reality of the world is the result of our attachment. It is the reality of the self which we transfer into things. It has nothing to do with independent reality. That is only perceptible through total detachment. Should only one thread remain, there is still attachment (Weil 1986: 258-259).

It must follow, then, that 'attachment is a manufacturer of illusions and whoever wants reality ought to be detached' (Weil 1986: 259).

Weil seemed to share the idea of there being an authentic way of escape. For Weil, to repeat, 'the only way into truth is through one's own annihilation; through dwelling a long time in a state of extreme and total humiliation' (Weil 1986: 70). In other words this type of 'escape', if it is to be thought as such, is something fundamentally different from what we usually understand as escapism. Usually escapes are illusory and we find them to be flattering, ego-centric, self-indulgent and so forth. The experiences which come from drug usage, for example, are usually illusory, particularly when

taken as a party drug and not as part of a religious ceremony (nevertheless, at times, it can be difficult to distinguish between the two). Today there aren't too many Huxleys willing to argue that their 'experimentations' are undertaken for the purposes of experiencing a higher truth – and when this reason is cited, it may well be, as Sidney Cohen came to believe, a case of 'self-deception'. Drugs, like gluttony, gambling, shopping, whoring or playing computer games and so forth are all examples of escaping from the loneliness and boredom of our ordinary lives (although some are less harmful than others). They are not, however, what Inge would recognize as legitimate ways of escape and they are also far from the difficult asceticism proposed by the religious, including Weil. Against egotistical escapism she wrote, 'we have to know that we are nothing, that the impression of being somebody is an illusion' (Weil 1974: 50) and 'religion, in so far as it is a source of consolation is a hindrance to true faith' (Weil 1974: 50). It is through 'affliction ... a pulverization of the soul' (Weil 1974: 93) in which Weil prescribes the authentic means of escape, and something very different from those other ways which only lead to further illusion.

This idea lends itself readily to what we have already considered, that being, that the truth of mysticism is proven by the passionate and selfless love of the virtuous. Many of the writers and mystics explored in this thesis attest to this theory.

We have encountered differences of opinion between what we have recognized as the traditionally religious and the secular humanists, particularly when it comes to the notions of the natural and the supernatural. The religious are usually adamant that 'the mystical' is a Divine affair between God and the mere mortal. Whereas the secular humanists find in mysticism a natural phenomenon which can be explained without recourse to the supernatural. Nevertheless what unites both groups is a profound conviction that the genuine mystic is a courageous truth seeker who must be integrated into society as a whole, usually has tremendous abilities and can be recognized as someone

quite different from the sick and insane.

Secular humanists, like Becker, Maslow, Winnicott and Murdoch, point to the life of action, of 'doing' as opposed to the mere experiences of a change in consciousness. This is again shared by many of the religious thinkers we have encountered. Becker claimed that the ill avoid life, are governed by fear and can be recognized by their crippled personality (Becker 1973: 248).

Maslow distinguished between the sick schizophrenic who is paralyzed by his or her experiences and the productive, inspiring experiences of the self-actualizer. He claimed that the schizophrenic does not make use of her experiences and is 'too much "totally experiencing" and not enough "self-observing – and criticizing"' (Maslow 1976: 74). He went on to suggest that 'bright ideas really take a small proportion of our time. Most of our time is spent on hard work' (Maslow 1976: 76). Maslow added that the sick person has an 'inability to cope in a society' (Maslow 1976: 85) and can be identified by her lack of 'control, reason, order, logic' (Maslow 1976: 163). Winnicott wrote about the experience of 'feeling real' which involves the emotional experiences of love, joy, creativity and the meaningful. Without these factors, Winnicott claimed, one can become mentally ill (Winnicott 1974: 138).

Murdoch likewise shared this conviction that the genuinely mystical involves action . She wrote 'imagining is *doing*, it is a sort of personal exploring' (Murdoch 1997: 199). Furthermore she suggested that imagination is highly 'natural' and holds much more sway and importance than 'pure reason' (Murdoch 1997: 202). When it came to the mystics, Butler claimed that 'they were, most of them, peculiarly sane and strong men and women, who have left their mark, many of them, for good in history'. He suggested that the difficulty in understanding their discourse is due to their, 'struggling with the barriers and limitations of human thought and language in order to describe their union with

God' (Butler 1966: 5).

Of course this is not to deny that some mystics may have been ill. We have already mentioned some of the possible reasons why some mystics could end up crazy. Many of the Christian mystics warned against the power of the devil and many others wrote about how character flaws or vices like pride, egotism and a love of glory could potentially unhinge an individual. There is also the suggestion of James, Jung and R.D. Laing - the idea that mystical ecstasy takes place in the subconscious or unconscious levels and by travelling through these dark and potentially hazardous realms, one could become lost. Another idea, possibly related to this one, is the extraordinary strain spiritual ecstasy can place on people and how it can potentially crush those who are mentally weak or insecure in their surrounds. Knowles wrote about how a mental disturbance could be caused by 'an intensive inner conflict' (Knowles 1961: 122). Inge seems to concur with this. When it comes to the mystics, he claimed, 'sometimes their concentration on the inner life became pathological' (Inge 1947: 13).

A Sick Society

Now we have already noted that just as it is possible for a person to become mentally ill, so too can a society become sick. In fact a society can have an immense effect on how a subjects experience is to be interpreted and how the mystic is to become integrated in her culture. We recall the case of St. Paul and how today his experience may very well have been diagnosed as an epileptic and our society would, then, lose a potential saint and major contributor. A similar situation may occur to Socrates – the great spiritual conscience and one of the most revered figures in spiritual history. Many of our writers and mystics may claim that society will always be the domain of lies and illusion, Kierkegaard, for instance, asserted 'what the world most highly and unanimously honours is cleverness or acting

cleverly. But to act cleverly is precisely the most contemptuous of all' (Kierkegaard 1962: 243). Nevertheless many can at least distinguish between a bad society and a worse one, and recognize that some cultures are more adept at nourishing spirituality and social justice than others. Thus Greeley points to our own materialistic and atheistic culture and questions whether our modern ideas are more of a hindrance than a help. He wrote, 'if a person is told he's "a nut" or "crazy" for having such an interlude, could he not in fact become disturbed within the context of conflict and judgment?' (Greeley 1974: 87). Furthermore a society of lax morality could alienate and isolate those of virtue who seek to follow a spiritual path and possibly make them feel aberrant.

St. Augustine was highly critical of his society and what he recognized as its sickness and delusions. In his *Confessions* he railed against his own culture and its celebration of power, egotism, cleverness and glory – all at the expense of the virtues Christianity values – piety, humility, charity and self-sacrifice. These popular Roman practices St. Augustine held to be nothing but 'delusions' (St. Augustine 1961: 31) In addition he voiced his disgust at the fact that all of this 'sinful pleasure', that he engaged himself in, was the very reason why he 'was called a promising boy' (St. Augustine 1961: 37). After St. Augustine's conversion to Christianity he looked back on his life and discovered that, to quote his own words, 'my sin was this, that I looked for pleasure, beauty, and truth not in him but in myself and his other creatures, and the search instead led to pain, confusion, and error' (St. Augustine 1961: 40-41).

Weil mused on the idea as to what a good society might look like when it came to the needs of the soul. She wrote:

The human soul has need of security and also of risk. The fear of violence or of hunger or of any other extreme evil is a sickness of the soul. The boredom produced by a complete

absence of risk is also a sickness of the soul (Weil 1986: 209).

Nevertheless Weil, with her own twist on Plato's myth claimed that 'society is the cave' and 'the way out is solitude' (Weil 1974: 58).

Conclusion

This essay has been concerned with the topic of madness, mysticism and what possible relationship may exist between the two. We have explored the work of many courageous truth seekers and while we cannot conclude with any singular theory – it is my hope that the discussion has revealed the complexity of our mental and spiritual lives, and thus encourage us to remain open-minded when it comes to these topics.

Through our discussion on the Pre-Socratics, Plato, Wittgenstein, Christian mysticism, romanticism, eastern thought, Nietzsche, existentialism and modern psychology – we have found many valuable contributions to our subject. We have learned that the notions of madness and mysticism exist cross culturally and can be found throughout all times – although many have their own ideas on what they involve. We have also learned that ideas on both madness and mysticism, and the behaviour accompanying it, can severely affect both the subject herself and the world she inhabits.

Mystical experiences are often said to be ineffable and perhaps part of the difficulty has to do with the transcending of ordinary consciousness. Some claim it is a mode of experience, others a contemplation of truth, still others find it supernatural and God-centric. Atheists and agnostics offer their own suggestions. It could be a 'peak experience', 'individuation', 'psychic health', and/or a feeling of love, awe, or power. More negatively, it could be considered a project of self-deception and escapism. What links can we find here? We have not found an essence as such, instead preferring a Wittgensteinian analysis, where we instead offered a 'picture' of the possibly mystical.

Madness, likewise, is an ambiguous concept. Many of our thinkers contributed their own ideas on the subject. It has been considered a psychic imbalance, possession by gods, demons or corporeal

desires, inflation of the ego, a failure of the subject to integrate herself into society, an absence of love, or being loved, a cultural imprisonment where the creative has been walled off, an excess of fantasy and magical thinking. More positively, it may be a 'blessing' akin to mystical experience.

Now while all these thinkers have offered their own disparate analyses of these subjects, all seem united in their belief that uncovering Truth is a very difficult process and it requires an enormous amount of courage. The mystical is said to be a journey which is fraught with danger both from the unconscious and society at large. But if achieved, it is also the most rewarding and intense of experiences human kind is capable of experiencing.

Perhaps we have not succeeded in providing an adequate defence of mysticism as an Ultimate Truth and many will be unchanged in their belief that all spirituality (including the mystical) is really self-deception and escapism, even if it is proved to be psychologically healthy. I know not how to answer the question either way, but I am reminded of certain profound words from the mystical poet William Blake who wrote:

If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would
appear to man as it is, infinite.

For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro'
narrow chinks of his cavern (Blake 1953: 129).

Works Cited

- Aaronson, B. 1967, 'Mystic and Schizophreniform States and the Experience of Depth' in *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, vol. 6, no. 2 (Aut). Retrieved 21 May from <http://links.jstor.org.ezproxy.une.edu.au>
- Akhilananda. 1948, 'Mysticism and Altruism' in *Journal of Bible and Religion*, vol. 16, no. 2 (April). Retrieved 17 May 2007 from <http://links.jstor.org.ezproxy.une.edu.au>
- Armstrong, K. (ed.) 1991, *The English Mystics of the Fourteenth Century*, Kyle Cathie Ltd, London.
- Artaud, A. 1965, *Anthology*, ed. J. H. Hirschman, City Lights, San Francisco.
- Artaud, A. 1965, 'Artaud – Riviere Correspondence' in *Anthology*, ed J. H. Hirshman, City Lights, San Francisco, pp 7-25.
- Artaud, A. 1965, 'Coleridge the Traitor ' in *Anthology*, ed J. H. Hirshman, City Lights, San Francisco, pp 128-134.
- Artaud, A. 1965, 'Concerning a Journey to the Land of the Tarahumaras' in *Anthology*, ed J. H. Hirshman, City Lights, San Francisco, pp 69-83.
- Artaud, A. 1965, 'General Security: The Liquidation of Opium' in *Anthology*, ed J. H. Hirshman, City Lights, San Francisco, pp 61-64.
- Artaud, A. 1965, 'Here Where Others ...' in *Anthology*, ed J. H. Hirshman, City Lights, San Francisco, p 26.
- Artaud, A. 1965, 'Letter on Lautreamont' in *Anthology*, ed J. H. Hirshman, City Lights, San Francisco, pp 123-128.
- Artaud, A. 1965, 'Van Gogh: The Man Suicided by Society' in *Anthology*, ed J. H. Hirshman, City Lights, San Francisco, pp 135-163.
- Attar, F. 1990, *Muslim Saints and Mystics*, trans. A. J. Arberry, Arkana, London. .
- Augustine, Saint. 1948, *Basic Writings of St. Augustine Vol 1*, ed. W. Oats, Random House, New York.
- Augustine, Saint. 1961, *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin, Penguin Books, Middlesex.
- Augustine, Saint. 1948, 'On The Morals of the Catholic Church' in *Basic Writings of St. Augustine Vol 1*, ed. W. Oats, Random House, New York, pp 319-357.
- Barnes, J. (ed.) 1979, *The Pre-Socratic Philosophers Vol 1: Thales to Zeno*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.

- Bataille, G. 1988, *Inner Experience*, trans. L. A. Boldt, State University, New York.
- Bataille, G. 1992, *On Nietzsche*, trans. B. Boone, Paragon House, New York.
- Becker, E. 1973, *The Denial of Death*, The Free Press, New York.
- Blake, W. 1953, *Selected Poetry and Prose of Blake*, ed. N. Frye, Random House, New York.
- Blake, W. 1953, 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell' in *Selected Poetry and Prose of Blake*, ed. N. Frye, Random House, New York, pp 122-135.
- Buche, R. 1951, *Cosmic Consciousness: A Study in the Evolution of the Human Mind*, E.P. Dutton, New York.
- Burnet, J. 1930, *Early Greek Philosophy 4th Ed*, Adam and Charles Publishing, London.
- Butler, D. 1966, *Western Mysticism*, Harper Torch Book, New York.
- Camus, A. 1975, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. J. O'Brien, Penguin Books, London.
- Coleridge, S. & Wordsworth, W. 1969, *Lyrical Ballads 1798*, ed. W. J. B. Owen, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Cornford, F. (ed.) 1912, *From Religion to Philosophy*, Edward Arnold, London.
- Daiches, D. 1960, *A Critical History of English Literature Vol 4: The Romantics to the Present Day*, Secker and Warburg, London.
- Eckhart, Meister. 1963, *Selected Treatises and Sermons*, trans. J. M. Clark and J. W. Skinner, Fontana Library, London.
- Feuerbach, L. 1957, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. G. Eliot, Harper Torchbook, New York.
- Freud, S. 1946, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 3rd edn, trans. J. Riviere, Hogarth Press, London.
- Freud, S. 1959, 'Obsessive Actions and Religious Practices' in *The Standard Edition of the Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: Vol IX (1906-1908)*, trans and ed J. Strachey, Hogarth Press, London.
- Govinda, Lama Anagarika. 1974, *Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism*, Samuel Weiser, New York.
- Gray, F. 2008, *Jung, Irigaray, Individuation: Philosophy, Analytical Psychology, and the Question of the Feminine*, Routledge, East Sussex.
- Greeley, A. 1974, *Ecstasy: A Way of Knowing*, Prentice Hall, New Jersey.
- Hay, D. & Morisy, A. 1978, 'Reports of Ecstatic, Paranormal, or Religious Experience in Great Britain and the United States: A Comparison of Trends', in *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, vol. 17, no. 3 (winter). Retrieved 22 May 2007 from

<http://links.jstor.org.ezproxy.une.edu.au>

Huxley, A. 1978, 'Natural History of Visions' (216-235) in *The Human Situation: Lectures at Santa Barbara 1959*, Chatto and Windus, London.

Huxley, A. 1959, *The Doors of Perception and Heaven and Hell*, Penguin, Middlesex.

Inge, W. R. 1947, *Mysticism in Religion*. Hutchinson's University Library, London.

James, W. 1957, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, The Modern Library, New York.

John of the Cross, Saint. 1973, 'The Ascent of Mount Carmel' (66-292) in *The Collected Works*. trans. K. Kavanaugh and O. Rodriguez, ICI Publications, Washington D.C.

John of the Cross, Saint. 1973, *The Collected Works*. trans. K. Kavanaugh and O. Rodriguez, ICI Publications, Washington D.C.

Julian of Norwich. 1991, 'Revelations of Divine Love' in *The English Mystics of the Fourteenth Century*, ed K. Armstrong, Kyle Cathie Ltd, London.

Jung, C.G. 1968, *Analytic Psychology: its Theory and Practice. The Tavistock Lectures*. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.

Jung, C.G. 1997, *Jungs Seminar on Nietzsche's Zarathustra*. Princeton University Press, Princeton.

Jung, C.G. 1959, *The Collected Works: Vol 9 Part 2*, trans. R. F. C. Hull, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.

Katz, S. 1978, 'Language, Epistemology and Mysticism' in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, ed. S. Katz. Sheldon Press, London.

Katz, S. (ed.) 1978, *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, Sheldon Press, London.

Katz, S (ed.) 1983, *Mysticism and Religious Traditions*, Oxford University Press, New York.

Kierkegaard, S. 1985, *Fear and Trembling*, trans. A. Hannay, Penguin Books, London.

Kierkegaard, S. 1962, *Works of Love*, trans. H and E. Hong, Harper and Row, New York.

Kinsley, D. 1974, "'Through the Looking Glass": Divine Madness in the Hindu Religious Tradition,' in *History of Religions*, vol. 13, no. 4 (May). Retrieved 16 May 2007 from:

<http://links.jstor.org.ezproxy.une.edu.au>

Knowles, D. 1961, *The English Mystical Tradition*, Burns and Oats, London.

- Laing, R. D. 1967, *The Politics of Experience and The Bird of Paradise*, Penguin Books, Middlesex,
- Lynch, T. 2003, 'Winnicott's World: The Mystical Foundations of Reality,' in *Transcendent Philosophy: An International Journal for Comparative Philosophy and Mysticism*, vol.4, no. 4, pp 425-460.
- Majumdar, R. 1965, *Swami Vivekananda: A Historic Review*, General Printers and Publishers Pty. Ltd., Calcutta.
- Mascaro, J. (ed.) 1965, *The Upanishads*, Penguin Books, Middlesex.
- Maslow, A. 1976, 'A Holistic Approach to Creativity' in *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*, Penguin Books, Middlesex, pp 69-70.
- Maslow, A. 1976, 'Education and Peak Experiences' in *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*, Penguin Books, Middlesex, pp162-172.
- Maslow, A. 1976, 'Emotional Blocks to Creativity' in *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*, Penguin Books, Middlesex, pp 78-99.
- Maslow, A. 1976, 'Fusions of Facts and Values' in *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*, Penguin Books, Middlesex, pp 101-120.
- Maslow, A. 1976, 'Knower and Known' in *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*, Penguin Books, Middlesex, pp149-161.
- Maslow, A. 1976, 'Synanon and Eupsychia' in *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*, Penguin Books, Middlesex, pp 216-226.
- Maslow, A. 1976, 'The Creative Attitude' in *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*, Penguin Books, Middlesex, pp 55-68.
- Maslow, A. 1976, *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*, Penguin Books, Middlesex.
- Murdoch, I. 1997, 'Art is the Imitation of Nature' in *Existentialists and Mystics*, ed. P. Conradi, Penguin Books, New York, pp 243-257.
- Murdoch, I. 1997, *Existentialists and Mystics*, ed. P. Conradi, Penguin Books, New York.
- Murdoch, I. 1997, 'Hegel in Modern Dress' in *Existentialists and Mystics*, ed. P. Conradi, Penguin Books, New York, pp 146-150.
- Murdoch, I. 1997, 'Knowing the Void' in *Existentialists and Mystics*, ed. P. Conradi, Penguin Books, New York, pp 157-160.
- Murdoch, I. 1997, 'Literature and Philosophy: A Conversation with Brian Magee' in *Existentialists and Mystics*, ed. P. Conradi, Penguin Books, New York, pp 3-30.

- Murdoch, I. 1997, 'On God and Good' in *Existentialists and Mystics*, ed. P. Conradi, Penguin Books, New York, pp 337-362.
- Murdoch, I. 1997, 'Salvation by Words' in *Existentialists and Mystics*, ed. P. Conradi, Penguin Books, New York, pp 235-242.
- Murdoch, I. 1997, 'The Darkness of Practical Reason' in *Existentialists and Mystics*, ed. P. Conradi, Penguin Books, New York, pp 193 -204.
- Murdoch, I. 1997, 'The Existentialist Hero' in *Existentialists and Mystics*, ed. P. Conradi, Penguin Books, New York, pp 108-115.
- Murdoch, I. 1997, 'The Fire and the Sun: Why Plato Banished the Arts' in *Existentialists and Mystics*, ed. P. Conradi, Penguin Books, New York, pp 386-463.
- Murdoch, I. 1997, 'The Idea of Perfection' in *Existentialists and Mystics*, ed. P. Conradi, Penguin Books, New York, pp 299-336.
- Murdoch, I. 1997, 'The Sovereignty of Good over Other Concepts ' in *Existentialists and Mystics*, ed. P. Conradi, Penguin Books, New York, pp 363-385.
- Murdoch, I. 1997, 'The Sublime and the Good' in *Existentialists and Mystics*, ed. P. Conradi, Penguin Books, New York, pp 205-220.
- Nietzsche, F. 1956, *The Birth of Tragedy and The Genealogy of Morals*, trans. F. Golffing, Doubleday, New York.
- Nietzsche, F. 1976, *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. W . Kaufmann, Penguin, New York.
- Nietzsche, F. 1976, 'Thus Spoke Zarathustra' in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. W . Kaufmann, Penguin, New York, pp 103-439.
- Nietzsche, F. 1990, *Twilight of the Idols and The Antichrist*, trans R. J. Hollingdale, Penguin Books, London.
- Novak, S. 1997, 'LSD before Leary: Sidney Cohen's Critique of 1950s Psychedelic Research', in *Isis*, vol. 88, no. 1, (March). Retrieved 22 May 2007 from <http://links.jstor.org.ezproxv.une.edu.au>
- Otto, R. 1931, *The Philosophy of Religion: Based on Kant and Fries*, trans E.B. Dicker, Williams and Norgate, New York.
- Otto, R. 1936, *The Idea of the Holy*, Trans J. W. Harvey, Oxford University Press, London
- Owen, H. 1983, 'Experience and Dogma in the English Mystics' in *Mysticism and Religious Traditions*, ed. S. Katz, Oxford University Press, New York, pp 148-162.

- Plato. 1953, 'Ion' in *The Dialogues of Plato: Vol 1*, ed. B. Jowett, Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- Plato. 1968, 'Making the Changeless Available for Life (Philebus)' in *Philosophers Speak for Themselves: From Thales to Plato*, ed. T.V. Smith, Phoenix Books, Chicago.
- Plato. 1953, 'Meno' in *The Dialogues of Plato: Vol 1*, ed. B. Jowett, Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- Plato. 1968, 'On Love as Wings for the Aspiring (Symposium)' in *Philosophers Speak for Themselves: From Thales to Plato*, ed. T.V. Smith, Phoenix Books, Chicago.
- Plato. 1968, 'On the Kingly Art (Statesman)' in *Philosophers Speak for Themselves: From Thales to Plato*, ed. T.V. Smith, Phoenix Books, Chicago.
- Plato. 1969, 'Phaedo' in *The Last Days of Socrates*, ed. H. Treolenic, Penguin Classics, London.
- Plato. 1973, *Phaedrus and Letters VII and VIII*, ed. W. Hamilton, Penguin Classics, London.
- Plato. 1969, 'The Apology' in *The Last Days of Socrates*, ed. H. Treolenic, Penguin Classics, London.
- Plato. 1953, *The Dialogues of Plato: Vol 1*, ed. B. Jowett, Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- Plato. 1970, *The Laws*, ed. T. J. Saunders, Penguin Classics, London.
- Plato. 1987, *The Republic*, ed. H. D. P. Lee, Penguin Classics, London.
- Plotinus. 1952, *The Six Enneads*, trans. S. Mackenna & B. S. Page, Encyclopedia Britannica, Chicago.
- Raab, K. 1995, 'Is There Anything Transcendent about Transcendence? A Philosophical and Psychological Study of Sri Ramakrishna', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 6, no. 2 (summer). Retrieved 21 May 2007 from <http://links.jstor.org.ezproxy.une.edu.au>
- Rolle, R. 1991, 'The Fire of Love' in *The English Mystics of the Fourteenth Century*, ed. K. Armstrong, Kyle Cathie Ltd, London.
- Sartre, J. 1969, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans H. E. Barnes, Methuen and Co Ltd, London.
- Sartre, J. 1965, *Nausea*, trans. R. Baldick, Penguin Books, London.
- Sartre, J. 1971, *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions*, trans. P. Moiret, Methuen and Co. Ltd, London.
- Schumaker, J. 1995, *The Corruption of Reality: A Unified Theory of Religion, Hypnosis and Psychology*, Prometheus Books, New York

- Schumaker, J. 1990, *Wings of Illusion: The Origin, Nature and Future of Paranormal Belief*, Prometheus Books, New York.
- Smart, N. 1979, *The Philosophy of Religion: Studies in Philosophy and Religion 6*, ed. P.R. Baelz, Sheldon Press, London.
- Smart, N. 1978, 'Understanding Religious Experiences' in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, ed. S. Katz, Sheldon Press, London.
- Smith, T.V. (ed.) 1968, *Philosophers Speak for Themselves: From Thales to Plato*, Phoenic books, Chicago.
- Stace, W.T. 1961, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, Macmillan and Co. Ltd., London.
- Stifler, S., Greer, J., Sneck, W. & Dovenmuehle, R. 1993, 'An Empirical Investigation of the Discriminability of Reported Mystical Experiences among Religious Contemplatives, Psychotic Inpatients and Normal Adults' in *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, vol. 32, no. 4 (Dec). Retrieved 17 May 2007 from <http://links.jstor.org.ezproxy.une.edu.au>
- Teresa of Avila, Saint. 1957, *The Life of St. Teresa of Avila*. Trans. J. M. Cohen, Penguin Books, Middlesex.
- Tuan, Y. 1989, *Morality and Imagination: Paradoxes of Progress*, The University of Wisconsin Press, Wisconsin.
- Underhill, E. 1930, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness*, 12th edn, Methuen and Co., London.
- Underhill, E. 1975, *Mystics of the Church*, Morehouse Publishing, Pennsylvania.
- Wach, J. 1951, *Types of Religious Experience: Christian and Non Christian*, University of Chicago, London.
- Walsh, R. 1993, 'Phenomenological Mapping and Comparisons of Shamanic, Buddhist, Yogic and Schizophrenic Experiences' in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 61, no. 4 (winter). Retrieved 17 May 2007 from <http://links.jstor.org.ezproxy.une.edu.au>
- Walsh, R. 1997, 'The Psychological Health of Shaman's: A Reevaluation' in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 65, no. 1 (spring). Retrieved 20 May from <http://links.jstor.org.ezproxy.une.edu.au>
- Watts, A. 1987, *The Early Writings of Alan Watts: Essays by the Leading Interpreter of Zen to the West*, Electronic University, London.
- Weil, S. 1986, 'Detachment' in *Simone Weil: An Anthology*, trans. S. Miles, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, New York, pp 257-260.
- Weil, S. 1986, 'Friendship' in *Simone Weil: An Anthology*, trans. S. Miles, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, New York, pp 261-269.

- Weil, S. 1974, *Gateway to God*, ed. D.Raper, Fontana Books, Glasgow.
- Weil, S. 1986, 'Human Personality' in *Simone Weil: An Anthology*, trans. S. Miles, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, New York, pp 49-78.
- Weil, S. 1974, 'Selected 'Pensees' of Simone Weil' in *Gateway to God*, ed. D. Raper, Fontana Books, Glasgow, pp 37-74.
- Weil, S. 1986, *Simone Weil: An Anthology*, trans. S. Miles, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, New York.
- Weil, S. 1974, 'Some Reflections on the Love of God' in *Gateway to God*, ed. D. Raper, Fontana Books, Glasgow, pp 80-102.
- Weil, S. 1986, 'The Needs of The Soul' in *Simone Weil: An Anthology*, trans. S. Miles, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, New York, pp 85-120.
- Winnicott, D. 1974, 'Creativity and its Origins,' in *Playing and Reality*, Penguin Books, Middlesex, pp76-100.
- Winnicott, D. 1974, 'Mirror Role of Mother and Family in Child Development,' in *Playing and Reality*, Penguin Books, Middlesex, pp130-138..
- Winnicott, D. 1974, 'The Place Where We Live,' in *Playing and Reality*, Penguin Books, Middlesex, pp122-129.
- Winnicott, D. 1974, 'Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena,' in *Playing and Reality*, Penguin Books, Middlesex, pp1-30.
- Wittgenstein, L. 1929, 'Lecture on Ethics', The Galilean Library Manuscripts. Retrieved 16 Sept 2005 from http://www.Galilean-library.Org/witt_ethics.html.
- Wittgenstein, L. 1984, *Philosophical Investigations*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford.
- Wittgenstein, L. 1961, *Tractatus Logico – philosophicus*, trans D.F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.
- Wordsworth, W. 1969, 'Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey' in *Lyrical Ballads 1798*, ed. W. J. B. Owen, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp 111-117.
- Zaehner, R. 1957, *Mysticism: Sacred and Profane*, Clarendon Press, Oxford.