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MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE AS SITUATED IN RULLA'S THREE DIMENSIONS OF SELF-TRANSCENDENT CONSISTENCY THEORY

Michael C. Porcia, S.J.

Abstract. Mystical experience does not happen in a vacuum. It is a mediated experience taking into consideration the nature and context of the human person. This is God's respect for human freedom. However, spiritual transcendence is premised by the psychological constitution of the person, conscious and unconscious. Hence, there are degrees of freedom. L. Rulla's self-consistency theory situates freedom for self-transcendence according to three dimensions within a continuum. With this framework, mystical experience is evaluated according to the dialectical dynamic between needs and values in each dimension. And the Ignatian discernment of spirits becomes the lens by which to sift through the experience either as anomalously mystical or pathological.

Keywords. mystical experience; dimensions; self-consistency; transcendence

This article attempts to investigate anomalous mystical experience in the context of faith. Its premise is that a mystical experience is always indirect and respects the human faculties and *Sitz im Leben* of the one who experiences it. Moreover, as this paper is written with a specific group in mind for its readership, mystical experience is considered within the dynamics of a religious experience as situated

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in each of the three dimensions of Luigi Rulla's Self-Transcendent Consistency Theory.

Rabeyron and Loose classify mystical experiences as anomalous experiences which they consider as belonging to the "encounter category [that relates] to an intense and global feeling of having become one with God or the universe."[1] Daniels makes a distinction between mystical and religious experience:

> Religious experience includes many phenomena that are not direct personal experiences of a relationship to a fundamental Reality. Most obvious is that fact that much, perhaps most, [of] religious experience reflects an *indirect* relationship to the Real (which is approached through intermediary representatives or representations such as priests, scriptures, moral precepts, rites and rituals, symbols, or works of art). Also religious experience often expresses relative personal needs (e.g., for forgiveness or a sense of control) or relative social demands and expectations (e.g., feelings of duty or obligation) rather than representing any fundamental, self-evident Reality. In the same way that religious experiences are not always mystical, so mystical experiences are not always religious, at least in the generally accepted sense of this word.[2]

Daniels seems to have seen the limitation of his own effort to make such a scission as he is caught in his own tautology in his claim that since "religious experiences are not always mystical, so mystical experiences are not always religious."[3] His explicit denial of any relative degree of relationship between mystical and religious experiences by splitting them off from each other is an implicit affirmation that the dual distinction can be a singular experience.

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[1] T. Rabeyron & T. Loose, "Anomalous Experiences, Trauma, and Symbolization Processes at the Frontiers Between Psychoanalysis and Cognitive Neurosciences," *Frontiers in Psychology* 6:1926 (2015): 2.

[2] M. Daniels, "Making Sense of Mysticism," *Transpersonal Psychology Review* 7:1 (2003): 3–4 (preprint version). Available at http://www.psychicscience.org/Papers/daniels03.pdf.

[3] Daniels, "Making Sense of Mysticism," 4.

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Moreover, Daniels also distinguishes mystical from transpersonal experience. He elaborates on the distinction as follows:

> Mystical experience is also not precisely coterminous with transpersonal experience although there is much experiential overlap between them.… More importantly, while many mystical experiences are indeed transpersonal because they involve an extension of the sense of identity or self beyond the individual or personal, some mystical experiences are not. For example, the direct experience of God's overpowering presence is sometimes associated with the feeling of personal insignificance, weakness[,] or sin, i.e., [with] an emphasis or fixation on the boundaries of individual or personal identity rather than their extension. Such an experience is *mystical* in the sense defined above (i.e., it is a direct experience of relationship to a fundamental Reality), but is not *transpersonal* since it does not expansively transform the sense of self.[4]

However, Daniels still falls into the same limitation in his attempt to make the necessary nuance of that which remains implicit in the explicit difference. Perhaps his problematic distinctions between mystical, religious, and transpersonal experience could be inferred from his own definition of mystical experience as the "*individual's direct experience of a relationship to a fundamental Reality*."[5] He seems to highlight the premise of "direct experience" which is "distinguishable from particular subjective states, such as pleasure, since these are temporary and relative (i.e., pleasure is not understood as existing *in itself*, separate from our experience of it)."[6] He stresses further that the "direct experience of a relationship to a fundamental Reality allows different types of relationships to be acknowledged and investigated … [which] leaves open the question of exactly how this Reality is to be experienced and conceived.…"[7] Daniels seems to have provided a neutral conception of mystical experiences rather than reinforcing a

[4] Daniels, "Making Sense of Mysticism," 4.

[5] Daniels, "Making Sense of Mysticism," 1.

[6] Daniels, "Making Sense of Mysticism," 3.

[7] Daniels, "Making Sense of Mysticism," 3.

religious faith-based concept. Such an inference could be supported by Daniels's specifications of 1) "direct" (over indirect) experiences of a 2) "fundamental Reality" (over God or a Transcendental Being). He seems to view mystical experience phenomenologically by purifying it of potential religious bias to be inclusive toward non-believers.

Can mystical experience really take place in a vacuum without taking into consideration the context of the one who experiences it? Does one have a mystical experience without situating it in one's psycho-socio-emotional, cultural, and faith structures?

Qualifying a Mystical Experience

Steven Katz

> recognizes that the mystic's experience is conditioned by the complex preexperiential pattern of beliefs, attitudes, and expectations which [she/he] brings to it [such that] … the structuring of an experience according to the particular tradition is done quite explicitly and self-consciously.[8]

Mystical experience does not happen in its most pristine and unbiased state; instead, it is a contextualized experience or phenomenon according to its nature. Although mystical experience is an in-breaking of the monotony of life, it does not invade that which constitutes the human person. It can only heighten the experiencer's consciousness of herself or himself through a heightened experience of a Transcendental Being or God. This occurs over a protracted period of time as manifold meanings and insights are revealed to and discovered by the experiencer. Proudfoot, espousing the thoughts of Katz, justifies:

> [There is] … "a clear causal connection" between the antecedent beliefs and commitments one brings to an experience and the resultant experience. [Katz] seems to think he can show causal influence by demonstrating temporal priority. In fact, the connection between the mystic's antecedent beliefs and [her or his] experience is not a causal one

[8] W. Proudfoot, *Religious Experience* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), 122.

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> but a conceptual one.… The logic that governs the concepts by which people interpret their experiences in different traditions shapes those experiences. Any attempt to differentiate a core from its interpretations, then, results in the loss of the very experience one is trying to analyze. The interpretations are themselves constitutive of the experiences.[9]

William James identifies four indicators of a mystical experience, namely, ineffability, noetic quality, transience, and passivity.[10] Ineffability and noetic quality "[defy] verbal expression, and [they seem] to the mystic to [characterize] … state[s] of knowledge or insight, revelation or illumination."[11] Although James puts limits to ineffability as being solely emotional, W. Stace sees it to be logical as well through the notion of paradoxicality in mysticism.[12] Proudfoot further explains the reasoning of Stace:

> Mystical paradoxes are flat logical contradictions, and the difficulty of finding language adequate to the mystical experience is a logical one rather than a case of the incommunicability of a feeling or sensation.… Paradox, like contradiction, is a predicate applied to sentences or propositions. By definition, a paradox entails a logical or grammatical structure. Such a term could properly be applied to the mystic's experience only if that experience were constituted by certain thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes.[13]

The noetic quality pertains to the mystical experience as a "source of knowledge and insight" such that "mystics judge their experiences to be revelatory, productive of insight into the true nature of reality, and not artifacts or projections of their own subjective mental states."[14] Moreover, the relevance of the mystical experience for the human

[9] Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*, 123.

[10] Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*, 120.

[11] Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*, 120.

[12] Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*, 134.

[13] Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*, 134–135.

[14] Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*, 136)

person depends on it being anomalous such that it does not fall within the category of the cause-effect relationship of natural law.[15]

Transience and passivity are "related to the noetic quality of the experience" which is grounded on the premise that mystical experience is beyond any form of deliberate control on the part of the experiencer.[16] However, one could have the necessary dispositions of openness and receptivity to the mystical realm. As Proudfoot conveys,

> Passivity conveys the sense of being grasped and of being subject to some power beyond oneself. Both passivity and transience reflect the perception that the experience is not under the subject's voluntary control. It cannot be manipulated or guaranteed by the subject's decision or by causes that [she or he] might set in motion. [She or he] can prepare [themselves] for it, but the experience is finally not subject to [her or his] control. The rules for the identification of an experience as mystical include the condition that [she or he] judge it to be something other than an artifact of [her or his] own thought and actions.[17]

Mystical experience seems to violate the causal law of nature and can thereby put one's reasoning into a crisis of logic when trying to grasp its intelligibility. The experiencer, however, can render it meaningful for herself or himself; indeed, meaning-making of the supposed mystical experience makes it intelligible. And this meaning-making process is not separate from the experiencer's context of life with its faith dimension. Hence, mystical experience is a religious experience in the context of faith in God.

Mystical Experience as Situated in a Continuum

Mystical experience can be viewed within a continuum. On the one end, it could be "seen as a pathological or semi-pathological breakdown

[15] Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*, 145.

[16] Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*, 147.

[17] Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*, 147–148.

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of psychological boundaries plus delusions of identification with something bigger than [oneself]."[18] On the other end, it

> involves transcendence of the biological self … [and] an altered state or states of consciousness as well as these possible parapsychological dimensions.… So perhaps at least some mystical experiences are teaching … something about reality; it is not just some release of endorphins within the brain producing comforting illusions.[19]

Tart quotes William Braud regarding the spiritual dimension of mystical experience instead of dismissing it outrightly as something pathological:

> "Parapsychological findings can be useful to those on a spiritual path as they can provide a certain degree of confidence and trust that at least some of the processes and concepts encountered are 'real' in a more traditional sense and are not delusions, projections, or misinterpretations. They also can serve to remind us that we are not alone in having exceptional experiences; such experiences are normal, natural, and remarkably widespread." [Braud] is concerned not just with the scientific aspects of psi, though, but with the growth aspects. "But these scientific reassurances, though of value, are only partial: A great deal of what is encountered along the spiritual path is quite beyond the reach of current science. Here, one must be armed with trust, faith, hope, love, discernment, and a tolerance for ambiguity and for contraries, rather than with the feelings of safety, certainty, familiarity, and understanding that science can provide."[20]

And between the two ends of the continuum of a single experience is a spectrum of nuances that move closer to or farther away from any one of the two directions, namely, pathological or mystical. Braud recognizes that this spectrum is characterized by "ambiguity" and "contrariness" which calls for "tolerance" and "discernment." He elaborates further:

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[18] C. Tart, "On the Scientific Foundations of Transpersonal Psychology: Contributions from Parapsychology," *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 36:1 (2004): 72.

[19] Tart, "On the Scientific Foundations of Transpersonal Psychology," 81.

[20] Tart, "On the Scientific Foundations of Transpersonal Psychology," 86.

> Perhaps most importantly of all, we can begin to explore, deeply and intensively, the *meanings* of psychic and other exceptional human experiences [for] those who have these experiences. We can study the impacts of such experiences upon the lives of the experiencers. We can interest ourselves not only in the fact that such experiences exist, but also in why they happen to particular persons at particular times and in particular ways. What are their outcomes, their consequences, their fruits? How are they and how are they not assimilated into the experiencer's life, self-concept, growth, being and becoming?[21]

Furthermore, the paradigm of a continuum in assessing the authenticity of a mystical experience and its impact on the life of the experiencer would be the framework of reference in situating the experience according to the three dimensions of Luigi Rulla's Self-Transcendent Consistency Theory.

Self-Transcendent Consistency Theory of Theocentric Love

Rulla affirms the action of God's grace that is infused into the nature of the human person so the latter may respond in theocentric love as a decision of transcending oneself in freedom. Rulla describes the central message of his theory:

> Respecting and maintaining the primacy and the antecedence of the action of divine grace, for which there is no possible substitute, the dynamisms or psycho-social forces in the person, *both conscious and unconscious*, influence the person's freedom for the self-transcendence of love, and so also affect the vocational process in different ways and different degrees.[22]

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[21] W. Braud, "Parapsychology and Spirituality: Implications and Intimations" (originally published in *ReVision: A Journal of Consciousness and Transformations* 18:1 [1995]: 36–43), 18. Available at https://www.inclusivepsychology.com/uploads/ParapsychologyAndSpirituality.pdf.

[22] L. Rulla, *Anthropology of the Christian Vocation* Vol. I: *Interdisciplinary Bases* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 2004; originally published in 1986), 309.

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Moreover, freedom from unconscious needs in the human person allows one to have freedom for the conscious values that are essential for one's authentic living of the Christian life and vocation. The interaction between the consciousness and unconsciousness of the personality structure results in "three dispositions" which Rulla termed "dimensions."[23] These dimensions can either dispose or impede the human person to or from self-transcendence on the basis of consistency or inconsistency, respectively.

According to Rulla, the First Dimension disposes the human person to either virtue or sin. It is derived "from the action of *conscious* structures; more precisely, from the harmony or agreement which, to a greater or lesser extent, exists between the ideal self (which is conscious) and the level of the actual self which is *prevalently* conscious.…"[24] It is premised in this dimension that the human person's dialectical structure of self between values (ideal self) and needs (actual self) is conscious, thereby disposing one freely and responsibly to either transcendence by virtue or resistance by sin.[25]

The Second Dimension disposes the human person to either the real good or the apparent good.[26]

> More precisely, it involves both the harmony or agreement existing to a greater or lesser degree between the ideal self and the actual self (both prevalently conscious) and also the opposition existing to a greater or lesser degree between the ideal self and the *unconscious* actual self.[27]

The unconscious puts some restraints on the freedom of the human person for self-transcendence. Unconscious needs are inconsistent with conscious values that could express in some degrees of ambiguities

[23] Rulla, *Anthropology of the Christian Vocation*, 173.

[24] Rulla, *Anthropology of the Christian Vocation*, 179.

[25] Rulla, *Anthropology of the Christian Vocation*, 179.

[26] Rulla, *Anthropology of the Christian Vocation*, 180.

[27] Rulla, *Anthropology of the Christian Vocation*, 180.

and ambivalences in the motivational system of the human person toward the transcendence of love.

The Third Dimension disposes the human person to either normality or pathology.[28] It "develops primarily in relation to the motivating force of natural values" or needs.[29]

> Natural values involve the will of the self only as nature, while transcendent values involve the will of the *whole* self, the *whole* person, and so engage the *exercise of freedom* not only of [the human person's] nature, but [also] the person's freedom for the self-transcendence of theocentric love.[30]

The human person in the Third Dimension is "mainly open to natural values, and less so to self-transcendent values."[31]

The three dimensions as dispositions to self-transcendence run through a single continuum as made palpable to the degree of maturity or immaturity of the personality structure specifically in the dynamics between the consciousness and unconsciousness. Rulla writes:

> It is clear, however, that both in the first and in the second dimension one finds a continuum, ranging from persons who are more mature to those who are less mature, from cases where the contradiction between the actual self and the ideal self is minimal to cases in which it is very great. Lack of maturity in the first dimension is by nature conscious and so may involve deliberate sin; this does not hold for the second dimension where the lack of maturity is by nature unconscious.… In any case, for the third dimension as for the second, any lack of maturity is unconscious.[32]

Moreover, the second dimension lies on the spectrum of the interplay between the two ends of the continuum, namely, the predominance

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[28] Rulla, *Anthropology of the Christian Vocation*, 181.

[29] Rulla, *Anthropology of the Christian Vocation*, 181.

[30] Rulla, *Anthropology of the Christian Vocation*, 185–186.

[31] Rulla, *Anthropology of the Christian Vocation*, 186.

[32] Rulla, *Anthropology of the Christian Vocation*, 181.

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of the consciousness in the first dimension and the potency of the non-pathological unconsciousness in the third dimension. The second dimension could be the area of the continuum where discernment is most needed for sifting through the internal movements roused in a person during a mystical experience.

Rulla's theoretical framework of the three dimensions could be applied, therefore, to the authentication of a mystical experience as either a spiritual or a religious experience in the first dimension, a pathological manifestation of psychotic processes in the third dimension, or to further investigations to decipher between the spiritual and the pathological through the qualifications of real or apparent mystical or religious experience in the second dimension. Mystical experience would be used analogously with religious experience through the lenses of the Christian vocations.

Mystical Experience in the First Dimension

Godin claims that the "experience of God is never immediate."[33] He elaborates further:

> Experience of the inner God or recognition of the Spirit is always indirect, mediated by signs which in the end are interpreted in faith. It is a synthesis, actively established and maintained in its integrity, in other words, the highest and most complete form of experience accessible to [the human person], whether in religion or in love.[34]

Meissner conceives of mystical experience as "characterized developmentally by a number of significant achievements, which include the integration and structuring of drive derivatives with relatively autonomous functions of the ego."[35]

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[33] A. Godin, *The Psychological Dynamics of Religious Experience* (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1985), 63.

[34] Godin, *The Psychological Dynamics of Religious Experience*, 65–66.

[35] W. Meissner, *Psychoanalysis and Religious Experience* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), 157.

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> Thus anxiety is reduced to a manageable level and is expressed exclusively in terms of more structured signal functions that mobilize rather than overwhelm ego resources.… [It] permits these tensions to be embraced, affirmed, and somehow resolved and integrated into a more balanced faith-orientation and faith existence.[36]

It reverberates Rulla's presupposition of the consistency between values and needs on the conscious level of the human person. The coherent and non-contradictory structures of the self provide fertile ground for an experience of God that disposes one to transcendence. It is a self that is receptive and open to the divine infusion of grace into one's nature. Meissner writes:

> Consequently, the religious belief system and its tradition are seen in increasingly realistic terms that affirm their inherent tensions and ambiguities and accept the relativity, partiality, and particularity of the beliefs, symbols, rituals, and ceremonials of the religious community.… Faith at this level becomes a lived and integrated source of support and strength.… Such individuals reflect an inner life of lucidity, simplicity, and inner harmony that escapes the great majority of humans, yet somehow seems more fully and more profoundly human. The love of God in these souls seems wholly unselfconscious, stripped of the residues of infantile narcissism, and yet capable of integration into a life of activity, responsibility, and generative fulfillment. They often seem capable of profoundly meaningful object relations that are characterized by selfless love and acceptance of others.[37]

Mystical Experience in the Second Dimension

Meissner explicates a mode of mystical experience "around the formation and consolidation of the superego" which is conscious of and equivalent to the moral values that eventually open up toward the horizon of the religious.[38] "The internalization of ideals and values

[36] Meissner, *Psychoanalysis and Religious Experience*, 157.

[37] Meissner, *Psychoanalysis and Religious Experience*, 157.

[38] Meissner, *Psychoanalysis and Religious Experience*, 156.

https://publications.lst.edu/

means the organization of conscience."[39] However, the "central developmental achievement brings about critical changes that include the formation of the barrier of repression."[40] It is most likely that the perceived mystical experience could have been only a projection of the human person's unconscious need for an omnipotent God to assuage the internal pangs of moral anxiety. Meissner explains:

> Consequently, danger is henceforth experienced mainly as moral anxiety, or as a sense of failure to attain and satisfy the demands of the ego ideal and the internalized value system—whereas previously the child responded to extrinsic threats and to primitive expectations of retaliation.… Conflicts between sources of authority in various spheres of experience are resolved by tactics of hierarchical subordination and/or compartmentalization. Reliance on authority to buttress uncertain judgement persists and is extended during this period, but there is increasing reliance on one's own sense of judgment in selecting and evaluating authoritative positions.[41]

Henceforth, the explicitly articulated experience would have to see through the implicit contents by means of continuous inquiry into the nature and quality of that which is labeled as mystical. Inquiry renders the mystical intelligible on the basis of logical constructs, thereby arriving at a judgment on the veracity of the experience as either real or apparent. Judgement eventually leads one to decide to either assent in faith on the premise of its authenticity or dismiss it as a figment of one's projected imaginations. Meissner clarifies:

> Cognitively, the constructs that allow for a distinction of forms of valuation and factual knowing begin to emerge and serve as a foundation for clarifying aspects of subjectivity and objectivity. In general, the capacity to evaluate the multiple levels of meaning and connotation in symbols now emerges, although it remains relatively vague. Discrimination is increasingly made between the realms of the spiritual, concerning both the existence of God and the spiritual aspect of human beings, and of the nonspiritual. Awareness of the faith orientation of

[39] Meissner, *Psychoanalysis and Religious Experience*, 156.

[40] Meissner, *Psychoanalysis and Religious Experience*, 156.

[41] Meissner, *Psychoanalysis and Religious Experience*, 155–156.

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> other individuals or groups remains relatively undifferentiated and tends to be expressed in prejudicial or assimilative terms. The organization of institutional authority and/or sacramental community tends to sustain this level of synthesis and provides a powerful motivation for institutional adherence; the breakdown of institutional structures or sacramental forms may undermine this organization and result in regressive tendencies.… Decisive achievements of internalization and differentiation of reality lead increasingly to acceptance of responsibility for one's view of the world and one's synthesis of beliefs.[42]

Mystical Experience in the Third Dimension

Meissner sees a pathological process related to mystical experience which he attributes to a "primitive and/or deeply regressive state [which] is dominated by the conditions of primary narcissism." He explains:

> Developmentally, the individual has not yet reached the level of self- and object-differentiation, so that the conditions of symbiosis obtain. The narcissistic experience is one of unconditional omnipotence and absolute dependence. Faith cognition at this level is entirely undifferentiated, functioning in terms of a preconceptual and prelinguistic disposition to accept the conditions of life. This relates to the conditions of basic trust that characterize the symbiotic union of mother and child. The religious experience at this level would presumably involve merging the boundaries between self-representation and God-representation. The sense of self is without cohesion, in a state of extreme regression, which may take a psychotic form, issuing in delusions of total omnipotence and Godlike grandiosity. It may also express itself as profound and ecstatic mystical experiences involving loss of boundaries, diffusion of the sense of self, and absorption into the divine. While the mechanisms and the level of organization may be similar, it seems reasonable to maintain a distinction between such mystical experiences and regressive psychosis.[43]

[42] Meissner, *Psychoanalysis and Religious Experience*, 156.

[43] Meissner, *Psychoanalysis and Religious Experience*, 150.

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Meissner turns to the Object Relations Theory as the point of reference in providing the conceptual basis for pathological underpinnings in a perceived mystical experience. He elaborates:

> In these regressive terms, then, such states of fusion represent a reactivation of primitive states of symbiotic fusion with the all-good, all-giving, all-nurturing maternal breast. One of the central difficulties in this approach has been the inability of the analytic conceptual apparatus to articulate a sustained sense of cohesiveness of self and of mature and developed identity in a context in which such mystical states of fusion seem to take place. Within the analytic framework such states involve feeling a loss of ego boundaries and a fusion with the love object.[44]

Following the same thinking, Meissner categorically differentiates between mystical experience and psychosis as regards the experiencer's sense of self-cohesion. He avers:

> Nonetheless, it is clear that the sense of fusion with the object in mystical states is not the same as the regressive fusion to primary narcissistic union that might occur in states of psychotic regression. Rather, authentic mystical experience … not only does not undermine or destroy identity but in fact has a powerful capacity to stabilize, sustain, and enrich identity.[45]

> In regressive states, however, the basic mechanism becomes incorporation … by which the distinguishing qualities of the external object are lost. Incorporation blends what has been internalized into an overriding, global sense of primitive narcissistic grandiosity. In contrast, the *unio mystica* may represent a dissolution of the sense of self and a diffusion of the self-representation so that its elements are absorbed into the transcendent and sublimely loved object. This transcendent absorption of object love stands in opposition to psychotic self-absorption.[46]

Self-coherence is the basic presupposition in the evaluation of the authenticity of the mystical experience. Self-coherence is also premised

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[44] Meissner, *Psychoanalysis and Religious Experience*, 151.

[45] Meissner, *Psychoanalysis and Religious Experience*, 151.

[46] Meissner, *Psychoanalysis and Religious Experience*, 153.

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on self-consistency. This is the correspondence between the intra-psychic needs and moral and spiritual values in the consciousness of the person. And in case a need remains unconscious for the person, it resists the pull of infantile regression in the pursuit of the conscious value. Mystical experience brings profound awareness into the self and of God; transcendence is always an act of consciousness. Rulla's "dimensions" attempt to provide a three-pronged framework for understanding the nature of the mystical experience according to the person's degree of freedom from her/his psychological life. Hence, mystical experience is always indirect and mediated with respect to the human faculties and context of the life of the human person.

Human freedom is at its optimum in the first dimension. It is the seedbed of grace, and the person is disposed to a mystical experience with her or his heightened consciousness. On the other hand, freedom is lost in the third dimension due to a high probability of psychopathology, where a seemingly mystical experience is in fact a clinical disturbance of sense perception and cognition muddled by the unconscious. Discernment becomes most challenging in the second dimension due to the subtle dynamic of interaction between the conscious and unconscious. And Ignatius of Loyola's discernment of spirits could be the lens through which a perceived spiritual experience is rendered intelligible and eventually judged as mystical. Consequently, the mystical experience becomes a wellspring from which successive decisions would have their point of reference in the life of the experiencer.

The discernment of spirits would be immanent in all three dimensions of Rulla's Self-Transcendent Consistency Theory. It applies in the first dimension, in the discernment between "virtue" and "sin" whereby the spirit—good or evil—is exposed objectively through the fruits of the human person's lived choices; to quote from Ignatius, "Love is shown more in deeds than in words." Discernment also applies in the third dimension, in deciding whether a perceived mystical experience is anomalously credible based on the criterion of ineffability or pathological from the point of view of psychiatry. However, discernment can be facilitated objectively through diagnostic

criteria culled from extensive scientific research and clinical practice in distinguishing what is anomalously "normal" from "pathological."

Perhaps the greatest challenge of discernment belongs to the second dimension, which calls for a certain degree of intuitive sensibility of heart and sharpness of mind in judging the "real good" from the "apparent good" through the different dynamic movements of the spirits in the experiencer and a third person, such as a spiritual director or Catholic therapist, whom the former can disclose herself or himself to in trust and confidence. Moreover, it is in the second dimension where the Second Week of Ignatius's Rules of Discernment can find their applicability and fecundity in the life of the experiencer. And central to these Rules is Rule 5:

> We must carefully observe the whole course of our thoughts. If the beginning and middle and end of the course of thoughts are wholly good and directed to what is entirely right, it is a sign that they are from the good angel. But the course of thoughts suggested to us may terminate in something evil, or distracting, or less good than [what] the soul had formerly proposed to do. Again, it may end in what weakens the soul, or disquiets it; or by destroying the peace, tranquility, and quiet which it had before, it may cause disturbance to the soul. These things are a clear sign that the thoughts are proceeding from the evil spirit, the enemy of our progress and eternal salvation.[47]

Conclusion

This study was an attempt to integrate psychology with spirituality to understand mystical experience as an indirect and mediated phenomenon. Mystical experience brings into greater consciousness God's presence in one's life. And this places the human person at the turning point to act deliberately according to the values of Christ in the Spirit. However, this does not deny the unconscious underpinnings in the human psyche that limit one's capacity for transcendence. Interior human freedom is compromised by self-gratifying needs,

[47] Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, trans. L. Puhl (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1952), 148.

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whether immature or pathological. Unconscious self-serving needs constantly drag down and eventually derail the person in their pursuit of consciously progressive theocentric movements. Mystical experience, therefore, is mediated through the quality of human freedom to receive the gratuity of God's grace in varying degrees as situated in Rulla's "three dimensions."

About the Author. **Michael C. Porcia, S.J.** earned his M.A. in Pastoral Ministry degree with a concentration on family and marriage counseling from Loyola School of Theology in Quezon City, Philippines. He holds a Licentiate in Psychology degree from the Institute of Psychology of the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, Italy and received his clinical training in psychological assessment and psychodynamic psychotherapy for priests, religious, and seminarians from the Institute's *Centro di Consultazione*. His pastoral experiences include diocesan college seminary and religious formation, vocation programs, prison chaplaincy, and the screening of candidates for the priestly and religious life. He is also a registered nurse and psychologist in the Philippines.