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HYPER-KANTIANISM IN RECENT DISCUSSIONS OF MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE

Much work on mystical experience has taken for granted a certain view about the relation between experience and its interpretation. This ‘traditional view’ has received perhaps its most explicit statement in Stace’s *Mysticism and Philosophy*. It is a view which is attractive to proponents of the doctrine of unanimity, the doctrine (roughly put) that at the phenomenological level all mystical experiences are basically similar. Recently, however, in a growing body of literature, the traditional view has come under heavy fire. Its critics adopt a Kantian, indeed a hyper-Kantian, picture of experience. And they see the traditional view, accordingly, as ‘naïve’ and ‘simplistic’. In addition, hyper-Kantians typically reject the doctrine of unanimity.

My aim in this paper is twofold: first, to defend the traditional view against its hyper-Kantian critics; and second, to suggest that, because of the ways in which the hyper-Kantians differ from Kant himself, any success they might have in undermining the doctrine of unanimity carries with it sceptical implications about one sort of evidential value mystical experiences are sometimes thought to have.

I

In a well-known passage in *Mysticism and Philosophy* Stace draws a distinction between an experience and its interpretation.

It is probably impossible... to isolate ‘pure’ experience. Yet, although we may never be able to find sense experience completely free of any interpretation, it can hardly be doubted that sensation is one thing and its conceptual interpretation is another thing. That is to say, they are distinguishable though not completely separable. There is a doubtless apocryphal but well-known anecdote about the American visitor in London who tried to shake hands with a waxwork policeman in the entrance of Madame Tussaud’s. If such an incident ever occurred, it must have been because the visitor had a sense experience which he first wrongly interpreted as a live policeman and later interpreted correctly as a wax figure. If the sentence which I have just written is intelligible, it proves that an interpretation is distinguishable from an experience; for there could not otherwise be two interpretations of one experience.¹

¹ W. T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy* (Philadelphia and New York, 1960), pp. 31–2. Further page references will appear in the text.

Although this passage is explicit about sense experience, Stace makes it clear that he believes the same distinction holds for mystical experience as well.

Stace indicates that he understands the notion of 'interpretation' very broadly.

I use the word 'interpretation' to mean anything which the conceptual intellect adds to the experience for the purpose of understanding it, whether what is added is only classificatory concepts, or a logical inference, or an explanatory hypothesis (p. 37).

On this definition, to apply any concept at all to an experience is to interpret it. So if one were to call an experience 'pleasant' or 'boring', or if one were to judge it 'veridical' or 'hallucinatory', or to say that it 'arises from a tumour in the brain' – all these would be interpretations of experience. But Stace seems especially concerned with one particular kind of interpretation, the sort of judgement we make when we take for granted that our experience constitutes an accurate perception of something and then attempt to identify the object of that experience, to judge *what* it is that, through the experience, we are perceiving. Let us call these 'object judgements'. The visitor at Madame Tussaud's makes two different object judgements, first judging his experience to constitute an accurate perception of a live policeman, later realizing that it was instead only of a wax dummy. And the fact that it is possible to make different object judgements of the same experience shows, Stace believes, that there is a distinction between an experience and an interpretation of it.

Stace speaks also of different levels of interpretation.

If a man says, 'I see a red colour', this is a low-level interpretation, since it involves nothing except simple classificatory concepts. But a physicist's wave theory of colours is a very high-level interpretation. Analogously, if a mystic speaks of the experience of 'an undifferentiated unity', this mere report or description using only classificatory words may be regarded as a low-level interpretation... If a mystic says that he experiences a 'mystical union with the Creator of the universe', this is a high-level interpretation since it includes far more intellectual addition than a mere descriptive report. It includes an assumption about the origin of the world and a belief in the existence of a personal God (p. 37).

Here the range from a low-level to a high-level interpretation seems to be a range from an interpretation which confines itself to what the experience itself indicates or warrants, and so would count as a 'mere report or description' to one which incorporates beliefs and assumptions – pieces of 'intellectual addition' – which presumably are extraneous to anything the experience itself warrants.

It seems clear, then, that Stace accepts the following three claims: (a) it is possible to make different object judgements about what is phenomenologically the same experience; (b) there is, therefore, a distinction between an experience and interpretations, including object judgements, of that experience; and (c) we can distinguish in principle between interpretations which assert nothing more than is contained in, or warranted by, an

experience itself and those which, in varying degrees, assert more than, or go beyond, what is so warranted. Let us call this collection of claims the 'traditional view' of the relation between experience and its interpretation.¹

The traditional view is understandably attractive to proponents of the doctrine of unanimity (though of course it does not entail that doctrine). For the reports mystics give of their experiences are on the surface frequently quite different. In order to maintain that the experiences they are reporting are nevertheless essentially the same, one must regard the differences in the reports as due to the injection of beliefs and assumptions not warranted by the experiences themselves but instead incorporated, for example, from the different religious backgrounds of the reporters. These background beliefs and assumptions are seen as extrinsic to, i.e. not contributing in any way to the actual content of, the experiences on which they are brought to bear. And the reports they give rise to are simply different 'interpretations' of experiences which are essentially the same.

II

I turn now to what I am calling the hyper-Kantian attacks on Stace and the traditional view. Although the hyper-Kantian position has been gaining currency among an increasing number of writers, I shall take the work of Steven T. Katz and Bruce Garside as representative. I believe their arguments best illustrate the range of criticisms available to those who share this general outlook.²

The criticisms we shall consider emerge from a picture of experience which seems, very generally at least, to be of Kantian inspiration. The core of this picture is put by Katz as follows.

There are NO pure (i.e. unmediated) experiences... That is to say, *all* experience is processed through, organized, and makes itself available to us in extremely complex epistemological ways... This epistemological fact seems to me to be true, because of the sorts of beings we are, even with regard to the experiences of those ultimate objects of concern with which mystics have intercourse, e.g., God, Being, nirvāna, etc.³

¹ The traditional view is employed in a good deal of writing on mystical experience. For another prominent example see Ninian Smart, 'Interpretation and mystical experience', *Religious Studies* 1, 1 (1965), 75–87.

² Other discussions of mystical experience from a hyper-Kantian perspective can be found in: John Hick, 'Mystical experience as cognition', in Richard Woods (ed.), *Understanding Mysticism* (Garden City, 1980), pp. 422–437; Peter Moore (1) 'Recent studies of mysticism: a critical survey', *Religion*, III (1973), 146–56, and (2) 'Mystical experience, mystical doctrine, mystical technique', in Steven T. Katz (ed.), *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis* (New York, 1978), pp. 101–31; and the following articles in Steven T. Katz (ed.), *Mysticism and Religious Traditions* (New York, 1983): Robert M. Gimello, 'Mysticism and its contexts', pp. 61–88; Katz, 'The "conservative" character of mystical experience', pp. 3–60; H. P. Owen, 'Experience and dogma in the English mystics', pp. 148–62; and John E. Smith, 'William James's account of mysticism: a critical appraisal', pp. 247–79. Of these writers all but Hick and Owen use the hyper-Kantian outlook to attack the traditional view.

³ Steven T. Katz, 'Language, epistemology, and mysticism', in Steven T. Katz (ed.), *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis* (New York, 1978), p. 26 (italics in original). Further page references will appear in the text.

And Garside begins his discussion of interpretation and mystical experience by setting out what he calls a 'general model of experience'.

The main premiss of the model is that experience is a product of the interaction of the organism and the environment, involving both external stimuli and interpretative structures of the perceiver... Philosophically the model is of Kantian inspiration, experience being the product of the synthesis of percepts and the *a priori* structures of the understanding.¹

Given this model, Garside adds:

it is impossible to perceive the world directly with no intervention of an interpretative framework (p. 95).

The picture these writers present seems so far a familiar one. For Kant, experience is a compound, a product of sensory intuitions filtered, as it were, through *a priori* concepts. (To simplify, I will ignore the role of the *a priori* intuitions of space and time). But as we will see, this 'rival' view is really hyper-Kantian in at least two respects:

(1) First, for Kant the *a priori* concepts, the categories, are twelve in number and are shared by all mankind. And they are inescapable. Human beings must experience the world in terms of cause and effect, and substance and attribute, if they are to experience it at all. The filtering categories are not like a pair of rose-coloured glasses which one could remove and replace with ones of another tint. But the rival view extends an experience-shaping role to concepts and beliefs which vary from one culture – more pertinently, one religious tradition – to another. Mystical or religious experiences are partially determined or shaped by concepts and beliefs that are peculiar to the particular religious tradition of the one having the experience. Let us call these elements which shape experience, but are not categories, 'category-analogues'.

(2) Second, experience for Kant is, very roughly speaking, essentially judgemental; having experience is inseparable from making judgements about it. The categories 'shape' experience by determining that those judgements will take certain forms. They do not contribute to the phenomenological content of the experiences they shape. But on the rival view the category-analogues shape experience by partially determining its phenomenological content.

Let us call 'hyper-Kantian' a view which, though broadly Kantian in inspiration, goes beyond Kant and assigns to non-categories, e.g. non-universally shared beliefs and concepts, a causal role in determining the phenomenological content of experience. Both Garside and Katz appear to be hyper-Kantians. We find Garside asserting, for example:

If experience is the product of stimuli and conceptual framework as suggested above,

¹ Bruce Garside, 'Language and the interpretation of mystical experience', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, III (1972), 93–4. Further page references will appear in the text.

then people of different cultures and religious traditions would necessarily have different religious experiences (p. 99).

And Katz expresses this sort of outlook time and again.

There is a clear causal connection between the religious and social structure one brings to experience and the nature of one's actual religious experience (p. 40)... The experience itself as well as the form in which it is reported is shaped by concepts which the mystic brings to, and which shape, his experience... the Christian mystic does not experience some unidentified reality, which he then conveniently labels God, but rather has the at least partially prefigured Christian experiences of God, or Jesus, or the like (p. 26)... The entire life of the Jewish mystic is permeated from childhood up by images, concepts, symbols, ideological values, and ritual behavior which there is no reason to believe he leaves behind in his experience. Rather, these images, beliefs, symbols, and rituals define, *in advance*, what the experience *he wants to have*, and which he then does have, will be like (p. 33, italics in original).

In all of these passages there appears the view that non-categories, namely non-universally shared beliefs, concepts, etc., play a causal role (roughly that of a causally sufficient condition) in determining the content of experience.

If the traditional view is attractive for those supporting the doctrine of unanimity, the rival view is a useful weapon for opponents of that doctrine. To the extent that the concepts and beliefs of a given religious tradition actually determine the content of the religious experiences of members of that tradition, then when those concepts and beliefs vary from one tradition to another the experiences of mystics in those different traditions will also vary. This seems precisely the sort of outlook expressed in the last remark quoted from Garside. And it is no surprise that Katz remarks near the end of his lengthy paper:

our investigation suggests... a wide variety of mystical experiences which are, at least in respect of some determinative aspects, culturally and ideologically grounded (p. 66).

Defenders of the doctrine of unanimity, faced with the striking differences in the reports mystics give of their experiences, are driven to regard the concepts and beliefs reflected in those reports as extrinsic to the experiences themselves, as something applied after the fact, so to speak, to an experience that could just as well occur to one who did not share those particular concepts and beliefs. In this way it is possible to maintain that the mystics' experiences are essentially the same. But if one sees those concepts and beliefs as partially determining the nature of the experiences themselves, then one will expect to find a 'wide variety' of mystical experiences and will tend to see the differences in the mystics' reports as reflecting actual phenomenological differences in the experiences being reported.

Although we can see why advocates of the rival view might reject the doctrine of unanimity, it is not at all clear, from the rather general characterization of their outlook presented so far, how they hope to attack

the traditional view. Let us now consider the criticisms advanced by Katz and Garside. I believe these criticisms are unsuccessful. More importantly, however, I will try to show in a more general way why the sorts of claims available to the hyper-Kantians cannot yield a successful criticism: where such claims are plausible at all, they are irrelevant against the traditional view; where they are relevant, they are implausible.

Katz thinks the experience-interpretation distinction, so central to the traditional view, is 'simplistic' (p. 31). He characterizes it as 'a naïve distinction – almost universally held by scholars – between claimed "raw experience" and interpretation' (p. 30). It is therefore a distinction which would justifiably be rejected by an 'inquiry into the logical and social-contextual conditions of mystical experience' (p. 31), for example by attending to the role of the category-analogues in the formation of such experience. These claims are illustrated with reference to the work of Stace. Katz notes Stace's remark that 'it is probably impossible... to isolate "pure" experience', which he takes as an expression of agreement with his own view that there is no such thing as unmediated experience. However:

Stace fails to grasp clearly the force of this concern about the impossibility of 'pure' experience and what this entails. For Stace turns this discussion into a discussion of the post-experience interpretation placed on the experience rather than pursuing *in any sense at all* the primary epistemological issues which the original recognition requires (p. 28, italics in original).

Katz then proceeds to document Stace's apparent lack of concern with the complex factors that allegedly enter into the formation of experience and his tendency to regard the category-analogues as playing a role only in the interpretation of an experience and not in its formation. This shows, Katz suggests, that Stace's initial acknowledgement of the impossibility of unmediated experience is hollow and that he actually is employing the naive distinction between 'raw' or 'pure' experience and interpretation which Katz opposes.

Two comments are in order here. First, the experience-interpretation distinction is neutral with respect to the question of whether or not experience is raw. The inquiry Katz urges into the 'logical and social-contextual conditions of mystical experience' may well show that such experiences are not raw, but mediated, even mediated by the category-analogues. But these findings could be accepted by an advocate of the traditional view. He could still distinguish between any given mediated experience and an object judgement about it. And he could still speak of the various degrees to which different object judgements go beyond what is warranted by some particular mediated experience. So it is simply a mistake to suppose that the discovery that experience is not raw will justify rejection of the 'almost universally held' distinction between experience and interpretation. Second, we should note that Stace, in addition to accepting the traditional view, also defends what at bottom is a version of the doctrine of unanimity. It is therefore to be

expected that he will think the category-analogues play a role only in the interpretation, and not the formation, of experience. However, this does not show that Stace is employing the naïve distinction Katz deplors. It is instead a consequence or symptom of his adherence to the doctrine of unanimity. Indeed had Stace come to believe that the category-analogues affect the content of experience itself, he might eventually have backed off from the doctrine of unanimity. But he would not have been forced to abandon anything in his presentation of the distinction between experience and interpretation.

The failure of Katz's criticism points to a general difficulty for the hyper-Kantian attempt to mount a successful attack against the traditional view. The hyper-Kantian outlook will be compatible with the traditional view so long as the category-analogues (or the categories themselves, if one thinks of them as contributing to the content of experience) make their contributions to an experience prior to our making object judgements about it. So long as there is this sort of 'distance' between forming or shaping an experience and rendering object judgements about it, there will be a point at which one can stand back, as it were, from an already fully formed experience (just as Stace conceives the visitor at Madame Tussaud's doing) and make now one, now another, judgement about it, the differing judgements perhaps differing in the extent to which they are verified by the experience in question. It seems, then, that if the category-analogues do their work too early, thus allowing a gap between the forming and the judging of the experience, the hyper-Kantian claims will be irrelevant against the traditional view.

A relevant criticism requires seeing the category-analogues as doing (at least some of) their work at the point where one makes object judgements. One would have to hold that the very act of applying concepts to an experience, as in making object judgements about it, affects the content of the experience being judged. If it were further assumed that the application of different concepts affects an experience differently, it will follow that one cannot make different object judgements of the *same* experience. Such an outlook, by eliminating the distance between the formation of an experience and any object judgement about it, will be incompatible with the traditional view.

Some such radical hyper-Kantianism may be what Garside has in mind in the following passage.

Language plays a crucial role in our perception in that to a great extent a thing is objectified for us through the imposition of a word.

Given the relationship between language and experience sketched above we should include that the relationship is not an extrinsic, accidental one as is often supposed by those writing about mystical experience. We must be very cautious about the sense in which one can express the same experience in very different ways (p. 96).

And in another passage he describes a particular outlook as ‘another case of the failure to see the intrinsic connection between language and experience’ (p. 100). Although Garside is talking in these passages about language or the imposition of a word, the contexts make it fairly clear that he could just as well speak of a conceptual framework or the application of a concept.

Garside then criticizes Stace. He claims that Stace’s treatment of the Madame Tussaud example reflects his

failure to realize that what he calls an interpretative framework... enters into the experience itself as a constitutive factor (p. 99).

If we attribute to Garside the sort of radical hyper-Kantianism currently being considered, we can perhaps understand this objection as follows. When the visitor at Madame Tussaud’s judges first, ‘I see a live policeman’, and then later, ‘I see a wax dummy’, his experience inevitably changes with the shift in the concepts being applied. And so it will not be true, as Stace claims, that he is making different object judgements of the same experience. Stace’s mistake can be seen as a failure to realize that the application of concepts to experience actually affects the content of the experience being judged or, as Garside puts it, that the ‘interpretative framework’, that set of concepts one applies to experience in making object judgements about it, actually ‘enters into the experience itself as a constitutive factor’.

If the hyper-Kantians are to produce a relevant criticism of the traditional view they must adopt something like the radical version we are tentatively attributing to Garside. But the radical version seems too radical to be plausible, and Garside himself unfortunately provides no reasons or evidence in its support.

Psychologists and philosophers have taught us that in perception we are not simply passive recipients of data that impinge on our sense organs. We organize patterns of stimulation into separate objects, we select certain objects for attention, we separate object from ground, and generally we work to arrange our sense perceptions into one harmonious system. Perhaps here we have examples in which, at a very fundamental level, we ‘shape’ or ‘colour’ experience. But such examples will illustrate the required radical outlook only given the (dubious) assumptions: (a) that such organizational work involves the application of concepts to experience; and (b) that such application of concepts affects the phenomenological content of the experience in question. Even when it will not follow that whenever we apply concepts to an experience, in particular while making the sort of object judgements involved in Stace’s example, we affect its content. There seem countless cases, of which Stace’s is one, where our judgements about an experience are entered after all this organizational work is finished. In these cases we are not trying to organize a ‘buzzing, booming confusion’ into separate objects, nor are we selecting a particular object for attention, nor separating a

determinate object from its background. So there is no reason to suppose that we are affecting content in the way we might be thought to in the earlier organizing work. Rather we are concerned to *identify* an already selected and determined object. Do I see Aunt Jane or her twin? Do I hear an oboe or a synthesizer? Is that a live policeman or a wax dummy? In such cases, one is strongly inclined to think, the formation and shaping of the experience have already taken place and we are able, while continuing to have the experience, to make first one, then another judgement about it (perhaps because we recall some pertinent information which makes the first judgement doubtful), without in either case contributing anything more to the experience itself. And so it seems quite possible, as the traditional view maintains, to make two different object judgements of the same experience.

I have heard it suggested that Jastrow's duck/rabbit figure provides a paradigm for the sort of thing the radical version is talking about: when we see that figure as a duck, our experience takes on a certain 'organization'; when we later see it as a rabbit, it loses that organization and takes on another. This sort of case will provide a paradigm only if two assumptions are made: first, that the different organizations involved in the different seeings-as constitute phenomenological differences in the content of the experiences; and second, that these different organizations are due to different judgements one makes about the Jastrow figure. Both of these assumptions are doubtful, especially the second. It would seem more natural to suppose that the shift in judgements is posterior to, and so does not cause, the shift in seeing-as. In the well-known cases of this sort the shift in 'organizations' occurs spontaneously and our judgements race to catch up. But suppose we waive these difficulties and allow that the Jastrow figure does illustrate the radical hyper-Kantian outlook. Then we should again be struck by the implausibility of the radical view as a general account of the relation between judgements and experience. These gestalt-shift cases are a very special sub-class of cases where we make object judgements about experiences. Certainly there is no reason to suppose that the experience of the visitor at Madame Tussaud's undergoes such a shift.¹ And more generally there is no reason to suppose that every time we make an object judgement about an experience we contribute to that experience anything analogous to the 'organization' that emerges when we suddenly see the Jastrow figure as a duck.

It is difficult, then, to find merit in any of the hyper-Kantian criticisms of the traditional view. The category-analogues must be thought to do their work either prior to, or at the point where, we make object judgements about our experiences. In the former case, the hyper-Kantian criticisms are

¹ This point is missed in a recent paper by Gary E. Kessler and Norman Prigge ('Is mystical experience everywhere the same?', *Sophia*, xx1 1 (1982), 39–55). They write: 'To see a wax policeman as alive and to see a wax policeman as wax are two different experiences' (p. 40). The talk here of a change in 'seeing-as', which the authors do not justify, illicitly likens Stace's example to cases of gestalt-shift.

irrelevant; in the latter, they are implausible. In any event it has not been shown that there is something inadequate – or ‘naïve’ or ‘simplistic’ – in the traditional view.

III

Nothing we have said in defence of the traditional view suggests that the hyper-Kantians are mistaken about the doctrine of unanimity. It may be (ignoring from now on the implausible radical hyper-Kantianism) that the category-analogues contribute to the content of experience prior to that point where we come to make the sort of object judgements with which Stace is concerned. It may also be that they contribute differently to the experiences of mystics from different religious traditions, with the result that there are significant differences among mystical experiences themselves. The doctrine of unanimity would thus be wrong.

Let us assume that these hyper-Kantian reasons for rejecting the doctrine of unanimity are persuasive. In this section I want to consider what consequences such an assumption has for the possible evidential value of mystical experiences.

It will be helpful to have before us a clear and relatively unproblematic example illustrating how the category-analogues affect experience. Here is an example offered by Katz.

Beliefs shape experience, just as experience shapes belief. To take, for the moment, a non-controversial example of this, consider Manet's [*sic*] paintings of Notre Dame. Manet ‘knew’ Notre Dame was a Gothic cathedral, and so ‘saw’ it as a Gothic cathedral as testified to by his paintings which present Notre Dame with Gothic archways. Yet close examination will reveal that certain of the archways of Notre Dame which Manet painted as Gothic are in fact Romanesque (p. 30).

For this example (let us suppose it is historically accurate) to provide what is needed we should envision Manet, with his strong belief that Notre Dame is Gothic, looking at the cathedral's Romanesque archways and yet having, because of his belief, a visual experience in which those archways look Gothic. We will then have a case in which a perception-like experience is partially determined by something (a belief) which, unlike Kant's categories, is not shared by all mankind. But it is also a case in which Manet's experience is inaccurate in precisely that aspect which is shaped by his belief. Were his belief not causally effective, Manet would presumably have had a visual experience in which the archways looked as they in fact are – Romanesque. The belief does its work by producing in the content of Manet's experience a feature that is not present in the cathedral he is looking at. In short, the belief's causal efficacy consists in its producing an hallucination of Gothic archways.

Now I assume it is not essential to Katz's view that the causal mechanism

he postulates always produces inaccurate experiences. That mechanism might also be responsible for a similar experience of Gothic archways even on those occasions when Manet was looking at the Gothic parts of Notre Dame. In that case there might be no inaccuracies in Manet's experience even though the salient feature of the experience was produced by the same mechanism which allegedly produced it in the actual case introduced by Katz. The example Katz cites is intended, I take it, simply as a dramatic illustration of how the role of the category-analogues is powerful enough to help produce an experience of something's appearing to have a certain feature even when in fact that thing lacks that feature.

Katz's example points to a crucial difference in the experience-shaping roles of the category-analogues and the Kantian categories themselves. (This difference remains even if one maintains, as I earlier suggested Kant does not, that the categories shape experience by affecting its phenomenological content.) Because Manet's belief is not shared by all mankind, others will not have their experiences 'shaped' by it and can look at Notre Dame free of that causal influence. Consequently they are in a position (as is Manet himself at another time) to determine whether Manet's original experience is accurate or hallucinatory. But of course no one can look at things free of the influence of the categories. And so no one is ever in a position to determine that certain features of an experience 'contributed' by the categories are inaccurate or hallucinatory. Indeed we do not even think that simply because an experience is partially determined by the categories it may, on *that* account, be inaccurate, i.e. that the influence of the categories might be to distort the experience one would otherwise have were he face to face, so to speak, with noumena. On the contrary the distinction between veridical and hallucinatory experience is made *within* the class of experiences (which on Kant's view comprises all experience) partially shaped by the categories. The role of the category-analogues, however, is quite different. They can produce experiences in which a thing appears other than in fact it is.

This difference between the category-analogues and the categories proper has implications for the possible evidential value of mystical experiences. To develop this point, let us note, first, that ordinary sense experiences are frequently thought to possess a presumption of veridicality. If, for example, you have a visual experience in which it seems that you are seeing a cathedral with Gothic archways, then barring some special reason to the contrary it is reasonable to suppose that your experience is veridical, that you are indeed accurately perceiving such a cathedral. Why is this? Perhaps, very roughly, it is because we have a general picture of ourselves and our world according to which: (a) there exist many sorts of things external to and independent of us; (b) we have certain perceptual faculties which normally function in certain ways; and (c) when we are appropriately situated with respect to external things these faculties normally will record the presence of those

objects and will take in a good deal of what they are like. Given such a picture, then in the absence of a special reason for thinking otherwise, your visual experience is most naturally and most plausibly explained by supposing there really is before you a cathedral with Gothic archways and that your sense organs are simply taking in what is there to be perceived.

Some philosophers have been inclined to extend to religious experiences this sort of presumption of veridicality allegedly enjoyed by ordinary sense experience. Thus, for example, it might be held that if one has an experience the phenomenological content of which made it appear that one is in some way ‘perceiving’, or ‘directly encountering’, a personal and loving supernatural being, or even God, then (again barring special considerations to the contrary) that is itself reason for supposing one is in the presence of, and really is ‘perceiving’, such a being.¹

Let us assume that both ordinary sense experiences and mystical experiences enjoy this presumption of veridicality. Such a presumption is not upset by the supposed fact that those experiences are shaped by the Kantian categories – our epistemic or evidential distinctions are made within the class of experiences so shaped. But the situation is otherwise with the category-analogues. Because of the way their experience-shaping role differs from that of the categories proper, the presumption of veridicality is nullified for those aspects of an experience which they contribute.

Suppose I am in the presence of a supernatural being who acts on some appropriate ‘faculty’ of mine. During this encounter certain sensory or super-sensory input gets mixed with input from the category-analogues, with the result that I have an experience in which it appears that I am confronting a personal and loving being (a P.L.B.). But now suppose it turns out that the category-analogues served here as a causally sufficient condition for the existence of those aspects of my experience which make it appear that the being I am confronting is personal and loving.

Now of course it will not follow from the truth of this hyper-Kantian explanation that the being I am in the presence of is not personal and loving. That might even be a causally necessary condition of my experience. Typically when we say that *X* is causally sufficient for *Y* we mean not that *X* by itself will produce *Y*, but that given certain background conditions *Z*, *X* will produce *Y*. In our present example, although the category-analogues are the sufficient condition, *X*, my being in the presence of a P.L.B. may be part of the background conditions, *Z*.

Nor, more importantly, will it follow that I am not accurately perceiving a P.L.B., that my experience is not veridical in all respects. For we might have here a case of over-determination: it may be true both that I am accurately perceiving a P.L.B. and that the category-analogues are working in the way

¹ See, for example, R. G. Swinburne’s discussion of the ‘Principle of credulity’ in chapter 13 of *The Existence of God* (Oxford, 1979), pp. 244–76.

supposed, so that two different processes are each sufficient to yield the experience I have.¹

What I suggest does follow, however, is that the hyper-Kantian explanation nullifies any presumption of veridicality that might have existed in the absence of such an explanation. This is surely what we would say about ordinary sense experience. While looking at a cathedral you have an experience in which it appears to have Gothic archways. (Call this aspect of your experience *G*.) It turns out, however, that some category-analogue was causally sufficient to produce *G*. Before this discovery we would naturally have supposed that your experience is veridical and thus that the cathedral does have Gothic archways. But now these suppositions, though both may still be true, are gratuitous. We know, from the Manet example, that the category-analogues can make an object appear to have a feature which it actually lacks. For all we know, they are working in the same way in the present case. And so we can, so far as we know, adequately account for aspect *G* of your experience simply by citing the role of the category-analogues; we do not have to suppose either that the cathedral has, or that you are veridically perceiving it to have, Gothic archways. Once we learn that the category-analogues were at work, your experience carries no presumption of veridicality so far as aspect *G* is concerned.

The case of my experience of a P.L.B. is similar. If we do not know that the hyper-Kantian explanation (or some other naturalistic explanation) is correct we might naturally account for my experience by supposing that I was in the presence of a P.L.B. and that the experience simply registered or recorded that fact. But if we accept the hyper-Kantian explanation, then so far as we know there is no need to make these suppositions – we can account for why I experience the being as personal and loving simply by pointing to the work of the category-analogues. Even if we allow that I am in the presence of some sort of supernatural being, so long as the properties I experience that being as having are determined by the category-analogues, my experience provides as yet no reason to think that the supernatural being has those properties. And so my experience itself provides no reason for thinking I am actually perceiving a personal and loving being. If the standard presumption of veridicality is nullified in the cathedral example, why should we suppose it remains here?

If these remarks are correct, then the hyper-Kantians pay a price for any victory they may achieve in the debate about the doctrine of unanimity. On their view mystical experiences are phenomenologically much richer, and they display a greater phenomenological variety, than advocates of the doctrine of unanimity would allow. However this is not claimed to be due to a corresponding richness and variety in any entities the mystics might be

¹ The points in this and the preceding paragraph are nicely made by William J. Wainwright, 'Natural explanations and religious experience', *Ratio* xv (1973), 98–101.

‘perceiving’. It is due to the work of the category-analogues. But to the extent that the category-analogues contribute to the content of mystical experiences aspects whose presence refutes the doctrine of unanimity, they rob those experiences of any presumption of veridicality in precisely those respects. If the hyper-Kantians are right we can see mystical experiences as a rich and varied lot. But we must also see them, by and large, as stripped of any presumption of veridicality in their most salient respects.