

Religious Experience, Pluralistic Knowledge and William James

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If one claims to have knowledge based upon a religious experience, must they belong to a specific religion to have that experience? More importantly, must they have participated *directly* in that experience? These experiences may be an entirely normal human phenomenon, given that most have an understanding of "a divine presence" or even "participation" in such an event.ⁱ However, something so widely understood as "religious experience" falls short when a definition must be ascribed to it. Some may contend that a "religious" experience does not imply its origin in doctrinal or institutional religion.ⁱⁱ On the other hand, those that cling to religion often find that religion would be deprived (in most cases) of its most *basic* element if it did not at one time, or presently include what we call "religious experience". Arguably, in one degree or another, all experiences that support the basis of religion are considered ontologically to be of *mystical* quality.ⁱⁱⁱ It is the personal quality of mystical experiences that will be explored in the pages that follow.

The American philosopher and pragmatist, William James, had significant things to say regarding mystical experience in his work *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (VRE). In reference to the above discussion, he felt that the moving force behind religion was not found in the creeds, dogmas or elaborate descriptions of religions, but:

What keeps religion going is something [...] [other] than abstract definitions and systems of concatenated adjectives, and something different from faculties of theology [...]. These things are the after-effects, secondary accretions upon those phenomena of vital conversation with the unseen divine [...] renewing themselves [...] in the lives of humble private men (VRE 487).

What he means here is that these “secondary things” are *dependent* upon this dialogical connection that, as he defines it, happens in a mystical experience.

Looking at his epistemology in general will be important to gain the proper understanding of mystical experience in *Varieties*. In this essay, I first trace this epistemological development in the later works of *Pragmatism* (P) and the posthumously published *Essays of Radical Empiricism* (ERE). Then, I examine whether he remains consistent after applying the findings from his epistemology to the metaphysical dimension he holds of religious experience. Finally, after leaving behind James’s idea that religious experience remains only authoritative for the individual, I will defend my position that this does not entail mystical experience is less verifiable and applicable to a *collective whole*. From comparisons of our own and others’ religious experiences and the role of cognitive feeling within them, this may be a case of what I term “pluralistic knowledge”—an intersubjective knowledge that makes a practical difference to more than one individual’s life. Some ideas from contemporary philosophers Richard Rorty and Bruce Wilshire will help illuminate the details of cognitive feeling, and the social community that this pluralism depends on.

I: An Inherited Religious Tendency

Who was this man William James, and why as a pragmatist, was he concerned with religion? The innovation he brought regarding pragmatism was to see it as a method applied to moral, metaphysical and religious problems regarding uses of truth and value, rather than just a method of scientific inquiry into the meaning of ideas. The first American pragmatist, Charles Sanders Peirce, embodied the latter idea in his pragmatism, and became put off by the ideas of James, and henceforth diverged from James calling his own pragmatism, “pragmaticism”—a name he said was “ugly enough [...] to be safe from kidnap-

pers" (Thayer 88). In James's work *Pragmatism*, he describes the results of this wider inquiry as freeing us "from abstraction and insufficiency, from fixed principles, closed systems, and pretended absolutes and origins" (51).

Throughout James's early life, he struggled with the notion that human thought and action was determined, and humans might be thus forced to act mechanically in a closed universe (Thayer 133). His father, Henry James was a religious man, having studied extensively at Princeton Theological Seminary, and he instilled in James a democratic way of viewing religious impulses (VRE v). Later in life, James fulfilled a promise to his father that someday he would deal critically with the issue of religion by writing the comprehensive work *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, where the focus of religion would be placed not on the object (i.e., God), but on the subject as an experiencing, believing, doubting, and praying person (VRE vii).

Although James did not consider himself to be a direct participant in mystical experience,^{iv} he says in a letter to a friend that his purpose in writing the *Varieties* was to show the glue holding the world's religious life together. Furthermore, he wanted to show that the function of the *life* (i.e., those things found within the religious experiences) of religion was mankind's most important one.^v So how did James define mystical experience, and what did experience mean to him in general? These two components of his epistemology must be explored.

II: Experience: Mystical and Mundane

For James, there are four qualities that accompany mystical experience^{vi} and the resulting conditions he placed on these experiences. The first quality is *ineffability*; that is, it "defies expression" and a wholly adequate articulation is impossible. Second, it is *noetic*, or a state of knowledge, and we gain things from this experience. A third is *transiency*—the experience does not last long, but passes away quickly. Finally, it is *passive*, or the feeling of *union* where one is ac-

tually "grasped" or "held" by a superior power. The condition James places on mystical experience is its authority for only those individuals who have it (VRE 414-15).

In some of James's later works, the mindset he used to view experience and what he termed "experiences" unfolds for us. In radical empiricism, James explains experiences within the flux of time as being within "a world of pure experience." This world of pure experience is a world of "pure objects" in which things can only be identified as a "that" or a "datum, fact, phenomenon, or content" (McDermott 227). In order for an object (say, a book) to be classified as more than a "that," but also as "physical" or a "percept" of something else it must have a function (i.e., it can be read). When a particular object (the book) within experience is seen with and then obscured from the eyes, it can be thought of as "having been," or existing in past experiences and is thus a percept. In addition to this, taken in totality, my experiencing the book is what it is "to be conscious of something".^{vii}

Thus, James shows us in the world of pure experience, objects have three ontological states. First, they have their "pure" form, or "as they are" and can be referred to only as a "that" and without content. Secondly, as things move within space and time, they become divided into what they have been, are, and will be.^{viii} Finally, these relations are *conscious*, given they are inseparable from the cognitive element of experience, and that acquisition of a conscious quality depends upon its having a context.

Given these examples and analyses, the tendency for James to emphasize the cognitive *relation* connecting things within experience should be evident, and that in cases where there are cognitive relations, these are as much experiences as the objects that they connect.^{ix} Carrying the cognitive aspect of radical empiricism further, one may claim the importance of the personal *feeling* that gives mystical experience its individual quality.^x In any event, the issue raised here by James's radical empiricism concerns the subjectivity of experience. This arises because the subjective

qualities of these experiences are inevitably determined by the limitations of that particular person's perceptions and sensations.

Similarly, James mentions repeatedly the importance of cognitive states in his *Pragmatism* lectures. The cognitive function of feeling arises when things are evaluated by their "cash-value", or by the practical difference they make. Things are useful to us insofar as we value them. This useful value is determined by what our belief (i.e., the response to our feelings) about these things may entail.^{xi} Cognition is defined as the action or faculty of knowing taken in its widest sense, including sensation, perception, memory and judgment. In *Pragmatism*, James uses an example of being lost and starving in the woods, and seeing a cow-path. It is reasonable, he says, to believe that there may be some human habitation beyond the path, for this may mean saving oneself from starvation. Thus, the inclinations given to this experience by *sensations* with the eyes had great implications for one's life and future well being: namely, the practical relevance of believing there *is* a human habitation beyond that path (P 93-5). We can see for ourselves that this feeling, or impulse to *act* on our belief would have implications important to our life, even though we would only be acting on the probability that there was something beyond that path. James elaborates on implications of individual belief somewhat further:

If there be any life better we should lead, and if there be any idea which, if believed in, would help us to lead that life, then it would be really *better for us* to believe in that idea, unless indeed, belief in it incidentally clashed with other greater vital benefits (37).

Thus, the significance placed on individual belief, especially in religious tone, cannot be separated from the cognition of sensuous experience. It is therefore not unruly for James to say that "pragmatism, so far from keeping her

eyes bent on the immediate practical foreground, [...] dwells just as much upon the world's remotest perspectives" (56).

Note he is willing to include religious experience, yet in a tone that is not monistic in quality.^{xiii} The religious pluralism he wants to account for is an open-ended system; one guided by empirically verified hypotheses (73-4). Even more so, in religious life the notion holds true that:

We can and we may, as it were, jump with both feet off the ground into or towards a world of which we trust the other parts to meet our jump – and *only so* can the *making* of a perfected world of the pluralistic pattern ever take place (McDermott 740).

Thus, the full experience for James consists in intricate cognitive connections that present the world as mostly unified or held together by the plurality of experiences of others, as well as our own.

III: Empirical Verification Applied to Mystical Experience

With these things in mind, I would like to suggest that James's epistemological development seems to show, *prima facie*, a consistent residue from his earlier account of religious experience in *Varieties*.^{xiii} However, he fails to remain consistent when holding that the metaphysics of mystical experience are only possibly verifiable by scientific methods because this assumption goes beyond his pragmatism, given he holds the practical benefits of mystical experience are private, and cannot be shared to a community. I would like to show that his view of religion has more similarities to radical empiricism by looking into his concept of "quasi-chaos" and then seeing the working cognitive aspect within experience which allows us to know and identify mystical experiences of others. These are issues I will return to later in my discussion of pluralistic knowledge.

In both *Pragmatism* and *Varieties* James insists that the value placed upon religious mystical experience is not only *real* but also *true* for those who have them, and are a possibility for greater truths *beyond* current scientifically verified empirical data. Regarding scientific knowledge, he asks us, why not think that perhaps our own, or others' mystical experiences are not the beginning of a "transition" in the total human experience? It is likely that what James *really* meant by saying mystical experience was potentially scientifically verifiable, was that it could be evidence providing insight into *new* knowledge that's becoming *more* "scientifically verifiable", but not necessarily "verified" at this point in time.

Where I diverge from James is the point at which he discusses another problem with the scientific verification of mystical experiences, saying that science tends to focus more on creating "entities" or "universal laws" that will work regardless of situation, or personal feeling. James might be trying to avoid an appeal to the monism of scientific rationalism here, or that a particular religious *union* with a greater power will make an immediate practical difference in *more than one* person's life. The latter conception is impossible, because mystical experiences for James are fundamentally subjective, and authoritative only for that individual. My disagreement is that two or more person's "knowledge" about mystical experiences of others might not require their being verifiable and arguable—and this is contrary to science.

He seems unaware of having set up the case here, by his naming it the "science of religions", for a knowledge one can *immediately* obtain from such experiences that should not be ignored since it has a *possibility* of being eventually verified. With this in mind, those who have not had mystical experiences should be able to grant from the accounts of others their *possible* verification; and this at least provides them a general knowledge that such experiences indeed do "exist" and are "out there" to be evaluated as

such. This now brings me to the notion of "pluralistic knowledge".

IV: Pluralistic Knowledge

It has been mentioned early on that, in stepping away from James's position regarding mystical experience, I wished to amplify what I call "pluralistic knowledge". I will begin by first examining, in order, James's concept "quasi-chaos", degrees of mystical knowledge, and the inseparable emotive and cognitive elements of mystical experience; finally I will discuss the pragmatic value of this knowledge. Although this notion may become clearer by sketching these things throughout the following pages, I continue to hold with James that mystical experience is valued in society, but I think he failed to see this value is not dependent on its scientific verification.^{xiv}

The concept involved in "quasi-chaos"^{xv} is that an individual may undergo an experience leading to an event X, while another may have an experience and also be led to X. However, the first individual may have employed methods, or experienced feelings of A and B to get to X, while the second employed or experienced C and D. So in short, differing paths may sometimes lead people to experience the same event. Hence, given the variety of experiences that are mystical throughout differing cultures and religions, this supports the claim that "there is vastly more [perceptual] discontinuity in the sum total of experience than we commonly suppose" (McDermott 204).

If one claims to know something about an experience, it is assumed they must have knowledge of that experiential content—either from their own experience, or of another individual's experience. But according to James's "quasi-chaos", we can have different *experiences* that lead to the same event. In mystical experience the abstract object (such as God) is what my experience "points to". Conversely, my cognitive awareness, feelings, thoughts, attitude of the object, and sense of self to whom that attitude

belongs are what my experience consists of (VRE 542-3). The experiential events termed "quasi-chaos" must therefore include supersensible or mystical experiences, and by doing so take into account a whole system of experience. Mystical experiences are *real*, *sensible*, and *plural* according to his notion of "quasi-chaos".

It was mentioned above that in order to *know* something, usually one must have knowledge of that subject's content.^{xvi} The *noetic* quality in mystical experience therefore is the awareness of the content of that experience. However, if we recall a principle from radical empiricism, an object has no content unless we are made "conscious" by our recognition of it in continuous transition. In order for pluralistic knowledge to work here, the content must be made intersubjectively explicit to a group of individuals. From the concept of "quasi-chaos", we can have different experiences leading to the same event, so it's plausible to claim that our individual mystical experiences can differ, but not necessarily the object to which they refer (and they won't differ greatly, assuming the object(s) in mystical experience are all supersensible).

Now, it seems obvious that if I have had a mystical experience, I needn't argue with myself whether I know the content of that experience. However, the problem for pluralistic knowledge is how I can identify *another* as having had a valid mystical experience. How can I, without being aware of the content they alone have, identify it as mystical? I would like to suggest that the solution to this problem lies in the inherent cognitive feeling within mystical experience. We all know what it is to be conscious of something, and moreover, we know what it is to have a sensation, or emotional feeling for something, or for some object. It seems that the only condition for identifying what another knows, is to have knowledge of the content. But the *fullness* of that content one must have is not generally made an issue.^{xvii} With this point, the definition of "mystical" can be broadened to relate to knowledge, of any degree, of what may be mystical, as a criterion for identifying whether an-

other's experience was a mystical experience. Thus, because a mystical experience involves a cognitive feeling towards an object, it is plausible that everyone may possess the ability to identify whether another's experience was mystical.^{xviii}

However, since I may only have a small degree of the content to identify this experience as mystical, I cannot understand either the *full sensibility* of the other's experience or *totally understand* the ineffability of that mystical experience. In order for mystical experiences to be called "scientific" they would need to be fully describable, measurable, and also repeatable (much as an experiment—i.e., not transient). This is where I think James missed a fundamental point underlying mystical experiences: If they are currently not scientific, this doesn't imply that they can't be an intersubjectively knowable experience at least to a certain degree. Gathering from what we have seen above, an experience needn't be fully explicit to everyone to be known to others, and these religious experiences can still exist in a community in which they are known. The pluralistic knowledge here is an intersubjective understanding of each other's possession of differing *ways* or *paths* of experience to a supersensible object.

Pluralistic knowledge can also be understood by its similarities to the inseparable emotive and cognitive functions from common phenomena in daily life that are inarguable in much the same way as I am claiming mystical experiences can be. For example, one may not be able to describe or provide inferential reasons of their love for a husband, wife, or family, but this does not mean that those acquainted with them would deny the existence of this love. The concept of "being in love" in general (with God, a person, etc.) may be incapable of description in terms of the character or actions of the beloved people or objects. Even more so, one would not undermine a child's love for their pet dog, an unconditional love for an imperfect person, or philanthropic desire to help others as unwarranted because of its ineffability. An insightful philosopher regarding this,

Richard Rorty, writes:

It does not greatly matter whether we state our reason to believe—our insistence that some or all finite mortal humans can be far more than they have yet become—in religious, political, philosophical, literary, sexual, or familial terms. What matters [most] is [...] *the ability to experience overpowering hope or faith or love* (Cambridge 97, italics mine).

What Rorty is trying to suggest is that experiences we have may go *beyond* argument. He says later this may be because we presently have no way of describing them. This doesn't imply however, that they are not *real* to us or *knowable* to others. More importantly, he stresses the insistence we have to believe our experiences are real that allows us to move forward in the flux of experience—to become what we are not yet—and, on my view, mystical experience is not excluded from this.

Some pragmatic implications for such an acceptance of mystical experience are found in the possibility of hope and improvement of the quality of life, and the source of such possibilities for James is a supersensible realm of new experience. Although participating in someone else's mystical experience is impossible, "sharing notes" with others about our own experiences cannot provide but a pluralistic way to help us understand better the supersensible reality we ourselves may have hope in. This interaction with others in a community is vital to the sharing and growing of religious hope and a faith in what lies beyond this life. Pragmatically considered, here we find the heart of pluralistic knowledge as applied to mystical experience. In another place, Rorty says:

A religious faith which seems to lie behind the attractions of both utilitarianism and pragmatism is, instead, a faith in the future possibilities of mortal humans, a faith which is hard to distinguish from love for, and hope for, the human community (96).

This love, hope, and faith in the efforts of the human community are what Rorty terms “romance”—a romance underlining the notion that a pluralistic knowledge among individuals may “[...] crystallize around a congregation, around a novel as easily as around a sacrament, around a God as easily as around a child (96).

So in essence a “romantic attitude” can help us understand the importance of a knowledge that is pluralistic in nature, yet binds humanity by the fact that our individual experiences have value applicable to the whole human enterprise. A social quality like this is, after all, the primary benefit of an anti-foundationalist epistemology that rejects all ready-made absolutes. This is further supported by an observation of James scholar Bruce Wilshire. He writes that “[...] our experiencing is not completely private. To a great extent it is experienceable by others, and their experiencing infiltrates (sometimes floods) ours” (Cambridge 120).

Moreover, in reminiscence of James’s lifelong struggles with determinism, I think he would have agreed with Wilshire here that there is a need for recognition of the role of pluralistic or publicly attained knowledge; and also when Wilshire continues to say that human viewpoints of the world are determined largely because as social creatures, “[...] thinking beings that get constituted within an experienceable world [...] experience others experiencing *them* as experienced and experienceable (10). Perhaps it is not James’s intelligence, but rather his human temporality that prevented him from furthering his philosophical perspectives to rest upon a view of pluralistic knowledge.

V: Conclusion

In tracing James’s radical empiricist and pragmatist views in the course of this paper, I have tried to show the implications of these views when applied to mystical experience in *Varieties*. These implications have proven not so

clear-cut, however, given the complexities of James's meaning of experience. Nonetheless, I have maintained that although James holds mystical experience compatible with eventual verification on scientific grounds, he did not see clearly enough that our knowledge from mystical states can currently be widened by dependence on humanity's collective effort of sharing knowledge and constant deliberation.

"Pluralistic knowledge" is the term I have used to represent this collective effort of experiencing and intersubjectively identifying to one another the mutual relations of *cognitive feeling* inherent in all mystical experiences. In doing this, we can pragmatically benefit by increasing our own knowledge of the supersensible by becoming conscious of that of other's.

Moreover, with both a Jamesian-eye view, and from Rorty's clever suggestion, the undertaking of a "romantic attitude" towards pluralism allows us to see that mystical experience is valuable to humanity as a whole. I have hoped to show this as the result of acknowledging pluralistic knowledge. Finally, with the suggestions of Wilshire, and James's concern to incorporate his own strong reservations about determinism into his philosophy, we can see clearly that the pragmatic value and meaning of James's reflections are worth bearing in mind.

Notes

ⁱ Contributor to this topic, Professor Ellen Kappy Suckiel of Notre Dame writes "I [...] begin with the modest and uncontroversial claim that a great many human beings have experienced feelings such as religious awe and wonder, and that having such feelings is an entirely normal mode of response." from "The Cognitive Value of Feelings", in *Heavens Champion – William James's Philosophy of Religion*, p.73.

ⁱⁱ I am borrowing the Deweyan distinction between "religion" and the "religious". According to Dewey, "*Religion* always signifies a special body of beliefs and practices having some kind of institutional organization, loose or tight. The adjective *religious* denotes nothing in the way of a specifiable entity, either institutional or as a system of beliefs. [Furthermore, this adjective] does not denote anything that can exist by itself or that can be organized into a particular or distinctive form of existence", from "Religion Versus the

Religious”, in *A Common Faith*. John Dewey (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1933), pp. 9-10, italics mine.

ⁱⁱⁱ In this paper, I will assume the most basic function underlying all religions is mystical states. Therefore, when I say something is a mystical experience, it should be kept in mind that this function is common to religious experience in a variety of religions. Thus, combining this with the aforementioned definition of “mystical” — a religious experience can indeed be “mystical”, but at the same time, it does not hold to say all mystical experiences are of a religion.

^{iv} “Whether my treatment of mystical states will shed more light or darkness, I do not know, for my own constitution shuts me out from their enjoyment almost entirely, and I can speak of them only at second hand” (VRE 413).

^v “[In preparing the *Varieties*], the problem I have set myself is a hard one: first, to defend (against all prejudices of my class) “experience” and “philosophy” as being the real backbone of the world’s religious life — I mean prayer, guidance, and all that sort of thing immediately and privately felt, as against high and noble general views of our destiny and the world’s meaning; and *second*, to make the hearer or reader believe, as I myself do invincibly believe, that, although all the special manifestations of religion may have been absurd (I mean its creeds and theories), [...] the life of it as a whole is mankind’s most important function. A task well-nigh impossible, [...] but to attempt it is *my* religious act.” From *Letters of William James*, Vol II, p. 127. To Miss Frances R. Morse.

^{vi} I should like to distinguish for purposes of this essay that there are two *basic* types of mystical religious experience. First is the *communal* type, a form common in Christianity. In this experience we feel there is a providential God about us that hears our prayers, and works with us continually in our life. Second, and the type which will be discussed in this essay, there is the kind that involves a *union* with the divine, and is perhaps so powerful that one loses all self-identity. This latter type is the one that James focuses on most in his *Varieties*. For a more elaborate expansion on this distinction of “communal” and “union” mystical experience, see David Stewart’s “Mystical Experience”, in *Exploring the Philosophy of Religion*. (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1992) pp.8-9.

^{vii} This conscious relation is further advanced by his idea that “the relations of continuous transition *experienced* are what make our experiences cognitive” (WJ 213, italics mine).

^{viii} Perhaps James draws this description of reality from influences by Peirce and his theory of probability that deals with the pragmatic maxim and its applications to *hardness, weight, force, and reality* in his essay “How to Make Our Ideas Clear.” More specifically, Peirce writes: “the will *be*’s, the actually *is*’s, and the *have beens* are not the sum of the reals. They only cover actuality. They are besides *would be*’s and *can be*’s that are real”, in H.S. Thayer’s *Meaning and Action: A Critical History of*

Pragmatism (Bobbs-Merrill: Indianapolis and New York, 1968) p.114.

^{ix} "The relations that connect experiences must themselves be experienced relations, and any kind of relation must be accounted as 'real' as anything else in the system." From *A World of Pure Experience* (WJ 195). Also in another place, "Experience as a whole is a process in time, whereby innumerable particular terms lapse and are superseded by others that follow upon them by transitions which, whether disjunctive or conjunctive in content, are themselves experiences, and must in general be accounted at least as real as the terms which they relate" (McDermott 202).

^x "As a rule, mystical states merely add a supersensuous meaning to the ordinary outward data of consciousness. They are excitements like the emotions of love or ambition, gifts to our spirit by means of which facts already objectively before us fall into a new expressiveness and make a new connection with our active life." (VRE 466)

^{xi} A similar passage in *Varieties* reads: "Both thought and feeling are determinants of conduct, and the same may be determined either by feeling or by thought" (VRE 548).

^{xii} Although in *Varieties* he says that mystical states of religious experience encourage monistic tendencies, James thinks that this is unfortunate. The problem he sees with monism is its "fixed" and "static" nature that will not accept a "cholera-germ" of imperfection in its water-tank. However, because the idea of monism encourages the notion that we have already "reached the end" of inquiry, it cannot provide a sufficient account of experience in totality, given the "flux" of knowledge is in constant transition.

Thus, pragmatism rejects *absolute* monism (P 74), and openly embraces pluralism, because "for men in practical life, perfection is still something far off and in the process of achievement" (P 16) We must take a melioristic approach to knowledge; that is, accepting that our current beliefs are open to falsification, and that reformulation of them inevitably results in new ideas intertwined and tainted with hints of the old.

^{xiii} It should be noted that James held Pragmatism and Radical Empiricism to be separate doctrines (McDermott 314). But I am emphasizing the most pertinent threads in both so as to give light to discussion of what he meant by mystical experience, and set up the case for amplifying his views in what I am going to call "pluralistic knowledge".

^{xiv} The subjective and pluralistic characteristics inherent to mystical experience may be reason too, why Peirce (who was mathematically and scientifically inclined) chose to leave the psychological and emotional elements *out* of his pragmatism, and perhaps why he responded to James negatively.

^{xv} "The whole system of experience as they are immediately given presents itself as a quasi-chaos through which one can pass out of an initial term in many directions and yet end in the same terminus, moving from next to next by a great many possible paths" (McDermott 204).

There is also an interesting and rather long example of this type of pluralism in the New Testament regarding the church body: "The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. [...] If the foot should say, because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body, it would not for that reason cease to be a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be." I Corinthians 12:12-20 (NIV).

On another note, in Hindu scripture an interesting pluralism is found with the creation of the caste system and where the making of humanity is presented. The particular passage that follows formed the basis and foundational authority for the Hindu caste system: "When they [the gods] divided the Man, into how many parts did they apportion him? What do they call his two arms and thighs and feet? His mouth became the Brahmin; his arms were made into the Warrior, his thighs the People, and from his feet the Servants were born". Rig-Veda 10.90.

^{xvi} Although how we ever became aware of the content of a subject in the first place has been problematic from the beginning of western philosophy. In Plato's *Meno* this paradox states that we cannot seek what we know because we already know it, and thus do not need to seek for it; and we cannot search for what we do not know without some criterion to identify the thing with. I do not wish to solve this dilemma in my essay however, but assume that we are able to get past this stage somehow in knowledge, and I think this claim is inductively plausible. Ed. John M. Cooper, from *Meno*, in *Plato's Complete Works* (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett, 1997) 80D-E.

^{xvii} The problem of whether one can know that either they or another possess knowledge of something with only second order knowledge (i.e., knowledge-of-knowledge, as opposed to first order, or knowledge of the content) is dealt with extensively by Plato in his *Charmides*. I agree with Plato scholar Charles H. Kahn, that having "knowledge-of" something implies we have a *degree* of the content, and hence, second order knowledge is a degree of first order knowledge. He argues, "Without knowing quantum mechanics I can know enough *about* quantum mechanics to know that I am ignorant of it. Of course I must know something about it besides the name, or I could not be sure of my ignorance; I cannot be wholly ignorant of the subject." From "Charmides and The Search for Beneficial Knowledge", in *Plato and The Socratic Dialogue* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1996) pp. 198-99.

^{xviii} I am broadening James's definition of "mystical" a bit, but my goal is to try and show the similarities of feelings to any object, to feelings towards a supersensible object. This is something I feel James

unwarrantedly neglected. In doing so, I hope to show that even if one claims to *not* have had an experience called mystical, they may avoid a horn in the dilemma of Meno's paradox because they do *already* know how to identify another's mystical experience because they already have a small degree of the content of it.

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