

Ineffability:
The Significance of the Presence of an Absence

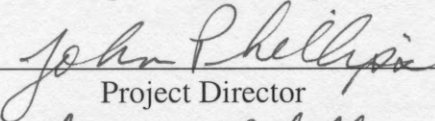
by
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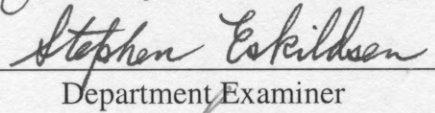
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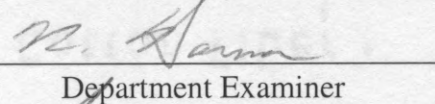
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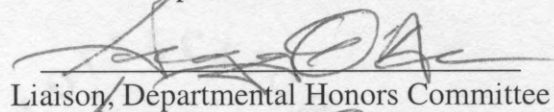
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Foreword

“Why are you writing about ineffability?” was the second most asked question I have been posed since the conception of this project. The first was “How can you write about it if it’s ineffable?” I took these concerns in stride. I thought these questions stemmed from a general ignorance on the subject matter. But, soon after beginning this paper I realized that my naïve critics might not be naïve as I once thought.

How does one write on the subject of ineffability? Many people have. I have read some of their books. There is a rich literature of philosophers, mystics, poets, theologians, psychologists, prophets, and others that directly and indirectly confront ineffability in all its paradoxical glory. Other people have done it, but the question remained: How could *I* write about that which cannot be put into words?

I realized that I did not care about what ineffable meant as a descriptive term. I had no interest in playing semantics. If we allow for the fact that “ineffable” is truly applicable as a descriptive term to actual states of being and modes of knowledge, then we are left with the oldest question of mankind, “Why?” Furthermore, why is it even important?

This final question provoked this paper out of me. This paper is truly a culmination of a framework of thought that I have been developing throughout my studies at university, and perhaps, throughout my whole life. My thesis is that no understanding of humanity can ever be complete without the consideration of the ineffable, the metaphysical, the religious, or the mystical. My purpose is to

illuminate how so many have missed this simple point. It seems ironic to me that the very concepts that have eluded definition in the end define us.

Every individual is at once the beneficiary and the victim of the linguistic tradition into which he has been born—the beneficiary inasmuch as language gives access to the accumulated records of other people’s experience, the victim in so far as it confirms him in the belief that reduced awareness is the only awareness and as it bedevils his sense of reality, so that he is all too apt to take his concepts for data, his words for actual things. (23)

-Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception*

...To talk about language is presumably even worse than to write about silence.
(190)

-Martin Heidegger

Ineffability and Language:
an introduction

With each word I write, and that you are now reading, I am acting on the presupposition that I will be understood, that I will effectively externalize a previously internal dialogue. Martin Heidegger illustrates it in this way:

...Speaking [language] is expression. The idea of speech as an utterance is the most common...If we take language to be utterance, we give an external, surface notion of it at the very moment when we explain it by recourse to something internal. (192)

The reason I believe that I will be understood is because I am using language—not simply any language, but a common language shared by my audience and myself.

Within this language is an inherent grammatical structure, an extensive catalogue of vocabulary, and, perhaps only indirectly present, a rich history that it shares with all languages having similar aetiologies. Language is a powerful tool of communication.

We simply need to look around ourselves and we will see uncountable cultural and technological products, which have been fabricated through cooperation made possible through the use of language, both spoken and written. Language has proven

to be highly effective in producing tangible results, but how effective has language been in realms less concrete?

In preparing to write this paper on ineffability, I began seeing examples of the ineffable all around me. It seemed as if every text that I picked up had something to add to the discourse on ineffability. I began to wonder if I was projecting ineffability *into* these sources. Perhaps all writing, poetry and prose alike, is somehow getting at what it cannot say, what lies beyond its shadowy world of words. Perhaps all writing is elegiac. In all that is written there is an inherent lament at the inadequacy of the language to live, to rise beyond the page and become the organic notions it represents. The reason I saw ineffability on the very first page I turned to in Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* is because it is there, staring me in the face:

Thus when I ask you to write more books I am urging you to do what will be for your good and for the good of the world at large. How to justify this instinct or belief I do not know, for philosophic words, if one has not been educated at a university, are apt to play one false. What is meant by "reality"? It would seem to be something very erratic, very undependable—now to be found in a dusty road, now in a scrap of newspaper in the street, now in a daffodil in the sun. It lights up a group in a room and stamps some casual saying. It overwhelms one walking home beneath the stars and makes the silent world more real than the world of speech--and then there it is again in an omnibus in the uproar of Picadilly. Sometimes, too, it seems to dwell in shapes too far away for us to discern what their nature is. But whatever it touches, it fixes and makes permanent. That is what remains over when the skin of the day has been cast into the hedge; that is what is left of past time and of our loves and hates. Now the writer, as I think, has the chance to live more than other people in the presence of this reality. It is his business to find it and collect it and communicate it to the rest of us. So at least I infer from reading Lear or Emma or La Recherche du Temps Perdu. For the reading of these books seems to perform a curious couching operation on the senses; one sees more intensely afterwards; the world seems bared of its covering and given an intenser life. (120)

This may appear to be an oblique reference, but I feel that it is essential to illustrate the universality of the problem of ineffability. And, note that it is a problem. With every word uttered there is a tension not only with what can be communicated, but also, with all that is unuttered. The presence of language is always accompanied by this frustrating absence. This absence is most overtly present in poetic verse. Poetry will be the topic of a later portion of this paper. For now, let us look at the purposes of language.

We use language to tell another what is on our mind, to describe emotional states, to write clear and concise academic essays, to create art in poetry and prose, and to describe experiences. This by no means is an exhaustive list, but merely representative of many possibilities. The final example of describing experiences will hold the most interest for the purposes of this paper. In his text, *Ineffability*, Ben-Ami Scharfstein states that one of the most important factors needed to communicate effectively with another is “shared experience”:

...What allows complete strangers using the same language to assume that they understand it in much the same way. The answer is, briefly, that we are not abstract linguistic creatures—bodiless angels who communicate by means of an identical, purely logical syntax. On the contrary, our use of language presupposes and reflects the physical structure of our bodies, our emotions and appetites, the ways in which we perceive, the kinds of spaces in which we live, and the cultures we assimilate as we become human in their image and in ours. (4)

This “shared experience” functions on multiple levels. For instance, we take for granted that those whom we address are, as we are, embodied and possess many, if

not all, of our sensory abilities. Scharfstein also notes an interesting facet of “shared experience” that logically follows from its communicative properties:

When the shared experience is extensive enough, single words can replace complete sentences; and when the shared experience is both extensive and intensive, speech can become sparse and hints—not necessarily verbal—more effective; and then the sheerly abstract information the speech conveys is understood in the light of its intimately personal qualities. Such speech creates the fullest, most natural tie between people, one of idiosyncratic, emotionally colored conceptuality. (7)

I write to you with a history. We have lived different lives, but we share all that is inherent in embodied-*ness*.

Sharing similar bodies, we have similar experiences, and furthermore our similar biological systems also share a language faculty, or natural capacity for language acquisition. The recognition of this faculty seems to be in direct opposition to Skinner and other behaviorists, who claim that language is simply conditioned. Behaviorists believe in a strictly clean slate. Give a behaviorist an infant and they will make her a doctor, a musician, or a psychologist. They give no credit to biology in determining the personality and characteristics of the individual. I will not go into this distinction presently because it would sidetrack the discussion. However, in light of the presence of this language faculty I will note two points (1) language is not arbitrarily constructed and there is a natural organization, a language faculty, that not only precedes but occasions language acquisition, and (2) this natural organization is biologically based. In his book, *New Horizons in the Study of Languages and Mind*, Noam Chomsky illustrates the existence of this pre-linguistic conceptual framework:

At peak periods of language acquisition, children are acquiring (“learning”) many words a day, perhaps a dozen or more, meaning that they are acquiring words on very few exposures, even just one. This would appear to indicate that the concepts are already available, with much or all of their intricacy and structure predetermined, and that the child’s task is to assign labels to concepts, as might be done with limited evidence given sufficiently rich innate structure. (61)

At this point I feel it is important to understand my perspective on this “innate structure.” This brings to mind John Locke’s concept of the *tabula rasa*, which is usually translated “clean slate,” but I have also seen it translated as “empty cabinet.” I think Locke had an interesting idea, but his metaphor was too simplistic. A “slate” is a flat surface with very little “innate structure.” The “empty cabinet,” as Marvin Harris translates the phrase in *The Rise of Anthropological Theory*, is closer to how I conceptualize this “innate structure” (Harris). A “cabinet” will have different levels or compartments that have a more complex inherent structure than that of a “slate.” Yet, even this is far too simple to account for an innate faculty that organizes something as complex as a human language system. My version of the *tabula rasa* is an empty library. All the shelves are empty but are already labeled. They are waiting for the librarian to begin shelving the books in their appropriate places. Our brains are already organized when we are born: for instance, the occipital lobe is the primary area for vision processing, and so on. In the same way, our language faculty is already geared to acquire a native language.

The reader should take from this the fact that language does not produce, or *cause*, an organized conceptual framework. Language is a manifestation of a structure that is generated from an interaction between our biological systems and our

environment, or in a word, experience. I will return to this pre-linguistic framework when I discuss reasons for ineffability that will not discount ineffable experience as being without content.

At this point it would be prudent to define exactly what ineffability is, or at least what it is within the confines of this paper. W.T. Stace writes, "...this word 'ineffability' is only the name of a problem, not something the meaning of which we understand at once" (278). First of all, "ineffable" does not describe a single set of conditions, but it is, in fact, descriptive of a myriad of conditions. One use of the word ineffable is when it is posited of an object itself. This seems to be analogous to Kant's noumena, which are differentiated from the phenomena, or the appearances of the noumena. When there is a schism between the object itself and its apprehended appearance, it makes sense to call the noumena ineffable because when all that can be experienced is its phenomenal appearance, then it is forever held at length from the world of language and definition.

Another use of the word ineffable applies directly to the subject and the subject's experiences, rather than to the object. Stace lays out a clear explanation of this type of ineffability when he writes: "What is said to be ineffable is a concrete experience which no proposition can describe" (279). There are a couple ways that this quote can be read: (1) that, literally, *no* proposition can describe it or (2) that no proposition that the individual possesses can describe it. Both of these interpretations converge within the individual who has an ineffable experience. She would have no way of differentiating between lacking the words to describe an experience or simply

being unable to describe it regardless of the extent of her vocabulary. When we are infants the world is predominantly ineffable because we do not possess the words to begin to describe our brave new world. Likewise, consider the case of an adult who has lived far from any city her whole life without ever seeing one, not even the slightest skyline, and is then brought blindfolded into downtown Manhattan. When the blindfold is removed, the adult, with fully functional use of English, would be unable to describe or label the world around her. She would not see the ordinary objects of her world, but she would be immersed in a world that is largely ineffable, not due to her inability to speak, but from the simple fact that she lacks the necessary vocabulary to mediate the urban landscape. Like the infant, she will begin to acquire the labels, or names, that apply to what she sees, and only then will the objects around her take on a sense of regularity and slowly, the awe inspiring immediate experience will dull and become nothing more than part of a daily routine. This disenchantment with everyday reality will be dissected further in the section on mysticism and the final section on validating ineffability. Other occurrences of ineffability are often due not to a subject's inability to verbalize an object or an experience, but more precisely to an *unwillingness* to do so. The claim of ineffability is often made to protect an ember of memory, a bright spark, that once labeled would lose its luster, its preciousness. On the other hand, a subject often refuses to verbalize that which she does not wish to remember. This link between language and memory is an interesting one that would call for its own essay, but even if only peripherally mentioned it further rounds out this discussion on ineffability.

A final mode of ineffability can be found in the mind of an individual with Autism. The Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky has theorized that every child goes through an autistic stage (18). There was some point in time where each of us was lost in a private world of imagination, but we were slowly pulled from that world and assimilated with the practical world of adults. Another psychologist, Jean Piaget, illustrates the characteristics of autistic thought by differentiating between conscious thought and sub-conscious thought:

Directed thought is conscious, i.e., it pursues an aim which is present to the mind of the thinker; it is intelligent, which means that it is adapted to reality and tries to influence it; it admits of being true or false (empirically or logically true), and it can be communicated by language. Autistic thought is subconscious, which means that the aims it pursues and the problems it tries to solve are not present in consciousness; it is not adapted to reality, but creates for itself a dream world of imagination; it tends, not to establish truths, but to satisfy desires, and it remains strictly individual and incommunicable as such by means of language. On the contrary, it works chiefly by images, and in order to express itself, has recourse to indirect methods, evoking by means of symbols and myths the feeling by which it is led. (43)

I do not want to get too deeply into the conscious/sub-conscious dichotomy.

This psychological example is meant to emphasize the point that ineffability is not an issue simply for philosophical deliberation, but it also has a far-reaching inter-disciplinary presence.

To recap, the term ineffable applies to a wide variety of objects and conditions. Furthermore, it is not simply limited to that which *cannot* be put into words, but also that which *will* not be put into words. The term “will” is literal, meaning that verbalizing is dependent upon the will of subject to do so. But now, let

us return to our discussion of language so that we may analyze in a positive way that which ineffability appears to negate.

We have seen by aid of Chomsky that there are organized thought systems even in the absence of language. There is a logical problem in saying that with language comes order. After all, if our minds were in complete disarray how could we go about learning, or acquiring, language in the first place? We can reason from this that if our knowledge is defined by an organized, internal representation, and is not necessarily dependent upon the possibility of linguistic expression, then within Chomsky's model we possess knowledge that is unable to be linguistically expressed.

Those well-versed in epistemology will not accept this simplistic assertion of "ineffable knowledge." "What do you mean by knowledge in this context?", they may ask. We will not be able to explore exhaustively this "noetic" property of ineffability in the confines of this paper. An indepth epistemological discussion would be worthy of a lengthy paper itself. That being said, there still needs to be a general framework to add to this discourse. We will satisfy this need by splitting knowledge into two general categories: knowledge *of* and knowledge *about*. Even though this may seem relatively simplistic, it provides a much needed distinction when we begin to analyze first-hand experience. In *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James focuses on individuals who have "first-hand religion" rather than "second-hand religion." To James, this dichotomy is analogous to having knowledge *of* and knowledge *about*. This separation produces an interesting dialogue between the esoteric and exoteric world.

This distinction between knowledge *of* and knowledge *about* should not be taken as a distinction between subjectivity and objectivity. In his book *Hegel and After*, Richard Schacht presents Kierkegaard's position on objective knowledge:

For the attainment of knowledge, an attitude of objectivity is required; and the cultivation of an attitude of objectivity involves the suppression of personality and the transcendence of individuality. And in the attempt to rise above and leave behind one's individuality and personality, which can be partly if not completely successful, Kierkegaard sees a kind of self-annihilation, to which he objects in the strongest possible terms. Against the tendency to applaud and encourage this development, he argues that men are essentially finite, subjective, particular individuals, rather than unlimited, objective, impersonal knowing minds. (121)

Objective knowledge, whatever that may be, is something that is quite alien to what we call knowledge. Because "men are essentially finite, subjective, particular individuals" we are unable to produce any knowledge which would be separate or outside this realm of subjectivity. The distinctions I am making between types of knowledge and functions of the mind are essentially grounded in the subjective nature of man. Evelyn Underhill takes this to its extreme to claim that those who only know *about* something truly have no knowledge at all:

Wisdom is the fruit of communion; ignorance the inevitable portion of those who "keep themselves to themselves," and stand apart, judging, analyzing the things which they have never truly known. Because he has surrendered himself to it, "united" with it, the patriot knows his country, the artist knows the subject of his art, the lover his beloved, the saint his God, in a manner which is inconceivable as well as unattainable by the looker-on. Real knowledge, since it always implies an intuitive sympathy more or less intense, is far more accurately suggested by the symbols of touch and taste than by those of hearing and sight. (24)

Even though Underhill is playing a semantic game by defining “real knowledge,” it should be clear that what she refers to as knowledge is precisely that which I call knowledge *of*.

However, I would like to note that this separation is merely a conceptual one. There is no way of dissecting and isolating aspects of our minds for study. Minds are complex, integrated systems. Ralph Waldo Emerson questions this in his essay on *Intellect*:

How can we speak of the action of the mind under any divisions, as of its knowledge, of its ethics, of its works, and so forth, since it melts will into perception, knowledge into act? Each becomes the other. Itself alone is. Its vision is not like the vision of the eye, but is union with the things known. (263)

We far too often and far too easily talk about experience as it is, knowledge as it is, and language as it is. If neurology has taught us anything about human minds, it is that they are far too complex to make vague generalizations and compartmentalizations. When I speak of separate processes of the mind, I merely do so out of necessity. Ironically there does not seem to be a way to discuss the mind, or the brain, if you prefer, as a whole. We are like children who separate the different foods on their plate for fear that any of it touches, that any of the flavors become less distinct. We cannot overcome this problem, but I illuminate this limitation so that we keep an appropriate perspective of the issues at hand and their undeniable complexity despite our attempts to simplify and make the ideas more manageable. In writing this paper I have continually had to remind myself of what I can and cannot talk about, and never to confuse the two.

James bluntly states: “knowledge about a thing is not the thing itself” (532).

This paper will concern itself solely with knowledge *about* ineffability and mysticism. Unless, perhaps, I lace my final drafts with a psychotropic substance, I do not think that this paper could, by virtue of its medium, provide its reader with knowledge *of* ineffability or mysticism. This, if anything, should illustrate the difficulty and delicacy that is needed in order to discuss such elusive topics.

Whatever success this paper will have, it will be a far cry from the simple, immediate experience and self-reflection that its reader may seek out individually. Keep that in mind as you reason with me through this maze of language. We may have little hope of ever reaching any goal, of becoming enlightened to a *new* idea, but we very well may be able to synthesize what you are now reading and what I am now writing with how we each experience the world, how we choose to embrace reality.

In the second section I will discuss ineffability and mysticism. A student or professor in religious studies may wince at my grouping of mysticism, metaphysics, religion, and ineffability. Each of these terms is applicable to a wide range of phenomena and thought systems. So why then do I group them together in a presumptuous manner? The reason is that, as James notes, I think that the rhetoric of the day often groups these concepts together under the term ‘mysticism’: “The words ‘mysticism’ and ‘mystical’ are often used as terms of mere reproach, to throw at any opinion which we regard as vague and vast and sentimental, and without a base in either facts or logic” (413). Even James expands his working definition of mysticism to include mystics who exist outside of religious traditions and whom society has

written off as *insane*. He is responding to actual conditions and is not limiting himself to abstract theories without real-world correlates. In this same way, I am attempting to respond to the rhetoric as it *occurs* and not to become preoccupied with *proper* semantics.

Next, in section three, I will briefly touch on poetry, music, and ineffability. Even though this section will be rather brief, I wanted to discuss ways in which language itself becomes ineffable. This is obviously paradoxical. I risk the possible confusion that this brings about because it is an essential component in understanding how ineffability functions in our lives and in our world.

In the fourth section of this paper, I will deal with the interesting problem of validating ineffability. I hope to bring into sharp focus the cleavage between the linguistic reality of science and the ineffable realm of metaphysics. These realities are often brought into contention with one another when they should be synthesized in order to construct a more complete picture of our universe and how we perceive it.

We never dispense with language and the other symbol systems; for it is by means of them, and only by their means, that we have raised ourselves above the brutes, to the level to human beings... We must learn how to handle words effectively; but at the same time we must preserve and, if necessary, intensify our ability to look at the world directly and not through that half opaque medium of concepts, which distorts every given fact into the all too familiar likeness of some generic label or explanatory abstraction. (Huxley, 74)

But the communication of religion is not like the communication of ideas and perceptions to be sought in books. In this medium, too much of the pure impression of the original production is lost. Like dark stuffs that absorb the greater part of the rays of light, so everything of the pious emotion that the inadequate signs do not embrace and give out again, is swallowed up. (150)

-Friedrich Schleiermacher

The angels are so enamored of the language that is spoken in heaven that they will not distort their lips with the hissing and unmusical dialects of men, but speak their own, whether there be any who understand it or not. (273)

-Ralph Waldo Emerson

The material for an intenser life, a wider, sharper consciousness, a more profound understanding of our own existence, lies at our gates. But we are separated from it, we cannot assimilate it; except in abnormal moments we hardly know that it is here. (28)

-Evelyn Underhill

Ineffability and Mysticism

Many theologians, philosophers, and mystics have linked ineffability and mysticism. This correlation was canonized in modern discourse by William James in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. When James discusses mysticism he is pointing toward an experience that has two essential components and two non-essential but frequently occurring components. The necessary components are ineffability and noetic quality, and the non-necessary components are transiency and passivity (James 414). James defines mysticism in this way to avoid confusing the term mysticism with other possible meanings.

The quality of ineffability is a many-faceted and complex property. However, James provides a straightforward, concise explanation of it:

The handiest of the marks by which I classify a state of mind as mystical is negative. The subject of it immediately says that it defies expression, that no adequate report of its contents can be given in words. It follows from this that its quality must be directly experienced; it cannot be imparted or transferred to others. In this peculiarity mystical states are more like states of feeling than like states of intellect. (414)

Stephen Katz criticizes James's description of ineffability in his book *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*. He directly attacks James's position on ineffability when he writes:

While an accurate description of 'ineffability' James's definition is not the basis on which one can compare experiences, nor the basis on which one can conclude that different experiences have a common 'object' or reality. Though two or more experiences are said to be 'ineffable', the term 'ineffable' can logically fit many disjunctive and incomparable experiences. That is to say, an atheist can feel a sense of dread at the absurdity of the cosmos which he labels ineffable, while the theist can experience God in a way that he also insists is ineffable. (Katz, 48)

Though Katz has a valid point, it seems he is criticizing the flexibility of language and not James's mystical quality of ineffability. If anything, this passage seems to be an argument validating ineffability claims. Since anyone, atheist and theist alike, can apply the term ineffability to anything they choose to apply it to, there does not seem to be a consistent *Webster's Dictionary* definition that is appropriate. However, if this line of reasoning is carried out to its extreme then we must admit that all descriptives are dependent upon the describer's subjective choices. It is like arguing with a color-blind person about the color of her socks. Katz's rabbit hole does not seem to lead anywhere other than back to ineffability. This illustrates the paradoxicality of the term.

A deeper concern that Katz brings up in his essay on *Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism* is that the terms ineffability and paradoxicality really tell us nothing about the experience:

These two features are standard elements in all phenomenological descriptions of mystical experience and are taken to be grounds for their comparability; but do they actually support his position? Do these elements logically allow for the inquiry into the possible identity of mystical experiences and their attempted comparability, especially their claimed equivalence or similarity? What leads me to ask these questions is the following argument: the terms ‘paradox’ and ‘ineffable’ do not function as terms that inform us about the context of experience, or any given ontological ‘state of affairs’. Rather they function to cloak experience from investigation and to hold mysterious whatever ontological commitments one has. As a consequence, the use of the terms ‘paradox’ and ‘ineffable’ do not provide *data* for comparability, rather they eliminate the logical possibility of the comparability of experience altogether. (54)

I understand and empathize with Katz’s position. This concern plagued me through the development of this paper. However, I slowly began to realize that what I wanted to write about ineffability was not what it *was* but what it *was not*. It is comparable to how astronomers search for black holes: you cannot directly look for a black hole, but you have to discover the presence of an absence. The astronomer can observe planets, stars, or galaxies reacting to a strong gravitational force; yet where a massive star should be there is *nothing*. Ineffability is the description of an absence. What I am trying to do is not to compare experiences, but to point at facets of our lives like heavenly bodies caught in the immense gravity of an unseen source. Keeping Katz’s criticisms in mind, we now turn back to James’s description of mysticism.

To further flesh out James’s position on mysticism, we need to investigate what he means by “noetic quality.” James is not as clear in his description of the noetic quality of the mystical experience.

...They are states of insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect. They are illuminations, revelations, full of significance and importance, all inarticulate though they remain; and

as a rule they carry with them a curious sense of authority for after-time. (415)

It seems that James is trying to suggest that this mode of knowledge is a state of awareness, an intimate knowledge *of* the object of the experience. I do not say this to differentiate between the subject having the experience and the object of that experience, because this line is often blurry when examining mystical experience. In this brief definition of noetic quality, it appears that James is trying to illustrate the staying power of this *noesis* with “a curious sense of authority.” Therefore, this is not simply a state of awareness, but it also stands out in the mystic’s mind upon reflection and remains with the mystic after the experience has ended.

Defining mysticism works in the short-run, within the confines of a book. The language within a text may have its own internal logic, but how does mysticism once defined work outside of the enclosed world of a book? Definitions such as James’s are not sufficient to produce any consistent meaning. Time after time writers have argued that mysticism is not *that* but *this*. In *Mysticism and Philosophy*, W. T. Stace remarks on this odd term:

The very word “mysticism” is an unfortunate one. It suggests mist, and therefore foggy, confused, or vague thinking. It also suggests mystery and miracle mongering, and therefore hocus-pocus. It is also associated with religion, against which many academic philosophers are prejudiced. And some of these latter persons might be surprised to learn that, although many mystics have been theists, and others pantheists, there have also been mystics who were atheists. It would be better if we could use the words “enlightenment” or “illumination,” which are commonly used in India for the same phenomenon. But it seems that for historical reasons we in the West must settle for “mysticism.” All that we can do is to try gradually to overcome the prejudices which it tends to arouse. (15)

What Stace points out in this passage is that even if you try to redefine the term mysticism it still carries with it a negative connotation, a mystique that, more often than not, produces skepticism and disdain in its audience. This is quite unfortunate because the term “mysticism” already suffers enough under the yoke of mystery without bringing our misconceptions to it. Underhill also touches on this prejudice.

However, she associates it with the language choices of mystical writers:

The hard separation which some mystical writers insist upon making between “natural” and “supernatural” contemplation, has been on the whole productive of confusion rather than clearness: for the word “supernatural” has many unfortunate associations for the mind of the plain man. It at once suggests to him visions and ecstasies, superstitious beliefs, ghosts, and other disagreeable interferences with the order which he calls “natural”; and inclines him to his old attitude of suspicion in respect of all mystical things. (151)

It seems that I can now throw the word “supernatural” in with ineffable, metaphysical, and the others.

Mysticism is not simply limited to the realm of religious discourse.

Furthermore, it often is not filled with illumination and romantic idealization such as is found in Evelyn Underhill’s *Practical Mysticism*. It is often dark and foreboding.

Often that which is ineffable is nefarious, an incommunicable horror, rather than an unspeakable delight. James describes this odd dichotomy:

...Religious mysticism is only one half of mysticism. The other half has no accumulated traditions except those which the text-books on insanity supply. Open any one of these, and you will find abundant cases in which “mystical ideas” are cited as characteristic symptoms of enfeebled or deluded states of mind. In delusional insanity, paranoia, as they sometimes call it, we may have a *diabolical* mysticism, a sort of religious mysticism turned upside down. The same sense of ineffable importance in the smallest events, the same texts and words coming with new meanings, the same voices and visions and leadings

and missions, the same controlling by extraneous powers; only this time the emotion is pessimistic: instead of consolations we have desolations; the meanings are dreadful; and the powers are enemies of life. It is evident that from the point of view of their psychological mechanism, the classic mysticism and these lower mysticisms spring from the same mental level, from the great subliminal or transmarginal region of which science is beginning to admit the existence, but of which so little is really known...what comes must be sifted and tested, and run the gauntlet of confrontation with the total context of experience, just like what comes from the outer world of sense. Its value must be ascertained by empirical methods, so long as we are not mystics ourselves. (464)

From my limited readings on the topic of mysticism I have made some elementary observations that have helped me conceptualize this elusive term. First and foremost, mysticism is *experiential*. This is quite obvious to anyone who has read any of the plenitude of mystic texts and mystic commentaries. The reason I even mention it is because it has definite epistemological import as it echoes Underhill's "real knowledge" and my knowledge *of*. If, as James asserts, ineffability is an essential property of the mystical experience, then how is this property discovered? This presents a paradox because the property of ineffability cannot be observed by a third party without the mystic herself *telling* them. This is interesting because the *telling* of an experience is a conversion process; the mystic is trying to convert her knowledge *of* to another's knowledge *about*. This is as impossible as trying to make a waterfall *fall* up; It is a one-way process. For those mesmerized by the physical world there is also a neurological correlate: when our sensory receptors communicate a feeling, a sight, a sound, a smell, or a taste, it must first be *transduced* into an electrical signal that our neurons can understand. The key point to note is that when light enters our eyes and stimulates our receptors, and these receptors transduce this light into an

electrical signal, this pathway is irreversible, just as the waterfall must inevitably *fall* and not rise. If we could convert the electrical signals in our brains and neurons into the varied stimuli that they represent, into colors of light, into flavors, into scents, into textures, or into music, then we would be living much different lives: kissing would be much more interesting, communication would be much more perfect, we would each be our own symphony, and knowledge *of* would not be so stubbornly locked away in the cold cell of our mind. We do not have any of these luxuries to aid in communication. We most often rely on language and we occasionally give precedent to other modes of communication: we might hear a friend telling us she is doing great, but we might see something else in her face, in the way she hesitated to smile; we might be near a mourning friend and the only solace we offer is our fingers enclosing their trembling hand, or a deep embrace that says all that you have to say.

We understand ineffability in those moments, but when the mystic describes an experience of awe, peace, or horror that she does not have the words to describe, we often respond as if she were part of James's second kind of mystic, the insane. The scientist scoffs at the reality of these experiences. Whatever these experiences may be, if they refer to the world that we all live in, the physical universe that we inhabit, they are simply the products of a flawed mechanism, an inaccurately perceived world. If you are skeptical of how science perceives the mystic just take a look at the history of psychology and the treatment of the "mad." Even though science itself makes no qualitative claims, it seems that those who practice science are infected by a malicious subjectivity that pollutes the purity of scientific observation.

My tongue is placed firmly in my cheek as I say this because I have seen science exalted as some absolute principle of reason while the scientist who makes the smallest moral or qualitative judgment is disregarded as being unscientific, as being bewildered by her own ego. This discourse is void of logic. Scientists, in the very least, think that knowing about the world is *better* than not knowing about it. Is this not a qualitative judgment? Why would you choose one topic to study over another unless you thought one would be more fruitful, would further some positive end that you yourself have the audacity to think is *good*? Just as some scientists value space exploration over research in renewable resources, so too do these same scientific-minded individuals value certain modes of consciousness, certain ways of seeing, over others.

The scientist's mode of consciousness is concerned with knowledge *about* the universe. And, not just any knowledge *about*, but a particular knowledge *about*. Take geocentricity for instance: no one is taken seriously by the scientific community who thinks that the Earth is the center of our solar system, despite the amazing fact that Ptolemy's geocentric model of our solar system actually works! I am not arguing for a geocentric solar system, but I am trying to illustrate the exclusivity with which science has infected the mind of modern man. You, yes, you who are reading this very sentence, more than likely are thinking that the reason geocentricity is not taken seriously is because geocentricity is simply *wrong*. Yet you, who have never been to space, have never accurately mapped the flight path of a satellite past the planets, and

know very little about astrophysics, agree with the majority that we do indeed live in a solar system with the sun at its center.

The reason we believe the claims of science, such as heliocentricity, is because the experiments are repeatable. We may not know the mathematical proofs that illustrate the mechanics of our solar system, but we could find out if we wanted to learn. That is why science and scientific thinking are as popular as they are—it is accessible to all of us. Quantum theory may be outside our grasp, but we could certainly test Newton's laws of motion if we wanted to.

We are skeptical of the mystic because she hints at an uncommon world, a place we are not familiar with. We assume there are psychological explanations for what she experiences; and I agree, there are psychological explanations. However, those explanations are by no means final or exhaustive. Psychological explanations, or even physiological explanations, do not explain away these differential phenomena. *Every* experience has psychological or physiological explanations, yet we do not use these explanations to explain away the taste of ice cream as being only in our minds.

Another reason we discredit the mystic is because we do not think that we could replicate the mystic experience ourselves. Because we doubt the legitimacy of the mystic's claim we no more consider achieving the experience ourselves than we try to discover Zeus's home on Mt. Olympus. If we can entertain the notion that the mystic is not delusional then we open the door to the possibility that mystic experiences might be authentic, and, even further, perhaps repeatable. Just as we can

occasion the taste of an orange by eating an orange, perhaps we could occasion a mystical experience by meditation, by fasting, or by the use of psychotropic drugs.

The repeatability mysticism is one of the central topics of Evelyn Underhill's *Practical Mysticism*. In it she addresses the argument of the "practical man" when presented with the possibility of accessing the mystical realm:

Here the practical man will naturally say: And pray how am I going to do this? How shall I detach myself from the artificial world to which I am accustomed? Where is the brake that shall stop the wheel of my image-making mind? I answer: You are going to do it by an educative process; a drill, of which the first stages will, indeed, be hard enough. You have already acknowledged the need of such a mental drill, such deliberate selective acts, in respect to the smaller matters of life. You willingly spend time and money over that narrowing and sharpening of attention which you call a "business training," a "legal education," the "acquirement of a scientific method." But this new undertaking will involve the development and the training of a layer of your consciousness which has lain fallow in the past; the acquirement of a method you have never used before. It is reasonable, even reassuring, that hard work and discipline should be needed for this: that it should demand of you, if not the renunciation of the cloister, at least the virtues of the golf course. (51)

What Underhill seeks to accomplish with her book is to enlighten the "practical man" to the rich world that he exists within. What she proposes with her book is not to see new things but to *be*, to live in "union with Reality":

As the bodily senses have been produced under pressure of man's physical environment, and their true aim is not the enhancement of his pleasure or his knowledge, but a perfecting of his adjustment to those aspects of the natural world which concern him—so the use and meaning of the spiritual senses are strictly practical too. These, when developed by a suitable training, reveal to man a certain measure of Reality: not in order that he may gaze upon it, but in order that he may react to it, learn to live in, with, and for it; growing and stretching into more perfect harmony with the Eternal Order, until at last, like the blessed ones of Dante's vision, the clearness of his flame responds to the unspeakable radiance of the Enkindling Light. (Underhill, 190)

This is but one path in developing an awareness of the ineffable reality that awaits behind the veil of that which we call ordinary.

Stace also comments on the repeatability of mystic experiences:

The mystic claims that all normal men are possible witnesses of his mystical reality. We should believe in the existence of a newly discovered mountain in the Antarctic even though only one competent and reliable explorer had seen it. This is because we think there is good reason to believe that all normal men could observe it if they took the proper steps. Not all men perceive the mountains at the South Pole or the hidden jungles of the Mato Grosso, but all men could perceive them if they would carry out certain instructions which might in most cases and for most of us be so unendurably rigorous and time-consuming as to be practically impossible. In like manner it may be held that any normal man could verify the experience of the mystic if he would begin by leading a pure and saintly life, if he would detach himself completely from all worldly desires, and if he would subject himself to a long and rigorous course of physical and mental disciplines such as the yogis of India undergo, or to a life of "orisons" and contemplative exercises, preferably in a monastery, such as those which St. Teresa or St. Ignatius of Loyola have written about. There is reason to believe that this claim of the mystics to the universal *possibility* of mystical experience is correct. And this means that mystical experience is potentially just as "public" as sense experience, since to say that an experience is public only means that a large number of private experiences are similar, or would be similar if the appropriate steps were taken. As has already been observed, all experiences are in themselves equally private, and the public world is a construction out of private experiences. (138)

The fact that objective reality is "a construction out of private experiences" is immensely important in understanding the validity of the mystic experience. If the patients inside a mental hospital begin to outnumber the people outside, then who is insane? Who is normal? Just as we believe, or in the least give the benefit of the doubt to, the explorer in Antarctica on discovering a mountain, so too should we credit the mystic with having an experience that we also might have.

There are many other paths that are proposed by others. I am not going into the myriad of mystic traditions because this paper has no use for them. I do not seek to be a proponent of a particular mystical pathway to incorporate ineffability into our thought systems. The point is that there *are* possibilities; there are standards for repeatability. While these standards may not be as straightforward as the scientific methods we use to repeat a chemistry experiment, they should not be ignored simply because they would require thought, effort, or a suspension of disbelief.

If the thought of work dissuades you from seeking the awareness of the mystic, then perhaps you should look to Aldous Huxley's *The Doors of Perception*. In this text Huxley recounts an experience he had while under the influence of the drug mescaline, which is a synthesized ingredient found in *peyote*. *Peyote* is extracted from a cactus plant and is used in some Native American religious rituals to occasion mystical experiences. Yet, even Huxley acknowledges the limitations of such an experience:

I am not so foolish as to equate what happens under the influence of mescaline or of any other drug, prepared or in the future preparable, with the realization of the end and ultimate purpose of human life: Enlightenment, the Beatific Vision. All I am suggesting is that the mescaline experience is what Catholic theologians call "a gratuitous grace," not necessary to salvation but potentially helpful and to be accepted thankfully, if made available. To be shaken out of the rust of ordinary perception, to be shown for a few timeless hours the outer and the inner world, not as they appear to an animal obsessed with survival or to a human being obsessed with words and notions, but as they are apprehended, directly and unconditionally, by Mind at Large—this is an experience of inestimable value to everyone and especially to the intellectual. (73)

And, I am not so foolish as to take mescaline simply because Aldous Huxley says it is a good trip, but he has a point. In our “Just Say No” society, propositions such as Huxley’s are not taken seriously. Even I joked about legitimacy of his claim by using the phrase “good trip.” This is yet another eye-opening example of how the metaphysical realm is dismissed by our society. Drugs like LSD or mescaline are not only illegal to most Americans, but most of you probably would not take LSD for fear of “permanent damage.” Even in light of the fact that Dr. Ralph Hood, Jr. just finished doing a study at Johns Hopkins University in which he gave participants doses of LSD, we are still skeptical of the safety of such psychotropic drugs. I am making an assumption, but an informed assumption, that Johns Hopkins, a nationally renowned center for research, would not allow such a study to be conducted if there was any significant probability of harm.

We live in a culture that fears those who see the world differently. We have mental institutions for those people so we can lock them up out of sight. What do they do in those institutions? They give them drugs in order to help them see the world the *normal* way, the way *we* see the world. We easily bracket out people like this: the insane person, the mystic, the taker of mescaline. We say they are “seeing things,” but we forget that we are *seeing things* as well; there just happen to be more people who agree with us.

Perhaps mysticism should not be written off so quickly. We should at least give mystical frameworks the benefit of the doubt. If we put forth some thought and effort into becoming mystics ourselves, then we might find out that there truly is a

metaphysical realm, and if we acknowledge that aspect of ourselves and our world, we would then have a more complete understanding of our universe and the place we hold within it.

One must have musical ears to know the value of a symphony; one must have been in love one's self to understand a lover's state of mind. Lacking the heart or ear, we cannot interpret the musician or the lover justly, and are even likely to consider him weak-minded or absurd. (414)

-William James

"The question is," said Alice, "whether you *can* make words mean different things."
(Carroll, 238)

-Alice, *Through the Looking-Glass*

Ineffability, Poetry, and Music

I want to apologize for this section's misleading section heading. I am not referring to music here as we commonly use it, with modifiers such as classical, rock and roll, or jazz. In this section I will be talking about the music of language. I allowed you to be misled because I still want you to keep music *proper* in mind as you read this section. Poetry and music are intimately joined. If you do not believe me, just listen to some of the greatest singing poets of the 20th century: Bob Dylan, Jim Morrison, Paul Simon, etc. With this section I want to focus on the fact that language often tries to say more than the words themselves say, and this is what I mean by poetry and music.

I am taking a poetry class this semester and I recently received an e-mail on the class listserv asking the question: "Is poetry important and why?" My first reaction was *of course it is!* But, then I realized that the fact that this question even came up is indicative that the answer is not as obvious to everyone as it is to me.

Think about it for a moment; what part does poetry play in our lives? Living in America we do not have statues of poets in our nation's capital, as do other countries such as Slovenia. We have great generals, war heroes, and war memorials galore, but few poets with few lines of poetry written in iron or stone. We, as a

nation, put more emphasis on war and political power than on poetry, music, or art. I do not want to go too deeply into a political discussion, but simply consider the inordinate allocation of resources to the military as opposed to the pocket change that is cast into the hats of those begging for money for the arts or education. It would seem that poetry is not important in America. But, it is.

Poetry is important wherever language is present. Did Shakespeare write in iambic pentameter by accident? Are line after line of blank verse, unrhymed iambic pentameter, pleasing to our ear simply because it sounds pretty? There are language patterns already present that determine the musical quality that poetic meter will have. The job of the poet is to tap into this vein and enter into this elegant tapestry of language with eyes wide and mouth agape. Poetry is not something that man creates but it is something that creates man. A poet does not invent something new; a poet listens to what is already there and reacts.

If you have ever read Lewis Carroll's *Jabberwocky* you have seen how words hint at something more than what they say. The majority of words that Carroll uses in his poem are made-up words, and yet they somehow sound right when we hear them. Alice herself comments on this condition in *Through the Looking-Glass*: "Somehow it seems to fill my head with ideas—only I don't exactly know what they are!" (Carroll, 183). We understand what he is saying in a very real way without knowing what the words themselves mean. This poem illustrates that through language you can have an intimate knowledge *of* what is meant without having knowledge *about* the words that are used to occasion this knowledge. When anyone

tries to explain the words in this poem they are often reduced to making odd hand gestures or sound effects.

The point I am trying to make is that we are not taught how to understand a poem like *Jabberwocky*; it is something that is, in a sense, already inside us. According to the Huxley quote that opened this paper, language may shut many doors, but it can also open many others. Furthermore, this access that poetry provides should not be labeled as *art* or simply *expression* and put aside while we take on the more practical issues of the world. Whether we choose to acknowledge it or not, poetry is an essential component of our lives, of the languages we speak. The heart of poetry is a sublime ineffability such that when we look into ourselves we see an immense emerald city of language surrounding us. If only we could look behind the curtain and see ourselves, in all our frailty that we might realize the control we think we have is simply an illusion. The only hope we have of getting beyond language to the ineffable, that which it can never say, is to acknowledge the power that language has over us, and close our eyes and wish for a way out. When I said in the first section of this paper “all writing is elegiac,” this is exactly what I meant.

It is that our normal waking consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it, is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different. We may go through life without suspecting their existence; but apply the requisite stimulus, and at a touch they are there in all their completeness, definite types of mentality which probably somewhere have their field of application and adaptation. No account of the universe in its totality can be final which leaves these other forms of consciousness quite disregarded. (422)

-William James

Validating Ineffability

At the core of the anti-religious, anti-mysticism movement in academia is the issue of ineffability. With the rise of materialism and science the religion-minded individual has encountered far more resistance socially and, because of socialization, self-reflexively. Writing near the beginning of the 20th century, James was much closer chronologically to this ideological shift from religious thought than we, his readers, are today:

Such inaptitude for religious faith may in some cases be intellectual in its origin. Their religious faculties may be checked in their natural tendency to expand, by beliefs about the world that are inhibitive, the pessimistic and materialistic beliefs, for example, within which so many good souls, who in former times would have freely indulged their religious propensities, find themselves nowadays, as it were, frozen; or the agnostic vetoes upon faith as something weak and shameful, under which so many of us today lie cowering, afraid to use our instincts. (226)

Of course, no one in academia thinks it is *wrong* to be religious, just don't bring it up in respectable intellectual discourse. Religious frameworks are more often than not founded on principles that are qualitative and have little to offer to scientific inquiry. A vivid example of this cleavage between science and religion is the Catholic practice of communion and transubstantiation. Scientists proved *scientifically* that the wine never turns to blood and that the wafer never becomes flesh, but Catholics simply

redefined transubstantiation, carefully avoiding the *symbolic* communion of many protestant traditions. This is absurd to the scientist because she has *proven* that transubstantiation does not affect the molecular structure of the wine or the wafer. The major cleavage of the 20th century was the creationist-versus-evolutionist debate. The primary discrepancy can be reduced to estimating the age of the Earth. Creationists say that the Earth is approximately 6,000 years old, whereas, evolutionists believe the Earth to be millions and even billions of years old. Creationists have faith in holy scriptures, and evolutionists have faith in carbon-dating and other methods of geological time-dating. Even though there is a movement toward *scientific* creationism, most *serious* scientists are viscerally opposed to this as being foolish. I have heard laughter at the very mention of the phrase “scientific creationism” in some of my classes. Nobody laughs at the mention of the Jurassic period.

Before entering college, I heard horror stories from some of my conservative Christian friends: “The professor walked into class and the first thing he did was ask how many Atheists and Christians were in the class,” they said with terror in their eyes, ”He wrote those numbers on the board next to each other and then he pointed to the number of Christians and said ‘My goal is to make this number smaller and this number larger’ as he pointed to the number of atheists.” I found this scenario quite laughable, but many people I knew were genuinely frightened. After attending a university for almost four years now, I have realized that even though there is no overtly stated anti-religion agenda that there is a sub-stratum of scorn toward all that

is religious or, in some cases, even all things metaphysical. I could not enumerate the number of grumbles and mumbles I have heard anytime god or religion is mentioned in a class. Sometimes this even comes from the professors.

It seems that there is an unspoken consensus amongst many people attending this university and many of its faculty that religion and metaphysics are contemptible frameworks of thought. I almost wish that a professor would actually make the outrageous statement that all my conservative friends feared. At least then it would seem that the professor thought religious frameworks were formidable enough to challenge head on and not something to scoff at as foolish.

However, the professors are not the problem and neither are the students. There is a deep-seeded societal trend that seems to be centered in the intelligentsia. The more an individual learns the latest “how’s” of science, the more it seems that she feels that she has liberated herself from foolish faith-based frameworks. A vivid example of this is the creationist-versus-evolutionist debate as mentioned above. Evolutionists cannot seem to understand why anyone would believe in a system when we have *proof* that that system is based on false pretenses.

I do not want this to sound like a reactionary, anti-science attack. I believe that science and the scientific method can teach us much about the world we live in. However, science itself cannot and should not be the sole mechanism of explaining the world around us. In the previous section of this paper I discussed the realm of art, music, and poetry. These varied expressions of humanity should not be bracketed off as simply being modes of *expressing* ourselves. They are also modes of

investigation; they are intrinsically bound up with the way that we view our world, and part of the differential qualities that aid us in mediating experience; they tell us something about ourselves, wherever and whatever our *selves* may be. What I am trying to illuminate is that those people who scoff at mysticism, metaphysics, religion, or ineffability are scoffing at their own minds, at their own ineffable thoughts, and they are truly depriving themselves of a much richer, fuller life. To finish the quote that I began in the first section, *Ineffability and Language*, James writes:

Knowledge about a thing is not the things itself. You remember what Al-Ghazzali told us in a Lecture on Mysticism—that to understand the causes of drunkenness, as a physician understands them, is not to be drunk. A science might come to understand everything about the causes and elements of religion, and might even decide which elements were qualified, by their general harmony with other branches of knowledge, to be considered true; and yet the best man at this science might be the man who found it hardest to be personally devout. *Tout savoir c'est tout pardonner*. The name of Renan would doubtless occur to many personas as an example of the way in which breadth of knowledge may make one only a dilettante in possibilities, and blunt the acuteness of one's living faith. If religion be a function by which either God's cause or man's cause is to be really advanced, then he who lives the life of it, however narrowly, is a better servant than he who merely knows about it, however much. Knowledge about life is one thing; effective occupation of a place in life, with its dynamic currents passing through your being, is another. (532)

There may be a deeper problem at the educational level. If I may use my experiences as a sort of litmus test paper, an indicator of the propensities in the academic world, then it seems that there may be something missing from the educational process. Dr. Ralph Hood Jr., a psychology professor at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, said that he used to illustrate how hypnosis worked by

hypnotizing his entire class and giving them hypnotic suggestions such as wetting the bed that night. He told them afterwards that many of them would be wetting the bed that night. And oddly enough, many of them did. Dr. Hood's classes now seem quite plain in comparison to the stories he tells of years past. This change was probably due to a strengthening of the ethical standards of universities, especially state universities. I find myself agreeing with the necessity of these ethical standards, but also lamenting the loss of such valuable experiential methods of education. He has been reduced to reading texts and recounting the experiential methods of past years. Textual analysis is invaluable, but it should not be relied on to produce *educated* individuals, whatever *educated* means anymore. In *The Doors of Perception* Huxley writes:

Literary or scientific, liberal or specialist, all our education is predominantly verbal and therefore fails to accomplish what it is supposed to do. Instead of transforming children into fully developed adults, it turns out students of the natural sciences who are completely unaware of Nature as the primary fact of experience, it inflicts upon the world students of the humanities who know nothing of humanity, their own or anyone else's...In a world where education is predominantly verbal, highly educated people find it all but impossible to pay serious attention to anything but words and notions. There is always money for, there are always doctorates in, the learn foolery of research into what, for scholars, is the all-important problem: Who influenced whom to say what when? Even in this age of technology the verbal humanities are honored. The non-verbal humanities, the arts of being directly aware of the given facts of our existence, are almost completely ignored. A catalogue, a bibliography, a definitive edition of a third rate versifier's *ipsissima verba*, a stupendous index to end all indexes—any genuinely Alexandrian project is sure of approval and financial support. But when it comes to finding out how you and I, our children and grandchildren, may become more perceptive, more intensely aware of inward and outward reality, more open to the Spirit, less apt, by psychological malpractices, to make ourselves physically ill, and more capable of controlling our own

autonomic nervous system...no really respectable person in any really respectable university or church will do anything about it. Verbalists are suspicious of the non-verbal; rationalists fear the given, non-rational fact; intellectuals feel that "what we perceive by the eye (or in any other way) is foreign to us as such and need not impress us deeply." Besides, this matter of education in the non-verbal humanities will not fit into any of the established pigeonholes. It is not religion, not neurology, no gymnastics, not morality or civics, not even experimental psychology. This being so the subject is, for academic and ecclesiastical purposes, non-existent and may safely be ignored altogether or left, with a patronizing smile, to those whom the Pharisees of verbal orthodoxy call cranks, quacks, charlatans and unqualified amateurs. (75)

Experience still has a place in academia, but it has taken on an *objective* slant. In Biology, Chemistry, and even Psychology experiments and tests are still performed. However, in order to be valid they must be sanitized of subjectivity, and, in the case of psychology, the researchers must hold their participants at arms length. This is all entirely appropriate because the people conducting these experiments and research projects are trying to make scientific claims. The unfortunate result of this is the fact that many see this as the end of the intellectual investigation: scientific investigation leads to further scientific investigation and as iron sharpens iron, science will cull out invalid theories and will become more correct in the mode of limiting and eliminating inaccuracies.

In light of these facts, what should we do? There are no administration changes that I propose. An impersonal bureaucracy cannot effectively address the issues presented in this paper. Even organized religious groups have problems addressing these issues. The answer does not lie in the power structures that surround us and dictate our actions. The only manner that these inadequacies can ever be

addressed is through the simple, immediate presence of our individual experiences. The manner in which we see the world we inhabit reflects, in a sense, the way in which we see ourselves. If we choose to see the world in *objective*, impersonal terms, then we diminish the value of the subjective immediacy of life that is not a hindrance to us, but perhaps it is our only salvation.

Epilogue

Synthesis in general...is the mere result of the power of imagination, a blind but indispensable function of the soul, without which we should have no knowledge whatsoever, but of which we are scarcely ever conscious. (Kant 112)

-Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*

For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known.

-1 Corinthians 13:12 NAS

Dream delivers us to dream, and there is no end to illusion. Life is a train of moods like a string of beads, and as we pass through them they prove to be many-colored lenses which paint the world their own hue, and each shows only what lies in its focus. From the mountain you see the mountain. We animate what we can, and we see only what we animate. Nature and books belong to the eyes that see them. It depends on the mood of the man whether he shall see the sunset or the fine poem. There are always sunsets, and there is always genius; but only a few hours so serene that we can relish nature or criticism. The more or less depends on structure or temperament. (309)

Of what use is genius, if the organ is too convex or too concave and cannot find a focal distance within the actual horizon of human life? (310)

-Ralph Waldo Emerson

This final section of my paper is the first thing I wrote down after reading the majority of the texts I used in this paper. I wrote it over a period of about five hours. In those moments I had a surreal clarity of vision and the writing felt effortless. I do not think that it is by any means an amazing work of prose. However, I think it is useful to understand how my ideas were formed going into this project. In a way this is a creative representation of what I tried to accomplish through the acceptable avenues of research and scholarship. I do not necessarily think one approach is superior to the other. However, one approach will allow me to achieve honors in Philosophy and Religion whereas the other would not. I am a practically-minded individual, but I also try to have it both ways. This is what I wrote:

A Brief History of the Word

Prior to the Word there was a chaotic plenum. With the Word came order: the formless was given form, the limitless given limits. Though the word defined all, gave meaning to all, between each particular thing arose a new word, one derived from relation. Among humankind this differentiation began as a relationship between the self and the other, between the esoteric world and the exoteric world. The first word was that which defined the other, which inversely gave meaning to the self with the same swipe of the blade. When the self became acknowledged it was internalized as the “I” of thought. By observing the behavior of an infant as she grows up we can see how the development of mankind is mirrored by the development of the individual.

No sooner does “I” become the object of thought then we are irreversibly infected with words, with language. If the multiplicity of words is language then language can say nothing of what the Word is, only that which is within the Word, a realm of associations that undulate like great dunes of sand. If language is sand, then the Word is a pane of translucent glass, through which we may see that which words could never be, but are undoubtedly within it. Therefore, “I” is the single grain which is the harbinger of the sandstorm through which nothing may be seen. We might imagine what through the storm we see a mountain, but upon reaching the foothills we see that which was once a mountain. Now it is irrevocably changed into an entirely other thing by the wind and sand which blasts its face. We

may seek mountains, but we shall never find one for the storm surrounds us and follows us close by.

To this point I have said nothing of Plato, Spinoza, Nietzsche, Hume, Girard, Chomsky, or all the others. Why seek guidance from them? They are merely part of the storm. See how each grain bears their names? We were born into the storm. We need heat, we need fire, we need a furnace within ourselves to refine the vicious circle of associations into the purity of glass. This furnace can be localized in the imagination. We imagine what the world looks like beyond the storm, we make precious glass, and we begin to wear these glasses. Though they are less than perfect, perhaps cloudy, uneven, or tinted, they still protect our eyes from the stinging sand.

What we then may see, though still through the storm, is a greater landscape surrounding us in all directions, a world within which limits cease being limitations. This is a world that occasions even greater feats of imagination, of re-creation. The only hope we have of seeing the Word is to re-create it from within itself, to ourselves be re-created through it. Where once we were sand we may then become glass. The clarity with which we see within will mirror the unmediated splendor of that which is perceived without, for there will be no differentiation between the two. There will be no "I" or "you" only an indivisible "We" that recognizes no persons but acknowledges all people, a great Anti-Solipsism. "I" shall no longer imprison us in its perpetual misnomer.

If we are re-created by the Word our second chance cannot, will not, follow the paths we have already traveled. Once you begin to see, your sight is *de facto* an

inalienable quality of your perceptions. Even in your sleep you will see things. You shall see glorious visions and they will forever be a part of how you see. The future can not negate the past, only fulfill it. There is progress to be made, there is a path to take, and you truly have no choice in the matter. Learn to read and words will always be read. Symbols will always be interpreted. There is not hope in unlearning language, but there is hope in refining it, in superseding it with something far beyond the grasp of our imaginations.

Imagination is not madness. Even if in the arbitrariness of hallucination, alienation finds the first access to its vain liberty, madness begins only beyond the point, when the mind binds itself to this arbitrariness and becomes a prisoner of this apparent liberty. At the moment he wakes from a dream, a man can indeed observe: "I am imagining that I am dead": he thereby denounces and measures the arbitrariness of the imagination—he is not mad. He is mad when he posits as an affirmation of his death—when he suggests as having some value as truth—the still-neutral content of the image "I am dead." And just as the consciousness of truth is not carried away by the mere presence of the image, but in the act which limits, confronts, unifies, or dissociates the image, so madness will begin only in the act which gives the value of truth to the image. There is an original innocence of the imagination: "The imagination itself does not err, since it neither denies nor affirms but is fixed to so great a degree on the simple contemplation of an image"; and only the mind can turn what is given in the image into abusive truth, in other words, into error, or acknowledged error, that is, into truth...Madness is thus beyond imagination, and yet it is profoundly rooted in it; for it consists merely in allowing the image a spontaneous value, total and absolute truth.

-Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*

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