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See Mysticism - Adjunct: Comparative Mysticism

Comparative Mysticism distinguishes mysticism and mystics post C1900 the beginning of modern global society. Equally can be distinguished as post 'new thought' (Jones 2005) from approximately the same period. Comparative Mysticism decentralises the notion of isolated disciplines both in the academic realm, where the study is made, as well as in the social realm where knowledge and practices are shared though teacher/learner exchange. Exemplified by but not limited to: Arthur SCHOPENHAUER (1788-1860) Evelyn UNDERHILL (1875-1941), Alan WATTS (1915-1973), Rev J KENNET (1924-1996), Mother MEERA (b1960). All of whom are popular as well as rigorous comparative thinkers in their own right. Mysticism, then, is acknowledged as a cross-cultural expression of 'Mysticism' which is benefited by /or/ is limited by popular culture and mass media (pictured right the Beatles with Transcendental Mystic, Maharishi Mahesh 1967)



Comparative mysticism draws on the coming together of mystic commonalities, continuities (characteristics) such as, self-awakening, theology, symbolism, meditation, yoga, pilgrimage, dietary/eating habits, and material practices that are embodied, enacted and taught socially as methods of engagement with the self and the wider world. Comparative Mysticism being not an isolated academic discipline allows a translation of commonalities. Reflecting advances in Cognitive Science, Psychology, Physiology, Philosophy, Ethnobotany, Archaeology, Anthropology and Social Sciences. 'Mysticism' inherits definitions encompassing of many academic disciplines. Comparative Mysticism maintains the primacy of a global perspective, in terms of a dispersion or diaspora of mystical traditions, philosophies, knowledges, rites and practices that serve to reproduce and coproduce within modern global society.

Two known proponents of comparison are Alan WATTS (1947) and Evelyn UNDERHILL (1911) who created a sustained study of mysticism. Both well versed in dialogues and discourses which are inclusive of multiple mystical views other than

their own, delivering by comparison, and by example, global world-views which consist of the common elements of mysticism such as but not limited to: contemplation, inner-reflection, love, meditation, bliss, awareness of mortality etc. Evelyn Underhill identifies the commonality of 'Union'. Which was questioned as a universal but none the less is very common (Ellwood, 1933). Alan WATTS wrote on the '*Necessity of Mystical Religion*' (1947) as an expression of a relationship with Reality, to maintain and commune with a sense of awe (and fear). Carl JUNG (1875 -1961) too, found religion [the relationship] a necessary aspect of the self. When asked if he believed in god he replied, "I have no need to believe I know" (Carl Jung 1959 BBC). Indicating perhaps an aspect to Reality that although is supra-sensual is none the less present.

Comparative Mysticism acknowledges self-awakening as an experiential aspect of direct knowledge, meaning that an aspect of knowledge is haptic (bodily) acquisition of experience directly as knowledge, (cf SADGURU, OSHO: 'direct knowledge') so that almost any experience could be a mystical one. The difference being in the learner. Therefore, what is the difference in learner that can account for the variance in what can be a Mystical/noetic experience? Introducing varied disciplines helps to diversify the understanding, brining energetic facts into the enquiry: physiologically, biologically or psycho-actively what is the relationship of food, of the environment, of mood, of emotional conditions, body chemistry?

Multidisciplinary approaches are widening considerably the given scope of Mysticism. Through comparison Mysticism takes on a multiplicity of meanings to wide numbers of people. The scope of Mysticism is vast and can be related but not limited to: - *All known Religions, New Age Religions, Spirituality, The Esoteric, Mystery Schools, Healing, Bliss, Shaman/Woman, Ancient Origins, Animism, Energy, Occult, Out of Body, Dreaming, Love, Alien Abductions, Witchdoctor, Druids, Sorcerer, Witch, Sage, Soothsayer, Voo-Doo, Magic/Magical, Dreamtime, Medicino, Emotional Shock, Trauma, Meditation.*

A cognitive or a psychological approach (Pyysiäinen 2003) helps to engage with Mysticism outside of overt ideology (except academic enquiry, can be argued to be an ideology), this kind of approach can be controversial and appear to be reductive,

as in, to appear to force all categories in to one which ultimately reduces the diversity of experience. However, the MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE in a comparative sense can represent a cognitive break in the continuity of self, a discontinuity, where the self can become un-differentiated from the whole (appear boundless). The self, that is held in place, through constant inner dialogue. A break in this dialogue lays open a certain aspect of Reality that is beyond words, ineffable. When such an event occurs it must be explained, and is explained in a multitude of ways and in many languages. What remains is whether or not there is a cross cultural meaningful meta-narrative that can properly account for direct knowledge and its attributes.

For Jung this is a place of archetypes which are accessible to all. The Mother, The Sage, The God, The Child, The Master. For Pyysiäinen they are equally abstract culturally shared spaces 'knowledge structures...Domain specific' (Ibid:235) and moreover not always pleasant and positively enriching. Nona COXHEAD (1967) "the experience itself is defined by those who have had it" essentially meaning that the experiencer, the verbal testimony is key. Meta-narratives can be deduced those who are rigorously comparing [comparison as experience].

Comparative Mysticism described here, is a common shared function of the relationship with the mysterious complexity of being human and so the feeling and emotion of such a function can only be experienced. Equally it can be represented through agreed abstract signifiers which can be words, sounds etc.

Mysticism lends itself to symbolism and belonging which are the abstract signifiers for comparison, some of which are very old: Artistic, linguistic, musical, dance, dress, social codes, pilgrimage, prayer, ritual and many more possible symbolic, enacted, embodied, social presences and materials. They signify a connection to an abstract narrative which may or may not be present. These social and material presences may be more than they appear on the surface; their continuity and temporal order is dictated by a relationship to an abstract concept such as 'self-awakening'. To an observer a pilgrim may 'just' be walking, a ZEN monk maybe 'just' sitting. A Zen master may give a Koan, a short parable or verse which defies an answer. A Sufi may tell a teaching fable with multiple ever unfolding, narratives (Idries SHAH 2017). A yoga teacher may simply answer questions as they arise having a deep sense of

the questioner. Wherein, there are known proponents in each tradition and within each tradition there is a lineage of master to student which may span hundreds if not thousands of years.

A pilgrimage as Mysticism, as an age-old practice, is a good example of what exists in many cultures word-wide: of striving outwardly, physically far 'just' a long journey. However, it is disruptive to daily life and daily thought and points to an inwardly journey equally far and equally disruptive, it breaks the continuity. The outward physical journey as symbolic of the inner journey, practically, specifically. Signifying time put aside for meditation, reflection, reflexive considerations, mindfulness, managing the inner dialogue, to establish a relationship with inner peace, tranquillity, inner unity, all aspects of self-awakening/transformation. Comparative mysticism draws on commonalities, continuities (characteristics) such as, self-awakening, theology, symbolism, meditation, pilgrimage, dietary/eating habits, material practices that are embodied enacted and taught socially as methods of engagement with the inner-self and equally the wider world. All of which have and continued to be comparatively studied for a little more than 100 years.

Mysticism today encompasses great plurality of, traditions, cultures, religions, symbols, languages, influences and descriptions. Traditionally placed in the field of religion but more lately placed in line with social theory and modern life.

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Image reference courtesy of: <https://tmhome.com/experiences/interview-lennon-and-harrison-on-meditation/> (Date accessed 04-11-17)

Video reference – Carl Jung – BBC Interview – *Face to Face* - 1959 (8:10 – 8:20)
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