

What, exactly, is mysticism?

Hartshorne's answer seems to me to have much to recommend it. He holds that mysticism involves two claims: (1) that there is or can be immediate experience of God or of "the eminent, supreme, or unsurpassable Reality"; and (2) that this eminent Reality is ineffable or characterizable only in paradoxical or seemingly contradictory ways ("Mysticism and Rationalistic Metaphysics": 463). He then argues—as it seems to me rightly—that the first claim is not problematic, allowing, as he does, that the eminent Reality, being ubiquitous, cannot be absent from any even conceivable experience; and that we all in fact experience more than we may be consciously aware of, "conscious awareness" meaning "awareness with introspective judgments." As for the second claim, he also seems to me to be right both in (1) allowing that any concrete reality and, *a fortiori*, the eminent Reality is and must be "ineffable" in the sense that it cannot be exhaustively characterized; and (2) insisting that there is no good reason why the abstract structure of that eminent Reality cannot be more or less adequately characterized.

My question, however, is whether much mysticism, at any rate, doesn't involve a third claim—namely, that the immediate experience of the eminent Reality that it claims to have is a properly "ecstatic" experience, i.e., an experience not only beyond abstract reason, but also beyond conscious awareness of the immediate experience of the ubiquitous eminent Reality that, as Hartshorne argues, none of us can fail to have. Whereas the fulfillment promised by Christian witness is always transcendent rather than immanent—in Luther's terms, "alien" rather than "domestic"—the fulfillment promised by this kind of mysticism is eminently immanent—namely, in the mystical experience of ecstasis, in which the self and the eminent Reality are experienced as somehow one.

In any case, Bultmann, for one, takes something like this third claim to be definitive of the "mysticism" that he reckons to be a properly religious competitor of Christian faith, in distinction from humanism-idealism, which he does not think of as properly religious at all.

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