

left with the nature of the real connection between general laws and the facts that instantiate them still unexplained, still in question.

Beyond

The important hymn from the Vedas, the Hymn of Creation, begins "Nonbeing then existed not nor being". This is the translation by Radhakrishnan and Moore.²⁷ In the Griffith translation, we find this as "Then was not nonexistent nor existent"; in the Max Muller translation, "There was then neither what is nor what is not."

How can what there was "then", that is, in the beginning or before everything else, be neither nonbeing nor being, neither nonexistent nor existent, neither is nor is not? For being and nonbeing, existent and nonexistent, is and is not, seem exhaustive. There does not seem to be any other possibility. In accordance with the law of the excluded middle, everything is either one or the other.

However, sometimes things that seem to exhaust the possibilities do not, rather they do so only within a certain realm. Consider color. Everything is either colored (singly colored or multicolored) or uncolored, that is, transparent. Either a thing is colored or it is uncolored, what other possibility is there? Yet the number 5, and Beethoven's Quartet Number 15, are neither colored nor uncolored. These are not the sort of things that can have or fail to have colors—they are not physical or spatial objects or events. (Do not confuse them with numerals or written musical scores, which can be colored.)

Let us say that this pair of terms (colored, uncolored) has a presupposition; it presupposes that the thing or subject to which the terms 'colored' or 'uncolored' are applied is a physical or spatial object or event. When the presupposition 'X is a physical or spatial object or event' is satisfied, then 'X is colored' and 'X is uncolored' exhaust the possibilities. When the presupposition is satisfied, X cannot be neither colored nor uncolored. However, when that presupposition is not satisfied, then X may be neither colored nor uncolored.²⁸

Similarly, the pair of terms (loud, not loud) presupposes that X is a sound or a possible sound source, that is, a physical object or event. The number 5 is neither loud nor not-loud. The pair of terms (harmonious, unharmonious) presupposes that a thing has parts related in a certain way. An elementary particle itself is neither harmonious nor unharmonious.

Might it be that every pair of predicates that seems to exhaust the possibilities, apparently contradictory, has a presupposition beyond which neither of the terms applies? We might picture a presuppositional situation as follows (Figure 2.2). A rectangle represents all the things there are. Encircled things are the things that satisfy the presupposition. The pair of terms t_1 and t_2 divides up everything that satisfies the presupposition; each such thing is one or the other. Outside the set of things that satisfies the presupposition are all the things that are neither, things to which neither one of these terms applies. The crosshatched area contains those things that are neither t_1 nor t_2 .

There are two ways we can try to avoid there being any presupposition. Where the rectangle is everything that exists, everything there is, we can simply draw a line across it, across all of it, letting t_1 apply to one resulting part and t_2 to the other (Figure 2.3). Nothing is left outside.

However, this assumes that 'exists' exhausts everything, that there is nothing that doesn't exist. This need not faze us; if there are things that do not exist, Santa Claus, golden mountains, and so on, let our large rectangle be all those things that do or could exist, and let our line then distinguish those things that exist from those that do not. Surely, there is no presupposition now.

This assumes, however, that the pair of terms (exists, doesn't exist) does not itself have a presupposition, that it does not apply just to a certain range of things with something outside. It assumes that we do not have the situation shown in Figure 2.4, with the crosshatched area being those things that neither exist nor don't exist.

There is another way we might try to eliminate any presupposition. Until now we have been specifying a domain by the rectangle, and drawing a distinction within it. (I now use a wavy line for the distinction.) But we had worries that there was something outside

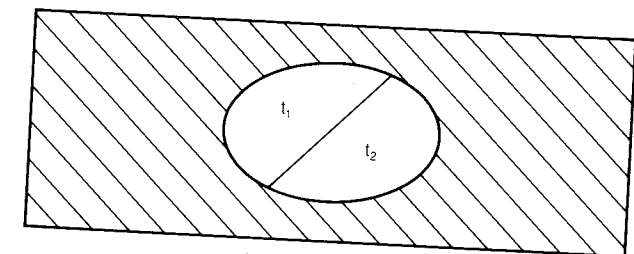


FIGURE 2.2

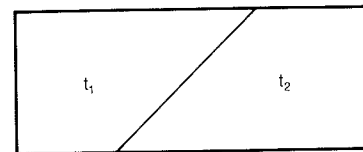


FIGURE 2.3

the domain, as in Figure 2.5. Why do we not instead just draw the distinction? In Figure 2.6 we mark t_1 off against everything else. There appears to be no further worry that there are things outside; t_1 is distinguished from whatever else there is.

However, there are reasons for thinking we encounter paradoxes and contradictions if we proceed without first specifying the domain and then drawing distinctions within it.* Also, we said "it is distinguished from whatever else there is." But why think *is* does not itself have a presupposition? We distinguish t_1 from whatever else —. If the blank itself has a presupposition, then the structure of the situation is as represented by Figure 2.7.

I suggest we understand the beginning of the Hymn of Creation, "nonbeing then existed not nor being", as saying that the pairs being and nonbeing, existent and nonexistent, and is and isn't have presuppositions, that the terms within these pairs apply and exhaust the possibilities only within a certain domain, while outside this domain a thing may be neither. Such theories are not unknown in the West: Plato says God is "beyond being" (*Republic* VI, 509b), and Plotinus makes this central to his theory of the One; Judah Halevi (*Kuzari* II, 2) holds that neither of a pair of contrasting terms applies to God; and there are other examples.

It is plausible that whatever every existent thing comes from, their source, falls outside the categories of existence and nonexistence. Moreover, we then avoid the question: why does *that* exist? It doesn't *exist*. Strictly, that which is beyond those categories neither exists nor doesn't exist. But if you had to say one, you would mention

* This is the usual moral drawn from the set-theoretical paradoxes. So set theory is done without a universal set which contains everything, or with a class which does but is ontologically different from what is within it and so not subject to the same manipulations as sets. Or, most securely, set theory is done in iterative fashion, starting with the null set and iterating operations to generate new and always limited sets.

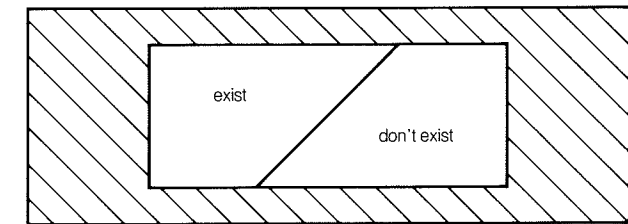


FIGURE 2.4

whichever of existence and nonexistence was closer to its status. If both were equally close or distant, if it was equidistant from both, you might say: it exists *and* it doesn't exist. We read this as: strictly speaking neither holds, and it is no more distant from one than from the other. This provides us with a possible explanation of the tendency to utter contradictions on the part of those who talk about such things.²⁹

There are at least four questions to ask about a theory that holds that the pair existence and nonexistence has a presupposition that can fail to be satisfied. First, what is the presupposition, what is the condition which all things that exist and all that nonexist satisfy, yet which need not be satisfied? Second, what reason is there to believe that something does fail to satisfy the presupposition, that there is something beyond existence and nonexistence? Third, is there a biggest box, with nothing outside it? And fourth, if there is, how can one tell one has reached it, that there is not still some hidden transcendable presupposition, outside of which is another realm that fits none of the previous categories?

This chapter is not the place to deal with all of these questions. Let me say just a few words about the first. Is the presupposition statable? Well, we can coin a short word. We can say that only those

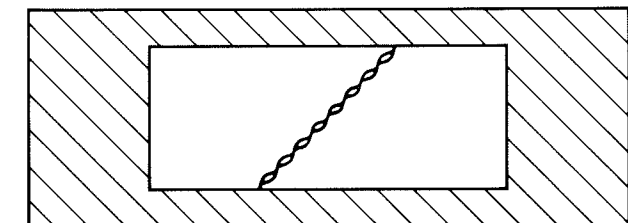


FIGURE 2.5

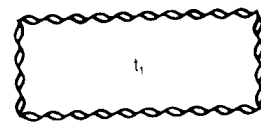


FIGURE 2.6

things which *th* exist or nonexist, that the presupposition of the pair exist and nonexist is that there be (this is a verb coming up) *thing*.* We can coin this word to denote the presupposition, but can we explain it in terms we already understand?

It seems we can only come to understand the presupposition ostensively. We can state the boundaries and understand what they are only by standing outside them. If this is so, and if experience of what is outside the boundary is necessary to get one to see what the presupposition of the boundary is and to understand what can transcend it, then such experience will be necessary to understand the position, to grasp its content. The experiences can function not only to support the position (in the next section we shall consider the intricate question of whether they do so) but also to ostensibly explain it. The ostensive route to understanding the position may be the only route we have, raising the possibility that all those who understand it realize that it is true. (Shouldn't some accounts of a priori knowledge be revised, then, to exclude this realization as a priori?)

Persons who have had such experiences struggle to describe them; they say all descriptions are inadequate, that strictly the experience is ineffable. This goes beyond saying that we cannot describe it in terms already available to us, that an ostensive encounter with it is needed to know what it is like and what any term applying to it means. Perhaps such ostensive acquaintance is needed to understand what sounds or sights are, an understanding which a blind or deaf person would lack (in the absence of direct stimulation of the brain to produce the experience). Still, those of us who do have the

* We can continue with a verb-form theory that goes beyond merely the presuppositional view. We might view "nothing" as the present continuous of the verb 'to noth', and "something" as the present continuous of the verb 'to someth'. Clearly, an x noths or someths, it is nothing or something only if it ths. What 'to noth' and 'to someth' have in common is 'to th'. (The following sentence contains three present continuous verbs, and no nouns except insofar as the quantificational structure does duty for them.) Only thing is nothing or something.

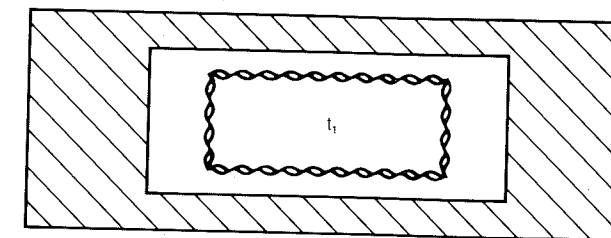


FIGURE 2.7

experience can produce a descriptive vocabulary to describe them. Sights and sounds are not ineffable. Perhaps those who call the experience of what is beyond existence and nonexistence ineffable merely mean that they cannot adequately describe it to those who have not had it. If so, their use of "ineffable" is misleading. Perhaps they mean something more, however, namely that there is a presupposition to the application of terms, that we normally live within the realm where the presupposition is satisfied and hence never consider the possibility that there is such a presupposition, and finally, that their experience has taken them beyond the realm of the presupposition to where terms, all terms, just do not apply. This raises problems of a familiar sort: what about second-level terms such as "ineffable" or "is such that first-level terms do not apply to it"? We can leave these problems aside now.

Of something that does not satisfy the presupposition of the pair exists and nonexists, and so neither exists nor nonexists, we cannot ask why it exists. But though it does not exist, it does _____. Some verb must describe its status; so let us just coin a verb, 'to aum', to fill in the blank. Auming is what that which is beyond existence and nonexistence does. It aums. Now it seems we can ask: why does it aum? Why does it aum rather than not?

If the ineffability doctrine were true and the presuppositions for the application of terms were not satisfied, then of course we could not coin a term for what it does and then ask why it does that. (But couldn't we just wonder "why?" and mentally gesture in the direction of the ineffable? Or does the term "why" fail to get a grip, along with the other terms?) To keep open the possibility of saying something further, I shall proceed on the assumption that a term can be applied so that a question can be asked. It aums, and we ask why.

Without knowing more about what is beyond existence and nonex-

istence, and about auming, it is difficult to see how to begin to discuss the question. There is one structural possibility worth mentioning, however. Various versions of the ontological argument (for the existence of God) founder on their treatment of 'exists'. By treating existence or necessary existence as a property or perfection, they allow us to consider the n^{th} most perfect being ($n = 1, 2, 3, \dots$), and so to overpopulate our universe. What the ontological argument wanted to discuss, though, was a being whose essence included existence; it is a structural possibility similar to this, rather than the deduction of existence from the concept of a thing, that I want to take up. Can the nature of whatever is beyond existence and nonexistence include auming, so that there is no possibility that *it* does not aum? We need not suppose that we are (or aren't) speaking of God here; when it says "nonbeing then existed not, nor being" the Hymn to Creation is not speaking of God. Nor am I constructing an ontological argument from the concept of what is beyond existence and nonexistence to its auming. Perhaps auming is part of its essence without being part of the concept of it. Indeed it is difficult to suppose we have presented a determinate concept of it here at all, if the only route to knowing what is beyond existence and nonexistence and about auming is through an experience of it. My intention here is merely to raise the possibility that there is no room for the question "why does it aum?"

Consider, as an analogy, the structure of all possibilities. A particular possibility is realized or is actual or exists, and another is not realized and so nonexists. What exists and nonexists are particular possibilities. The structure of all possibilities underlies existence and nonexistence. That structure itself doesn't exist and it doesn't nonexist. A presupposition for the application of this pair of terms (exists, nonexists) is not satisfied by the structure of all possibilities. Now suppose we coin a verb for the status of the structure of all possibilities, saying that it *modes*. Is it clear that there is room for the question, why does the structure of all possibilities mode? Can *it* fail to mode?

I do not claim that the structure of all possibilities is what the Hymn of Creation begins with, or is what is found in experience. I believe that the Hymn of Creation means to speak of what underlies and gives rise to the structure of possibilities. What that might be we shall pursue in a later chapter. My purpose here is to give an exam-

ple of something that does not satisfy the presupposition of the pair exists and nonexists, yet about whose status there may be no room for the question why it does that, why the structure of all possibilities modes. All this is to give one some feeling for how there might be no room for the question of why what aums does aum. Even so, there still would remain the question of how and why existence and nonexistence arise from what aums. We shall say a bit about this connection later.

Mystical Experience

Assertions of something beyond existence and nonexistence, infinite and unbounded, appear in the writings of (some) mystics, not as hypotheses to answer questions of cosmogony but to describe what they have experienced and encountered.³⁰

How much credence should we give to these experiences? Undoubtedly such experiences are had and are sincerely reported, and they strike the mystic as revelatory of reality, of a deeper reality. Why deeper? What is experienced is different, but this does not show that it is deeper, rather than more superficial even than the reality we normally know. The experiences come as revelatory of something deeper. Should we believe the report of mystics that there is this reality? Should the mystics themselves believe it?

There are two major approaches to these experiences: first, to explain them away, to offer an explanation of why they occur that doesn't introduce (as an explanatory factor) anything like what the mystics claim to experience; and second, to see them as revelatory of a reality that is as it is encountered. To notice that there are special conditions under which such experiences occur, for example, after yogic practice or ingestion of certain drugs, does not settle which approach should be taken. What the first approach treats as a cause of the experience, the second will see as removing the veil from reality so that it can be perceived as it really is. Does the unusual physiochemical state of the brain produce an illusion, or does it enable us to experience reality?

We might think there is an evolutionary reason why the unusual brain states should not be trusted; our tendency to have the normal ones has been selected for in a process wherein too gross a failure to

cognize reality led to extinction. However, if the underlying reality is as the mystics report, and if knowing it (as opposed to knowing the more superficial features of macro-physical objects) had no adaptive value, then we should not expect these normal brain states selected for in the evolutionary process to be ones that reveal the underlying reality as it is.

The procedure often used to induce the unusual experience, yogic or zen meditation, aims at "quieting thoughts", stopping our usual chatter of thoughts so that, as some say, we can experience the true self or at any rate a reality which the thoughts mask and cover. (And this sometimes may be an effect of other means, such as chemical ones, not consciously aimed at this result.) It is surprisingly difficult to stop thoughts from flitting about, but the difficulties of accomplishing this should not distract us from wondering what success shows. Supposing the procedure, when it succeeds in quieting the thoughts, does lead to an experience of the sort described, should we think this reveals something fitting the experience? That depends on what experience we think the procedure would produce even if there was no such unusual underlying reality to be perceived.

The following analogy may help make the point: Consider a phonograph system as an apparatus of experience. With the amplifier on, turntable turning, speakers on, a record on the turntable and the stylus moving in its grooves, sound is experienced; it (we are temporarily imagining) has the experience of sound. Now let us do the equivalent of quieting thoughts, namely, removing the record, perhaps also turning off the speakers and the turntable. When only the amplifier is on (with no ordinary "objects of experience" given it), what is the experience like? We do not know; perhaps infinite, unbounded, and so on, is what it feels like when the amplifier switch (of consciousness) is on, yet nothing is being experienced. Nothing differentiated is present to consciousness to produce a differentiated experience. It would be a mistake to think there is an unusual reality being encountered, when that merely is what it feels like when the experience-mechanism is turned on yet nothing is present to be experienced. None of the literature I know describes what experience the quieting meditative procedure would produce in the absence of any unusual reality or self, so we don't know whether the unusual experience is a revelation of an unusual reality or self, or instead an artifact of an unusual procedure of experiencing wherein most but

not all functions are damped down. (Will this debunking explanation have more difficulty in explaining the surprising and often momentous changes in the people who have the experiences?)³¹

Empiricist methodology, presumably, would have us treat the mystics' experiences as on a par with all other experiences, to be fed into some procedure of theory generation and support. The question is whether the resulting theory explaining (or explaining away) the mystics' experience that *p* will itself incorporate *p* or something like it. The answer will be interesting, however, only if the procedure itself is unbiased toward the mystics' claim; for example, it must not give it an almost zero a priori probability or degree of initial credibility, or give the mystics' individual experiences lesser weight than others in fixing either what is to be accounted for or how theories are evaluated.³²

We are far from knowing whether the mystics' *p* will be preserved as (roughly) true by the empiricists' account, even if we suppose it a maxim that the resulting explanatory theory incorporate (as true) as many *q*'s as possible from the experiences that *q* for which it tries to account. As much as possible, the theory is to save the appearances, including the experiences that *p*.³³ Perhaps this is not merely a maxim but a necessary component of any (unbiased) confirmatory and explanatory procedure we can wield. That we don't yet know whether the empiricists' explanatory theory will endorse the mystics' claim does not mean it is not an important question to raise.

Does the empiricist methodology distinguish between the mystic and the nonmystic? One has the experience while the other only hears it reported, but should this make a difference to what they believe? Certainly, a higher percentage of those who have had mystical experiences that *p* than of those who have not believe that *p* is true. Some of this difference in percentages will stem from the fact that many of those without the mystical experience will not know that such experiences are had by anyone or know of the probity of those who report them; or they simply spend less time thinking about the matter because, not having had the experiences that *p* themselves, the question of the truth of *p* is less salient to them. However, I believe there will remain a difference in the percentages after we control for all such facts. A higher percentage of the mystical-experiencers will believe in the veridicality of the experience, will believe that reality is as it then was experienced.

Why should this be so? The experiences are very powerful, but the person without the experiences is told this and can weigh this in as evidence about veridicality. It is merely that the person having (had) the mystical experience cannot help believing its veridicality, or does he have reason to differ? We can imagine that a nongullible person has a powerful mystical experience, not easily dismissed, and wonders whether he should believe that reality is as it apparently has been revealed to be. What weight should he give to the fact that he himself had the experience?

Do I rationally give my experiences that q different weight than yours that r in constructing my picture of the world? My accepting that you have had the experience that r will be based on my experiences (of your reports), and so my experiences seem primary in that way. Once I have accepted the fact that you have had the experience, though, do I try to save your appearances any less than mine, your r 's less than my q 's?

If somehow we were telepathically connected with a creature in another galaxy or universe, having its experiences, then we must give those some credence as our access into what that world is like. Must we give more credence to them than to the experiences of other denizens of that realm (which we come to know of via our telepathic contact)? Apart from the earlier point about primacy, apparently not. And aren't we each in our own world simply in special telepathic communication with ourselves, as it were, so that it would be similarly inappropriate to give our own experiences that q special weight or credence as compared to other's experience that r ?

Alternatively, imagine an amnesia victim who is being told of the experiences of different persons, including some people's mystical experiences. He comes to hold a general picture of the world which, let us suppose, rejects the mystics' claim that p . Should it make any difference to his belief if now he is told: you were one of the people who had that mystical experience. Surely not. He has already considered how much evidential weight to give the fact that such an experience was had (under certain conditions with a certain frequency), how much weight to give to the fact that *someone* had the experience; it is irrelevant further information that the someone was himself (rather than another of the same specified degree of probity, sincerity, and so on).

Yet there remains something special about the mystical experience

whereby it evades this general argument. Because this mystical experience is ineffable, powerfully (if not indelibly) remembered but inadequately described, the mystic knows something the hearer of his reports does not. The hearer does know something, though, for later if he does have the experience he will know that must be what the other was reporting.* We need not hold that nothing can be transmitted by imagery, metaphor, and so on; only that something significant evades the description.

The experiencer knows what the mystical experience is like in a way and to an extent the attentive listener does not, and in a way and to an extent the amnesiac does not who is told he once had a certain sort of experience which he doesn't remember. Relevant is not simply the fact that the experiencer had the experience, for the amnesiac also had it, but the way this fact normally shows itself in the person's evidential base. There is evidence available to the experiencer (who remembers) that is not available to the hearer or the amnesiac. So there is a reason for him to reach a different conclusion than they do. We can see how he *might* reasonably believe that p (that there is an infinite underlying reality transcending existence and nonexistence) while they could not. This explanation does not show that the person with mystical experience does reasonably differ in his view that p ; but it does leave room for such a difference, showing how such a reasonable difference might be possible.

What should a person without mystical experience, who realizes all that has been said thus far, believe? He knows that almost all those who have mystically experienced that p believe that p , and that something about their experience, which eludes telling and so is unknown to him, may (properly) play a role in their belief. This additional information may make it somewhat more reasonable for him to believe that p , but he still is not in the position of the experiencers. For he will face the question of whether the (unknown) character of the experience was such as to make it reasonable to believe p . Perhaps the experiencers are especially gullible, either because there is

* Though even this may be unclear. For example, Madhyamika Buddhists report experiences of emptiness, of a "vibrant void", while Vedantists report an experience of the fullest possible pure infinite existence: existence-consciousness-bliss. Are they experiencing the same thing? It would help to have someone who reported (in the suitable language) having both experiences (and that they were different), rather than all reporting only one or the other.

selective entry into the class of experiencers, the mystical experience coming only to the already especially gullible and credulous, or because the experience makes people gullible, causing them to become gullible and credulous, either generally or just about the import of this particular experience. (Should the mystics not be concerned about this, too?) Certainly mystics often appear gullible and credulous in the rest of what they accept. But is this because of a general gullibility, new or old, or rather because they reasonably have shifted their general picture of the constitution of the universe which leads to a shift in other a priori probabilities or expectations, so that some things previously excluded as impossible now will seem possible, and less evidence is needed to establish them as actual?

Lacking firsthand acquaintance with the mystical experience, and so having an ineradicably different evidence base, the non-experiencer may reasonably reject the mystics' claim that *p*, while admitting the mystic may be reasonable in believing that *p*. The mystic may now claim one further bit of support for the truth of *p*, other than mystical experiences that *p*. If *p*, as a hypothesis, provides an answer to the question of why there is something rather than nothing, then performing this function provides it some support. Thus we have two independent routes to *p*, each reinforcing the other: the experiential route of the mystic and the explanatory route in philosophical cosmogony.

That the (purported) fact that *p* is the right sort of thing to explain why there is something rather than nothing does not show how it does this; it does not show what the particular connection is between the fact that *p* and our universe, or its contents, in detail. Here we must be careful about the mystic's claims, distinguishing those *p*'s for which he claims or reports an experience that *p* from other statements that he introduces as hypotheses to connect the deep underlying reality he experiences with the superficial one he normally inhabits. These connections the mystic does not himself (even claim to) experience, and they have lesser authority than his experiences. The mystic's special knowledge of his experience does not extend to a special authority about its (and its object's) connection to ordinarily perceivable reality; for this connection does not link with, much less get revealed in, the ineffable character of the experience.

For this reason we find many theorists of the connection, even among mystics; some see our world as an illusion (to whom?), others as like a work of fiction, others as a thought, others as an emanation,

others as a creation, and so on, views all based on the fundamental underlying reality described in *p*. The fact is, I think, that what is experienced by the mystic is so different from our ordinary world, yet is experienced as underlying that world and as more real, that the mystic gropes or leaps for some explanation, for some theory of how it underlies the world, of how the two might be connected. Similarly, the mystic who experiences himself as the infinite perfect underlay of everything, neither existing nor nonexisting, whether in the experience that Atman = Brahman or in the experience of being the void, has to explain why he did not always realize this, his own true nature. Since he didn't experience himself becoming ignorant, his explanation of his (recent) ignorance is always (only) a hypothesis. So mystics present different theories here as well. Greater credence should be given to the mystic's experiences than to his hypotheses, both by the nonmystic and by the mystic.*

* Though, perhaps some mystical experiences can (seem to) indicate something about the character of the connection, even if not the details.

Some of the yogic mystical experiences are of the self as being the underlying substance of the universe or an infinite purity; also, I think, of it as turned back onto itself, creating itself, the experiential analogue of self-subsuming.

The practitioner of Hatha Yoga develops extraordinary suppleness and physical capabilities, and the yoga manuals are explicitly dark and mysterious about some of the practices. In these classic manuals, the practitioner of yoga is warned to keep some things very secret and to do them only in private. For example, *Gheranda Samhita*, i, 13-44, contains five admonitions that different practices are very secret; *Siva Samhita*, iv, 41-44, says the "wise Yogi" should "practice this . . . in secret, in a retired place." See the passages quoted in Theos Bernard, *Hatha Yoga* (Columbia University Press, 1943, reprinted by Samuel Weiser, New York, 1950), pp. 34 and 69. For an indication of the suppleness of body developed, see the photographs there.

Printed interpretations and explanations of what is involved leave the practice innocuous. (For example, M. Eliade, *Yoga*, Princeton University Press, 1969, ch. 6. For discussion of reading esoteric texts, see Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, Free Press, Glencoe, 1952.) They leave it wholly mysterious why secrecy is enjoined, why if that is all that is involved, the manuals do not say it straight out. It is a general principle in interpreting texts which announce they hold secrets, however, that the secret doctrine should turn out to be something the writer would go to great lengths to keep secret.

In these yoga manuals the actions and postures of the practitioner are meant to lead him to the secret. When the doctrine itself is to be conveyed by the text, though, the writer has a special problem: having announced that a secret is embedded in the work, how can he prevent its detection by the very ones from whom he wishes to keep it secret, who have been told explicitly