

Inquiry into phenomenology of mystical experiences: a defense of the perceptual model

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This paper explores the phenomenology of mystical experiences and its philosophical implications. The focus will be on defending Alston's view that there are perceptual kinds of mystical experiences, a view that has been historically prominent. In Christian mystical tradition the most influential discussions on spiritual senses were led by Origen and respected theologians like Karl Rahner and Hans Urs von Balthasar. The question of phenomenal qualities of such experiences will be discussed, as well as the role of emotions in mystical cognition. In addressing the problem of inter-subjective confirmation and articulation of such largely ineffable experiences, it will be argued that analytical methods are limited, but this is not philosophically problematic. The conclusion affirms the thesis that mystical experiences of the holy and infinite resemble sensory perception in its essential features.

Key words: *mystical experience, perception, religious affections.*

Introduction

This paper affirms the view that some mystical experiences are species of perceptual experience. The so called 'perceptual model' has had a long tradition in influential figures such as Origen, St. Augustine, William James, and Jonathan Edwards. It will be argued, along with William P. Alston in *Perceiving*

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God, that there are non-sensory mystical and inherently perceptual experiences of transcendent divinity appearing holy, good, loving etc.¹

Every mode of perception has distinctive object qualities. In the case of visual perceptions, those are colors, shapes, dimensions, and so on. So, if there are mystical experiences of non-sensory type, and yet perceptual, what exactly would be their non-sensory object qualities or »phenomenal qualia«? Alston was concerned that the content of such experiences might be entirely affective, consisting of various emotional reactions to the object identified as God. Although he was not denying that there must be »phenomenal qualia«, he admitted the difficulty that »we are quite incapable of enumerating the basic phenomenal qualities of which divine phenomena are configurations«. ² In »Can mystical experience be a perception of God?« Keith Augustine further argued that the lack of phenomenal commonalities between mystical experiences and perceptual experiences »provides us with reasonable grounds for suspecting that mystical experience does not qualify as a form of perception«. ³

In this paper the focus will be on the question of what the non-sensory »phenomenal qualia« in mystical perceptual experiences (MPE) could be. First to be addressed is Alston's concern, indicating that there are some features of MEs that distinguish them from mere affections; second to be addressed is Augustine's objection against the view that there are mystical perceptual experiences. Although we may not have a full list of »phenomenal qualities« mainly because of diversity of MEs across different religions, it is strongly argued that Augustine's objection is not fatal. This paper disagrees that the project of inquiry into philosophical and religious importance of MEs is doomed to failure because there is no way to inter-subjectively verify such experiences. It will be argued that the requirement for inter-subjective verification is in fact question begging. Providing an account of basic, commonly shared object qualities shared by all mystical traditions suffices to maintain the analogy between mystical and perceptual experiences. As Rudolph Otto⁴ and William James⁵ both have suggested, all religions share mystical perceptual experiences of the holy and the infinite whose noetic and phenomenological nature is irreducible to affections, and furthermore, exemplify universal object qualities in MPE.

¹ William P. ALSTON, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience*, Ithaca – London, Cornell University Press, 1993.

² *Idem*, 49.

³ Keith AUGUSTINE, *Can mystical experience be a perception of God?* (1999), http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/keith_augustine/alston.html (03.10.2024.)

⁴ Rudolph OTTO, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, trans. J. Harvey, New York, Oxford University Press, 1923.

⁵ William JAMES, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, London – New York, Longmans, Green and Co., 1905.

1. Preliminary distinctions

In the beginning, it is appropriate to introduce important terminology that will be discussed. »Religious experience« is a term used for a wide range of phenomena, including divine inspirations, insights about God's providence, guidance, presence in the world, and one's successes and failures to pursue a life guided by religious values, etc. »Religious experience« refers to any experience having content or significance appropriate to a religious context or that has a 'religious' flavor. This would include much of mystical experience, but also religious visions and auditions, non-mystical Zen experiences, and various religious feelings, such as religious awe and sublimity⁶. Additionally, parapsychological phenomena, locutions, sensory apparitions, and such like will not be considered. The kinds of experiences that will be discussed in this paper are those in which a direct intentional object, identified by the subject to be God, typically appears as holy, loving, infinite, and good, although no sensory attributes (like color, shape, smell) can be attached to the object. A typical example of such an experience goes as following:

»I felt the presence of God- I tell of the thing just as I was conscious of it- as if his goodness and his power were penetrating me altogether... The state of ecstasy may have lasted four or five minutes, although it seemed at the time to last much longer. I think it well to add that in this ecstasy of mine God had neither form, color, odor, nor taste; moreover, that the feeling of his presence was accompanied with no determinate localization. But the more I seek words to express this intimate intercourse, the more I feel the impossibility of describing the thing by any of our usual images. At bottom the expression most apt to render what I felt is this: God was present, though invisible; he fell under no one of my senses, yet my consciousness perceived him.«⁷

The mystical experiences that will be explored in this paper exhibit intentionality, namely, there is an answer to the question »What is one's experience about«? The awareness is as of something, there is an intentional object. Such mystical experiences are usually reported to be (as) of God, the One, or other divinities and spiritual beings. I'm going to focus on *experiences (as) of God*,⁸ or *theistic mystical experiences*, which exhibit intentional structure. What is experienced does not seem to originate in sense perception, somatosensory

⁶ Cf. Jerome GELLMAN, *Mysticism*, in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2005), <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/mysticism> (03.10.2024).

⁷ James, *Varieties...*, 68.

⁸ The concept of »God« is to be taken very loosely demarcated and open ended, including the following characteristics on which there is a massive consensus: omnipotent, omniscient, benevolent, a perfect being who is the source of existence (goodness, justice, moral lawgiver, having a purpose for the creation) of all other that itself. So long as one is thinking of the experienced object as being (basically) within the rough contours of this territory, one is identifying the object as God.

modalities, or standard introspection. The mode of presentation, and its content, is non-sensory – it does not involve qualities such as color, shape, smell, taste, etc. – and yet it is experiential in the following sense: the awareness (as) of God does not seem to be a result of an inference, and it has a phenomenal character, there is »what is like« to experience God that is entirely subjective and private. The presentedness of the purported object of the experience, i.e. God, is not inferred by the discursive intellect, although the experience usually involves an intellectual insight that resembles intuition. According to James, every such mystical experience can be called *noetic*:

»Although so similar to states of feeling, mystical states seem to those who experience them to be also states of knowledge. 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.«⁹

Because of its specific mode of presentation, mystical experiences of this sort are (at least partially) ineffable: no one can make clear to another who has never had a certain feeling, in what its quality or worth consists of¹⁰.

Additionally, experiences that will be discussed are also essentially *cataphatic*¹¹ to a certain degree; namely, there is something positive that can be said of experienced object.

To summarize, mystical experiences that are the focus of my interest here exhibit the following features: they are theistic, cataphatic, non-sensory noetic experiences which involve epistemically direct and non-inferential awareness (as) of God, which exhibit intentional structure.

Alston's arguments in favor of the perceptual model because »it is both necessary and sufficient for a state of consciousness to be a state of perceptual consciousness that it (seem to the subject to) involve something's presenting itself to the subject, S, as so-and-so...«¹². In some mystical experiences, a direct intentional object, taken by the subject to be God, *appears* as good, holy, loving, etc. Hence, presentedness of the intentional object in the experience seems sufficient to establish that there are such mental states as mystical *perceptual* experiences.

However, Richard Gale presented an objection to Alston:

»This phenomenologically-based analysis is too broad, since it encompasses in addition to perceptual experiences certain involuntary presentational subjecti-

⁹ James, *Varieties...*, 380.

¹⁰ Cf. *ibid.*

¹¹ Cataphatic mystical experiences are contrasted with apophatic ones. Apophatic mysticism claims that nothing can be said of objects or states of affairs which the mystic experiences. These are indescribable, or »ineffable« [cf. Jerome GELLMAN, *Mysticism*, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, (2005), <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/mysticism> (03.10.2024)].

¹² Alston, *Perceiving God...*, 38, 55, 59.

ve experiences, such as dreaming, sensing an after-image, feeling a pain, as well as introspective experiences«. ¹³

Hence, it is necessary to be more specific about phenomenological features that mystical experiences share only with sensory experiences, and not with all other mental states.

The main idea of Alston's perceptual model is that some mystical experiences which exhibit intentionality share general phenomenological and presentational features with perception. All those similarities ground the claim that some non-sensory mystical experiences are a kind of perception. In short, shared features are the following ¹⁴:

- I. Awareness is experiential: there is »what it is like« to have an experience as-of-God. And what it is like to have such an experience is unlike thinking or imagining God.
- II. Intentional objects seem to be »there« (*presentedness, givenness*): the intentional object, identified as God, seems to be presented or given to consciousness, in generically the same way as physical objects are presented in sense perception.
- III. Passivity and the order of experienced determination. When having a mystical experience, the subject does not have the impression that she is somehow bringing about the object of consciousness and tailoring its appearance. It *seems* thus and so, and it is a part of the phenomenology that the subject is not in control of the situation, with respect to determining how the object appears.
- IV. Vividness and immediacy. The intentional object of some mystical experiences is also presented in a very lively manner, unlike in the case of thinking. Awareness (as) of it is epistemically direct in the sense that nothing (as far as one knows) mediates it.

Since sensory experiences and some mystical experiences share relevant phenomenological and presentational features as listed above, then there should be an explanation why they resemble each other in such ways. The most plausible answer is that they belong to the same *genus*. The current proposal is that we fix the mental state as of a broad perceptual kind if and only if it satisfies the internal or subjective criterion, namely if it shares general phenomenal and presentational features with perceptual experience. The subjective and qualitative properties of mental states, or 'what it is like' properties, constitute a mental state, i.e. determine its kind. Similarly, pain is what it is because of the way it feels to be in pain, regardless of where it's felt.

¹³ Richard GALE, *Why Alston's Mystical Doxastic Practice Is Subjective?*, (1994). http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/richard_gale/alston.html (4.10.2024.)

¹⁴ Cf. Alston, *Perceiving God...*, ch. 1.

Since this perceptual model of mystical experiences aims to explain its phenomenology and nature, the model also needs to account for the role that affections play in mystical experiences. That important topic will be addressed next.

2. *Affections and mystical experiences*

Affective states are subjective responses; their role is not to represent reality but to contribute crucially to defining our ends and priorities, they play an indispensable role in determining the quality of life, and in the regulation of social life¹⁵. But more importantly, the emotions »do not consist in any difference in the manner of the presence of the object, but in the manner of subject's response to the object«. ¹⁶ For example, the feeling of fear does not bear a relation of correspondence with a mind-independent property of »being frightening«. There are different things that people find frightening (e.g. spiders, or bacteria), thus »frightening« is at least partially constituted by people's emotional reaction to it. There is no simple »mind-to-world direction of fit« between qualities of emotions and qualities of their mind-independent objects. As a prominent philosopher of emotions, Ernest Sousa stresses the following:

»Emotions merely reflect something that belongs exclusively and contingently to the mind of the subject of experience, and therefore do not co-vary with any property that could be independently identified«. ¹⁷

On the other hand, mystical experiences have a *noetic component* – they seem to be representations of something mind-independent. They seem to carry information about the thing 'out there'. In a similar way, perceptual experience of a tiger gives us information about the tiger; how big it is, what's its color, etc. In addition, we may be afraid of the tiger, but fear is a different kind of experience than perceptually seeing the object. We are afraid of precisely because we see its size. In mystical experience one may feel joy, peace, love, and excitement as a response to the object that has been perceived.

To deny the cognitive value of mystical experiences would be to deny their phenomenology, particularly their presentational features. If this analysis is correct, it seems that there are some mystical states that are not reducible to affections, but then the question is whether, and to which extent, mystical experiences convey truth.

Another important difference between affections and mystical states is to be found in the nature of mystical awareness of God; such cognitive experiences are *epistemically authoritative*. James defines this feature in the following way:

¹⁵ Cf. Ronald de SOUSA, *Emotions*, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, (2007). <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/emotion> (03.10.2024).

¹⁶ Howard ROBINSON, *Perception*, London, Routledge, 2001, 165.

¹⁷ De Sousa, *Emotions*.

- »1. Mystical states, when well developed, usually are, and have the right to be, absolutely authoritative over the individuals to whom they come.
2. No authority emanates from them which should make it a duty for those who stand outside of them to accept their revelations uncritically«. ¹⁸

The authority that is conveyed through mystical experiences carries *epistemic commitment*: MEs carry *ought to believe* that deliverances of the experience are true. However, the ought to believe is different from the moral ought. For example, in the statement »You ought to tell the truth«, »ought« refers to a certain action, not a *belief* to do a certain action. Moral statements are prescriptions for action, not for belief. For example, when the alarm wakes you up early and you realize that you promised to help your friend in the morning, your desires pull you back to bed, but something quite different from your desires tells you should get out of bed. The moral ought in this case comes from moral conscience, or moral experience of what is the right thing to do.

The epistemic commitment proceeding from that which is perceived as epistemic authority is unique for mystical experiences. In the case of perception, there is no ought to believe in deliverances of the senses, but rather there is a *habit* or inclination to believe. In cases of affections too, there is a tendency to believe or there is a *force* that compels us to do something, but there is no sense of moral ought.

The authority of the noetic state (in ME) is not to be found in the force of affective states, in the habit to believe sense deliverances, or in the moral experience *per se*. If the *epistemic ought* (commitment) cannot be explained in such ways, then its binding force cannot be fully explained in psychological terms. Perhaps the authoritative feature of mystical states can be adequately explained only by reference to a non-psychological cause, external to the individual, which is the source of authority. In other words, the authority of mystical states over individuals is in the best way explained by its specific epistemic access to the object – a perception of God who is the source of authority. Although James believed that such view is plausible for the mystic, he maintained the same is not plausible to the non-mystic. Therefore, these are strong reasons to believe that MPEs are not reducible to affections.

However, a large part of religiously interpreted affections (e.g. love for God) constitutes subjective reactions to the presence of God. William James¹⁹, Rudolph Otto²⁰, and Friedrich Schleiermacher²¹ argued that these sentiments are common to all MPEs: the sense of dependence, the sense of being overpowered,

¹⁸ James, *Varieties...*, 422.

¹⁹ Cf. *idem* 68 et passim

²⁰ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy...*, 5.

²¹ Friedrich SCHLEIERMACHER, *The Christian Faith*, Berkeley, Apocryphile Press, 2011, 36.

the sense of presence, the sense of infinite. Some of these affections seem to play a crucial role in mystical cognition.

Loving affections in MEs could be considered as both affective and cognitive states. For example, in the case of aesthetic experience, delight in beauty could be thought of as instantaneously *recognizing* beauty. Jonathan Edwards argues that »spiritual perception« is – somewhat paradoxically – an affective cognition.²² The sense of the heart that involves the feeling of sweetness and delight is a kind of understanding. Knowing God by perceiving Him essentially involves loving Him and delighting in Him.

Another suggestion – proposed by Jacques Maritain²³ – is that affections that one undergoes in ME serve as a *medium of awareness*: it is through affection of love that the object is grasped. In other words, affections serve as a vehicle by which one becomes aware of the divine object.

To contrast love as affection from lovingness as a quality of the intentional object (which corresponds to Alston's concept of »phenomenal qualia«) the distinction between psychological vehicles and intentional objects of MPE has to be drawn. Now, one might ask how exactly the affection of love differs from lovingness of the experienced object? Loving affection in the experience is affection, it is the quality of the experience, but not a quality of the object presented. Thus, the distinction has to be made between (affective) qualities *of* experience (experiential qualia in the sense of intrinsic quality of experience) and qualities *in* the experience. Love as an affection is the quality of experience, whereas lovingness as quality is *of* the intentional object in MPE; it is a quality (as) of God. If one does not make room for such a distinction there is a possibility of dangerously conflating the means *by* which we are perceiving with *what* we are perceiving. For example, when one sees a tree, it is seen by having a certain mental representation of the tree. But the appearance of the tree is not identical to the tree out there, which one am aware of. Similarly, the quality of loving affection then cannot be identical with love as an object quality (as of God). God is not an emotion.

Therefore, if some mystical experiences are of a perceptual kind, then there must be something in the experience that is distinct from »what it is like« to have the experience. To avoid confusion between qualities of experience and qualities in the experience, the term *object qualities* in MPE will be used, which stands for non-sensory non-affective felt qualities of the (intentional) object.

One could argue that the »logical space« has been opened for the existence of object qualities. However, there is still lack of a *positive* argument for the existence of such qualities, i.e. the question of their nature must be adequately addressed.

²² Cf. Jonathan EDWARDS, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, New York, Cosimo Classics, 2007, 139-140 et passim.

²³ Cf. Jacques MARITAIN, *The Degrees of Knowledge*, London, Geoffrey Bles, 1938, 305-357.

The first major problem is the apparent impossibility of providing a list of object qualities common to all mystical traditions, and the second major problem raised by Augustine is the impossibility of inter-subjective verification of MPE, which consequently »provides us with reasonable grounds for suspecting that mystical experience does not qualify as a form of perception«²⁴. In the next section these objections will be discussed and answered.

3. The objection from varieties of MPE and impossibility of inter-subjective confirmation

Reports of MPEs are usually rich in poetic and symbolic expressions which resist systematic analysis and description of object qualities in MPE. According to Alston, the main difficulty with object qualities is to establish a publicly shared vocabulary for them. It has to be acknowledged that it would be difficult (if not impossible) to give an exhaustive list of object qualities in case of sense perception, such as tactile qualities. We can agree on basic tactile qualities (e.g. soft, hard, etc.), but it is hard to see how we can fully articulate all the details of a tactile experience. Sensations quickly outstrip our conceptual capacities; there is something inherently non-propositional or non-conceptual about the experience. There is an element of ineffability not only in MPEs, but also in everyday experiences. However, the inability to provide a full list of tactile qualities does not discredit tactile experiences as perceptions. If that is the case, then why would one require such condition for MPEs? There cannot be a double standard »at play«.

Now, one might think (correctly) that in the case of MPE there is much more disagreement on object qualities of the purported Divine across different mystical traditions, than there is disagreement on how humans experience softness. The underlining difficulty is that objects of tactile awareness are public, whereas God is not public in the same sense.

Every disagreement assumes that both parties are talking about the same thing. To use Alston's example: if I say that my house is white, and you say that your house is red, there is no disagreement between us unless we live in the same house. Hence, there will be disagreement about object qualities in MPE only if both mystics experience the same object and attribute incompatible predicates to it. But it is not so easy to show that object qualities in different MPE conflict unless denial of one predicate is embedded in the meaning of the other. Vedanta or Yoga mystics perceptual reports about undifferentiated unity are not itself incompatible with characterizing the same object as a personal

²⁴ Keith AUGUSTINE, *Can mystical experience be a perception of God?*, (1999), http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/keith_augustine/alston.html (03.10.2024).

deity. It seems that only if a background, full-blown conception of »God« (how God is like, what He has done, etc.) comes in the identification of the perceived object that there will be incompatible predicates in describing MPEs. Thus, only in the case »God« is used as *definite description* – loaded with central doctrines of a religion – will there be conflicts in perceptual reports. Alston persuasively argues through his book that wider systems of religious beliefs generate conflict, not the perceptual belief in which »God« functions as a *direct reference*. In the latter case when one says »God loves me«, it is not thereby explicitly asserted »Jesus Christ the Incarnated Word loves me«, it merely states »The being presented to me in the experience loves me«. Then, the experience is best interpreted as experience of God, because according to Christian conception God is Love, God is holy, God is pure goodness and beauty. However, it seems that descriptive concepts of God (even within the Christian tradition) will differ. The concept »God« for each believer will be associated with different experiences with God, background knowledge, etc. Nevertheless, that does not prevent us from sharing a common conception of God. Hence, even if all mystics (from different religious traditions) do not unanimously agree on object qualities of the purported Divine,²⁵ it does not follow that they straightforwardly disagree, nor that it is impossible to say *anything* about object qualities in MPE (at least) within a specific mystical tradition.²⁶ Even in the case of perception, there will be people – congenitally blind – who do not have a common vocabulary for colors. Nevertheless, there are those who see and do share a common vocabulary for distinguishing colors. We take that to be enough to satisfy conditions for a common vocabulary of object qualities in perception. So, why impose high standards on conceptualizing mystical experiences?

The main question here is whether unanimous agreement on object qualities in MPEs constitutes a necessary precondition for considering MPE a perceptual kind of experience (involving object qualities), and to which extent the list of object qualities has to be articulated. I believe it suffices to give an account of at a few universal object qualities shared by all mystical traditions, in addition to all the other conditions already specified.

The difficulty of determining object qualities in MPE has to be acknowledged, but at least it can be indicated why the project is so challenging; there can be no direct inter-subjective confirmation of what is experienced in MPE.

²⁵ It is worth mentioning that there are religious sentiments common to all religions: the sense of dependence, the sense of »overpoweringness«, the sense of presence, the sense of infinite. Major religions also share views on moral conduct. If mystical experiences differ in their phenomenal content, then how does it happen that mystics share religious sentiments and moral views, despite the difference in their teachings? James thinks that religious sentiments tell us more about God than our intellectualizations about God.

²⁶ In Christian mystical tradition the most influential discussions on spiritual senses were led by Origen, Meister Eckhart, and respected theologians like Karl Rahner and Hans Urs von Balthasar.

However, the good news is that there need not be one. Since ought implies can, then by contraposition cannot implies ought not. If God exists then it can be expected that we will not be able to perform systematic inter-subjective verifications of our religious experiences, or predictions. If God exists then He is not a scientific entity, but a personal reality who transcends the intermundane methodologies of science. Experiencing God is a grace, which essentially depends on His Will. Since God's will is unknown to us, it follows that neither God nor MPE can be predicted and tested in a scientifically rigorous manner. Our philosophical and analytical methods will be limited. In other words, it is reasonable to assume that the object of study partially determines the method of investigation. Thus, perfectly strict scientific methods and standards cannot be applied to MPE, just as a shovel cannot be used to solve a mathematical problem. Scientific methods and standards should not be applied in an exclusivist way taking a form of the following principle: »what does not pass our methods of verification is not a valid source of knowledge«. Just because the inter-subjective verification cannot fully be satisfied; it doesn't follow that nothing can be learned about the nature of mystical experiences.

To sustain the analogy of sense perception and mystical experience, given the expected limitations in articulating regularities of MPEs, it suffices to give an account of a few basic universal object qualities that are shared by all mystical traditions. However, those universal qualities are not going to be established by inter-subjective confirmation in the same way as we establish qualities of »public« objects in tactile perception. In case of MPEs, the proper methods to be used involve comparative research of mystical experiences in different traditions, and the so-called *overrider systems*²⁷ (sets of established background beliefs as means for discernment). As James and Otto have argued, the sense of the holy²⁸ and infinite²⁹ are common factors in almost all mystical experiences.

²⁷ Cf. Alston, *Perceiving God...*, 160 et passim.

²⁸ The experience of the holy is a central aspect of every religion. The primary meaning of holy is 'separate.' To be holy is to be other, to be different in a special way – transcendent.

²⁹ There is a difficulty in understanding the possibility of grasping or experiencing actual infinity (as »limitless in all respects«), given that we are finite beings. But that objection presupposes something like this; in order to experience an object being F, the subject has to be F. But that is false. We can experience yellow objects without needing to be yellow. In order to experience infinity, we don't need to be infinite. Although space is infinite, we can look at the bright night sky and look at infinite space. Now, one might object that would be experiencing the infinite *de re*, but not *de dicto*. One would be aware of the infinite space, but not as being infinite. *De dicto* awareness would require grasping the whole infinity, but that seems impossible because our mental capacities are finite. The challenge can be met by distinguishing »being aware *that*«, and »being aware of something *as*«. The latter would require fully grasping actual infinity, whereas the former wouldn't. As Descartes says, you can touch the mountain without putting arms around it. Alston also nicely responds to the difficulty by saying that he doesn't have to perceive the whole of X in order to perceive it. We rarely, if ever, perceive the whole of any physical object. But if we see enough of X under the right conditions, we are properly credited with seeing X. Although it is not possible to grasp whole infinity, taking a glance of the infinite is possible. The objection from human's finitude and limited mental capacities primarily concerns our

The list of object qualities in MPE is of course open, and susceptible to further analysis of commonalities between MPEs in different mystical traditions and practices. Nevertheless, the phenomenology of the MEs that have been discussed, and the existence of a few identifiable object qualities across different mystical traditions, render the perceptual model plausible.

Conclusion

This paper addressed Alston's concern regarding the role of affections in the MEs. It has been argued that some features of the MEs resist the reductive explanation to mere affections. Furthermore, the perceptual model of mystical experiences has been defended against Augustine's objection that our incapability to enumerate universal object qualities in MEs is a ground to question appropriateness of the perceptual analogy. It was also argued that even if the project of articulating commonly shared vocabulary of object qualities is difficult because of varieties of mystical experiences, it is as difficult as providing a full list of tactile qualities or finding two people with the same descriptive concepts of God (even within the same religious tradition). Based on such a parity argument the conclusion is that the objection is not fatal for the perceptual model.

Finally, another objection was considered – allegedly, the requirement of inter-subjective confirmation fails to be met by mystical experiences. The validity of this point was granted, but it was also indicated why it is expected to be so. There are other (indirect) means of confirmation: overrider- systems and holistic comparative research of MPEs. Therefore, it was concluded that the holy and the infinite are good candidates for basic universal object qualities, which suffices to sustain the condition for perceptual model of mystical experiences.

intellectual cognitive powers. We cannot intellectually conceive of actual infinity. However, MPE is not an intellectual act of grasping, it's not thinking or imagining. So, our inability to intellectually grasp actual infinity does not imply inability to grasp the infinite with a different cognitive faculty – *sense divinitatis*.

Ksenija Puškarić*

Rasprava o fenomenologiji mističnih iskustava: obrana perceptualnog modela

Sažetak

Ovaj tekst bavi se fenomenologijom mističnih iskustava. Po uzoru na Williama Alstona koji je teorijski slijedio kršćansku mističnu tradiciju o duhovnim osjetilima počevši od Origena do teologa poput Karla Rahnera i Hansa Ursa von Balthasara – brani se stav da su neka mistična iskustva nalik osjetilnoj percepciji. U ovom kontekstu razmatra se uloga emocija u mističnom iskustvu i spoznaji. Diskutira se problem intersubjektivne verifikacije subjektivnih i često riječima neopisivih mističnih iskustava, te se brani teza da ograničenost analitičko-filozofskog pristupa ovom fenomenu nije filozofski problem.

Ključne riječi: mistično iskustvo, percepcija, problem objektivnosti i subjektivnosti, vjerski osjećaji.

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