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ZERO PHILOSOPHY*

This article offers an aanalysis of the concept of mystical experience and its relation to science and philosophy in connection with E. A. Torchinov's research and in the context of Kant's doctrine of human "metaphysical disposition", the nature and purpose of philosophy.

***Key words**: mystic, mystical experience, science, philosophy, metaphysical disposition, E.A. Torchinov.*

… Gives itself a senseless possibility of an *extrasensory experience*, directly contradicting itself (to represent the transcendent as immanent) and is based on the well-known secret school of thought called mysticism, which is the direct opposite to all philosophy...

[AA, VIII, S. 441]

In the past two decades, the mystical mood in Russia has spread virtually unchecked, leading people away from reality: people would see what is not there rather than what really is. The state of society, the spiritual atmosphere is such that these sentiments do not only master the "masses", but scientists — those who seek to know the truth of being and should help others to distinguish reality from fantasy and deception.

What constitutes the *problem* that is most interesting *philosophically*? Where would we like to achieve clarity? First of all, let's come to the very concept of "mysticism." Mystic usually denotes something mysterious, incomprehensible, yet *vital*, therefore causing feelings of reverence, awe or fear — in short, something *mysterious and significant*. We are talking about something incomprehensible associated with the *mystery of human life*. All of us in varying degrees, are aware that the basis of our lives is a mystery. A vague idea about it is either cast in mythological images of supernatural beings, or — at best — leads to the idea of the *immediate detection* of the will of the almighty and incomprehensible God in a particular situation of everyday experience.

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Man wants to believe: a mysterious and powerful one is watching me, cares for me, takes care of me, and my person is not ignored. Ordinary mind goes far away from the paradox of Kant's thought: faith in God should be so absolute, that we *never* make him bothered with our affairs. Moments of *immediate contact* with the mysterious power, of the vivid perception of its presence are defined, first of all, as *mystic*. From a philosophical point of view, these types of "mystical experience" are not of a big interest. In this respect Kant made fairly rough, but generally true remark addressed to Swedenborg and other "visionaries": "if hypochondriacal wind should rage in the guts, what matters is what direction it takes: if downwards, then the result is a f---, if upwards, an apparition or an heavenly inspiration" [3, p. 328]. This popular form of mysticism, probably will always exist — not only because we will always maintain a childish thirst for protection and care, not only because our knowledge is always limited (and imagination is boundless) and we are always and will always be *dependent* on the forces *unknown* to us, and therefore have to have a lot of trust and a lot of hope, but also for the important reason that the "invisible world" — as a matter of vital hopes, as a matter of life and death for many people — has always been and will remain the province of the revenue for those chosen by "higher powers" as their intermediaries between themselves and ordinary people — for traders of exotic "occult", "magical" or "esoteric" goods.

This regular mysticism is interesting philosophically, perhaps only as a *domestic form* of manifestation of *metaphysical inclinations* of man, his thirst for the absolute. The world cultural history recognizes a *mystic* as an ultimate human desire for *unity* — or rather *merging* with God, to a complete "dissolution" of the soul in the Absolute, to the *disappearance of the distinction* between "I" and God. "But if I learn Him without mediation, I will become Him and He will become me! This is exactly what I understand. God must become "I" and "I" must become God, so completely one, so that He is the "I" become one and so would remain... " [5, p. 149—149]. This is the principle of *true mysticism*, mystery and ordinary everyday mystique as well as religious one. Let alone and developing freely, it leads to the conclusion stated in Upanishads: "Me and God — one unity», tat twam asi — «Thou art That!" It is based on the total *negation of the world* (as well as of any *multiplicity* in general, of fragmentation, materiality, the overall shape of which is space and time) as *untrue* and *evil*. The essence of the mystical aspirations is an attempt to *transcend* all specific, finite and concrete. "To transcend" not in the sense of aspiration to a higher, or the last *limit*, but in the sense of going *beyond all limits* — towards ***nothing and nowhere***. Hence — the desire to get away from the evil of worldly existence, asceticism, austerity, actions to *put out* the ordinary *consciousness*, burdened with unreal world. Even one's own *consciousness* is a product of untrue finitude, is in essence — evil! Indian mystical tradition quite consistently grades sleep higher than being awake and sleep without dreams higher than the one with dreams. Hence, the high evaluation of *unusual states of consciousness*, their interpretation as detecting falsity of everyday reality and manifestation of the *other world*, the pursuit of superconsciousness, ecstasy — "going out" of the self ("I", *finitude* in general) and "opening up" to infinity. All cultures can witness this desire to *deny* the world (split into the "I" and the "world") and to *empty the consciousness*, the desire to get rid of one's own separation from the absolute, desire to "return" back into it, "drown" one's own individuality (along with all the problems and suffering) in it. Mysticism conceals *radical nihilism*.

Mystics of different times and peoples, choosing this path, took on, according to their accounts (while they still retained consciousness and a link to this sinful world), a special kind of experience, which, in their opinion, reveals the *true reality* and leads to *higher knowledge*, far superior to anything that we could gain from everyday life experience, science and philosophy. How can a scientist, a philosopher treat such aspirations, statements and claims? What is the relation between *this* mystery and philosophy or science?

What is important in philosophy and in a philosopher — the soul focused on the *absolute*, universal, divine, or a passion aimed at *thinking*, reasoning, discussion, achieving *clarity* — including metaphysical aspirations of his own soul? In its interest towards the absolute, philosophy is akin to religion, in its quest for understanding, reflection, explanation and research it reminds science. Philosophy is the expansion of *scientific* passion for studying and knowing into the area of the highest *religious* interest. Kant here, as always, recognized the core issue. There is an ineradicable *metaphysical bent* in a man, the one constituting the very being of the person, and crucial question for the future of the philosophy is whether the *subject matter* of this metaphysical passion can be *known* by the same experience, reasoning, reflection, research and collaborative discussion, etc. which gives us the most perfect, reliable, evidence-based, universally valid, objective knowledge in *science*?

The problem of the mystical experience is seen as the most interesting in this context. What is the value it has for philosophy? How to treat the words of mystics and their claims to possess *higher* knowledge? How to assess the position of physiologists, psychologists, psychiatrists, who see in this kind of experience mainly *pathological* mental state, in the best case — the so-called "altered states of consciousness," which, in principle, do not differ in *cognitive* value from dreams and hallucinations? It is well known that prominent manifestations of religiousness and mystical visions are often associated with increased nervous irritability and high emotional state, exaltation, imbalance, decreased intelligence. Among mystics there were a lot of people of psychopathic disposition: "St. Paul was probably prone to epileptic seizures, George Fox, without a doubt, was the hereditary degenerate; Carlyle suffered from self-poisoning of the body caused by digestion disease, and so it was with many other" [2, p. 27—28]. So does a different *reality* get open in such a mystical experience, or are we dealing here with the same "reality" that we constantly "visit" in dreams or imagination? And how can a philosopher or scientist discuss this issue if he does not have such experience, and has to rely on a mystic having his mysticism as a *totally inner experience*. So the scientist has *trust a word* which, as a rule, is incomprehensible: the mystic himself primarily emphasizes *inexpressibleness* of his visions.

I got "hooked" by the title (and content) of recently published books of E. Torchinov, a famous St. Petersburg orientalist and religious researcher: "transcendent experience", "knowledge of the beyond" [8; 9]. Both word combinations make little sense. "The experience of the beyond" — it is either something else but experience, or it is not "of the beyond", since it is given in experience or knowledge is available.

In fact, what is a *mystical* experience? How is it different from other kinds of experience? What kind of experience deserves to be called "mystical"? E. Torchinov explains that in the course of psychopractice yogi gradually *eliminates* his consciousness, "replacing consciousness (necessarily requiring a subject-object dichotomy and shaping it) with non-dual, non-dichotomy (advaya)

gnosis-knowledge (jnana)" [9, p. 39]. This is the core of the matter: the vast mystical literature of different cultures talks about one and the same issue, of overcoming, or removing, the *subject-object relationship*. In the state of mystical experience the consciousness, actually, does not reveal itself, because it is fundamentally *intentional*, and its essence is contained in a particular *duality*: being outside itself — it is always perceiving something, something that is *not consciousness* itself, but something *different* to consciousness, *being*, or an *object*. As the mystical experience is non-dual, the "higher forms of mystical experience (peak ASC) are not the states of consciousness in general" [9, p. 353]! The abbreviation blurs the utter nonsense: an *altered state of consciousness* is not a *state of consciousness*. And why is a state — non-state of consciousness-unconsciousness is called an experience if the *experience* as the author says, — that's all, "which has become appropriated by consciousness" [9, p. 352]? It turns out that consciousness does not exist, but the experience does, though it is a ***zero*** experience! It may *not hold something given*. Pure experience. Experience as an experience and not an experience of anything that has any content. Empty experience. Experience of *nothing*. No one's experience. Moreover, it appears that in this "experience" some consciousness still holds, but it is the *consciousness without any intentionality*, that is, some consciousness, but consciousness without perceiving *anything*. Pure consciousness. Consciousness as such in general, which *does not process anything*. "The silent consciousness," according to the respected professor, "beyond perceptions and processing." No representations, no perceptions, no emotions, no thoughts, no conscious of any object, though the consciousness itself is there.

It is not surprising that this kind of "experience" cannot be *expressed* and *communicated* to others, has no *objective* meaning, is not intended for any critical group discussion, as there is no point in even talking about *what* exactly is known and what is learnt in this experience.

Why does the well-known researcher of religion nevertheless give mystical testimonies quite a high significance? He thinks it's time to find a "new intellectual courage" and find a way to "return to the philosophy its dignity." The call is attractive to follow, but in what way? We should "try to find workarounds leading philosopher-smuggler beyond these intellectual cordons" [9, p. 24—25]. This are the "cordons" set by the philosophers themselves, the notorious "boundaries of knowledge." Philosophers and scientists distinguish between subjective and objective, the mind and the object. But it's all in *unity*, all the same, in other words, there is something that lies at the basis of subject and object, and matter, and spirit — and the diversity and all the differences, therefore — it is simple, "non-dual". The only way to it, the unity, hidden behind all the diversity of the phenomena of the external world— the way "inside" oneself "from within" through a "tunnel" of self-consciousness — the *inner* essence of the *outside* world, as Schopenhauer suggested, interpreting Kant's idea of the "thing in itself". After all, my essence and the essence of the whole world are one and the same, and only *in myself* it is given to me *immediately*. This means that it is possible "to perceive the very reality that... constitutes the very nature of pure experience, just like the water forms the nature of any wave... And I think that transpersonal experience is the form for such knowledge" [9, p. 361], which was "pioneered" by the ancient Hindu mystics-yogis. This knowledge can be defined as a "movement from a conceptualized (mentally constructed) world of phenomena to a non-conceptualized knowledge of reality as it is (tathata...) ... what it IS without

the distorting effects of power of a conceptualizing mind" [9, p. 364]. Anyone who wants to know the true reality and merge with the unity — "let him stay deprived of concepts...", "hold your breath" and cease the "representative function of consciousness" [9, p. 364—365]! I knew Eugeny Alexandrovich personally and I always treated him with great respect, but it is difficult to assess these words differently rather than as betrayal of science and philosophy. The *scientist* writes about the *distorting power* of the mind! Kant was aware of such moods: "Sometimes the error of misology catches the ones who at first devoted themselves to sciences with great diligence and success, but finally did not find any satisfaction in its knowledge" [4, p. 334].

This path does not return to the philosophy its dignity, but rather negates it; in the best case it brings philosophy to its starting point. People who have not flirted with mysticism, but stayed true believers themselves and underwent the path of an ascetic practice, understood it very well. I call for St. Gregory Palama as a witness. Science for him is the "external" wisdom, barren and vain, neither knowledge nor truth. It cheats and robs the soul, gives no knowledge of God, and does not lead to it, and is therefore empty and meaningless. It brings the "greatest harm" as the "crown of evil, the devil's cardinal sin, pride — comes from the knowledge!" [7, p. 18]. To obtain the knowledge of proper truth, it is necessary to leave the abundant reading, to stop "wandering mind" and take a "monosyllabic prayer" to ascend to God. We must leave any *arguments* and "make the plank of the soul smooth", so that it may become suitable for imprinting gifts of the Spirit. Palama understands these "gifts" as ineffable *mystical experience*, contrasting it to the entire scientific vanity. If you acknowledge the mystical experience as actual *experience*, if you acknowledge that it opens the true *reality*, if you acknowledge that it gives superior *knowledge*, superior science and logic then have the courage to take the conclusions it entails. Go to the desert.

Let's try to take the words of the mysterious energies and blue mandala seriously. Can we even talk about something that is "higher intelligence" and "beyond reason"? After all, something that is "beyond reason" uses the *concept of reason*! If there is a mystical experience, then, like any experience it is the result of *judgment, thinking*. No feeling, perception, experience becomes *experience* if it is not *understood*, not *memorized*, not *played* back again by imagination, if its moments and my conditions, replacing each other, do not get connected by the *activity of mind* and the identity of the person in one. There is no experience without *diversity* of views. There is no experience without the *unity* of the diversity. There is no unity without identity of personality and synthesis of reason. The so-called "mystical experience" differs from other kinds of experience but not by the fact that it goes "beyond the bounds of reason" and refers to what reason cannot have any *idea* about. It may differ only in a *way* the mind is used or acts in an experiment. What is the relative "proportion", the proportion of the components which necessarily make up any human experience? Should we recognize the "mystical state" of consciousness as the unit of measure for assessing the ordinary and scientific experience, data of sensory perception and thoughts derived from "solid mind and clear memory" — or consider everyday life experience and the experience of science the unit of measure for evaluation of "mystical experience"?

Let's emphasize that we put the question in a state of "normal consciousness", though for the mystical experience *the question itself does not exist*. Such a condition bears no questions. If we want to solve this problem and do it having

some grounds, weighing the arguments, seeking the truth, choosing from a variety of options, analyzing them — we are already on the basis of a sober mind, "normal consciousness," the best and most advanced form of which is represented by science. The question itself and the intention already *include the answer.* Mystical state is not looking for "reasons"; it does not know "arguments" and "considerations". So if we ask the question, and we want an answer, *we have already chosen* a "normal" consciousness and scientific research. It is a measure and criterion, and mystical experience, or other "altered states of consciousness" become the *object* under study. This means that the 'mystical experience' exists only for *the mind*. It does not exist for itself or on its own. *Altered* states of consciousness exist only for *the normal* state of consciousness — the one in which Socrates was arguing about Eros and poetic frenzy, in which Freud was thinking about the causes of female hysteria and subconscious instincts. The subconscious mind exists only for *the mind*. Spinoza was right about that: the truth is the measure both for itself and for the delusion. Mind is the measure both for itself and mindlessness. Mindlessness can not be the judge of reason for the simple reason that it does not judge at all.

Any criticism of reason is a matter of the mind itself. A being without judgment, does not criticize. Limitations of man are manifested in the lack of understanding of one's own limitations. Recognition of the limitations of the mind is a manifestation of the *mind*, rather than feelings or a "superlogical" wisdom. The mind itself restricts itself from the "inside". Its limitation from "outside" is not possible, because the very "outside" is the *concept* of reason. In all "outside" aspects it stays within. How can we detect in our experience the presence of a being *infinitely* superior to us in its mind? "Higher intelligence" is the notion of our own mind. The mystical experience cannot "undermine the credibility of rational consciousness, based only on reason and feelings" [2, p. 336], because "authority" and its "undermining" are *concepts* of reason, as well as "other consciousness", "possibility of truths of a different order", as well as the "world" or "another world" or "alternate reality" etc. One can only wonder how people with enthusiasm and passion overwhelm the mind and the reason, not knowing that all of their destructive activities are the work of this very mind. It reminds me of a fighting fish that violently throws itself at its own reflection in the glass aquarium as if it were its opponent. Therefore, there is no non-conceptualized experience. There is only the experience which is poorly conceptualized or conceptualized unconsciously and implicitly, etc. If the experience remains in the memory, it is already "captured" by reason, even if it is difficult for a person to express it. The contradiction between the non-descript and the desire to tell others is still somehow "solved" sometimes through an indication that the mystical experience is non-conceptualized, so to speak, "in the process", but lends itself to the expression of hindsight, after regaining normal consciousness. And this experience is conceptualized, mostly through pointing at its non-conceptualized nature. Unfathomable gets comprehension through its incomprehensibility. Consequently, non-conceptualized nature of mystical experience all the same "is not absolute," as theorists slyly admit, but only "to a certain degree." It can be described, but through gradual "semantic destruction of language," as D. Zilberman said. To put simply, the way to finding a new intellectual courage and returning to philosophy its dignity means to destroy the language step by step, until the *words* become *sounds* that have *no meaning*, and thus disappear as unnecessary.

Everything said above, apparently, shows one thing: a mystical experience, in its highest and the strictest sense, is in *cognitive* respect *a point of contact* between religion and philosophy, the point of transition from religion to philosophy (or philosophy to religion in the reverse movement of the semantic deconstruction). Pure mysticism *finishes* religious development and *begins* philosophical one (if, of course, it ever begins). It is a kind of *premonition* of universal, absolute, sensual and emotional manifestation of *mind, philosophical* interest in the man. Therefore, philosophy treats mystical experience as only the first start, motivation, which must find its own *development* in the philosophical study. Thales' simple thesis is superior in its *cognitive*, theoretical value to the whole mystical tradition. The reality is revealed only in the long and difficult development of science and philosophy through *joint, cooperative* efforts. And the best thing that everyone can do is to take part in this work, and contribute to it.

To find out and save the mystic truth was an intention of super-rationalist Hegel who built his philosophy as *an academic system*. Truly *philosophical*, that is *speculative* (or "positive-wise"), thinking, he argued, was the same as that the one which used to be called "mystical" [1, p. 210—213]. Mystical is really "mysterious", but only for the understanding, the higher principles of which are the laws of formal logic, the principle of contradiction, the separation of opposites, the lack of understanding of their unity without seeing the difference in their relationship. The principle of *reason*, or speculative-dialectical thinking is the *concrete unity of opposing definitions*. Therefore, speculative thought "removes" the opposites of *finite and infinite*, "I" and God, *subjective and objective*, "consciousness" and its "subject". For a man of common sense speculative coincidence of opposites is either meaningless or *incomprehensible*. And if he is inclined to accept the reality of the mysterious and does not consider mystical description of blinding darkness a meaningless jumble of words, he calls for the sake of knowledge of a "higher" truth to give up thinking, logic, science, to limit the mind, etc. Hegel, however, leaves the mystical within science and philosophy, expanding the concept of "thinking" and "logic" and differentiating between the understanding and reason, which is able to keep opposites as "moments" of the absolute. Therefore, we should call all *reasonable mystical* because it goes beyond reason. But it does not go beyond cognition, which is always "in us" and makes *our own essence*. "Usually people think that an absolute must be away on the other side, but it's just absolutely tangible that we as thinking beings always carry it with us" [1, p. 124—125]. Tat twam asi — «Thou art That!" Correcting and cleansing the mystical tradition, Hegel observes: "Since *language* is the product of *thought*, we cannot express it through anything that would not be *universal*… And ineffable feeling, a sense are not the best, the true, but *the least significant*, most untrue... " (italics are mine. — *S. Ch.*) [1, p. 114]. Untold mystical intuition is the *initial* manifestation of philosophical ideas, which should expand the free movement of *thought* through its rich and quite *specific* content in the philosophy of science.

Implacable foe of German speculative idealism, Friedrich Jacobi also saw the core of true philosophy and true religion in the *mystical experience of the mind*. Where is the cause for this strange coincidence of opposites? It is in the same frustration with the "intellect", with its "abstract" nature. Hegel recognized the merit of Jacobi in putting together with Kant an end to *rational metaphysics* — he showed that it was impossible to apply the reason to learn the universal, absolute, infinite. The real "treasure" of the humanity Jacobi saw in the manifestation of *reason* in man, that is... in the belief in God, freedom, and virtue, which the

reason knows nothing about [10, p. 55]. This belief towers over science and limits the notion of nature with the concept of *freedom*, sensory-perceptual with extra-sensory and thus *makes up* for what the understanding alone, i. e. science, fails to give [10, p. 57]. For such a necessary fulfillment a person needs to get *out of the trail of understanding* [11, S. 40]. To achieve the ultimate and primary goal sought by the soul in the cognitive process, it is vital to make a *salto mortale* — to leap over the endless chains of cause and effect, and touch the unconditional, eternal, and infinite in the *direct perception of reason* in the depths of one's own subjectivity. Jacoby saw the necessary addition to the "abstractions" of understanding not in Hegel's speculative mind, but in the ultimate truth of *life*, in the *immediate perception of freedom* and the same *immediate perception* of God. Beyond the scope of understanding lie the most important things, which keep this paradoxical *sense of transcendental*. It is actually what we call the *reason*. Thus, Jacoby agrees with his opponent, Hegel, on the main point: the ***mystical*** knowledge is a manifestation of the ***reason*** of man. One finds its fullest realization in the system of *science*, the other, like Kant, in *morality*.

Mystics "can see what is not seen by any other healthy person, and can communicate to creatures which would not reveal themselves to anyone else…" When they finally wake up with God's help, that is when they open their eyes and their look shows that they can already understand other people, none of them will see clearly anything that convincingly and in the light of their evidence can become evident to someone else" [3, p. 321]. The fact that a mystic in his passionate quest for *unity* with the absolute (or transcendental) *retires*, moves away from the world and other people into a secluded and hidden from other people space, into his *own* world is a sure sign of an illusory, subjective, personal nature of his visions. Having summarized the large amount of evidence, James pointed to the characteristics of mystical experience: 1) it is ineffable, 2) it is intuitive, 3) it has short duration, 4) it is marked by inactive will [2, p. 303—304]. All these features *directly oppose* the properties of academic excellence and scientific and philosophical knowledge, which are based on the purposeful *activity*, the possibility of *multiple* objective observations, testing by other people, the primacy of *thought* over the sensory perception (intuition), the desire for *certainty*, accuracy, consistency, clear expression in the language, etc. Therefore, scientific knowledge is initially produced by joint efforts, it becomes public domain, gets a versatile, universal value. *Thinking* brings people together (as well as bringing sensory variety into holistic image of an object). Nothing separates us more than a mystical desire to dive into an infinite point inside oneself. The fact that such a separation brings the ultimate unity is an illusion. Only through thinking and language, we live in *one* world. "Unspeakable" and "unthinkable" is just sensual, inferior, not superior. Science is the most perfect expression of the ability to think and learn, to communicate, to comprehend the reality that no one is given "suddenly" and "as a whole," as if by magic, but which image is becoming deeper, more precise, more perfect, more interesting thanks to centuries-old works of the worldwide republic of philosophers and scientists.

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