

1998

The Swami and the Rorschach: Spiritual Practice, Religious Experience, and Perception

Diane Jonte-Pace

Santa Clara University, djontepace@scu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarcommons.scu.edu/rel_stud

 Part of the [Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Jonte-Pace, Diane. "The Swami and the Rorschach: Spiritual Practice, Religious Experience, and Perception." *The Innate Capacity: Mysticism, Psychology, and Philosophy*. Ed. Robert K. C. Forman. New York: Oxford UP, 1998. 137-60.

The Swami and the Rorschach by Diane Jonte-Paace, 1998, reproduced by permission of Oxford University Press. <https://global.oup.com/academic/product/the-innate-capacity-9780195116977?q=Innate%20Capacity&lang=en&cc=us#>

This Book Chapter is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Arts & Sciences at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Religious Studies by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact rscroggin@scu.edu.

The Swami and the Rorschach

Spiritual Practice, Religious Experience, and Perception

DIANE JONTE-PACE

NEARLY A CENTURY after William James initiated the psychological study of mysticism with the publication of *The Varieties of Religious Experience*,¹ Robert Forman has returned to James's project by issuing a call for a *psychologia perennis*.² This "perennial psychology" would investigate mystical or nonordinary states of consciousness and the transformative processes that produce them. Whereas James offered a typology of mystical experience structured around the mysticism of the "healthy minded" and the mysticism of the "sick soul," Forman proposes an inquiry that goes well beyond the work of his predecessor. He raises questions not only about types of mystical experience but also about the influence of innate psychological structure and of culture upon mystical experience.

Four central theses structure Forman's argument. First, he differentiates ordinary consciousness from mystical consciousness. Second, he argues that transformative processes like meditation can enact a shift from ordinary to mystical consciousness. Third, he suggests that the transformative efficacy of practices like meditation lies in the stripping away of learned cultural and linguistic categories to expose an underlying "innate capacity" for experiencing mystical "pure consciousness." Fourth, he maintains that this state of "pure consciousness" is cross-culturally and historically stable.

Forman argues, in other words, that *mystical experiences of pure consciousness, made possible by transformative processes like meditation, transcend historical and cultural differences and are in some way "innate."* As he explains in this volume, his approach to mysticism represents a "decontextualist" as opposed to a "constructivist" approach. Decontextualists are universalists who argue for the unity or

identity of mystical experiences across cultural and historical boundaries. In their view, which the psychologist of religion Ralph Hood refers to as the “common core theory” of mysticism, “variations in descriptions may mask similar if not identical experiences.”³ “Constructivists” like Wayne Proudfoot and Steven Katz, on the other hand, are pluralists who argue that mystical experiences differ according to cultural and historical context.⁴ The focus of the constructivists is on the cultural construction of experience: they argue, in opposition to the decontextualist thesis of an innate capacity for pure awareness, that no unmediated experience is possible and that all experience, including mystical experience, is shaped by culture and language. From their perspective, claims for universality or commonality in religious experience are a result of a cultural hegemony that disregards the differences that are the basis of historical and cultural particularity.

In his call for a perennial psychology and in his articulation of the decontextualist thesis, Forman urges scholars to initiate “comparative work in mysticism, religion, spirituality, and the fundamentals of cognitive psychology . . . (to investigate) deep psychological structures, states of consciousness, as well as transformative processes.”⁵ I propose that the Rorschach test might serve well as such a method for investigating religion, spirituality, psychological structure, and cognition. In addition, it might bring some clarity to the debate between the decontextualists and the constructivists. In this essay I discuss three unique Rorschach studies that, in my view, represent an important step toward such a psychology of religious experience and examine their implications for Forman’s decontextualist thesis.

Why might the Rorschach test represent a valuable method for studying religious experience? The nature of perception is the explicit concern of both the Rorschach test and the texts that describe religious experience. The Rorschach test explicitly deconstructs in order to analyze, understand, and interpret the process of perception while much of the mystical literature similarly describes an explicit deconstruction of the process of perception in order to escape from that process. William Blake’s famous assertion, “If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear as it is—infinite,” echoes, for example, the Upaniṣadic texts that urge the cessation of “the five sense knowledges” and the Buddhist Abhidamma texts that instruct the meditator in the practice of gaining insight into and detachment from sensation, perception, and judgment.⁶

Forman’s attempt to differentiate ordinary consciousness from mystical consciousness similarly focuses on perception. He outlines a tripartite epistemological and perceptual framework that characterizes ordinary consciousness: he describes the perceiving subject, the perceived object, and the process of perceiving or knowing. In mystical consciousness, Forman suggests, a subject no longer perceives an object but perceives or knows consciousness itself.⁷ For Forman, the transformations in the perceiving subject, the perceived object, and the process of perception are crucial in understanding the shift from ordinary consciousness to mystical consciousness. What makes the Rorschach test so valuable in this context is precisely its ability to analyze

the perceiving subject and the process of perceiving. By offering to the subject an ambiguous object—by removing, in a sense, the “perceived object” from the tripartite epistemological structure of awareness—the Rorschach test makes possible an inquiry into the relationship between the other two components, the perceiving subject and the process of perception. Since the Rorschach test itself is an instrument sensitive to the nature and the process of perception, the test records of spiritual masters can provide insight into perception in nonordinary consciousness.

The Rorschach Test

Primarily a diagnostic tool, the Rorschach, or “inkblot,” test has been widely utilized for many decades as a measure of perception and personality. The creator of the test, Hermann Rorschach (1884–1922), was vitally interested in the intersections of perception, cognition, and religion. His work developing the inkblot test was immediately preceded by—and, I’ve argued, was closely related to—his study of sectarian religious groups in the mountains of Switzerland.⁸ After publishing papers on these groups in early psychoanalytic journals, he put aside his research on religion to complete his manuscript on perception and personality, *Psychodiagnostics*.⁹ Letters written at this time to Swiss pastor and psychoanalyst Oskar Pfister refer to the psychological analysis of religion he intended to pursue.¹⁰ Plans for this research were cut short by his unexpected death, caused by acute peritonitis, in 1922 at age 37.

In spite of Hermann Rorschach’s interest in religion, in spite of what I consider to be the great potential of the Rorschach test for understanding religious experience, and in spite of the fact that the Rorschach is “the most extensively researched projective instrument” in diagnostic testing,¹¹ only a few Rorschach studies have focused explicitly on religion. Fewer still have explored nonordinary religious consciousness. Typical studies in the field of religion and the Rorschach, for example, have constructed personality profiles of nuns, priests, ministers, and applicants to seminaries.¹² This research has barely begun to explore the potential of the Rorschach test as a method of studying religious experience. Those few studies that have investigated the effects of altered states experience or meditation on Rorschach records have utilized inexperienced or naive subjects—Maupin’s study of the influence of Zen meditation practice on college students, for example, involved subjects with fewer than ten hours of meditation practice.¹³

The Rorschach literature, however, contains three remarkable but little-known sets of studies of the spiritually advanced. In the 1950s French psychiatrist Frederick Spiegelberg administered the Rorschach test to an Indian Vedantic master, Swami Sivananda;¹⁴ in the 1960s psychoanalytic anthropologists L. Bryce Boyer and Bruno Klopfer and their associates administered the test to Apache shamans and “pseudo-shamans”;¹⁵ and in the 1970s and 1980s psychologists Daniel Brown and Jack Engler conducted a complex study of advanced Buddhist meditators at different stages of progress in the Vipassana tradition of mindfulness meditation. Brown and Engler’s

study differentiated four groups of Western meditators (a beginners' group, a samadhi group, an insight group, and an advanced insight group) and a "masters' group" that consisted of a single South Asian enlightened master.¹⁶

The value of these studies of advanced practitioners of spiritual disciplines for the sort of *psychologia perennis* proposed by Forman is immense. Although they cannot offer a literal window into the pure consciousness experience, they do offer an opportunity for cross-cultural comparison into the cognitive and perceptual processes of the religiously and spiritually advanced. In this essay I discuss the Rorschach protocols of the swami, the shamans, and the meditators, demonstrating some remarkable similarities in the Rorschach records of the most advanced masters, similarities that may help lift some of the obscurity clouding the debate between the decontextualists and the constructivists regarding nonordinary experience and the processes that produce them.

Let us examine briefly the rationale and vocabulary of Rorschach test administration and scoring. Hermann Rorschach discovered in his inkblot test a method of measuring the human process of perceiving and creating the world out of the ambiguous sensory stimuli we constantly confront. His central insight concerned the relationship between the structure of perception and the structure of personality: he discovered that when exposed to relatively "unstructured or ambiguous materials (we) organize and interpret them in a manner characteristic of (our) own personalities and perceptions of the world."¹⁷

In the Rorschach test, the subject is given ten cards, one at a time, and is asked to tell the examiner what each card looks like. The cards are ambiguous, symmetrical inkblots, some nearly monochromatic, others including colors. The examiner records the responses (e.g., "bat," "butterfly," "clouds") and, in a subsequent inquiry, ascertains the perceptual stimulus that produced each response. Later, the "Rorschach test record" (the full set of responses to the ten cards) is interpreted according to a standardized set of perceptual and interpretive scoring categories. While several schools of thought have emerged in recent decades regarding the specifics of interpretation, all are in general agreement with Rorschach's original method and insights.¹⁸

Responses are classified under two major headings—location and determinant—and two minor headings, content and popularity/originality. Location scores (whole, detail, or small detail) are a measure of cognitive approach: they describe the area of the card chosen in the response and are an indication of style of approach and mental ability to organize. Whole responses reveal a capacity to integrate, organize, and see relationships between disparate parts, while detail responses indicate practicality and a focus on the particular. The sequence of approach (whole to detail or detail to whole) indicates how the subject encounters a task or engages a problem.

The determinant scores classify responses according to four specific perceptual properties: form, color, movement, and shading. Form responses measure the ability to objectify the visual field into definite patterns and objects; they provide an index of ego strength, rationality, and disciplined thinking. Color responses indicate the

way one is influenced by one's surroundings and one's emotional state, with high color responsivity interpreted as a sign of impulsivity and emotionality. Movement responses are characterized by the perception of a form combined with the perception of motion in the form. These, especially when the content is human (the Human Movement response), represent a capacity for inner life, fantasy, and a potential for empathy. Finally, the shading, or Chiaroscuro, responses (perceptions, for example, involving clouds, darkness, or smoke) are generally interpreted as a sign that the subject is at the mercy of the environment, beset by undifferentiated moods or depression. Thus, in these two major interpretive categories, location scores and determinants, the formal elements of perceptual structuring are the primary concern. The test provides a measure of how one perceives and what one selects as perceptually relevant.

The other two indices of interpretation turn away from the formal elements of perception to examine aspects of the content of the response. Although Rorschach was explicit in ascribing to the formal features the primary import in his diagnostic method, he acknowledged the subtle significance of content as well. Content and the related measure "popularity/originality" provide an understanding of the associative process and its social context. Attention to the content of Rorschach responses also makes possible a more nuanced interpretation of the formal elements of perception.

Popularity/originality is a specific measurement applied to the content. This measurement functions as an index of conventionality versus independence of thinking. Responses that are given by a statistically high percentage of adults in a culture are scored as "popular" responses. "Original" or rare responses are responses of good form quality (reasonably "realistic" responses) that are given by a small percentage of adults in a culture. Statistical norms for popular and original responses have been established by Rorschach researchers for many cultural groups.¹⁹

These scoring categories expose the perceptual and associative patterns foundational to consciousness. Rorschach argued that the inkblot test made evident the nonconscious elements of perception and cognitive experience. All perception, he maintained, involved a process of separating a total visual field into distinct percepts: encountering sense data, selecting particular elements of the data as relevant, eliminating other elements as irrelevant, and selecting an associative or verbal label.

Rorschach Test Records of Swamis, Meditators, and Shamans

First, a word about terminology: while Forman's interest is in "the mystic," I hesitate to call the subjects of these studies "mystics." Each is an advanced practitioner of his or her culture's tradition of religious discipline; each is an adept in nonordinary states of consciousness; and each might be called a spiritual master. The term "mystic" would clearly be inappropriate for the shaman; the Buddhist meditators and the Hindu Swami would not call themselves mystics. Thus, I use the term "spiritual master" rather than mystic. Brown and Engler refer to their most advanced subject,

an enlightened South Asian woman, as “the master” or as “the single subject in the masters’ group.” Since my term “spiritual masters” is broader than Brown and Engler’s “masters’ group,” I refer to their most advanced subject as the “enlightened master” to differentiate her from the other advanced Buddhist meditators who have achieved varying degrees of “mastery.” In addition, I generally refer to “nonordinary experience” rather than to “mystical experience.”

What does the Rorschach test indicate about the perceptual patterns or cognitive styles of spiritual masters? If the nonconscious components of perception and cognition are revealed through the Rorschach test, and if the deconstruction of perceptual categories constitutes nonordinary consciousness, then Rorschach test records of those deeply involved in a spiritual tradition should reveal some important commonalities. I show that this is precisely the case.

In specific responses the Rorschach test records of the spiritual masters differed considerably: there was clearly no universalism of content. Location scores and determinants as well showed a great deal of variation. The masters, in other words, did not see the same shapes and images in the Rorschach cards. However, notable parallels emerge in three particular areas. First, the responses reflect major cultural or religious tenets, rather than individual psychological concerns; in other words, the content is “impersonal” or “culturally embedded” to a degree never recorded in previous Rorschach literature. Second, the masters’ test records share an “integrative” approach in which all the inkblot cards are thematically and systematically related to each other in a comprehensive whole. Third, the test records reveal a common cluster of determinants, a grouping I call the “vague and slippery determinant cluster”: the masters’ records share high shading responsivity, high amorphous form responsivity, and high inanimate movement responsivity.

These three common features of the masters’ test records are quite unusual. The integrative style and the culturally embedded content of the responses are virtually unknown in the Rorschach literature, and the elements of the determinant cluster are generally interpreted as an indication of psychopathology. Let us examine these commonalities and the interpretive problems they raise.

Culturally Embedded or Impersonal Content

In the Rorschach cards each spiritual master saw representations of the doctrinal truths of the Apache, Vedantic, or Buddhist doctrines of his or her spiritual tradition. They either did not offer the “personal” responses normally expected in the Rorschach test or their “personal” responses were embedded in a “cultural” meaning or content. The Apache shaman Black Eyes gave responses involving traveling stars, the powers of nature, the energy of lightning, and the sequence of seasonal change on earth as perceived from above—all elements of his spiritual practice and discipline, especially his ecstatic journeys through space.²⁰ Swami Sivananda perceived symbolic representations of the unity that underlies all diversity, the union of the erotic and divine

forces Shiva and Shakti, and the rising of the sun of knowledge behind the clouds and shadows of ignorance—central tenets of the Vedantic tradition. The Buddhist enlightened master saw human and animal forms that represent the causes of suffering; black shapes depicting the entrapment of the human mind in envy, disease, sorrow, and hatred; and temples associated with the freedom of the mind from attachments. Each of these represented teachings central to her Vipassana tradition.²¹

The spiritual masters' responses to Cards V and VI provide dramatic examples of this cultural embeddedness of content. The Apache shaman Black Eyes gave the following response to Card V:

Well, this one, he travels with no star. Jus' a refleck from daybreak. This is a female. See daybreak is jus' comin' in there. Refleck from the rock bluffs. Female of the thunderwinds. It looks like a bat, but it's not a bat. This is a fas' travelin' jus' like a high wind. You could almos' see the reflection, travel on the Eastern States, way up close to Canada. That cloud is too wide. It covers the star there. This black here, cover the mornin' star. But it don't show.²²

Swami Sivananda responded to the same card with the following:

I like this design because it describes very accurately the practice of Radja Yoga. Look at this bat. It is a bird, and also a mammal. It has extended its wings and has taken the role of a bird. The alert ears and the nose like a searcher indicate that the bird is on wings searching for something. Like this creature, humanity has a subordinate nature and a dominant nature. The lower is animal nature and the higher, we say, is divine or human. The lower holds his feet firmly planted on the ground, so he is glued to worldly things. As long as he is concerned with his progeny, his country, and keeps his feet firmly planted on the ground, as long as he is stuck in worldly affairs, he will forget that he possesses wings. The movement which he releases with his wings (*viveka* or discrimination, and *vairagya* or nonattachment for the world . . .) makes his ears lift up with alertness and makes him eager to hear the truth and to pursue the quest for knowledge. He goes beyond the earth. He transcends his inferior nature and flies away as divine or as human, to realize, finally, the will of the soul.²³

The enlightened Buddhist master saw in Card V the ignorance and craving of the mind and the causes of human suffering. She went on in Card VI to describe how the mind can be used to gain liberation: "A pillar. It has taken the form of truth. This pillar reminds me of a process of getting at or discovering the human mind. Inside there is envy, disease, sorrow, and hatred in the form of black shapes. After conquering truth the mind has become clean and white."²⁴

These are unusual and striking responses, quite different from the responses found in typical Rorschach test reports. The masters were enmeshed in their spiritual traditions to such a degree that inner life became indistinguishable from the spiritual teachings. Even their preconscious perceptual selections were congruent with their cultural traditions. The embeddedness of these Rorschach responses must not be misinterpreted as cultural shaping of individual responses within a standard expectable range. All Rorschach records contain, of course culturally influenced responses. Social structure, language, geography, and culture influence the content of Rorschach

responses, making some responses unusual for one group but common in another. Norms for all the scoring categories, established for many regions, nations, and cultures, are readjusted periodically.²⁵ While the Rorschach can be used to measure broad variations *among* cultures, it is most often used to measure individual differences *within* cultures. Given a base level of groundedness in cultural norms, most responses, no matter what the cultural context, reflect the particulars of the individual's personality. Such factors as gender, age, education, intelligence, health, adaptability, and inner conflict influence the style of perception and response. Such individual factors, however, are virtually absent from the records of these spiritual masters, creating test records that stand out as anomalous and differ dramatically, not only from American and European records, but also from Native American, Asian, and South Asian records.

I think we can differentiate three types of cultural embeddedness in these records. In the first type, individual perceptions are expressed but are immediately connected to cultural and spiritual meaning systems. This is the case with the shaman's response of "bat" on Card V, which, as noted, "looks like a bat" but is not a bat. Instead, it's "fas' travelin' jus' like a high wind." In the second type, elements of the card that appear to reflect cultural teachings are selected as a primary percept: the masters perceptually select and organize into responses those stimuli that are congruent with aspects of their spiritual traditions. Illustrative of this type of response is Swami Sivananda's view of the bilateral symmetry of Card V as a representation of unity in duality. In the third type, responses reveal the virtual disappearance of individual perceptions: Brown and Engler found individual responses entirely absent from the Buddhist master's record and argued for an "impersonal" style of response, a response style entirely consistent with the Buddhist doctrine of no-self. Intrapsychic structure, they argue, "has undergone a radical enduring reorganization. . . . There may be no endopsychic structure in the sense of permanently opposed drives and controls."²⁶

Other examples of this cultural embeddedness abound in the test records. In Swami Sivananda's record, aspects of the inkblot consistent with Vedantic teachings became the primary focus: for example, the symmetry of Card VIII reflected the duality of the world of appearances and the ultimate unity of true reality:

Beyond the colors is the Self from which the colors are emanated. The card has two of each color to show that creation is based on defined laws, that the picture has its own soul in its symmetry, and that creation is supported by the pairs of opposites: good, bad, hot, cold, pleasure, pain, etc.²⁷

The paucity of personal responses and the preponderance of cultural responses in these records raise two provocative questions. First, do these cultural responses represent a stereotyped social conventionality or an impoverished inner life, devoid of intellectual or emotional richness? Second, might these responses represent a pathological disintegration of the ego? The answer to these questions lies in a "contextual" approach to the material. The test records must be interpreted in the context of

both other records from the same culture and the subject's entire set of responses to the ten cards.

The popular/original index of the Rorschach test provides a way of answering the first question regarding conventionality. A record in which "popular" responses predominate might also be considered "culturally embedded," but the responses would be stereotyped or conventional. These masters' test records, however, do not represent "popular," socially stereotyped, or impoverished records. An informal comparison of these test records with test records of others from the same cultures shows the richness of the masters' responses. Many of the responses may, in fact, be "original"—good "form responses" that are statistically rare.

Just one example from the Rorschach literature can vividly demonstrate the fact that these culturally embedded responses are far from stereotyped. Klopfer, Boyer, and their associates contrasted the Rorschach records of Apache shamans with "nonshaman" and "pseudoshaman" members of the Mescalero culture. In the Mescalero Apache society, the "true" shamans were believed to have supernatural powers: they were widely acclaimed as the possessors of the power to heal and the power to control the weather, and they were said to live and travel both in the world of the spirits and in the world of humans. Boyer and his colleagues defined "pseudoshamans" either as those who claimed to possess supernatural powers but were not acknowledged as shamanic healers by other members of the society or as those to whom such powers were attributed but who denied possessing them. The nonshaman group consisted of other members of the Mescalero Apache society. The study found that, in contrast to both the pseudoshamans and the nonshamans, "the shamans have a way of handling objective data with keener awareness of peculiarities and more selective theoretical interest."²⁸ Shamans were also found to be capable of using "regression in the service of the ego"—a capacity to revert temporarily to earlier forms of thought or behavior in order to make possible a renewed progression or recovery—and to have a greater creative potential, while pseudoshamans, as a group, had impoverished personalities and a lesser capacity for creative regression. Thus, the shaman's responses are creative and unconventional in comparison with the responses of others of their culture—although, paradoxically, the responses are, at the same time, impersonal or culturally embedded. Responses of the shamans, in other words, stand out from their own Apache culture in comparison with those of both nonshamans and pseudoshamans.

The second question—might these records be indicative of pathology—can be answered negatively as well: this culturally embedded style is not a result of ego disintegration or psychosis. The Rorschach record of the master looks entirely different from the record of a psychotic: psychotic records typically contain idiosyncratic, aggressive, and violent associations. The study of Apache shamans, nonshamans, and pseudoshamans addresses this question directly, concluding that the shamans "were not autocultural psychological deviants who had resolved serious psychopathological conditions . . . (such as) schizophrenic illnesses, through assump-

tion of the shamanistic role. . . . The shamans as a group had a high degree of reality-testing potential.”²⁹

Thus, the contextual approach affirms that the masters’ culturally embedded responses are not reflective of cultural stereotypes, mental impoverishment, psychopathology, or ego disintegration. Rather, the culturally defined content of the masters’ responses indicates that individual perceptions and associations are embedded in cultural teachings; individual identity is subsumed by spiritual/cultural identity to a far greater degree than the typical cultural shaping of individual consciousness. This feature of the Rorschach suggests that devoting one’s life to a spiritual path, focusing constantly on spiritual goals, and being continuously engaged in the spiritual practice have a powerful effect on perception and personality. Individual perceptions take on the cultural content of the teachings; personal identity merges with social role to an unprecedented degree. In the masters’ responses, as Buddhist students sometimes say respectfully about enlightened teachers, “There’s no one there!”

Integrative Style

In addition to this culturally embedded content, the masters exhibited a highly unusual integrative style, weaving their responses to all ten cards into a comprehensive, systematic, and sequential whole. Standard Rorschach test scoring procedure has no category for this degree of integration and organization, but I believe it is related to the organizational activity Rorschach measured by means of the whole response in his location scores. As noted earlier, the “whole response” represented for Rorschach the capacity to analyze percepts into parts and to integrate them into meaningful wholes; thus, it revealed analytic-synthetic abilities and the capacity for abstraction and generalization. Rorschach himself recognized that there were different kinds of whole responses, differentiated by the degree of organization and the complexity of the response. Subsequent Rorschach theorists have developed additional ways of measuring this capacity, including “organization scores” and “incorporation responses.”³⁰ However, these indices of organization and integration measure perceptual skills *within* individual cards. The masters’ organization scores are, in a sense, “off the charts”: they integrate all ten cards into a systematic whole in a radical extension of the perceptual and organizational components of the whole response.

This integrative style in the masters’ records is characterized by a systematic and sequential approach and by a didactic focus on the central teachings of the tradition. One would almost believe that the masters had been given the Rorschach cards in advance with the request that each prepare a lecture on his or her spiritual tradition based on the sequence and the imagery of the cards. For the enlightened Buddhist master, for example, the Rorschach test situation became an opportunity for a coherent spiritual discourse or “dharma talk.” She used the Rorschach test situation to describe the causes of suffering and the way to alleviate suffering through spiritual

practice based on nonattachment, closely following the traditional Buddhist teachings regarding the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path. Brown and Engler describe portions of her test record:

Card I sets the stage with four images of humans and beasts in their everyday life of suffering. Card II depicts a picture of the mind in its angered state, and Card III depicts the creatures of hell, the hellish stage of mind produced by anger in this life or the plane on which an angry person is believed to take birth in a future life, both in accordance with the Buddhist teachings on karmic action based on hatred. Cards IV–V depict the ignorance and craving of the mind, believed to be the two root causes of suffering in Buddhist psychology. . . . The remainder of the cards depict the enjoyment of the perfected practice as well as the consequences of practice that is not perfected.³¹

Similarly, Swami Sivananda created a coherent sequence that portrayed the stages of the spiritual path from a Vedantic perspective. Cards I and II showed devotees of the Lord at worship; Card III portrayed the removal of attachments and desires as one progresses in spiritual practice; Card IV depicted the three elements of ultimate reality experienced by the practitioner and the unity underlying the apparent duality of spirit and matter. Card V showed the lower and higher natures of mankind and the nonattachment possible through the practice of Yoga; Card VI portrayed the symbolism of the union of spirit and matter in the Shiva Linga cult, and Cards VII to X depicted various aspects of Atman, the soul, Brahman, the ultimate source of all reality, and Avidya, the darkness or ignorance that hides the truth. Thus, Swami Sivananda's record offered an organized set of instructions in the doctrine and practice, proceeding from worship to spiritual practice to ultimate reality and the monistic source of all things.

The shaman's record also contains a sequential, comprehensive approach toward cultural teachings. Black Eyes' responses created a description and history of the spiritual reality of the shaman's world. He began with "the old time" when there were "enemies in the clouds"; he shifted in the early cards to a description of the most prominent elements of his shamanic experience (traveling stars, seasonal changes, and views of the earth from far above); and he concluded with descriptions of the vital forces of movement and life (wind, lightning, and water). More specifically, Cards I–IV, for Black Eyes, depicted the traveling stars of summer and autumn (I); the view of Alaska from high above the earth during the early spring (II); traveling stars in the early fall when crops are maturing (III); and the view downward toward the earth in late spring (IV). The dynamic forces underlying all movement and life appeared in Cards V–X. Cards V–VIII showed the "fast-traveling thunderwinds" and the power of lightning "going straight to the earth"; Card IX showed thunder over the crops in late fall "giving them life, giving life again to go on through the winter"; and Card X showed a land underneath the water and a purposeful shaking of water directed by an unseen androgynous "water boss." What emerges is a coherent and sequential progression of spiritual perspective from the "old times" to the star travels to the elements of the cosmos to the life force that underlies the cycles of nature.

For each of these spiritual masters, then, taking the Rorschach test became an opportunity to function didactically as a teacher of spiritual realities and soteriologically as a proponent of the highest truth. The integrative, sequential quality of these Rorschach records represents a considerable accomplishment. Against the varied stimulus-pull of the diverse cards, the masters succeeded at integrating all ten cards into a single body of teaching in an orderly and systematic way, without significant departures from reality testing.³² The shaman communicated his ecstatic flights through space; the Swami taught the essential elements of Vedantic doctrine; and the enlightened Buddhist master related her knowledge and experience of the means to end suffering. The integrative and unitive styles reveal the masters' remarkable intellectual capacities; the presentations of cultural/spiritual truths support the earlier suggestion that individual perceptions seem to disappear as individual identity is subsumed by spiritual identity, while the didactic style demonstrates a deep embeddedness in the therapeutic and salvific role of master.

Again, it is necessary to raise the interpretive question regarding pathology: Can these integrative records be distinguished from symptomatic and pathological Rorschach records wherein one might also find the ten cards related to a single theme? The record of a delusional paranoid schizophrenic or an obsessive with fixated responses, for example, might show a single-pointed focus. There are several differences, however, in the types of records one would find in these cases. Again, a contextual approach clarifies the issues. First, the highly unique, idiosyncratic, and personalized nature of paranoid delusion or obsessional fixation contrasts sharply with the impersonal, culturally embedded, systematic presentation of a consensual body of teaching established by a tradition. Second, as Brown and Engler note, the decision to use the testing situation as an occasion to teach stands in stark contrast to the guardedness and constrictedness of a paranoid record.³³ Third, the spiritual masters' associations are consistent and integrated across all ten cards, rather than being loosely related from card to card. Finally, the responses show good form quality: percepts are quite realistic. We can conclude that the integrative quality of these records thus does not represent a defensive, obsessive, fixated, or perseverative clinging to fixed concepts.

The Vague and Slippery Determinant Cluster

Although the major scoring determinants (movement, form, and color) in the test reports of the masters showed no uniformity in the masters' Rorschachs, these unique records share high responsivity to the particular cluster of determinants I have called "vague and slippery." This includes shading responses, inanimate movement responses, and amorphously perceived form responses. These are particularly problematic findings, because in standard Rorschach diagnosis they are clear signs of pathology.

Shading can involve the perception of diffuse cloudiness, the perception of darkness in the card, or the perception of discrete nuances of shading. Although theorists debate the scoring and interpretation of shading, it is generally seen as an index of the sense of being engulfed by nothingness, the sense of groundlessness, or the sense of being lost in a world that has no discernible organization. Such responses are usually interpreted as a sign of depression, character disorder, feelings of inferiority, or vague anxiety. They are “more frequent in neurotics than in normals and still more frequent in psychopaths . . . [and] they are always connected with central feeling tones, mostly of a dysphoric nature.”³⁴ In addition, these responses often involve a tendency toward inadequate mood control. The closely related “vague or amorphously perceived form response” is a sign of lack of integrative ability, a noncommittal hold on reality, and weak mental processes.³⁵ The Rorschach literature thus views the shading and amorphous form responses perceptually as the experience of loss of boundaries, groundlessness, and constant change, emotionally as a manifestation of diffuse anxiety, and diagnostically as signs of depression and weak reality contact.³⁶

Typical examples of shading responses to the Rorschach cards are dark clouds or shadows, and such responses were frequent in the masters' records. The most common form of shading among the masters was the perception of diffuse cloudiness. Black Eyes' record contained seven shading responses and four (related) achromatic color responses. These included clouds, reflections of light on clouds, and darkness. Some Rorschach theorists such as Samuel Beck also score three-dimensionality and “bird's-eye views” of landscapes or maps as shading responses.³⁷ In Beck's system, Black Eyes would have had additional shading responses in Cards II, IV, and V. No matter which scoring system is used, Black Eyes' record reveals very high shading responsivity in comparison with Rorschach test norms. Swami Sivananda's record contains three dramatic shading responses. These include Card VI, “light hidden in darkness, truth buried in false appearances”; Card VII, “Atman hidden under apparent darkness surrounded by mold”; and Card IX, “rising of the sun of knowledge behind the clouds and shadows of ignorance.” Similarly, the Rorschach record of the Buddhist master showed “considerable reliance on shading responses and vague and amorphously perceived form.”³⁸ Notably, these features were also present in the Rorschach test records of the “samadhi group” in Brown and Engler's study.

In addition to high shading responsivity, the masters' records revealed a tendency toward inanimate movement responsivity. The inanimate movement response is characterized by a perception of movement in an object in the inkblot. This is differentiated from human or animal movement and is generally interpreted as “infantile intrapsychic tension” or “hostile and uncontrollable impulses.”³⁹ This percept was evident in very high incidence in Black Eyes' record and in Brown and Engler's “advanced insight group” of Western-born students of mindfulness meditation who had attained the first stage of enlightenment.⁴⁰

The Rorschach records of the “advanced insight group” of meditators, otherwise “mundane,” showed an extraordinarily high use of inanimate movement responses, alone and in conjunction with color and shading. Brown and Engler note: “10–20% of the total responses were inanimate movement responses for each of the four subjects. No subject’s record contained less than a raw count of eight such responses.”⁴¹ Typical responses involved content related to energy in motion, such as this response to Card X:

Sort of like just energy and like molecules . . . something like the energy of molecules. Very much like a microscopic view. . . . In some way there are more patterns of energy. . . . There are different energies in the different colors. It looks like it’s a view into the body where there’s energy, there’s movement, but it’s steady because it’s guided by a life force. There is a rising and passing away of these different elements.⁴²

This determinant is also present in Swami Sivananda’s record, notably in Card X: “All these have left the One. There is something beyond. On this side, across from a trunk, or a shadowy passageway . . . diverse objects are falling. Some large, some small, some with many limbs, others with none, with various nuances and forms.”⁴³ Similarly, Black Eyes’ “traveling stars” are an excellent example of this response, as are his “lightning power” and “shaking water.”

How can the preponderance of shading, inanimate movement, and amorphous form in these records be interpreted? Are these masters depressed, anxious, or unable to control their moods, as the high incidence of shading would indicate? Do they have a weak hold on reality, as the high incidence of amorphous form would indicate? Are they beset by hostile and uncontrollable urges, as the inanimate movement responses indicate? Klopfer and Boyer raise this question pointedly in relation to Black Eyes:

One of the most damaging aspects of . . . (Black Eyes’) record is the prevalence of undifferentiated shading and the inanimate or magic motion throughout the ten cards. . . . The best possible explanation in the given cultural setting for this combination of the deep anxiety connected with the strong and totally unrefined impulsive sensuous reaction, and the identification with the erratic wanderings of the traveling stars, seems to lie in the assumption that he identified his urges with his magic mandate, but is very careful, at the same time, to avoid any ego responsibility for his actions.⁴⁴

Thus, a traditional diagnosis—even from interpreters as sympathetic as Klopfer and Boyer—views Black Eyes’ record as pathological. I suggest, however, that in a spiritual rather than a psychological context, the shading responses, the amorphous form responses, and the inanimate movement responses should be interpreted differently. The perception of shadows, vague shapes, or moving fields of energy is not anomalous or pathological for a spiritual adept accustomed to the sense of reality as impermanent and in constant flux, the blurring of self-environment boundaries, and the sense of nothingness or groundlessness. These are experiences often attributed to mystical states, meditative states, or other altered states of consciousness. Buddhist teachings, in fact, are remarkably congruent with the experiential elements of

this shared determinant cluster. The constant flux of reality is consistent with the Buddhist teaching of impermanence (*anicca*), the constant change inherent in every aspect of the finite world. The blurring of self-environment boundaries, characteristic of shading percepts, parallels the Buddhist teaching of *anatta*, the lack of intrinsic durable nature of the self. Furthermore, the perceptual experience of nothingness in the shading response echoes the Buddhist view of Nirvana—nothingness, or the void.

Brown and Engler interpret the vague and slippery determinant cluster in the meditators as indications of the achievement of specific levels of meditative progress. In their view, inanimate movement in association with shading is a specific predictor of having achieved “access samadhi,”⁴⁵ while the inanimate movement responses, emphasizing the relationship of form, energy, and space as life forces, are predictors of having achieved the first level of enlightenment in “advanced insight.”⁴⁶ They might suggest that the shaman and the swami had achieved, through their own spiritual practices, the equivalent of the “samadhi” or “insight” levels of advancement. I think, however, that the experience of “perceptual deautomatization” in nonordinary consciousness itself is a more parsimonious—and cross-culturally applicable—way of explaining these patterns.

The notion of perceptual “automatization” and “deautomatization” was developed by A. Deikman in the 1960s in an attempt to understand ordinary and nonordinary or altered states of consciousness.⁴⁷ “Automatization” in Deikman’s theory is the mental process basic to human consciousness whereby the repeated exercise of an action or a perception results in the disappearance from consciousness of its intermediate steps. In other words, we are not consciously aware of the perceptual process of encountering an ambiguous stimulus, selecting certain features to attend to, ignoring other features, and providing a verbal label. All of these elements contribute to every perception, but the process is “automatized.” “Deautomatization” is the undoing of automatization by reinvesting actions and percepts with attention, leading to the breakdown of the psychological structures that organize, limit, select, and interpret perceptual stimuli.

According to Deikman, concentrative meditation is a primary method of attending to and deautomatizing the process of perception. He has suggested that deautomatization is the primary component of all mystical and meditative experience: “Training in contemplative meditation leads to the building of intrapsychic barriers against distracting stimuli. . . . The phenomena described in mystic accounts can be regarded as the consequence of a partial deautomatization of the psychic structures that organize and interpret perceptual stimuli.”⁴⁸

In ordinary perception, we select from ambiguous sense data the more stable, firm, clear, or rigid perceptual stimuli. Those who are accustomed to nonordinary states of consciousness, however, are able to perceive the unstable, infirm, unclear, and nonrigid. In the literature we’ve examined, the masters’ achievement of meditative, contemplative, or ecstatic states of consciousness has provided them with expertise

in breaking down ordinary perceptual patterns—an expertise that is evident in the Rorschach records.

The Buddhist meditators and the Swami are participants in spiritual traditions that engage the deautomatization of normal perceptual processes. Vedantic meditative practice is a classic example of a concentrative approach, while the Vipassana groups are practitioners of a mindfulness meditation system that emphasizes both concentrative meditation and “insight” (bare awareness of all mental processes). The “samadhi group” of Buddhist meditators, the group that shows the greatest evidence of perceptual deautomatization, is the group that is most diligently practicing concentration. Meditation in both its concentrative and its insight-oriented forms radically slows perceptual processing of stimuli and deconstructs cognitive structures. The shaman’s altered state experience, on the other hand, is clearly not meditative or concentrative. Rather, as the work of Eliade and Fisher suggests, shamanic ecstasy is akin to the rapid cognitive processing characteristic of hallucinogenic states.⁴⁹ Regardless of the source of the deautomatization or the degree of doctrinal and didactic elaboration on deautomatization, however, the result is a breakdown of ordinary perceptual processing. In Rorschach terms, this breakdown results in a predominance of shading responses, inanimate movement responses, and amorphous form responses. Thus, the deautomatization of ordinary perceptual structures appears on the Rorschach test in the vague and slippery determinant cluster and is indicative of a predictable and regular pattern among spiritual masters.

If these responses are an indication of spiritual progress, why are they understood as an indication of pathology in the psychodiagnostic literature? Shading does provide, in all contexts, an index of the perception of reality as changing and without boundaries. This is an appropriate experience for a practitioner of altered states but an inappropriate or frightening experience for those attached to the firmness and stability of reality in normal waking consciousness. The percepts that reveal anxiety in the Rorschach record of the ordinary subject instead reveal toleration of ambiguity and expertise in the spiritual realm in the Rorschach record of the master.

Thus, although the clearest theological and theoretical reflection of this experience occurs in the Buddhist literature, it is not foreign to the Apache and the Vedantic traditions. Shading, amorphous form, and inanimate movement may be valid indicators of the awareness of subtle internal and external nuances in stimuli that is a result of disciplined exploration of altered states of consciousness.⁵⁰ I would predict a high correlation of this determinant cluster with advanced spiritual practice in any tradition involving mystical, contemplative, or altered-states experiences.

Conclusions

I’ve argued that three dramatic cross-cultural similarities emerge in the Rorschach tests of the spiritual masters. First, the Rorschach responses of the spiritual masters are “impersonal” or “culturally embedded” to a degree far greater than one would

expect from previously established Rorschach norms. Second, the masters integrated their responses to all ten cards into a systematic, coherent whole. Third, the masters perceived a great deal of shading, amorphous form, and inanimate movement in the Rorschach test.

These cross-cultural similarities raise several interpretive problems. A preliminary problem, as I've noted, involves the question of diagnosis: Do these Rorschach records indicate spiritual progress or mental pathology? I've shown that the "impersonal" response might be misinterpreted as impoverished; the "integrated" responses might appear fixated; and the "vague" determinant cluster might appear to be signs of depression. I've argued, however, that when the context of the entire record and the norms within a culture are taken into consideration, the responses stand out as nonpathological.

A second major interpretive question raised by this material returns us to the Forman thesis with which we began this discussion. Do the Rorschach records of spiritual masters contribute to the cross-cultural psychological study of nonordinary consciousness proposed by Forman in his call for a *psychologia perennis*? To my mind, there's no question that these Rorschach studies offer a valuable paradigm for a cross-cultural psychology of religious experience. While psychological inquiries into religious experience have a century-long history, much of the research on religious experience remains fairly superficial. Typically, researchers have attempted to create or elicit religious experiences in experimental subjects through sensory deprivation, drugs, ordeals in nature, or suggestion.⁵¹ Predictably, such studies fail to uncover deeper cognitive or perceptual patterns related to long-term religious experience. Forman's proposal represents a significant shift from this earlier approach. His call for a *psychologia perennis*—which I would prefer to rephrase as a call for an investigation of the psychology of spiritual mastery—is well met by the Rorschach studies discussed here, studies that explore perception and cognition in the spiritually advanced. As I've shown, an analysis of these Rorschach studies reveals important commonalities. "Impersonal" responses indicate that the masters are, in a sense, embodiments or carriers of their spiritual traditions; "integrative" responses suggest that the masters utilized the Rorschach test as an opportunity to communicate the essential truths of their tradition; and "vague and slippery" responses indicate a mastery of nuance and a familiarity with nonordinary states of consciousness developed through perceptual deautomatization.

The Rorschach literature thus confirms the first two of Forman's four central theses: there is indeed a difference between ordinary and nonordinary consciousness, and transformational processes like meditation and shamanic training can enact a shift from ordinary to nonordinary consciousness. That shift is visible in the Rorschach test records we've examined. But what of Forman's third and fourth theses—that the transformational power of meditation lies in its ability to strip away learned cultural and linguistic categories, exposing an innate capacity for pure consciousness that is cross-culturally and historically stable? Can the similarities we've seen in the

Rorschach records of spiritual masters be interpreted as evidence of a stripping away of learned cultural and linguistic categories and of an innate capacity for pure consciousness? Brown and Engler would support Forman's thesis. Posing the questions "Does the yogi . . . 'really' reduce thinking and perceptual processes during concentration practice?" and "Does he 'really' become aware of the most subtle workings of his mind and the universe during insight practice?" they answer yes. They demonstrate remarkable congruities between Rorschach records at various stages of advancement and Buddhist teachings about the stages of the path toward enlightenment, arguing that "more complex thinking and perceptual processes are deconstructed during meditation" and that the Rorschach records of meditators at different stages expose this gradual deconstruction of perception.⁵² In their view, the Rorschach records validate the truth claims of Buddhist doctrine and practice: they would affirm Forman's view that spiritual practice gradually removes the perceptual veils that obscure pure awareness.

I am hesitant, however, to support this interpretation of the Rorschach material. My reading of the Rorschachs from the swami, the meditators, and the shaman is somewhat different. I see the similarities in the masters' Rorschach records as evidence of the two interrelated factors I've described—a perceptual deautomatization of consciousness resulting from expertise in nonordinary states of consciousness; and a didactic, salvific, or healing stance developed in response to the demands of the social role of shaman, teacher, or master. The vague and slippery determinant cluster illustrates most vividly the effects of perceptual deautomatization, while the impersonal and integrative response styles exemplify the pedagogical and soteriological stance of the masters' style. Let me explain the implications of these two factors for an assessment of Forman's thesis by returning to the debate Forman described between the decontextualists and the constructivists regarding the relationship between spiritual practice and nonordinary experience.

As Forman noted, decontextualists and constructivists disagree about the relationship between meditation and mysticism or other nonordinary states of consciousness. While both groups acknowledge that practice of meditation or other transformative techniques can lead to mystical experience, the constructivist sees the practice as a learned tradition within a particular religious/cultural context that produces, creates, or "constructs" a certain mystical effect, whereas the decontextualist sees the practice as a process of escaping from or eliminating cultural constructs to expose an authentic core of consciousness through an unlearning, deconstructing, or "forgetting" of cultural categories.⁵³ Those cultural categories, in the decontextualist view, may allow us to function efficiently within the social realm of human interactions in ordinary consciousness, but they obstruct access to an innate capacity to be aware of awareness itself. Thus, according to the decontextualists, spiritual practice gradually removes the cultural and perceptual veils that obscure pure consciousness; according to the constructivists, spiritual practice, rather than lifting veils, creates and constructs religious experience.

Can this debate be resolved? Is it possible to differentiate innate elements from learned elements in religious experience? Can these Rorschach records shed light on the controversy that divides the decontextualists from the constructivists, lifting the veils that obscure the nature of nonordinary consciousness itself? Seeking to resolve this question by controlling for the effects of culture, teaching, and doctrine, Brown and Engler gathered a set of “control” Rorschachs from a group that was familiar with the Buddhist teachings but did not practice intensive meditation.⁵⁴ This was the staff at the site of their “Three-Month Study.” This group listened to lectures with the meditators and embraced the teachings but, unlike the meditators, did not practice sixteen hours of daily meditation. As Brown and Engler predicted, the staff did not show the dramatic Rorschach results evident among the meditators. They concluded that the Rorschach results are an effect of meditative practice itself. I concur with their conclusion.

The fact that intense meditation results in perceptual changes, however, does not prove that meditation strips away culturally learned perceptual categories, leaving an innate capacity for awareness itself—even though the religious teachings may claim to be doing exactly that.⁵⁵ Indeed, members of Brown and Engler’s “advanced insight group,” who were not practicing intensive meditation at the time of testing, showed very few unusual effects in their Rorschach records. Although Brown and Engler see this as a confirmation of the Buddhist teaching that after first-level enlightenment one regains normal consciousness or “retains his ordinary mind,”⁵⁶ this seems to me an indication that the Rorschach effects were directly derived from the (presence or absence of) intensive meditation practice: the vivid effects of the meditating groups were caused by the perceptual deautomatization created through the meditative practice; the paucity of effects of the members of the “advanced insight group” was caused by the fact that they were not, at the time, involved in intense meditation practice. In other words, while the perceptual deautomatization of spiritual practice may create the perceptual changes characteristic of nonordinary consciousness, the question of the stripping away of learned structures and the question of the “innateness” of the nonordinary awareness remain unanswered.

I think that the Rorschach literature sounds a cautionary note. Rather than unambiguously supporting either the decontextualists or the constructivists, it points, in my view, toward the necessity of acknowledging both innate elements and cultural elements in nonordinary experience. The Rorschach studies we examined do not actually differentiate—and perhaps cannot differentiate—between “innate capacities” and culturally shaped experiences, nor can they prove a gradual unveiling of pure awareness through spiritual practice.

We must acknowledge that all human expressions are in some way created or shaped by language and culture: all human products, communications, texts, and behaviors are culturally and linguistically situated. At the same time, there are innate, universal aspects of the human experience: biological and physiological structures, perceptual capacities, capacities for ordinary and nonordinary experiences, and

a realm we haven't discussed here, the realm of unconscious fantasy and desire, the territory Freud devoted his life to charting. Indeed, even such radical constructivists as deconstructionist philosopher Jacques Derrida or social historian Michel Foucault, I think, would agree that the capacity to be shaped by language and culture is universal and in some way innate in humans. Historian of religions Catherine Bell articulates with clarity the impact of this paradox for the field of religious studies: "For many scholars who work closely with religious data of one sort or another, there is little confidence in any universal religious dimension, whether it be psychological, sociological, or metaphysical. Yet neither does it seem obvious that there are no commonalities and that what we want to talk about as 'religion' is in fact a matter of fundamental cultural differences."⁵⁷

In support of the decontextualist thesis, we can affirm that humans have an innate capacity for altered states of consciousness. As ethnopsychiatrist George De Vos states, "a psychological universal in human beings is what might be broadly termed the capacity for altered states of consciousness."⁵⁸ While not everyone experiences these altered states of consciousness, the basic capacity is widespread, if not universal. In support of the constructivist's view, however, we can also state that those who become masters of these nonordinary states of consciousness, whether through meditation or through other means, exhibit certain perceptual and cognitive changes that are shaped by spiritual practice, language, society, culture, and belief.⁵⁹ Decontextualists and constructivists would agree that "perceptual deautomatization" follows a long period of transformative practice, but we cannot finally determine whether or not the practice removes cultural obstacles that previously obscured something hidden and innate. This dilemma remains finally undecidable.

We scholars seem inevitably to frame our debates in terms that require an oppositional other: culture versus nature; universality versus plurality; theology versus religious studies; constructivism versus decontextualism. If William James argued against the "medical materialists" whose reductionistic approaches would pathologize religious experience, and if other generations of scholars argued over whether the mystic vision was attributable to divine or human origination, we argue today over whether mysticism should be traced to innate human capacities or to learned cultural/linguistic categories. What seems to be nearly universal is an "innate capacity"—or, better, an "inescapable compulsion"—to frame our intellectual debates dualistically: in ordinary consciousness or theory-building consciousness, we structure our ideas, experiences, and theories oppositionally in debates that "set up their terms in fundamentally reciprocal or oppositional relationships in which they are foils for defining each other."⁶⁰

It is clear that the contemporary study of religious experience has moved far beyond the collection of spontaneous religious experiences gathered by William James for his 1902 *Varieties of Religious Experience*. The essays in this volume exemplify what might be called, in a paraphrase of James's title, *The Uniformities of Religious Experience*. Yet, paradoxically, Forman's call for a cross-cultural and transhistorical

psychology of religious experience is far more diverse, broad, and complex than James's collection of primarily Christian experiences in *The Varieties*. The Rorschach studies of spiritual masters described in this essay provide an opportunity to examine, from the perspective of ordinary consciousness, the cross-cultural uniformities in the perceptual effects of expertise in nonordinary consciousness. I fear, however, that the Rorschach cannot resolve the debate over cultural versus innate experience. A valuable paradigm for understanding mystical consciousness is perhaps to be found in psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott's formulation of the infant's initial encounter with the world as simultaneously a creation and a discovery. In Winnicott's view, "the infant creates what is in fact . . . waiting to be found. . . . Yet the object must be found in order to be created." He adds, "this has to be accepted as a paradox and not solved by a restatement that, by its cleverness, seems to eliminate the paradox."⁶¹ We would do well to acknowledge the Winnicottian paradox in our attempts to formulate an understanding of religious experience: spiritual masters, we might say, discover an innate "pure consciousness"; at the same time, culturally and linguistically, they create it.

Notes

1. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985). (Original edition 1902)
2. Robert Forman, "Mystical Consciousness, the Innate Capacity, and the Perennial Philosophy," this volume.
3. Ralph Hood Jr., "The Facilitation of Religious Experience," in *Handbook of Religious Experience*, ed. Ralph Hood Jr. (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1995), p. 577.
4. Wayne Proudfoot, *Religious Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Steven Katz, *Mysticism and Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).
5. Forman, "Mystical Consciousness."
6. William Blake, cited in Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception and Heaven and Hell* (New York: Harper, 1963), p. 1. See also R. M. Mishra, *Yoga Sutras: The Textbook of Yoga Psychology* (Garden City: Anchor Press, 1963); T. Narada, *A Manual of Abhidharma* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1975); Mahasi Sayadaw, *Practical Insight Meditation* (Santa Cruz: Unity Press, 1972).
7. Forman, "Mystical Consciousness."
8. Diane Jonte-Pace, "From Prophets to Perception: The Origins of Rorschach's Psychology," *Annual of Psychoanalysis* 14 (1986): 179–203. See also D. Jonte-Pace, "Religion: A Rorschachian Projection Theory," *American Imago* 2 (1985): 199–234.
9. Hermann Rorschach, "Einiges über schweizerische Sekten und Sektengründer" (originally published 1917), "Weiteres über schweizerische Sektenbildungen" (originally published 1919), "Sektierstudien" (posthumously published 1927), in *Gesammelte Aufsätze von Hermann Rorschach*, ed. K. Bash, trans. Paul Lemkau and Bernard Kronenberg (Bern: Huber, 1965); Hermann Rorschach, *Psychodiagnostics* (Bern: Huber, 1975) (originally published 1921).
10. Henri Ellenberger, "The Life and Work of Hermann Rorschach, 1884–1922," *Bulletin of the Menninger Clinic* 18 (1954): 173–219.
11. Stephen W. Hurt, Marvin Reznikoff, and John Clarkin, "The Rorschach," in *Integrative Assessment of Adult Personality*, eds. Larry Beutler and Michael Berren (New York: Guilford Press, 1995), p. 187.

12. See, for example, Melvin Zax, Emory Cowen, and Mary Peter, "A Comparative Study of Novice Nuns and College Females," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 66 (1963): 369–375; Philip Helfaer, *The Psychology of Religious Doubt* (Boston: Beacon, 1972); Gotthard Booth, "The Psychological Examination of Candidates for the Ministry," in *The Ministry and Mental Health*, ed. H. Hoffmann (New York: Associated Press, 1960); R. Draeger, "Some Personality Correlates of Religious Attitude as Determined by Projective Techniques," Ph.D. diss., University of Southern California, 1950.

13. M. Maupin, "Individual Differences in Responses to a Zen Meditation Exercise," *Journal of Consulting Psychology* 29 (1965): 139–145.

14. Frederick Spiegelberg, "Le Protocole du Rorschach du Swami Sivananda Saraswati Maharaj," *Psyche* (Paris) 7 (1952): 598–602.

15. Bruno Klopfer and L. Bryce Boyer, "Notes on the Personality Structure of a North American Indian Shaman: Rorschach Interpretation," *Journal of Projective Techniques* (1961): 170–178; L. Bryce Boyer, Bruno Klopfer, Florence Brawer, and Hayao Kawai, "Comparisons of the Shamans and Pseudo-shamans of the Apaches of the Mescalero Indian Reservation: A Rorschach Study," *Journal of Projective Techniques and Personality Assessment* 28 (1964): 173–80. See also L. Bryce Boyer, George De Vos, and Ruth Boyer, "Crisis and Continuity in the Personality of a Shaman," in *Symbolic Analysis Cross-Culturally: The Rorschach Test*, ed. George De Vos and L. Bryce Boyer (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

16. Daniel Brown and Jack Engler, "The Stages of Mindfulness Meditation: A Validation Study," *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 12 (1980): 143–192; Daniel Brown and Jack Engler, "An Outcome Study of Intensive Mindfulness Meditation," *Psychoanalytic Study of Society*, vol. 10, ed. Werner Muensterberger, L. Bryce Boyer, and Simon A. Grolnick (Hillsdale, N.J.: Analytic Press, 1984), pp. 163–225. This research drew upon three independent projects: a study of Western-born meditators on a three-month retreat, a study of advanced Western students of meditation, and a study of South Asian meditators. I am greatly indebted to Brown and Engler for many of the ideas in this paper.

17. Hurt, Reznikoff, and Clarkin, "The Rorschach," p. 187.

18. See Samuel Beck, *Rorschach's Test*, vol. 1 (New York: Grune and Stratton, 1961); Ernest Schachtel, *Experiential Foundations of Rorschach's Test* (New York: Basic Books, 1966); Maria Rickers-Ovsiankina, "Synopsis of Psychological Premises Underlying the Rorschach," in *Rorschach Psychology*, ed. Maria Rickers-Ovsiankina (Huntington, N.Y.: Krieger, 1977); Bruno Klopfer, M. Ainsworth, Walter G. Klopfer, and Robert Holt, *Developments in Rorschach Technique*, vol. 1 (Yonkers: World Book, 1954); John Exner, *The Rorschach: A Comprehensive System* (New York: Wiley, 1974).

19. See A. Irving Hallowell, "The Rorschach as an Aid in the Study of Personalities in Primitive Societies," *Rorschach Research Exchange* 4 (1940): 106; Gardner Lindzey, *Projective Techniques and Cross-Cultural Research* (New York: Appleton-Century Crofts, 1961); Francis L. Hsu, *Psychological Anthropology* (Cambridge: Schenkman, 1972); and George De Vos, "Transcultural Studies: Normative and Clinical," in *Symbolic Analysis Cross-Culturally: The Rorschach Test*, ed. George De Vos and L. Bryce Boyer (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

20. "The basic concept of Apache religion is that of a vague, diffuse, supernatural power that pervades the universe and may enliven inanimate objects. To become effective it must 'work through' humankind." Boyer, De Vos, and Boyer, "Crisis and Continuity," p. 382.

21. The Buddhist meditators all practiced a Burmese meditation technique called Satipatthana-Vipassana, or mindfulness meditation.

22. Klopfer and Boyer, "Notes on Personality Structure," p. 173.

23. Spiegelberg, "Le Protocole," p. 599. Translations are mine. I thank Joann Jonte for assistance with translations.
24. Brown and Engler, "Stages of Mindfulness Meditation," pp. 168–169.
25. See Lindzey, *Projective Techniques*; Hsu, *Psychological Anthropology*; and De Vos, "Transcultural Studies."
26. Brown and Engler, "An Outcome Study," p. 219. Here and in their 1980 essay, they stress that the Rorschach data for the master's record corroborates traditional Buddhist teachings regarding enlightenment: ariyas or "ones worthy of praise" who have attained the ultimate (4th) or penultimate (3rd) stage of enlightenment are said to "no longer be subject to sexual or aggressive impulses or painful affects." The fully enlightened master is alleged to have "perfected the mind and to be free of any kind of conflict or suffering" ("Stages," p. 185).
27. Spiegelberg, "Le Protocole," p. 600.
28. Boyer, Klopfer, Brawer, and Kawai, "Comparisons of the Shamans and Pseudo-shamans," p. 178.
29. *Ibid.*, pp. 175, 179.
30. L. Hemmendinger and K. Schultz, "Developmental Theory and the Rorschach Method," in *Rorschach Psychology*, ed. Maria Rickers-Ovsiankina (Huntington, N.Y.: Krieger, 1977); and Marguerite Hertz, "The Organization Activity," in *Rorschach Psychology*, ed. Maria Rickers-Ovsiankina (Huntington, N.Y.: Krieger, 1977).
31. Brown and Engler, "An Outcome Study," pp. 197–198.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 198.
33. Brown and Engler, "Stages of Mindfulness Meditation," p. 186.
34. Ewald Bohm, "The Binder Chiaroscuro System and Its Theoretical Basis," in *Rorschach Psychology*, ed. Maria Rickers-Ovsiankina (Huntington, N.Y.: Krieger, 1977), p. 315.
35. Martin Mayman, "A Multidimensional View of the Rorschach Movement Response," in *Rorschach Psychology*, ed. Maria Rickers-Ovsiankina (Huntington, N.Y.: Krieger, 1977).
36. Schachtel, *Experiential Foundations*, pp. 246–248; Rickers-Ovsiankina, "Synopsis of Psychological Premises," pp. 13–16. The early literature on the *Helldunkel* (Chiaroscuro, or shading) response contains some hints of euphoric mood quality, subsequently unexplored in the Rorschach literature. See H. Binder, *Die Helldunkeldeutungen im psychodiagnostischem Experiment von Rorschach* (Zurich: Urell Fussli, 1932), and Bohm, "The Binder Chiaroscuro System."
37. Beck, *Rorschach's Test*, 1961.
38. Brown and Engler, "Stages of Mindfulness Education," p. 168.
39. Mayman, "Multidimensional View," p. 240.
40. Brown and Engler, "An Outcome Study," p. 184.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 210; "Stages," p. 163.
42. Brown and Engler, "Stages of Mindfulness Meditation," p. 166.
43. Spiegelberg, "Le Protocole," p. 600.
44. Klopfer and Boyer, "Notes on Personality Structure," p. 178.
45. Brown and Engler, "An Outcome Study," p. 204.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 193.
47. Arthur Deikman, "Experimental Meditation," in *Altered States of Consciousness*, ed. Charles Tart (New York: Doubleday, 1969), pp. 203–223.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 204.
49. Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Bollingen, 1964). See also Roland Fischer "A Cartography of Ecstatic and Meditative States," *Science* 174 (1971): pp. 897–904. However, see De Vos, who argues that ec-

static components are largely absent from Native American forms of shamanism; "Trans-cultural Studies," p. 379.

50. Cf. Brown and Engler, "Stages of Mindfulness Meditation," p. 186.

51. David Wulff, *Psychology of Religion: Classic and Contemporary Views* (New York: Wiley, 1991), pp. 172–193. See also Ralph Hood Jr., "The Facilitation of Religious Experience," pp. 568–597.

52. Brown and Engler, "An Outcome Study," p. 167.

53. Forman, "Mystical Consciousness."

54. Brown and Engler, "An Outcome Study," p. 167.

55. As Freud shows in *The Future of an Illusion*, religions often make truth claims that fulfill unconscious wishes but are not necessarily factual. Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, in *The Standard Edition of the Collected Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 21, trans. and ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1961).

56. Brown and Engler, "An Outcome Study," p. 211.

57. Catherine Bell, "Modernism and Post-Modernism in the Study of Religion," *Religious Studies Review* 22, no. 3 (1996): 188.

58. De Vos, "Transcultural Studies," p. 47.

59. *Ibid.*, p. 35. Here De Vos also points out that "psychological functioning is governed by a finite number of mental processes . . . involved in the development of affective and intellectual controls. Although influenced differentially by the practices of childhood socialization found in particular cultures, psychological functioning depends upon certain underlying physiological-hereditary structures common to all Homo Sapiens. Universals, therefore, are to be found cross-culturally."

60. Bell, "Modernism and Post-Modernism," p. 187.

61. D. W. Winnicott, *The Maturation Process and the Facilitating Environment* (New York: International Universities Press, 1966), p. 181.