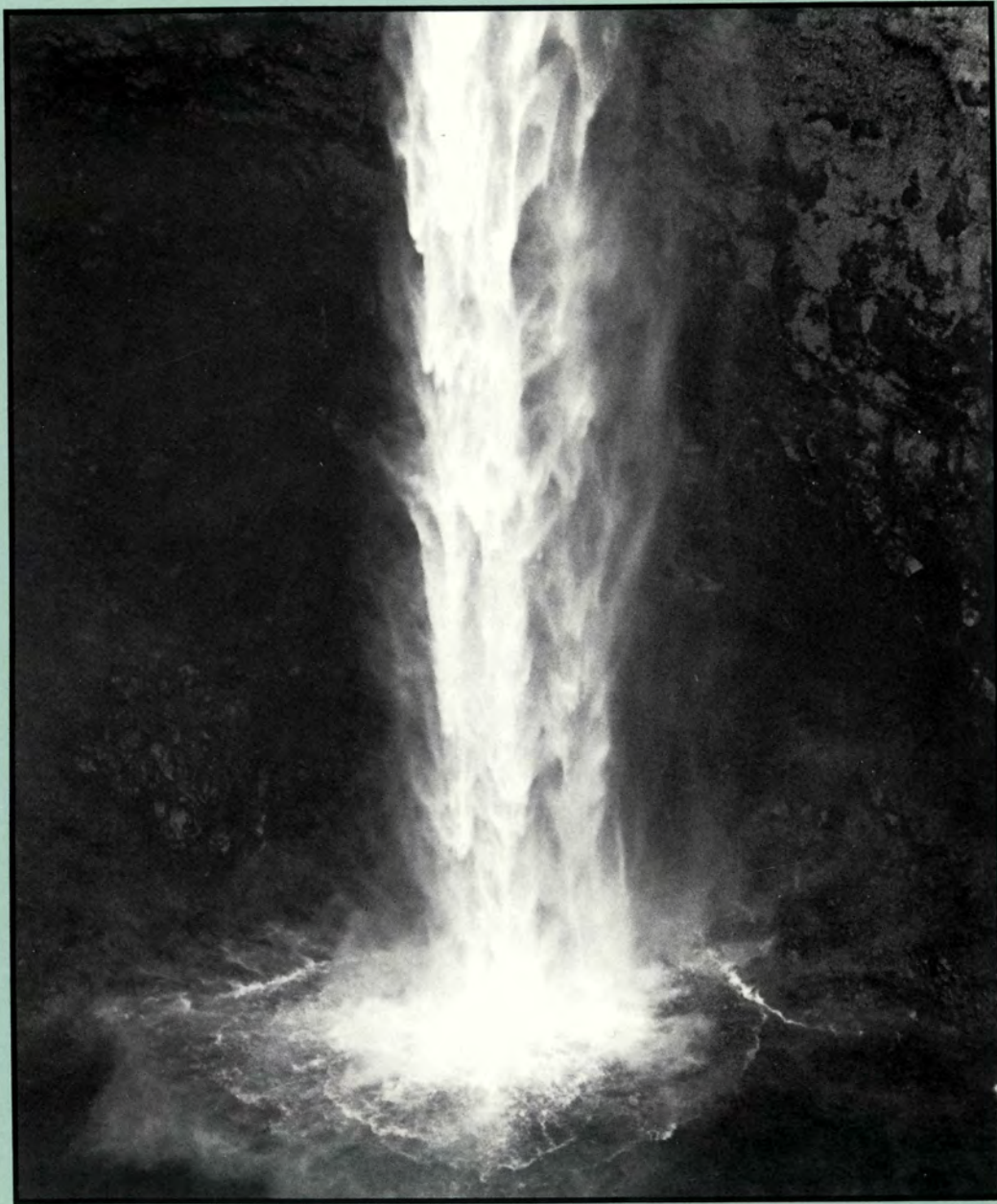


# ReVISION

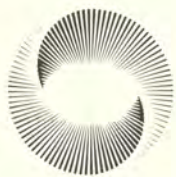
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**Mysticism Reconsidered**  
**PART ONE**



# ReVISION

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Frances Vaughan and Roger Walsh	<b>Mysticism Reconsidered—An Introduction</b>	3
Frances Vaughan	<b>True and False Mystical Experiences: Some Distinguishing Characteristics</b>	4
David Steindl-Rast	<b>The Mystical Core of Organized Religion</b>	11
Deane H. Shapiro, Jr.	<b>Exploring Our Most Deeply Held Belief about Ultimate Reality</b>	15
Robert A. McDermott	<b>From Mysticism to a Modern Spiritual Cognition</b>	29
Roger Walsh	<b>Shamanism and Early Human Technology: The Technology of Transcendence</b>	34
Jean Lanier	<b>From Having a Mystical Experience to Becoming a Mystic—Reprint and Epilogue</b>	41
Philip Novak	<b>Mysticism, Enlightenment, and Morality</b>	45

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# Mysticism Reconsidered— An Introduction

**T**he debate about the nature and validity of mysticism is as old as recorded history. The controversy has not been a trivial one. Wars have been fought, heretics burned, and reformers persecuted for disagreement with official religious doctrine, yet the power of subjective experience and conviction of truth has led many people to fight and die for what they believed.

In the twentieth century, the debate has been dominated by the scientific ethos of Western culture. The success of science and technology has been so spectacular that their tools and methods have been assumed to be adequate for investigating all aspects of reality. Human experiences not susceptible to empirical investigation and experimental proof either have been deemed unworthy of study or have been said to be nonexistent.

In their attempt to conform to the scientific paradigm, the behavioral sciences have, until recently, avoided the study of mystical experiences. Reductionistic theories abound. Psychoanalytic theory has suggested that mysticism is nothing but the residue of infantile longings, while Nobel laureate Sir Francis Crick considers it a neural disturbance caused by "theotoxin."

At the same time, we now have access to all of the world's great spiritual traditions and find a mystical core at the heart of each of them. The significance of mystical experience is affirmed by the lives of the founders of the great traditions, and some mystical claims are beginning to make sense from a psychological perspective in terms of concepts such as altered states of consciousness and state-specific sciences.

So the debate continues, fueled by the vast increase in information that both science and comparative religion now offer. The time therefore seemed right for a conference to reconsider mysticism in the modern world in the light of contemporary advances in knowledge.

The articles in this issue of *ReVision* are the result of a five-day meeting at Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California, in September 1988, where the topic was discussed from many different perspectives. Each of the authors, as well as the participants who did not write papers, brought a unique perspective and a long-term interest in mysticism. Some were more interested in the philosophical study of mysticism, others in spiritual practice, and others in the

effects of mystical experience on everyday life and work in the world. The material gathered will be presented in two separate issues of *ReVision*. The forthcoming issue will contain, among others, papers on shamanism and Donald Rothberg's philosophical analysis, "Understanding Mysticism: Transpersonal Theory and the Limits of Contemporary Epistemological Frameworks." We regret that owing to space limitations we could not include all the articles in one issue.

As conveners of the conference, we would like to express our gratitude to Michael Murphy, Steve Donovan, and the staff of Esalen Institute who made this gathering possible. We would also like to thank Huston Smith, Stan Grof, Stuart Funked'Egnuff, and Judy Cusick for their invaluable assistance in publishing this material.

Frances Vaughan and Roger Walsh  
*Guest Editors*

## A Special Note

William James considered mysticism "the mothersea and fountainhead of all religions," and even that leathery skeptic Bertrand Russell conceded that "the union of mysticism and science constitutes the highest eminence that it is possible to achieve in the world of thought."

Occasional testimonials like these, however, have not neutralized Descartes' impact. His dualism, together with his assumption that reason is in no need of trans-rational, intuitive infusions, have marginalized mysticism for most of the modern period.

It was fitting, therefore, that the conference that generated the papers here assembled was convened to reassess the phenomenon. And it is doubly fitting that the papers are being published in this two-hundredth anniversary of modernity's birth, which officially dates from the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man. Socially, modernity brought important gains, but—as postmodern thinkers are showing with increasing clarity—its conceptual foundations were unduly constricted and constricting.

Released from those constrictions, mysticism is receiving a new hearing, within which the papers that follow constitute a significant round.

Huston Smith  
*Executive Editor*

# Exploring Our Most Deeply Held Belief about Ultimate Reality

Deane H. Shapiro, Jr.

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Research has shown that an individual's belief system, presuppositions, and assumptions can influence the way in which reality is perceived. However, the task of examining one's own belief system may be quite difficult, and that difficulty may increase as the belief becomes more fundamental to the person. This article reports on a group exercise at the conference "Mysticism Reconsidered" in which each participant shared his or her most deeply held belief about ultimate reality that could be accessed and verbalized. This exercise was undertaken in order to help make explicit the "verbal ground of being" from which the discussion was proceeding. After exploring some of the difficulties that may be involved in accessing and stating such a belief, the beliefs are then examined in terms of content dimensions, process of development and psychological function, and scientific testability. In addition, the article provides an opportunity for readers to engage in a similar experiential exercise and to explore their own most deeply held belief system about ultimate reality.

Scientists have a tendency to pathologize religious beliefs and experiences.<sup>1</sup> These limitations of science in exploring the consciousness disciplines and the problems of "paradigm clash" have been clearly detailed.<sup>2</sup> As Walsh noted, "We need to become aware of our (usually unrecognized) assumptions and beliefs in order to begin to recognize their possible distorting and biasing effects."<sup>3</sup>

Certainly most of us would agree that scientists' fundamental beliefs, assumptions, and (potential) biases need to be examined.<sup>4</sup> But, would we also agree that it is worth examining the fundamental beliefs, assumptions, and (potential) biases of those of us who study and/or practice "consciousness disciplines?" The issue is a complex one. For example, that great dispenser of psychological wisdom Charles Schulz has a cartoon strip in which Snoopy is explaining to a cat the ludicrousness of certain ancient cultures' worship of cats as deities. The cat, incensed, angrily attacks a surprised Snoopy, who responds by noting, "Never discuss a cat's theology."

To many of us, our theological beliefs are a personal and private matter, not to be questioned, and certainly not to be evaluated. To explore such ultimate beliefs in a systematic way may seem not only sacrilegious but also futile. As e. e. cummings noted in his poem on the seasons, in spite of the fact that scientists probe, dissect, and analyze spring, "the earth responds with a flower." There are even reports in the spiritual traditions of great scholars and philosophers who, upon experiencing the wisdom of the mystical and esoteric traditions, "let [themselves] be ever more drawn to the mystic and gnostic ideas . . . and finally give up [their] philosophical interests altogether."<sup>5</sup> As Huston Smith has stated:

Science, as Justice Holmes was fond of saying, makes major contributions to minor needs. Religion, whether or not it comes up with anything, is at least at work on the things that matter most. . . . Whenever religion comes to life, it takes over. All else, while not silenced, becomes subdued and thrown without contest into a supporting role. . . .<sup>6</sup>

A reason for this may involve the depth, attachment, and certainty of the truth and understanding that can come from mystical experiences. For example, it has been shown that one of the hallmarks of the mystical experience is the belief of the person who has the experience in the absolute truth of the reality of the experience.<sup>7</sup>

However, as difficult, sensitive, and complex as the issue of examining foundational beliefs might be, it appears that there are major problems in *not* carefully examining and even evaluating one's own religious beliefs and experiences. For example, the Bible discusses the importance of distinguishing between true and false prophets (Deuteronomy 13:2-19), and our contemporary experience with the potential tragedy of cults,<sup>8</sup> exemplified by the Jonestown experience, suggests that belief, no matter how heartfelt, may need to be evaluated. To cite an analogous example from the (perhaps) less controversial arena of psychotherapy, the philosopher Michael Scriven noted in a report on the American Psychological Association's Task Force on Ethics and Psychotherapy that if psychotherapy were a drug, it would be banned by the FDA based on its outcome effectiveness.<sup>9</sup> He went on to say that honest and heartfelt belief by the

therapist in his or her treatment did not make it any more effective than honest and heartfelt belief in snake oil treatment.<sup>10</sup>

How do these issues impact those of us who study *and* practice consciousness disciplines? Presumably, we also have models of the world that we utilize as organizing principles, even (and perhaps especially) when we explore topics such as mysticism. Further, these models inform our efforts at scientific understanding of such topics, perhaps causing us to selectively attend to certain information and to discard or reframe other information.

Therefore, it was felt important by the participants at the "Mysticism Reconsidered" conference to try to investigate the nature of the "models" or glasses that we were wearing, regardless of how foundational they may be to our understanding of the world. As one way of attempting this, each participant stated his or her most deeply held belief about the nature of ultimate reality. This statement of belief would at least express the verbal "ground of being" from which the discussion of the conference participants was proceeding. This article first explores some of the problems and difficulties that may be involved in accessing and stating such a belief and then proceeds to examine the beliefs in terms of content dimensions, process of development and psychological function, and scientific testability.

### PROBLEMS IN ACCESSING AND STATING ONE'S BELIEFS

Before listing the beliefs of the participants, I would like to invite you, the reader, to pause and reflect for a moment and then write down a short statement that articulates your own most deeply held belief about ultimate reality.

If you are willing to do this, you will probably approximate some of the process that our group experienced during the exercise. For example, you may notice that there is a certain amount of difficulty (resistance?) to actually undertaking an exercise of this nature. First, you might argue (or at least question) the words themselves—for example, what is meant by *belief*,<sup>11</sup> *deepest*, *ultimate*, and even *reality*. Second, there is the difficulty of finding "the most deeply held" core belief. This may involve a sifting, sorting, clarification, and evaluation among competing beliefs not previously attempted. You may not feel ready at this time to be "pinned down" to just one foundational belief. You may also notice some fear at the prospect of seeing your belief clarified so plainly and simply in words. There

may be a fear of self-judgment—your belief may not be what you would really wish it to be; there may be a fear of judgment by others—by making the belief concrete and clear, it may be open to criticism from others. Further, the very process may seem overly analytical and feel as if it is taking away some of the mystery surrounding your views of ultimate reality. As Bishop Manning has said, "Religion without mystery ceases to be religion."<sup>12</sup> Finally, even if there is an implicit "felt sense" of that belief, it may seem inexplicable and ineffable. As D. T. Suzuki noted, "True understanding involves a special transmission outside the scriptures: no dependence on words or letters."<sup>13</sup> Or as Lao-tse observed: "Those who know do not talk, those who talk do not know."<sup>14</sup> The very effort to verbally state that belief explicitly may seem problematic and inaccurate at best and perhaps even inappropriate.

However, for the purpose of this exercise, try to move through and beyond the above issues and to look as deeply as you are able at your core belief. Also, in the process of so doing, please note the manner in which you attempt to access your deepest belief. Do you think about it? Try to imagine it? Close your eyes and try to feel it?

### CONTENT DIMENSIONS

The core beliefs of the conference participants are listed in Table 1. These beliefs (and your own) may be investigated along four different dimensions:<sup>15</sup> (1) Is ultimate reality thought to be positive (benign), negative (malevolent), neutral (indifferent), or some combination thereof, and, within each of these views, how is the problem of evil addressed? (2) Does the belief reflect a theistic or non-theistic position? (3) How much of ultimate reality is (can be) due to human effort and free choice? (4) What claim, if any, does the belief make to universal applicability, and how evident is a particularistic path in the statement of the belief?

As can be seen from the table, in terms of the first dimension—valence of ultimate reality—most of the conference participants believed in a positive, benign reality, as evidenced by words and phrases such as *positive*, *loving*, *life is good*, and *a healing, holy force*. Only two beliefs in Table 1 directly address the issue of evil: one notes that evil is a "second" order force, below the good; one states that within the "context" of ultimate "perfect" reality, "we have to sometimes absolutely oppose that which we feel is wrong."

The second dimension to notice is whether "ultimate reality" is theistic (a God source), or nontheistic (the universe "is"). It is apparent that some of the beliefs in Table 1 involve a (personal) God source; others clearly don't; and some are unclear.

A third dimension involves the question of how much ultimate reality is, or can be, determined by human effort and free will. Several

of the statements, both theistic and nontheistic, imply that human efforts are critical in attaining the ultimate "benign" reality: "oppose that which we feel is wrong"; "if we are converted to it"; "there is a means for enlightenment . . . and the community can help me"; "our task is to clarify and try to make the stream of consciousness more clear"; "love is responsibility." Other statements clearly re-

**TABLE 1. Content dimensions of beliefs about ultimate reality.**

Statement of belief	Benign view of ultimate reality <sup>1</sup>	Evil addressed	Orientation		Human control		Path	
			Theistic	Nontheistic	Assertive	Accepting	Universal	Particular
I believe in the unity of God and accept where I am right now as evidence of that unity.	■		■			■		
I take refuge in the Buddha (there is the possibility of enlightenment); I take refuge in the eight-fold path (there is a means for enlightenment); I take refuge in the sangha (community can help me).				■	■	■		■
I believe in a benign universe and trust my friends to help me.	■							■
There is One Mind, and that Mind is light, love, bliss, and awareness.	■		■					■
Everything is perfect; there is nothing to fear.	■			■				■
God's kingdom is at hand (i.e., is available to us) if we are converted to it.	■		■		■	■		■
I believe in Christian love—that the fundamental force is the universal experience of God's love.	■		■					■
God is love and light out of which everything comes into existence.	■		■					■
Love is responsibility.					■			
The very nature of life is good; there is nothing that is not Healing; no one (nothing) is left out.	■							■
The end goal of our existence is to be present, and our task is to clarify and try to make the stream of awareness more clear.				■	■			■
There is a healing, holy force above all, and just below that, on a second rung, is a force of evil.	■	■	■		■	■		■
Everything is perfect. But within that context, we sometimes have to absolutely oppose that which we feel is wrong.	■	■	■		■			■
I believe in a just and compassionate personal God; there is purpose and meaning; love is more powerful than death.	■		■					■

<sup>1</sup>It was also possible to score answers as "malevolent" or "indifferent," but these categories were eliminated here because all responses fell into the "benign view" category.

reflect an element of "benevolent Other's control": "unity of God"; "One Mind"; "healing holy force above all"; "a just and compassionate personal God." These two positions need not be either/or, and it can be seen that some statements reflect both: a combination of active human efforts for control and accepting (taking refuge) in a larger power, unity, or "isness" of the universe.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, there is the issue of whether the belief is stated in a universal or particular manner. There are two aspects involved in this dimension. The first aspect is whether the belief is stated as an "I" statement that may or may not be true and generalizable for all people's "ultimate reality." Some of these beliefs are stated as universals (true for all people); some are stated as more personal beliefs, and it is unclear whether they are also meant as being true (or can be, or should be, true) for all people.

A second aspect of the universal/particular dimension is whether one's deepest belief is stated within the framework of a particular tradition—for example, Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism. As can be seen from Table 1, there is one belief that uses the term Buddha and one that uses the term Christian; other beliefs, however, even though no particularistic language is used, appear to reflect and to be based upon experiences within certain religious traditions.

### PROCESS OF DEVELOPMENT AND PSYCHOLOGICAL FUNCTION

How is our deepest belief formed? Are there certain situations that are catalytic in causing a person to question his or her current assessment of reality and to search for a deeper, more fundamental truth? What is the nature of that search? Do we seek out a particularistic tradition within which to seek, or do we "pick and choose" among different paths? Do we voluntarily and consciously choose this belief, or does it seem as if we "receive" it, almost as if it "comes to us" and is beyond our control? What is the role of the mystical experience in this process? Of faith? Of the context of the path on which we are moving? Finally, what purpose do these beliefs seem to serve in our lives?

One way to investigate these questions is by a methodology called, in psychological terms, a functional analysis, or three-term contingencies.<sup>17</sup> This methodology has also been referred to as the ABCs: A = antecedents; B = behavior (beliefs, for the purpose of our discussion); and C = consequences. Not only can each of these terms be explored individually,

but this methodology also provides a way to note the causal relationship between antecedents, belief, and consequences.

### Belief

For some individuals, it seems that a mystical experience forms the experiential basis that subsequently, upon reflection, gives rise to a belief system about the nature of ultimate reality. There is a felt truth, a sense of unity—something that Brother David Steindl-Rast calls "ultimate belonging"<sup>18</sup>—that both goes beyond surface reality and at the same time informs that reality. But mystical experiences of this nature appear to be beyond our conscious control. Although we can engage in actions that may increase their likelihood of occurring (e.g., prayer, meditation, service), the actual occurrence seems an act of "grace," what Huston Smith has referred to as "other power."<sup>19</sup>

What about the belief systems of those individuals who have never experienced a mystical state of consciousness? It appears that it is possible to have a similar "belief" about the nature of reality without the actual experience of such a reality. In religious terms, this might be referred to as "faith." This faith may involve persons living *as if* their belief were true and may be based on readings of great masters, people they have met, or respect for particularistic traditions. Further, since these experiences don't seem to occur "at our will," our belief system may be based on "remembering" the truth as we glimpsed it and on faith that the remembered truth was "real." As one person put it, "The only way I know that my belief about the ultimate nature of reality is true is because of those times in my life when I have experienced, for want of a better word, 'bliss,' or 'transcendence.'"

Unless we are able to maintain a constant awareness and access to a state of mystical consciousness, all of us, whether we have had such experiences or not, are in a similar situation. All of us, to a greater or lesser extent, are living on faith<sup>20</sup>—trying to develop, uncover, remember, and/or re-access the experiential component of our most deeply held belief about the nature of reality.

### Antecedents

Antecedents involve looking at the situations, events, and experiences that may have precipitated a deeper searching regarding the nature of ultimate reality. It appears that the search for and development of our belief system is not context-free. Rather, the impetus

for evolving and deepening our beliefs seems to come at a crossroads in our life. This crossroads may be a time of relative stability in which we question whether there isn't something more to life; it may be a time of confusion, suffering, and crisis, when the surface reality seems to be too painful. But as the Chinese term for crisis (*wei-ji*) implies, there are two aspects to crises—danger and opportunity.

There appear to be certain common human conditions, any one (or more) of which can provide the impetus for a search for a deeper belief system. These conditions range from the personal to the cosmic: developing a stable positive identity in the face of illness, decay, and death; dealing with pain and suffering; seeing within ourselves unhelpful habits; interpersonal loss or feeling left out, alienated, and alone; the seeming chaos of the cosmos and a lack of coherence and meaning in one's life, combined with a desire for something more; seeing "evil" in others; and natural disasters in the world. These issues represent, to a greater or lesser degree, that which is unknown, uncertain, ambiguous, or even chaotic in the world. Such situations and issues, which are seemingly out of control or beyond human control, may cause feelings of existential stress, frustration, surprise, fear, and vulnerability and may be catalytic in providing the impetus for the search for a deeper belief about the nature of ultimate reality.

### Consequences

The term *consequences* refers to the effect that our beliefs have on our addressing one (or more) of the relevant catalytic antecedents. In general, consequences, as used in the technical definition of a functional analysis, alludes to two elements that serve to maintain a belief system.<sup>21</sup> First, the belief system must continue to address "antecedent" human conditions in a way that either removes or reframes the initial unpleasant, aversive feelings, thoughts, or suffering, and/or it must bring a sense of peace, comfort, and well-being to the individual. Second, the belief, to be maintained, needs to help the individual in anticipating future events that might otherwise, without the foundational belief, seem frightening, confusing, and out of control.

An investigation of the beliefs listed in Table 1 suggests that almost without exception each gives a comforting framework within which to understand life's events and/or provides a clear, specific means with which to address those events.<sup>22</sup>

A third "consequence" of a belief (although not part of the technical definition of a functional analysis) is that it may provide a goal, model, or vision of the universe worth trying to attain, uncover, remember, or exhibit (depending upon the particularistic perspective of the belief system). As such, the belief itself may, in turn, become an antecedent that leads to a change in behavior, thought action, and mode of relating to oneself and the world.

### EXPLORING BELIEFS WITHIN A SCIENTIFIC FRAMEWORK

This final section is addressed to those of us who both study and practice consciousness disciplines and have not yet reached the point where we are willing to give up the former to devote ourselves exclusively to the latter. If we wish to study beliefs about ultimate reality within a scientific framework, however broadly conceived, there are two questions that must be addressed: (1) Is the belief about ultimate reality a "theory" that could be changed based upon disconfirming information, and (2) How can we most skillfully explore the "theories" of different traditions, to see which one is "better."

#### Is Our Belief Scientifically Testable?

The hallmark of a scientific theory is that it is a belief about the world that has testable hypotheses. If an experiment repeatedly shows data that disconfirm a theory, the theory would be expected to be reevaluated and subject to change. Therefore, a way to address this first question is to imagine what type of information would cause one to change one's belief about the nature of ultimate reality. The participants in the conference acknowledged, almost without exception, that the greatest potential fear about their belief was that "the belief is wrong."

We then explored what amount of disconfirming data it would take to cause us to change our foundational belief. There was a range of views expressed here—some felt that "all beliefs might be wrong," and it would only take a small amount of new information; others felt that these beliefs represented such deeply held truths that they were unchangeable, despite any evidence that appeared "disconfirming." This latter view held that at one time a certain truth had been experienced that was so convincing that it formed a bedrock foundation that no amount of incoming information could alter. It was stated that if there were a change from the belief, it would be only out of weakness and would constitute a dis-



service to the tradition. As such, there is no way that these unchangeable beliefs can be considered a scientific theory. For, rather than disconfirming data causing the belief to change, the belief will cause new information that violates the belief to be reinterpreted in order that it conform to the belief.<sup>23</sup>

This may cause some to ask "So what?" Is it such a problem that our beliefs about ultimate reality may not be scientific theory, as long as they are effective and comforting to us? For those who are not interested in the *study* of consciousness disciplines, the answer may be "No, it may not be a major problem."<sup>24</sup> A person's belief about ultimate reality need not be scientific to be useful to that person, and research has shown that beliefs don't even have to be "truthful" to be helpful to the person.<sup>25</sup> In fact, as noted above, the beliefs themselves (and the resultant selective attention and reinterpretation of data) can be considered to have developed (at one level) because of the helpful function they serve for the individual in relieving suffering and other antecedent human conditions. Further, even if the belief about the nature of ultimate reality may not be a scientific theory, it can be a framework (paradigm, assumption) within which "scientific evaluation" can occur.

For example, Buddha's belief system began with the premise (first noble truth) that life is suffering and that reducing desires and developing nonattachment could serve a clear function (consequence) of reducing suffering. Buddha then proposed changes of lifestyle, behavior, and attitude (the eight-fold path) to help attain those consequences.

As individuals, we can test Buddha's belief. We certainly can observe and experience that there is suffering in the world; we can see how suffering often appears to be caused by desire and attachment; and, if we wish, we can practice the development of certain qualities and lifestyles to see if they lessen suffering.

However, this belief is not just an experiential truth that can be confirmed by "bare" awareness; rather, our awareness is colored, however subtly, by the initial belief that "life is suffering." For example, in most of our lives, there is also the possibility of moments of great joy: hearing a bird sing, seeing a flower bloom, watching a beautiful sunset, dialoguing in which you feel you connect with another person's essence. Although one *can* focus one's attention on impermanence, suffering, or no permanent self (*dukkha*, *anicca*, *anatta*), one can also focus one's attention on the joy of the moment. Further, the imperma-

nence need not lead to suffering if one feels it is part of a higher, unitary process. Therefore, at a subtle level, within the Buddhist system (as in all belief systems), there is selective attention and reinterpretation of events actually caused by, and following from, the initial belief.<sup>26</sup>

One additional example, from a theistic tradition, may be helpful in further illustrating this point. For those who believe in God as a unitary positive source of love in the world, there is also selective attention and reinterpretation. This belief, though based on a different premise than Buddha's, may serve the same *function* in helping humans deal with the antecedent conditions of existence. For example, based on psychological research on self-fulfilling prophecies,<sup>27</sup> we could suggest that a person who espoused this belief might be more likely to see the good in himself, the world, and other people. This person might look at events that appear "evil"<sup>28</sup> and ask, from a unitary perspective, what the spiritual opportunity is in this event and then, in fact, find some such lesson. Finally, the belief in a unitary and benevolent ultimate reality might allow a person to see more easily beyond the seeming duality of personal pain and suffering inflicted by others and therefore be more willing to extend forgiveness.

Depending upon the strength and unchangeability of a person's conviction, the above two examples may illustrate beliefs that are not scientific theories. However, based on knowing the depth, strength, and content of a person's belief, it may be possible to predict the nature of the selective attention and cognitive reframing with which events will be perceived. Thus, even if the belief itself can't be viewed as a scientific theory, it may be possible to scientifically evaluate the utility, function, effects, and consequences of that belief—for example, in dealing with antecedent issues and with how the belief changes our lifestyle, behavior, thoughts, and perception of the world and ourselves.

### Is One Belief Better Than Another?

A glance at Table 1 shows that there are clearly differences in belief systems, and these differences can be along several of the content dimensions: a nontheistic universe versus a theistic one, a benign universe versus an indifferent (random) one, and so on. Which belief is better? The very question may make us uncomfortable. If the mystical experience is one of ultimate belonging, then the question of "better" seems to immediately move us from

that position of unity and inclusiveness to one of duality and a demarcation. Better implies worse; insiders implies outsiders; particularistic can mean exclusivity; and "more true" seems to imply, at best, "less true," if not "wrong." If history hadn't raised this question so often, and with such devastatingly ugly consequences, there is a part of us that might prefer just to ignore the question altogether.

How can we sensitively yet directly approach this issue of "better" and "true?" One way, as we did earlier, is to begin with ourselves. Here, rather than looking at what our belief is, we can focus on our attachments to our own version of truth. For example, do you believe in the absolute truth of your belief system? If so, how do you perceive others who have a different belief system than you? Do you disagree with them, but respect them? Do you feel that if they had the "right" kinds of experiences, they would see the error in their thinking? Do you believe that their belief can also be equally and absolutely true? If so, would you be willing to switch beliefs?<sup>29</sup> Asking this latter question causes us to reflect on how attached we are to our version of ultimate reality, an attachment that may color our perception in evaluating issues of which belief is "better" or "more true."

Since this topic is quite complex, what follows needs to be understood only as an initial effort to provide an overview about how these questions might be approached. First, to address this topic, we need to tackle head-on the question of the relationship between science and values. Some believe that science can (and should) be value-neutral;<sup>30</sup> some believe that values can never be determined through empirical/analytic efforts;<sup>31</sup> and some believe that there is an area of interface in which what is fact and what is value become fused.<sup>32</sup> The differences between these positions can be shown with reference to the following sentences:

1. Ultimate reality is unitary and positive.
2. Ultimate reality should be unitary and positive.
3. Ultimate reality can be unitary and positive.

At a meta-level, all three of the above sentences are belief statements. Although the first one appears to be stated as a fact, it may actually be reflecting a value, a statement of belief, or a scientific theory. To verify it as a fact, empirical support of some type would be necessary. The second sentence is a value. One can't prove or disprove a value, but one can discuss what might be the function and utility of a

particular value. The third sentence may be a value position, but it is also scientifically testable. For example, as a simplified first step, we could operationalize our terms *unitary* and *positive* (dependent variable), detail replicable "skills and means" (independent variable) for reaching the dependent variable, and see if the statement turns out to be true (for which people, with what amount of effort and practice, and so forth).

Refining the relationship between values and science, as reflected in our discussion of the above three sentences, can serve as a helpful context as we now attempt to address the operative words in our question about beliefs: *better* and *more true*. Four different approaches are suggested: (1) phenomenological study of the mystical experience; (2) comparison of the functional utility and effectiveness of a belief in addressing (potential) antecedent issues facing humans; (3) the nature of values posited and associated with a belief; and (4) the effectiveness of techniques and practices for reaching those values (relationship between beliefs and deeds).

The first approach—phenomenological study of the mystical experience—deals with the central question, "Can we prove that there is one ultimate reality?" On one side of this debate is the belief that there is a unified universal truth, a reality of wholeness and ultimate belonging, and that this reality, perceived through mystical experience, is or can be independent of belief, culture, conditioning, and the particularistic tradition and context within which the experience occurs. This position would argue that the differences in the reports of the experience merely represent "translation" problems resulting from socio-cultural and linguistic filtering.<sup>33</sup> The other position argues that there is no such ultimate, pure, unified reality. As Katz noted:

The metaphysical naivete that seeks for, or worse, asserts, the truth of some meta-ontological schema in which either the mystic or the student of mysticism is said to have reached some phenomenological "pure land" in which he grasps the transcendent reality in its pristine pre-predicative state is to be avoided.<sup>34</sup>

This view argues that it is the sociocultural context and language that create the "contours of the experience and thus make pure experience a chimera."<sup>35</sup> As Gimello stated:

Mysticism is inextricably bound up with, dependent upon, and usually subservient to the deeper beliefs and values of the traditions, cultures, and historical milieux which harbour it.<sup>36</sup>

At one (conscious) level, these two positions represent a scientific debate, as outlined in sentence one above (Ultimate reality is unitary and positive), and the question of better, or more true, hinges on which side marshals the most impressive amount of evidence. However, this debate may also involve, consciously or unconsciously, sentence two (Ultimate reality should be unitary and positive)<sup>37</sup>—a value question. Then the question of better, or more true, takes on a slightly different focus. One might argue that *if* ultimate reality were perceived as unitary and positive, there might be certain self-fulfilling prophecies: we could better recognize the unity underlying different traditions; we would know that there is a benign universe beyond the seeming dualities of evil and subject/object dichotomies. Finally, this question may be framed as sentence three: Ultimate reality can be unitary and positive. From the perspective of this sentence, the question of “better” or more true would revolve around which traditions (or which aspects of which traditions)<sup>38</sup> most effectively access (and/or create) that reality (for which people, under what conditions, and at what stages of their development). We could also examine which methods are most helpful for which individuals, not only in accessing, but also in re-accessing and maintaining the experience of that reality. Thus, it should be clear from the above discussion that how the question of “better” is approached may depend upon the context, values, and framework of the person doing the investigation.

A second way to approach the question of which belief is “better” involves looking at how effectively the belief helps the individual address certain antecedent conditions that we have discussed (e.g., suffering, lack of control, impermanence). This approach involves a value: a belief should serve a comforting function for the individual and help reduce suffering. Within this value context, there can be scientific evaluation: empirically assessing whether, and to what extent, a belief creates certain positive consequences for the individual (e.g., meaning, peace, coherence, trust, and belonging).<sup>39</sup>

The third and fourth areas in which we might address the term *better* do not look at questions of the individual’s phenomenological reality (as did approaches one and two). Rather, they look at the relationship of beliefs to values (approach three) and to behavior (approach four). As Gimello has commented,

The mysticism of any particular mystic is really the whole pattern of his life. The rare and

wonderful “peaks” of experience are a part of that pattern, but only a part, and their real value lies only in their relation to the other parts, to his thought, his moral values, his conduct towards others, his character and personality. The modern study of mysticism has, I believe, tended to overlook those areas.<sup>40</sup>

In terms of approach three, how does one go about evaluating the relationship between belief about ultimate reality and the values which that belief may (or may not) inform? As scientists, what is *our* belief about values and morality? Do we believe there are (there should be? there can be?) “absolute” values that represent a universal standard of morality that transcends any particular tradition? If so, then it would be possible to evaluate each particularistic tradition in terms of how well its belief system informed and was in accord with those universal values.

There do appear to be certain common values across traditions: helping others, compassion, transformation of individual’s “evil habits,” decreasing unnecessary ego, wholeness, clearheadedness, “just” ends attained by “just means.”<sup>41</sup> If we assume that there are certain absolute values that transcend particular traditions and cultures, then one approach to the question of “better” would be to set up an agreed-upon standard, typology, and/or hierarchy of “values” and see how well different beliefs reflected and/or informed those values.<sup>42</sup>

A fourth way to approach the question of “better” could involve looking at the relationship between the values posited and subsequent efforts at personal and societal change. This view of “better” is based upon the assumption (value, belief) that action is a positive and useful outgrowth of a belief system. There appear to be certain traditions that emphasize that belief is sufficient.<sup>43</sup> If so, then those traditions would disagree with a criteria of better that emphasizes belief informing actions. However, if we posit that belief can (does? should?) not only inform positive values but also effect ethical action and behavioral efforts, then we should be able to establish certain criteria by which to evaluate “better” along this dimension. For example, are individuals with certain belief systems more motivated to try to change and transform themselves? Are there certain *practices* that follow from a belief system, and how effective are these practices in helping individuals deal with changing their lifestyle, behavior, and consciousness to address unhelpful human habits in themselves and the world? Are more

effective examples of changes in behavior and action evidenced by people with different belief systems<sup>44</sup>—for example, are they gentler and more compassionate with themselves and others, and so forth?

Although expressed in broad terms, the above four suggestions for evaluating “better” are quite difficult and complex scientific questions. First, as noted, each approach involves certain assumptions, and these must be investigated specifically: for example, is belief enough; are there “universal” values; is a belief that informs action “better”? Second, once assumptions have been stated and clarified, there still is the task of measuring “belief.” At the most general level, it would be necessary to try to assess the accuracy of a person’s belief—for example, is a person saying what she believes, or what she feels she should believe (demand characteristics); what is the intensity of the belief; and what is the amount of time that a person is “conscious” of his or her belief during the day (frequency and duration). These general refinements about belief would need to be controlled for in trying to make a connection between belief and function, belief and values, and/or belief and action.<sup>45</sup>

At a more refined level, the investigation could begin to explore which components of belief seem to be the most active ingredients in effecting function, values, and/or action: for example, valence of universe (positive, negative, neutral); theistic versus nontheistic; role of human control; universal/particular.<sup>46</sup> In terms of universal and particular, for example, what are the positives and negatives of how a belief is framed (and lived) in terms of function, value, and action?

There may be advantages to a particular tradition—for example, heroic figures of the past to emulate; rootedness to draw strength from; and a context within which the teaching is transmitted and passed on. There may also be potential disadvantages to the particular tradition—unwanted baggage; divisiveness and exclusion toward those on the outside; or “holy wars” and persecution. At their deepest level, all traditions appear to have a universal message, but, at least historically, it seems that this deepest level is not always reached, and, furthermore, it becomes all too easy to be trapped within the particular. In looking at different traditions, one important issue of “better” might be the way in which a particularistic path views other paths—for example, is there a sense that “ultimate reality” is available to all, through a variety of paths, or is

there a sense of exclusiveness—an “entrapment” in the particular?

Further, with all traditions so much more accessible than at any other time in human history, there are unprecedented opportunities available for individuals to explore different traditions. Is it possible (or even advisable) to try to develop a “generic” universal, perennial philosophy; is a pick-and-choose approach among the different traditions useful? Although that approach may break down issues of exclusiveness, is there a price to be paid in lack of rootedness and tradition? How effective is a generic approach in the transmission of belief to one’s children? In terms of the universal/particular component of belief, it seems that these are some of the pressing questions facing us as we explore our own understanding and beliefs about ultimate reality and how best to transmit and communicate that belief and understanding to the next generation.

#### SUMMARY AND FINAL COMMENTS

This article has been concerned with exploring a person’s deepest held beliefs about ultimate reality. Because it is directed to those who study and/or practice consciousness disciplines, there are two different levels upon which examination of such beliefs can occur.

On an individual level, this article has attempted through an experiential process to invite the reader to examine his or her own belief system about ultimate reality. Some might suggest that many of the questions raised should be filed as items in the sermon of Buddha entitled “Questions Which Tend Not to Edification.”<sup>47</sup> They might argue, “If we believe in it, or have experienced it, there is no need to then examine, explore, or prove it.” It should be clear that this paper is based on a different premise—namely, that exploration of our beliefs about ultimate reality, no matter how true we may experience those beliefs to be, is an undertaking that is worthwhile and can tend toward edification. Further, although all these questions have been explored from the perspective of an individual’s belief system, the same process and questions (with only slight modifications) could be applied to the nature of an organization’s or a particular tradition’s belief system.

On the scientific level, this article began by pointing out the limitations of “traditional” scientists in studying consciousness disciplines, noting how assumptions and beliefs (which are often unrecognized) can have a potentially “distorting and biasing effect.”<sup>48</sup> There are potential advantages to having these

questions explored by individuals who practice consciousness disciplines. Not only is there a greater sensitivity to the experiential and phenomenological component involved in belief, but also there is at least a stated commitment to exploring one's own beliefs and presuppositions. However, when Schumaker stated that "there is nothing more difficult than to become critically aware of the presuppositions of one's own thought,"<sup>49</sup> this could apply equally well not only to traditional scientists viewing the consciousness disciplines "from the outside" but also to those of us who attempt to study them *and* practice them.

As suggested throughout this article, even with such a commitment, the task of recognizing one's own assumptions and biases is not an easy one. The standard scientific problems may be encountered, such as expectation effects and demand characteristics. The very use of paradigms (models, beliefs) as organizing principles in conducting research and empirical investigations (no matter how broadly conceived) can lead to the possibility that these models might determine, in large part, the scope and nature of what is investigated and the ways in which results are interpreted.<sup>51</sup> In addition, we may need to explore our belief about the nature, value, and utility of science to see whether we are viewing "science" as some type of "pure" methodology. For, as has been detailed elsewhere,<sup>52</sup> subjective hunches and intuitive personal understandings can contribute significantly to scientific progress:

We are being convinced . . . of the message of Hume and Kant: All scientific knowing is indirect, presumptive, obliquely and incompletely corroborated at best. The language of science is subjective, provincial, approximate, and metaphoric, never the language of reality itself.<sup>53</sup>

In addition to examining some of the presuppositions, values, and goals we as scientists might be bringing to such an enterprise, the article has also explored ways in which "beliefs" about the nature of ultimate reality might be studied. It has raised what may be important questions for us to ask about our own and other's beliefs, and explored how, and whether, beliefs can or should be evaluated.

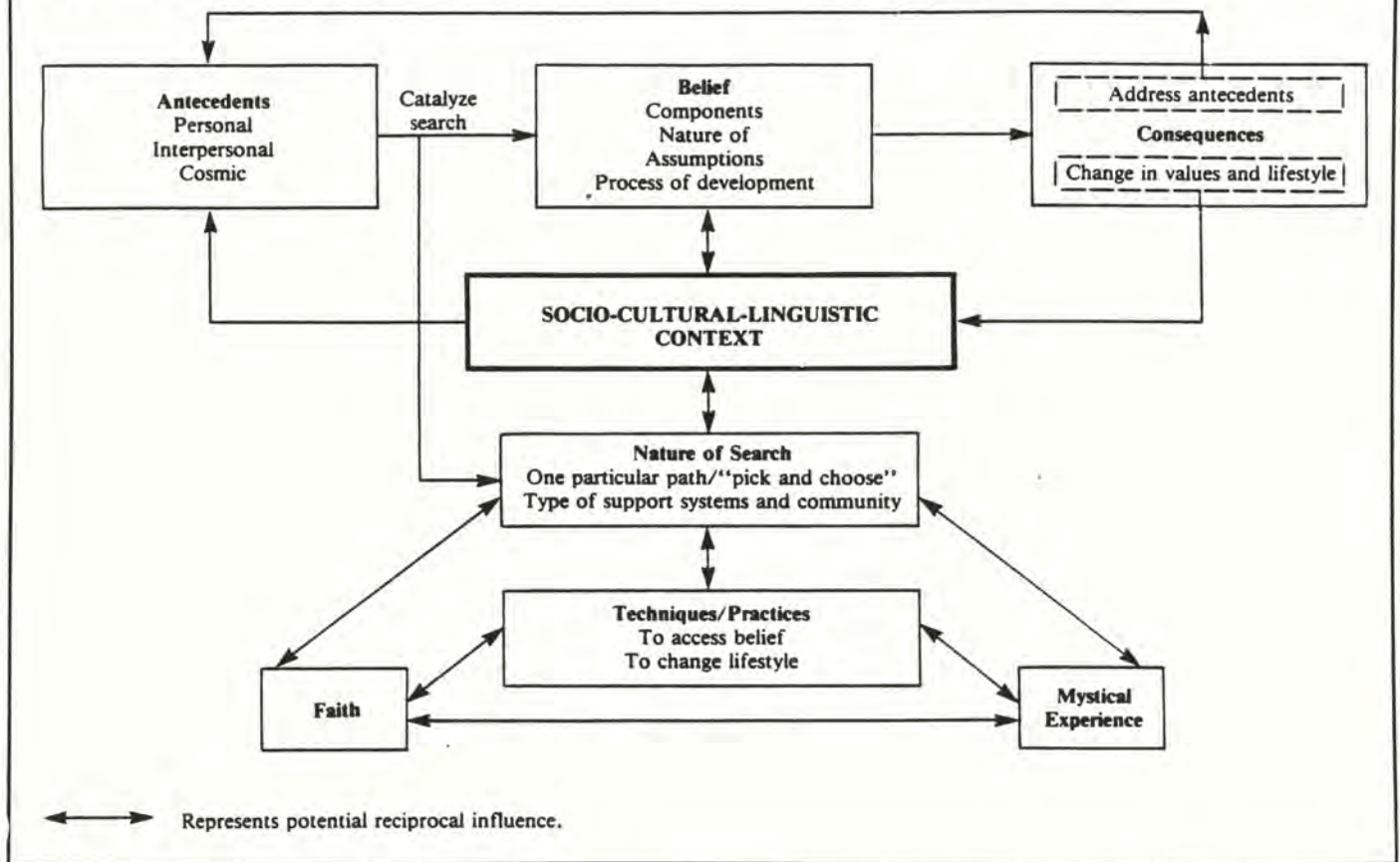
This paper has argued, contrary to e. e. cummings, that rather than being merely irrelevant "probing fingers of science," the study of belief systems might have several advantages. For example, Sagan has observed that "science looks for order in the universe. Laws of nature are the foundations for science."<sup>54</sup>

First, at the most basic level, this article is seeking to understand why and how certain people develop certain beliefs. Within the scientific tradition, this may be considered "basic research." At this level, are there certain general principles that can be discovered and understood? Second, this article seeks to explore the antecedents that may be catalytic in a person's searching for a deeper level of reality; the components of a belief; and the consequences (function) that a belief may have for that individual. Third, the article raises the question of the process of development of a belief system, and the (inter) relationship between belief, mystical experience, faith, and consciousness. It also looks at how "belief" is (re)accessed, and, in so doing, it suggests a framework and guidelines with which an individual can begin to recognize his or her own styles of understanding and, thereby, to seek those approaches to knowledge and awareness that might be most compatible. Finally, the article has suggested some guidelines for exploring the question of evaluating beliefs as "better" or "more true." In so doing, issues of attachment to our beliefs and potential problems and advantages of particularistic paths and generic, universal paths were raised. Perhaps, one day, with more information, it may be possible to more accurately respond to these questions and to understand how to best transmit beliefs to the next generation. A systems approach showing the interaction and potential reciprocal influence of these areas is provided in Figure 1.

Raising the above questions, no matter how important, is not to suggest that answering them will be easy. There is the danger of *inappropriate* reductionism<sup>55</sup> and oversimplification. Further, just the sheer complexity of the task is staggering, involving potentially multiple variables, multiple causes, and ineffable phenomenological experience. However, the very complexity of the task, I believe, should be only a caution, not a deterrent from undertaking the task.

Finally, in exploring these issues, there needs to be great care and sensitivity to the potentially delicate nature of what is being investigated. The examination of an individual's most deeply held belief about ultimate reality may be an emotional subject. Depending upon how present that belief is in a person's life, it may be a core principle upon which a person lives his or her life and represent a foundational lens that informs how a person perceives the world and how events are interpreted.

FIGURE 1. A systems approach to the exploration of belief about ultimate reality.



From a psychological perspective, to even discuss these core beliefs might be difficult, but to pose the question of which one might be “better” means having to evaluate and question our own deeply held and very fundamental belief system. This may be something to which we are quite attached, and there may be a tenderness and even rawness at asking the questions. Therefore, until we have incontrovertible proof of the effectiveness of a given approach, tradition, or belief as “better,”<sup>56</sup> it seems that compassionate attention to the *process* of asking and exploring the questions is required. Again, compassionate process does not mean we should avoid asking and exploring these questions, but rather that we should make every effort to be careful, humble, and sensitive in our approach.

#### NOTES

*I would like to express my thanks and appreciation to the participants in the Mysticism Reconsidered conference, who were willing to share, in an experiential group exercise, their most deeply held beliefs about ultimate reality. Those beliefs, and the ensuing discussion, are the core from which this paper developed.*

1. See, for example, Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry, *Mysticism: Spiritual Quest or Psychic Disorder* (New York: Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry, 1976); F. Alexander, “Buddhist Training as Artificial Catatonia,” *Psychoanalytic Review* 18 (1931): 129–45; S. Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, trans. K. Jones (New York: Vintage, 1939).

2. See, for example, A. Deikman, “Comments on the GAP Report on Mysticism,” *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 165 (1977):213–7; R. N. Walsh, “The Consciousness Disciplines and the Behavioral Sciences,” *American Journal of Psychiatry* 137 (1980): 663–73; D. H. Shapiro, *Meditation: Self-Regulation Strategy and Altered States of Consciousness—A Scientific/Personal Exploration* (New York: Aldine, 1980).

3. R. N. Walsh, “The Psychologies of East and West: Contrasting Views of the Human Condition and Potential,” in R. N. Walsh and D. H. Shapiro, eds., *Beyond Health and Normality: Explorations of Exceptional Psychological Wellbeing* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1983), 47.

4. M. Mahoney, *Scientist as Subject: The Psychological Imperative* (Cambridge, Mass.: Ballinger, 1976).

5. Gershom Scholem, ed., *Zohar: The Book of Splendor* (New York: Schocken Books, 1977), 15. Cited regarding Moses de Leon, the author of the Zohar.

6. Huston Smith, *Religions of Man* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 11.

7. S. T. Katz, *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); S. T. Katz, ed., *Mysticism and Religious Traditions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).

8. See, for example, the newsletter on cults published by Psychologists for Social Action (1, No. 2 [30 March 1980]).

9. M. Scriven, "Comments on the APA Task Force on Ethics," *American Psychological Association Monitor* (1974).

10. This is not to say that demand characteristics—and belief by the therapist (religious practitioner, shaman, and so forth)—don't have an effect on treatment effectiveness. See, for example, W. T. McReynolds et al., "The Role of Attention Placebo Influences in the Efficacy of Systematic Desensitization," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 41 (1973):86-92, and J. Smith, "Psychotherapeutic Effects of TM with Controls for Expectations of Relief and Daily Sitting," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 44 (1976):630-7.

11. Several participants preferred the word *creed* to *belief*. It should be noted that this brief statement of "belief" is not intended to be a multi-paged systematic theology but is rather "what comes to mind."

12. A. Guinness, ed., *Mysteries of the Bible* (New York: Reader's Digest Association, 1988), 5.

13. D. T. Suzuki, *Manual of Zen Buddhism* (London: Rider, 1956).

14. Lao-tse, *Tao-Ching*, trans. A. Waley (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1936).

15. These dimensions are not intended to represent all possible components upon which beliefs may be examined. Rather, they represent a first effort, based on what intuitively seemed salient. More systematic research may expand the dimensions explored; however, I would guess that there would be little disagreement about the essentialness of at least these four. Further, since the statements of belief considered here were done relatively quickly (see note 11), it will be noted that not all beliefs (Table 1) covered all four of these dimensions. However, I would again guess that with additional time, each individual would have some position on each of these dimensions.

16. There are really four possible positions being examined with regard to control. On the horizontal axis is the question of theism (control by a benevolent other) and nontheism (universe *is*). On the vertical axis is the issue of an active, assertive mode of human control and a yielding, accepting mode of human control:

	Other control	"Isness"
Active mode of control		
Accepting, yielding mode of control		

An accepting mode of control can occur with either a benevolent other (trust the guiding hand of God) or in a nontheistic position (accept the "isness" of the universe). Further, yielding is considered a mode of control because it involves a conscious letting go. As Brother David Steindl-Rast noted, there needs to be a distinction made between surrender (a yielding mode of control) and abandon (giving up all control).

For further reference, see Huston Smith, "Spiritual Discipline in Zen and Comparative Religion," *The Eastern Buddhist* 16, no. 2 (1983):371-88; D. H. Shapiro, "Self-Control and Positive Health: Multiple Perspectives of Balance," in R. N. Walsh and D. H. Shapiro, eds., *Beyond Health and Normality: Explorations of Exceptional Psychological Wellbeing* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1983), 371-88; and J. Rodin, "Aging and Health: Effects of the Sense of Control," *Science* 233 (1986):1271-6.

17. Skinner's functional analysis referred primarily to the relationship between behavior and consequence, in *Science and Human Behavior* (New York: Macmillan, 1953). Since antecedents also influence, cause, or increase the probability of a behavior occurring, Skinner's strict operant model was expanded to include

"three-term contingencies" of antecedent, behavior, and consequence. The model has also been expanded to include not only overt behavior but also covert, internal behaviors such as thoughts and images. See C. Thoresen and M. Mahoney, *Behavioral Self-Control* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1974); D. Meichenbaum, *Cognitive Behavior Modification* (New York: Plenum, 1977); and A. Bandura, *Social Foundations of Thought and Action* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1985).

18. Brother David Steindl-Rast has defined mystical experience as an "experiential awareness of ultimate belonging" (Mysticism Reconsidered conference, 8-12 September 1988). See also D. Steindl-Rast, *Gratefulness: The Heart of Prayer* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984); W. T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy* (Phil.: Lippincott, 1960); and W. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Longmans, 1901).

19. Huston Smith, "Spiritual Discipline in Zen and Comparative Religion," 9-25.

20. In many traditions, there is the example of the moment of "loss of faith," even for the most believing. Martin Buber has commented, "We know from the life of the founders of religion . . . that there is such an 'event of the night'; the sudden collapse of the newly won certainty. . . ." M. Buber, *Moses* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press International, 1988), 58.

21. These are positive and negative reinforcement. Positive reinforcement refers to a positive event that occurs after a certain behavior, increasing the likelihood that the behavior will occur again. Negative reinforcement refers to an occurring event after an unpleasant behavior, which causes the unpleasant behavior to cease. For example, believing we are made in the image of God may cause us to feel good about ourselves (positive reinforcement). Believing in a unitary God may help reduce the pain we feel at seeing death and decay in the universe (negative reinforcement).

22. This model is not intended to be a linear, uni-dimensional mechanized model of reality. In fact, several points need to be made here. First, this paper is not saying that the deepest belief about ultimate reality develops only to address antecedent conditions. However, it is saying that antecedent conditions may be catalytic in the development of such belief. Second, showing that a belief can have a psychological function is not intended to reduce the purpose of belief only to its psychological function (see J. Frank, "Nature and Function of Belief Systems," *American Psychologist* 32 (1977):555-9. Third, although this paper has utilized belief as the "hub" of the model, this was done for heuristic purposes as a way to "cut into" the discussion and is not intended to suggest a unitary causal model of reality. As noted, beliefs can be antecedents that trigger actions and/or values, and beliefs can also be consequences, depending upon the frame of reference of the discussion. Finally, this model is presented in simple terms initially: for example, belief brings comfort. Later in the paper there will be additional refinement of this proposition. For example, it will be noted in the section entitled "Scientifically Testable?" that the degree of comfort provided for those with a belief in the benign nature of the universe may be influenced by a number of factors: strength of belief, frequency of holding the belief in one's awareness, and so forth. Further research should also investigate the function served by the belief of those people who hold views of the universe as "malevolent" or "indifferent." Do these views help them better address perceived evil? Are there any negative consequences to the different beliefs about reality? Fifth, the relationship between belief about ultimate reality and belief about human nature should also be explored. For example, if there is a view of ultimate reality as benign, does that mean that the belief about human nature is always congruent?

23. For example, interpreting an event as "surface reality" versus a "deeper" or "higher" level of reality.

See D. Shapiro, "Science or Sermon: Values, Beliefs, and an Expanded Vision of Psychological Health" in R. N. Walsh and D. H. Shapiro, eds., *Beyond Health and Normality: Explorations of Exceptional Psychological Wellbeing* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1983), 14-38.

24. However, there may be some problems. There may be efforts at evangelical conversion, based on limiting beliefs. Even though those beliefs may be comforting and beneficial for the person, they may not be as helpful for others. And, as noted, without some search for criteria of "truth," there may be the problem of giving up rational evaluation—as suggested by the tragedy of Jonestown. Further, most of us would agree that phenomenological understanding, no matter how deeply believed, is not necessarily or always sufficient evidence of reality. For example, from one phenomenological perspective, the world does look flat! And the belief that the earth was the center of the universe may have been comforting. For further discussion, see F. J. Streng, "Truth," in M. Eliade, *Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 15 (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 63-72.

25. See S. Taylor, "Adjustment to Threatening Events: A Theory of Cognitive Adaptation," *American Psychologist* 38 (11):1161-73, and P. M. Lewinsohn et al., "Social Competence and Depression: The Role of Illusory Self-Perceptions," *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 89 (1980):203-12.

26. In more "advanced" states of consciousness within Buddhism, the difference between suffering and nonsuffering may disappear (D. Goleman, *The Meditation Mind* [Los Angeles: J. P. Tarcher, Inc., 1988]). However, that does not negate the fact that the initial world view and belief about reality may have been a major motivator—as well as the framework in which the techniques were practiced—in order to attain such a state of consciousness.

27. See, for example, R. Rosenthal, *Pygmalion in the Classroom: Teacher's Expectation and Pupils' Intellectual Development* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1968).

28. An interesting question about all belief is, What might be the negative consequence of a belief? In other words, do people who have a benign view of the universe ever "trust too much" or fail to take appropriate action to resist "evil," at least at the dualistic level?

29. We thought about doing an exercise of this nature in the group, that is, writing each belief on a slip of paper, putting the papers in a hat, and having each participant draw out one belief and try to identify with it—but there wasn't time!

30. C. Sagan, *Cosmos* (New York: Random House, 1980). See also the discussion by D. Heath, "The Maturing Person," in R. N. Walsh and D. H. Shapiro, eds., *Beyond Health and Normality: Explorations of Exceptional Psychological Wellbeing* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1983), 152-206, and M. D. Smith, "Mental Health Reconsidered: A Special Case of the Problem of Values in Psychology," *American Psychologist* 16 (1961):299-306.

31. A. Einstein, *Out of My Later Years* (New Jersey: Citadel Press, 1956), and K. Wilber, "Where It Was, I Shall Become: Human Potentials and the Boundaries of the Soul," in R. N. Walsh and D. H. Shapiro, eds., *Beyond Health and Normality: Explorations of Exceptional Psychological Wellbeing* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1983), 67-123.

32. A. Maslow, "Fusions of Facts and Values," *American Journal of Psychoanalysis* 23 (1963):117-31; A. Maslow, *The Psychology of Science: A Reconnaissance* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), and R. Kantor, *Implications of a Moral Science* (Menlo Park, Calif.: Stanford Research International, 1971).

33. D. Rothenburg, talk presented at Mysticism Reconsidered conference, 8-12 September 1988, and H. Smith, *Forgotten Truth: The Primordial Tradition* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976).

34. S. T. Katz, ed., *Mysticism and Religious Traditions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 41.

35. *Ibid.*, 41.

36. R. Gimello, "Mysticism and Its Contexts," in S. T. Katz, ed., *Mysticism and Religious Traditions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 61-88; quote from p. 63.

37. The conscious motivation for scientists, of course, would be "the search for truth." However, it may be worthwhile to examine other reasons that they might wish that a certain view of reality was true (e.g., political, funding, economic, egoic, and so forth).

38. An examination of these questions can be helped by referring to the research on psychotherapy outcome: for example, A. E. Bergin and M. J. Lambert, "The Evaluation of Therapeutic Outcomes," in S. L. Garfield and A. E. Bergin, eds., *Handbook of Psychotherapy and Behavior Change* (New York: Wiley, 1978).

39. To refine this question, it would be necessary to analyze the belief into component parts (that is, theistic vs. nontheistic; valence of universe; and so forth) as well as to look at issues of social support for the belief and, as noted, the nature (intensity, frequency, duration, unchangeability) of the belief.

40. Gimello, "Mysticism and Its Contents," 85.

41. D. Heath, "The Maturing Person," in R. N. Walsh and D. H. Shapiro, eds., *Beyond Health and Normality: Explorations of Exceptional Psychological Wellbeing* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1983), 152-206.

42. Obviously, this is a difficult and complex task, and any effort will be based on certain assumptions regarding the nature of truth (absolute or relative) and the nature of values following from that truth. Even if there could be agreement on truth (see F. J. Streng, note 24) there would still be the issue of different models of the ultimate goal: that is, transcendence of the world; transcendence, then integration; transcendence through integration. Do we consider all these goals equally good; are we willing to let each tradition be judged based on its own definition? These are the central questions and assumptions that need to be addressed when discussing the issue of "values." For examples of hierarchical models, see H. Smith, *Forgotten Truth*; K. Wilber, "Where It Was, I Shall Become"; A. Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1969); and H. Smith, *Beyond the Post-Modern Mind* (New York: Crossroads, 1982).

43. I use the phrase "appear to be" because it is often possible to be misinformed about a tradition when speaking about it "from the outside." My understanding is that certain traditions state that faith alone is sufficient. These include sects of Buddhism (e.g., Amida and the pure-land school), and sects of Christianity (e.g., conservative Protestant).

44. See note 39.

45. Other issues regarding belief and technique that might be investigated include the following questions: which techniques work best for which individuals in accessing and then re-accessing mystical awareness and which traditions, or techniques, appear to be most helpful in assisting individuals in developing and maintaining this consciousness (see also notes 38, 39, 45).

46. It would also be interesting to explore why certain people choose a particular belief (and even specific components within a particular belief). For example, how much of the variance is sociocultural (the dogma of a particular teaching; socialization; social/peer influence), and how much is personality temperament and style? Further, it would be interesting to investigate whether (and if so, why) a belief changes over time, and along which component dimensions (e.g., theistic to nontheistic, and so forth). Although this article has addressed itself primarily to the belief of the individual, the same questions could also be asked of religious traditions (e.g., what is the relationship between the evolution of belief within a tradition and its first princi-



ples/founding experiences). Then, the interaction between personal belief and a tradition could be explored. For example, some individuals believe that the founding principles and experiences of a tradition are immutable and forever true; others, while respecting tradition, believe that the tradition evolves over time.

47. H. C. Warren, *Buddhist Texts in Translation* (New York: Atheneum, 1969).

48. See note 3.

49. E. F. Schumaker, *A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), cited in Walsh, "The Psychologies of East and West," 47.

50. M. T. Orne. "On the Social Psychology of the Psychological Experiment: With Particular Reference to Demand Characteristics and Their Implications," *American Psychologist* 17, no. 10 (1962):776-83, and W. B. Weimer, *Notes on the Methodology of Scientific Research* (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1979). See also Rosenthal, *Pygmalion in the Classroom*, and McReynolds et al., "The Role of Attention Placebo Influences."

51. T. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); K. R.

Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery: An Evolutionary Approach* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972); M. Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Toward a Post-Critical Philosophy* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958); and C. Tart, "States of Consciousness and State-Specific Sciences," *Science* 86 (1972):1203-10.

52. A. Koestler, *The Act of Creation* (London: Hutchinson, 1964). See also F. Vaughan, *Awakening Intuition* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1979).

53. D. D. Campbell, "On the Conflict between Biological and Social Evolution and between Psychology and the Moral Tradition," *American Psychologist* 30 (1975):1103-26.

54. Sagan, *Cosmos* 81.

55. See note 22.

56. As this article has indicated, there may be strong attachments to, as well as positive benefits from, a belief system. Therefore, even if we could find incontrovertible evidence of "truth" and "better," careful thought, attention, and sensitivity would then need to be directed to the process by which the teaching, sharing, and imparting of this "truth" to others would occur.