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Mystical Experiences Among Astrologers

Liz Greene

Abstract. This paper examines mystical experience amongst modern astrologers in the UK, using a seminar group at the London-based Centre for Psychological Astrology in 2006. It adapts previous research in the area, chiefly that by Greeley. The majority of respondents considered that mystical experience had influenced their religious perspective, and that astrology had, in turn, allowed them to understand such mystical experience.

Introduction

Mystical experience constitutes one of what Spilka, Brown and Cassidy called the ‘perennial problems’ of the psychology and sociology of religion.¹ Formal work on this subject began over a century ago, but early investigators were preoccupied with systematising and analysing the mystical writings of the world’s major religious traditions, and only William James can be viewed as adopting a genuinely phenomenological approach.² Although Jung used empirical research to explore the psychology of mystical experience, his work has not been widely

1 Bernard Spilka, George O. Brown, and Stephen A. Cassidy, ‘The Structure of Religious Mystical Experience in Relation to Pre- and Postexperience Lifestyles’, *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, Vol. 2, no. 4 (1992) [hereafter Spilka *et al.*]: p. 241.

2 E. D. Starbuck, *The Psychology of Religion* (New York: Scribner, 1899); See, for example, Richard Maurice Bucke, *Cosmic Consciousness: A Study in the Evolution of the Human Mind* (New York: University Books, 1961 [1901]); Rudolf Otto, *Mysticism East and West: A Comparative Analysis of the Nature of Mysticism*, trans. Bertha L. Bracey and Richenda C. Payne (New York: Macmillan, 1970 [1932]); Robert Charles Zaehner, *Mysticism, Sacred and Profane: An Inquiry into some Varieties of Preternatural Experience* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971 [1957]); William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1982 [1902]) [hereafter James].

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acknowledged within the social sciences.³ Recent empirical studies can be traced back to Walter Stace who, in 1960, formulated a theoretical model of the core features of mystical experience through exploring the writings of mystics over the centuries and interpreting them from a Christian perspective.⁴ Among the classical authors he refers to Plato and Plotinus, but he ignores later Neoplatonic, Hermetic, Gnostic, Kabbalistic, and alchemical testimonies.⁵ This bias has influenced the direction of subsequent research. In the last four decades a large body of quantitative and qualitative research, conducted on both general population groups and a wide range of specific ‘target’ groups, has sprung from Stace’s model as well as James’ categories defining mystical experience.⁶ However, to date no research on mystical experience has been pursued within that aggregate of ideas and practices categorised as ‘New Age’, nor among astrologers.⁷ This is surprising, since the inclusion of astrology by social scientists under the general heading of ‘New Religious Movements’ (NRMs) suggests that this could be a highly

3 C. G. Jung, *Psychology and Religion, CW11* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973 [1958]) [Hereafter Jung *CW11*]; For an examination of attitudes toward Jung within the social sciences, see Christopher Hauke, *Jung and the Postmodern: The Interpretation of Realities* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 1–22.

4 W. T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy* (Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott, 1960) [hereafter Stace]; On Stace’s religious conversion, see Leitch, Alexander, *A Princeton Companion* (1978), http://etcweb.princeton.edu/CampusWWW/Companion/stace_walter.html, accessed 15 May 2006.

5 On mystical experiences in these traditions, see Dan Merkur, *Gnosis: An Esoteric Tradition of Mystical Visions and Unions* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991) [hereafter Merkur].

6 For a discussion of the two methodologies see Alan Bryman, *Quantity and Quality in Social Research* (Routledge, 2006 [1988]); James, pp. 378–82.

7 On New Age religions and spiritualities, see Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 1996); Steven Sutcliffe and Marion Bowman, *Beyond New Age: Exploring Alternative Spirituality* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000) [hereafter Sutcliffe and Bowman].

fruitful area of research.⁸ This paper is a tentative foray into this small, unexplored corner of the larger landscape of mystical experience.

Reasons for choosing the research topic

There are sound reasons for pursuing this research. Firstly, certain questions are raised by the psychological literature on mystical experience with which I was already familiar, including James, Maslow, Jung, and Assagioli.⁹ Secondly, there is the neglected testimony of ancient authors, in particular Plato, Plotinus, Iamblichus, and the Hermetic, Kabbalistic, Gnostic, and alchemical writers, all of whom assert a relationship between mystical experience and the heavens that does not fit comfortably into modern research categories.¹⁰ Thirdly, work

8 On 'New Religious Movements' or 'NRM's, see Eileen Barker and Margit Warburg, eds., *New Religions and New Religiosity* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1998) [hereafter Barker and Warburg]. On astrology as an 'NRM' see J. Gordon Melton, 'The Future of the New Age Movement', in Barker and Warburg, pp. 133–49.

9 William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Penguin, 1982 [1902]) [hereafter James]; Abraham H. Maslow, *Religions, Values, and Peak Experiences* (New York: Penguin, 1987 [1964]) [hereafter Maslow 1964]; Abraham H. Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 1999 [1968]) [hereafter Maslow 1968]; Jung, *CW11*; C. G. Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy, CW12* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970 [1953]) [hereafter Jung, *CW12*]; Roberto Assagioli, *Psychosynthesis: A Collection of Basic Writings* (New York: Viking Press, 1965).

10 Plato, *Timaeus*, trans. Benjamin Jowett; *Phaedo*, trans. Hugh Tredennick [hereafter Plato, *Phaedo*]; Meno, trans. W. K. C. Guthrie; *Republic*, trans. Paul Shorey [hereafter Plato, *Republic*]; all in Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, eds., *The Complete Dialogues of Plato* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961); Plotinus, *The Enneads*, trans. Stephen MacKenna (New York: Larson Publications, 1992) [hereafter Plotinus]; Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries of the Egyptians, Chaldeans and Assyrians*, trans. Thomas Taylor (Frome: Prometheus Trust, 1999); Gregory Shaw, 'Containing Ecstasy: The Strategies of Iamblican Theurgy', *Dionysius*, Vol. 21 (Dec. 2003): pp. 53–87; Polymnia Athanassiadi, 'Dreams, Theurgy and Freelance Divination: The Testimony of Iamblichus' in *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol. 83 (1993): pp. 115–30; Anne Sheppard, 'Iamblichus on Inspiration: *De Mysteriis* 3.4–8', in H. J. Blumenthal and E. G. Clark, eds., *The Divine Iamblichus: Philosopher and Man of Gods* (London: Duckworth, 1993), pp. 138–43; *Hermetica*, ed. and trans. Sir Walter Scott

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by Champion and Feher exploring contemporary belief in astrology, indicates that over 60% of astrologers view astrology as a 'spiritual path' or are 'influenced by metaphysical religion'.¹¹ This suggests a connection between mystical experience and the study of astrology, and raises the question of whether this orientation is due to the spiritual bias of many astrological textbooks or arises from direct personal experience of a mystical kind.¹² Lastly, there is a complete absence of any research into mystical experiences among astrologers.

Previous research in similar areas

Research on mystical experience is ongoing in sociology, clinical psychology and psychiatry, theology, religious studies, and humanistic, analytical and transpersonal psychologies, particularly since the 1970s. There is considerable debate and even acrimony between different methodological and ontological 'camps'. A major conflict exists between the essentialist perspective promulgated by Stace, Hood, and Greeley,

(Boston: Shambhala, 1993) [hereafter *Hermetica*]; Gershom G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken, 1954) [hereafter Scholem 1954]; Gershom G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1965); Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1963 [1958]); Jung, *CW12*; C. G. Jung, *Alchemical Studies, CW13* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967); C. G. Jung, *Mysterium Coniunctionis, CW14* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963).

11 Nicholas Champion, 'Prophecy, Cosmology and the New Age Movement: The Extent and Nature of Contemporary Belief in Astrology' (PhD Thesis, Bath Spa University, 2004) [hereafter Champion], p. 243; Shoshanah Feher, 'Who Holds the Cards? Women and New Age Astrology', in James R. Lewis and Gordon Melton, *Perspectives on the New Age* (Albany: State University of New York, 1992) [Hereafter Feher, 'Who Holds the Cards?'], p. 188.

12 For example, the Theosophical astrology in Isabelle M. Pagan, *From Pioneer to Poet, or The Twelve Great Gates* (London: Theosophical Publishing House, 1911); Alice Bailey, *Esoteric Astrology* (London: Lucis Trust, 1951); Alan Leo, *Esoteric Astrology: A Study in Human Nature* (London: L. N. Fowler & Co., 1967); Dane Rudhyar, *The Sun Is Also a Star: The Galactic Dimension of Astrology* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1975).

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and more relativist approaches.¹³ Stace postulates an essential trans-cultural core in mystical experience, which Hood summarises as ‘self-loss’.¹⁴ Many papers argue the theoretical merits of this position, and quantitative research has tested the hypothesis in different cultural milieux.¹⁵ Much of the testing utilises Hood’s ‘M-Scale’ (Mystical Scale), acknowledged as ‘the only acceptable instrument available for operationalized reporting of mystical experience’.¹⁶ The relativist position is represented primarily by Katz, who argues that mystical

13 Ralph W. Hood Jr., ‘The Construction and Preliminary Validation of a Measure of Reported Mystical Experience’, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 14 (1975) [hereafter Hood 1975]: pp. 29–41; Andrew M. Greeley, *Ecstasy: A Way of Knowing* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Spectrum, 1974) [hereafter Greeley].

14 Stace, pp. 41–133; Ralph W. Hood Jr., ‘The Mystical Self: Lost and Found’, *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, Vol. 12, no. 1 (2002): pp. 1–14; p. 2.

15 See, for example, Sallie B. King, ‘Two Epistemological Models for the Interpretation of Mysticism’, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 56, no. 2 (Summer 1988): pp. 257–79; F. Samuel Brainard, ‘Defining “Mystical Experience”’, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 64, no. 2 (Summer 1996): pp. 359–93; See, for example, Kenneth Stifler, Joanne Greer, William Sneck, and Robert Dovenmuehle, ‘An Empirical Investigation of the Discriminability of Reported Mystical Experiences Among Religious Contemplatives, Psychotic In-Patients, and Normal Adults’, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 32, no. 4 (1993) [hereafter Stifler *et al.*], pp. 366–72; Duane F. Reinert and Kenneth R. Stifler, ‘Hood’s Mysticism Scale Revisited: A Factor-Analytic Replication’, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 32, no. 4 (1993): pp. 383–88; Ralph Hood Jr., Nima Ghorbani, P. J. Watson, Ahad Framarz Ghramaleki, Mark N. Bing, H. Kristl Davison, Ronald J. Morris, and W. Paul Williamson, ‘Dimensions of the Mystical Scale: Confirming the Three-Factor Structure in the United States and Iran’, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 40, no. 4 (2001): pp. 691–705; Aryeh Lazar and Shlomo Kravetz, ‘Responses to the Mystical Scale by Religious Jewish Persons: A Comparison of Structural Models of Mystical Experience’, *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, Vol. 15, no. 1 (2005): pp. 51–61.

16 Stifler *et al.*, p. 367.

experiences reflect fundamental differences because all experience is socially constructed.¹⁷ In other words, Buddhists have Buddhist experiences, Christians have Christian experiences and, presumably, astrologers have astrological experiences. Katz rejects Stace's theory of 'causal indifference', which assumes that mystical experiences cannot be differentiated by whatever triggers them.¹⁸ Instead, Katz insists that the trigger of a mystical experience cannot be separated from the experience itself. Merkur asserts that technique chosen for the deliberate induction of mystical experience—such as psychedelic substances, meditation, visualisation, yogic or breathing techniques, rituals or prayer—determines the content of the experience.¹⁹ This is relevant to mystical experiences among astrologers, many of whom practice spiritual disciplines of one kind or another.²⁰

Within the fields of analytical, humanistic and transpersonal psychologies the research is primarily qualitative and often therapeutically focused, and transpersonal psychologists have developed new methodologies appropriate for the complex nature of the subject.²¹ An ontological position sometimes informs the theoretical model: for example, Assagioli's work appears to reflect certain assumptions related to the Theosophical framework of Alice Bailey, although the relationship is never explicitly stated.²² In 1962, Maslow, basing many of his ideas on

17 Steven T. Katz, 'Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism', in Steven T. Katz, ed., *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 22–74; p. 66.

18 Stace, pp. 29–31.

19 Merkur, pp. 9–10.

20 See Champion, p. 250.

21 See, for example, Seymour Boorstein, ed., *Transpersonal Psychotherapy* (Palo Alto, CA: Science and Behavior Books, 1980) [hereafter *Transpersonal Psychotherapy*]; See William Braud and Rosemarie Anderson, *Transpersonal Research Methods for the Social Sciences: Honoring Human Experience* (London: Sage, 1998) [hereafter Braud and Anderson].

22 See, for example, similarities between the models and categories in Assagioli, *Psychosynthesis*, pp. 17–21 and Assagioli, *The Act of Will*, pp. 7–34, and the

Jung, adopted the term ‘peak experiences’ to stress their positive qualities and create distance from the ontological implications of the words ‘mystical’ and ‘religious’.²³ Research into the relationship between psychedelic drugs and mystical experience was enthusiastically pursued during the 1960s.²⁴ Within the field of Jungian analytical psychology, discussions of mystical experience tend to be theoretical or based on individual case studies.²⁵ Jung’s perspective is ontologically agnostic but relies on specific psychological models: mystical experience, in his view, results from a direct inner encounter with the archetypal dominants of the

models and categories in Alice A. Bailey, *Esoteric Psychology*, Vol. 2, *A Treatise on the Seven Rays* (London: Lucis Press, 1971 [1942]).

23 Maslow 1968, p. 15; Abraham H. Maslow, ‘Lessons from the Peak-Experiences’, *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, Vol. 2 (1962): pp. 9–18; Maslow 1968, pp. 83–111. Also see Merkur, pp. 29–30; Maslow 1964, pp. 19–29. For examples of research based on Maslow’s work, see, for example, Michael J. Lewis, ‘Music as a Trigger for Peak Experiences Among a College Staff Population’, *Creativity Research Journal*, Vol. 14, nos. 3 & 4 (2002) [hereafter Lewis]: pp. 351–59; James Polyson, ‘Students’ Peak Experiences: A Written Exercise’, *Teaching of Psychology*, Vol. 12, no. 4 (December 1985): pp. 211–13; Lorraine S. Lanier, Gayle Privette, Steve Vodanovich, and Charles M. Bundrick, ‘Peak Experiences: Lasting Consequences and Breadth of Occurrences Among Realtors, Artists, and a Comparison Group’, *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality*, Vol. 11, no. 4 (1996) [hereafter Lanier et al]: pp. 781–91.

24 See, for example, Timothy Leary, ‘The Religious Experience: Its Production and Interpretation’, *Psychedelic Review*, Vol. 1, no. 3 (1964): pp. 324–46; Timothy Leary and Walter Houston Clark, ‘Religious Implications of Consciousness Expanding Drugs’, *Religious Education*, Vol. 58, no. 2 (1963): pp. 251–56; Willis W. Harman, ‘The Use of Consciousness-Expanding Drugs’, *Main Currents in Modern Thought*, Vol. 20 (1963): pp. 5–14; Robert Masters and Jean Huston, *The Varieties of Psychedelic Experience* (London: Turnstone, 1973 [1966]).

25 See, for example, Ann and Barry Ulanov, *Religion and the Unconscious* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1975); Roderick Main, ‘New Age Thinking in the light of C. G. Jung’s theory of synchronicity’, *Journal of Alternative Spiritualities and New Age Studies*, Vol. 2 (2006): pp. 8–25; John P. Dourley, ‘The Religious Significance of Jung’s Psychology’, *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, Vol. 5, no. 2 (1995): pp. 73–89.

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collective unconscious.²⁶ This theory, although making no religious claim, is open to challenge by researchers unable to demonstrate the existence of either archetypes or the collective unconscious through quantitative methods. Perhaps partly for this reason, Jung is sometimes perceived as the founder of an 'alternative spirituality', rather than as an empiric researcher.²⁷

Research in clinical psychology and psychiatry tends to focus on the functional and pathological dimensions of mystical experience.²⁸ Some researchers assert that mystical experience is a symptom of mental disturbance; others conclude that, although psychotic and mystical states are often indistinguishable, the difference lies in the individual's capacity to handle the experience.²⁹ I did not explore these issues in my research, partly because it was beyond the scope of the project, and partly because it would have required an *a priori* acceptance of diagnostic categories and hypothetical assumptions about what constitutes 'normality', none of which reflect the phenomenological approach I chose to use.

Methodology

My research was a phenomenological inquiry based on grounded theory, allowing the phenomenon to emerge by allowing the data to speak for itself.³⁰ I had no specific hypothesis to prove or disprove, and attempted to adopt the neutral position described by Ninian Smart as

26 C. G. Jung, *Civilization in Transition*, CW10 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974 [1964]), para. 655; Jung, CW12, paras. 9–19. See also Michael Palmer, *Freud and Jung on Religion* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 113–41.

27 Sutcliffe and Bowman, pp. 2 and 10.

28 See, for example, Spilka *et al.*, pp. 241–57; Stifler *et al.*, pp. 366–72.

29 Michael A. Thalbourne, 'A Note on the Greeley Measure of Mystical Experience', *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, Vol. 14, no. 3 (2004): pp. 215–22; Greeley, pp. 73–90; Stifler *et al.*, pp. 371–72.

30 Ron Valle and Mary Mohs, 'Transpersonal Awareness in Phenomenological Inquiry', in William Braud and Rosemarie Anderson, *Transpersonal Research Methods for the Social Sciences* (London: Sage, 1998), pp. 95–113; John W. Cresswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design* (London: Sage, 1998), p. 86.

‘methodological agnosticism’.³¹ I hoped possible patterns might emerge that could lead to potential theories and further research. I also followed Braud’s and Anderson’s recommendation that intuition and personal experience might be useful in the study of the spiritual dimension of human experience.³² I devised a questionnaire, included at the end of this paper, which combined a mixture of question types, including single response answers, open questions inviting brief but unstructured responses, and lists of items, any of which could be selected.³³ Before distributing the questionnaire, I tested it on a group of friends, to ascertain whether it raised any objections or problems. Questions 4 and 7 are based on the experiential categories developed by Greeley (who, in turn, derived them from Bucke, James, Maslow, and Laski), and the mystical experience triggers developed by Greeley and Argyle.³⁴ I also included questions on religious upbringing and present religious affiliations, to see whether Stace’s essentialist perspective held up in a group with varied religious backgrounds who would probably view themselves as spiritual rather than conventionally religious.³⁵ Further questions explored possible links between the participants’ mystical experiences and their study of astrology. I chose not to use the term ‘peak experience’ because it would have required explaining Maslow’s terminology, and I did not wish to influence the participants’ interpretation of their experiences. I avoided the term ‘religious experience’ because of its associations with established religious traditions. Although bearing in mind Brewer’s warning that ‘people are

31 Ninian Smart, *The Science of Religion and the Sociology of Knowledge: Some Methodological Questions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973).

32 Braud and Anderson, pp. 69–94.

33 See below, p. 28; Judith Bell, *Doing Your Research Project* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2002), pp. 119–20.

34 Greeley, p. 140; Marghanita Laski, *Ecstasy* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1961) [hereafter Laski], pp. 488–89; Greeley, p. 141; Michael Argyle, *Psychology and Religion: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2000) [hereafter Argyle], pp. 60–70.

35 See Campion, pp. 240–43.

not free to design their questionnaire...any old way they want',³⁶ I altered and expanded Greeley's lists of descriptors and triggers. I did not set out to resolve the conflict about whether mystical experiences are transcultural or culturally determined, or whether the trigger, 'pre-experience lifestyle',³⁷ method of induction, religious orientation, or individual psychology shapes the content of the experience.

I distributed my questionnaire to a group of 52 psychological astrologers attending a full-day seminar which I gave in London on 26 March 2006.³⁸ The seminar was on an astrological theme not specifically related to the content of the questionnaire. 27 students returned their questionnaires during the course of the day, or by post a few days later. These participants do not reflect a general population sample, or even a general sample of astrologers, since there are and always have been many different approaches within the study of astrology.³⁹ But this group seemed ideal for my research because all are involved in psychological rather than predictive astrology, and most have been in some form of psychotherapy. I therefore felt they might be able to communicate their experiences with reasonable insight. 'Ineffability'—the inability to describe a mystical experience—is stressed as a core feature in much of the literature, and I wondered whether this was true of those who, through study and training, might have a more extensive vocabulary.⁴⁰

I considered whether my authoritative position as seminar tutor would influence the responses, but concluded that, since I neither teach nor expect any particular religious or spiritual orientation in my seminars, my

36 John D. Brewer, *Ethnography* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000), p. 2.

37 Spilka *et al.*, p. 241.

38 For a definition of psychological astrology see Roy Willis and Patrick Curry, *Astrology, Science and Culture: Pulling Down the Moon* (Oxford: Berg, 2004) [hereafter Willis and Curry], pp. 72–75.

39 See Willis and Curry, pp. 65–75.

40 See, for example, James, p. 380, and Stace, pp. 277ff. For a discussion of ineffability in mystical experience, see John Y. Fenton, 'Mystical Experience as a Bridge for Cross-Cultural Philosophy of Religion: A Critique', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 49, no. 1 (March 1981): pp. 51–76.

ontologically neutral position might be helpful in instilling an atmosphere of trust. Although there is no clear boundary between emic/‘insider’ and etic/‘outsider’—as Hanegraaff points out, the emic becomes an etic as soon as a theoretical or interpretive dimension is applied to research results—nevertheless I am an emic in the sense that I am both an astrologer and the recipient of a mystical experience.⁴¹ Although I did not discuss my own experience at the seminar, my astrological background and unspoken acceptance of the psychological reality and value of mystical experiences probably encouraged the participants to feel they would not be derided or deemed ‘abnormal’.

Results and discussion

51% of the seminar group affirmed that they had had at least one mystical experience. As the remaining 49% did not return the questionnaire, I cannot determine whether they had not had a mystical experience or simply did not wish to participate. Argyle, summarising the results of a number of quantitative surveys, states that an average of 33% of the general population in Britain, the USA, and Australia report definite religious experiences.⁴² This result varies slightly according to age, gender, educational level, and social position. As my research was focused on a small, specialised group, it does not imply a general trend, but corroborative research by Wilson and Spencer involving yoga ashram residents suggests that groups involved in ‘alternative spiritualities’ may report a higher frequency of mystical experiences than a general population sample.⁴³

41 On the emic/etic polarity, see Russell T. McCutcheon, ed., *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion: A Reader* (London: Cassell, 1999); Wouter J. Hanegraaff, ‘On the Construction of “Esoteric Traditions”’, in Antoine Faivre and Wouter J. Hanegraaff, eds., *Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion* (Leuven: Peeters, 1998) [hereafter *Western Esotericism*], p. 12.

42 Argyle, p. 59.

43 Stephen R. Wilson and Robert C. Spencer, ‘Intense Personal Experiences: Subjective Effects, Interpretations, and After-Effects’, *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, Vol. 46, no. 5 (Sept. 1990) [hereafter Wilson and Spencer]: pp. 565–73.

General background questions, Questions 1–3, and Questions 10–13

Of the 27 participants who affirmed they had had mystical experiences, 85% were female and 15% male. The high percentage of women is virtually guaranteed by the typical predominance of women attending astrology seminars.⁴⁴ However, Argyle observes that in most large-scale mystical experience surveys there is a higher response from women (41% women versus 31% men).⁴⁵ The ages of my participants ranged from 30 to 72 years, and the time studying astrology ranged from 2 to 30 years. 49% of the participants were British, with the remainder from France, the USA, the Czech Republic, Argentina, Ukraine, Germany, Italy, Bulgaria, Belgium, Finland, and Australia. 60% were university graduates, of whom 34% had post-graduate qualifications. 30% did not have a university training but had professional qualifications. 10% had finished their education with secondary school. This reflects a generally high level of education, contradicting Wuthnow's observation that astrology appeals primarily to 'the more poorly educated'.⁴⁶

93% of the participants indicated they had had two or more mystical experiences (Question 1). As I did not include a question differentiating 'mild' from 'intense' experiences, the frequency of repetition is difficult to assess in comparison with other surveys.⁴⁷ Of those with two or more experiences, 68% stated their experiences had been different (Question 2). They were asked to base their responses to the descriptors on a single experience they felt to be deeply important and transformative. Regarding duration (Question 3), 56% indicated their experiences had been instantaneous; for 19% it had been prolonged; 25% were unsure.

44 On the predominance of women in astrology, see Feher, 'Who Holds the Cards?', pp. 179–88.

45 Argyle, p. 58.

46 Robert Wuthnow, 'Astrology and Marginality', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 15, no. 2 (1976): p. 167.

47 On the differentiation between 'mild' and 'intense' experiences, see J. B. Pratt, *The Religious Consciousness* (New York: Macmillan, 1924); See Argyle, pp. 56–58.

This correlates roughly with Hay's general population survey, in which 51% of his participants had an instantaneous experience.⁴⁸ James believed transience to be a core characteristic of mystical experience, but some people seem to experience prolonged effects lasting anywhere from a few hours to a year or more.⁴⁹

19% of the participants indicated they had never spoken about their mystical experiences to anyone before (Questions 10–11). I included this question because 'ineffability' might reflect unwillingness to discuss the experience with an unsympathetic listener, as well as a lack of appropriate vocabulary. Maslow calls mystical experience 'a totally private and personal one which can hardly be shared'.⁵⁰ Hay and Heald found that 44% of their participants had never discussed their experiences before.⁵¹ The high number of my participants who had talked about their experience with others seems unusual, and may reflect greater articulateness as well as the support of a sympathetic social milieu.

Regarding religious upbringing (Question 12), 34% of my participants were raised Protestant, 22% Catholic, 19% non-denominational Christian, 16% Jewish, 4% Russian Orthodox, 3% agnostic, and 2% 'other' (spiritualist). All of them indicated that they were not conventionally religious at the present time, but considered themselves spiritual (Question 13).

48 David Hay, *Exploring Inner Space* (London: Penguin, 1982).

49 James, p. 381; See Argyle, p. 57; Greeley, p. 142.

50 Maslow 1964, pp. 27–28.

51 David Hay and Gordon Heald, 'Religion is good for you', *New Society*, Vol. 8 (April 1987): pp. 20–22.

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Descriptors of mystical experience (Question 4)

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Descriptor of mystical experience	%
1. A sense of encountering the holy, sacred or divine	63
2. A sense of the unity of everything and my own part in it	63
3. A certainty that all things work out according to a greater plan	63
4. A sense that all the universe is alive and interconnected	59
5. An experience of timelessness	56
6. A great increase in my understanding and knowledge	56
7. A feeling of deep and profound peace	56
8. A sense of intense joy	52
9. A new sense of individual purpose, destiny or meaning	52
10. A sense of tremendous personal expansion	52
11. The sense that my personality has dissolved into something much greater than myself	52
12. A feeling of remembering or recollecting things I have always really known deep down	45
13. A loss of concern about worldly problems	41
14. A sensation of warmth, fire or light	37
15. A sense of my aloneness and uniqueness	37
16. A confidence in my own personal survival	33
17. A conviction that love is the centre of everything	33
18. A sense of the need to contribute to or help others	26
19. A sense of a new life and living in a new world	22
20. A feeling that I couldn't possibly describe what was happening to me	19
21. A sense of alienation	11

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Descriptor of mystical experience	%
1. A feeling of deep and profound peace	55
2. A certainty that all things would work out for the good	48
3. Sense of my own need to contribute to others	43
4. A conviction that love is the centre of everything	43
5. Sense of joy and laughter	43
6. An experience of great emotional intensity	38
7. A great increase in my understanding and knowledge	32
8. A sense of the unity of everything and my own part in it	29
9. A sense of a new life and living in a new world	27
10. A confidence in my own personal survival	27
11. A feeling that I couldn't possibly describe what was happening to me	26
12. A sense that all the universe is alive	25
13. The sense that my personality has been taken over by something much more powerful than I am	24
14. A sense of tremendous personal expansion, either psychological or physical	22
15. A sensation of warmth or fire	22
16. A sense of being alone	19
17. A loss of concern about worldly problems	19
18. A sense that I am being bathed in light	14
19. A sense of desolation	8

No single descriptor was experienced by all the participants, but each descriptor was experienced by at least 11%. This could support Hood's hypothesis, following Stace, that not all the core categories of mystical experience are essential to any individual mystical experience because there are always 'borderline' cases connected by 'family resemblances'

reflecting only some of the core categories.⁵² Equally, the result could support Katz's assertion that mystical experiences are entirely variable and have no essential core. Alternatively, there may be several types of experience, each with its own core qualities.⁵³

If a researcher is etic to the point of being anti-religionist, research questions will reflect this and may distort the results. If a researcher is emic to the point of being 'religionist'—defined by Hanegraaff as a refusal to respect the distinction between research and the expression of personal beliefs—distortions may also occur. Greeley, a Roman Catholic priest as well as a sociologist, is a religious emic who might be considered religionist.⁵⁴ His Descriptor No. 13 is striking in its wording: 'The sense that my personality has been taken over by something much more powerful than I am'. The word 'powerful', coupled with the phrase 'taken over', suggests dominance and submission, and could seem inappropriate or even threatening to people whose experience is not filtered through the lens of a hierarchical form of religiosity. I replaced this descriptor with my Descriptor No. 11, 'The sense that my personality has been dissolved into something much greater than myself', because this wording does not carry the same implications and, although it was not part of my own experience, I have heard the word 'dissolve' used frequently by others describing their experiences. Another alternative might have been 'merge'. The marked difference in results for this descriptor (Greeley = 24%, my participants = 52%) may reflect the change in wording.

I removed Greeley's Descriptor No. 6 because it seemed self-evident, and replaced it with my Descriptor No. 5, 'An experience of

⁵² Hood 1975, p. 30.

⁵³ For a discussion of types of 'transpersonal' experience, see Stanislov Grof, 'Theoretical and Empirical Basis of Transpersonal Psychotherapy', in *Transpersonal Psychotherapy*, pp. 356–57. For St. Augustine's distinctions between types of mystical experience, see Merkur, pp. 4–8. For a list of yogic definitions of mystical experience, see Haridas Chaudhuri, 'Yoga Psychology', in Charles T. Tart, ed., *Transpersonal Psychologies: Perspectives on the Mind from the Seven Great Spiritual Traditions* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975) [hereafter Tart], pp. 261–65.

⁵⁴ Wouter J. Hanegraaff, 'Introduction', in *Western Esotericism*, pp. XII–XIII; See Greeley, pp. 128–38.

timelessness'. This is one of Stace's core categories, also emphasised by Maslow.⁵⁵ The response to this descriptor was 54%, suggesting that timelessness is indeed an important dimension of some mystical experiences.

My Descriptor No. 12 reflects the most important quality of my own experience, for which I found echoes in the Platonic and Neoplatonic theory of the recollection of the soul, the Hermetic and Kabbalistic descriptions of 'illuminate' experience, and the Gnostic ideas of 'homesickness', 'nostalgia', and 'awakening'—although I was not familiar with any of these writings at the time of my experience.⁵⁶ Maslow and Greeley, like Stace, ignore this important dimension of mystical experience in the ancient world, although James refers to the 'noetic' quality of mystical experience as 'a state of knowledge'.⁵⁷ 45% of my participants responded affirmatively, indicating that recollection or remembering should be considered an important dimension of some mystical experiences. It is possible that Stace and Greeley were disturbed by the implications of this gnostic aspect of mystical experience: recollection hints at rebirth or a pre-life origin for the soul, concepts that are antithetical to the Christian idea that each human soul is created at conception and experiences only one life on earth.⁵⁸

My Descriptor No. 1, 'A sense of encountering the holy, sacred or divine', reflects one of Stace's core qualities. Both Otto and Eliade

55 Maslow 1964, p. 63. On the loss of the sense of time and space in mystical experience, see also Merkur, pp. 21–23, and Bucke, pp. 7–8.

56 Plato, *Phaedo*, 73–76, and *Meno*, 81e; Plotinus, *Ennead V* ('The Knowing Hypostases and the Transcendent'); See, for example, *Hermetica*, 4.3–9, 7.1–3. On the gnostic or 'illuminate' type of Kabbalistic mystical experience, see Scholem 1954, pp. 40–79; R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, 'Mystical and Magical Contemplation: the Kabbalists in Sixteenth-Century Safed', *History of Religions*, Vol. 1, no. 1 (Summer 1961): pp. 9–36. For an overview see Roelof Van den Broek and Wouter J. Hanegraaff, eds., *Gnosis and Hermeticism: From Antiquity to Modern Times* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998) [Hereafter Van den Broek and Hanegraaff]; See Jonas, pp. 65–68 and 86–91.

57 James, p. 380.

58 On the distinction between gnosis ('knowing') and the Gnostic religions of the first centuries CE, see Merkur, pp. 111–16.

postulate the holy as the basis of all religious feeling,⁵⁹ so it is not surprising that 63% of my participants responded affirmatively, making it the most frequently chosen of all the descriptors on my list. My Descriptor No. 9, 'A new sense of individual purpose, destiny or meaning', is not only part of my own experience but is echoed by Plato's idea, developed more recently by Hillman, of the individual *daimon* assigned at birth.⁶⁰ 52% of the participants responded to this question affirmatively. The relevance of these additional descriptors is reflected by the high percentage of responses, higher than most of Greeley's descriptors. Whether these results are relevant to astrologers in general, or are unique to psychological astrologers, can only be clarified by further research.

The quality of ineffability expressed by Greeley's Descriptor No. 11 (my Descriptor No. 20) had the next to lowest response in my group—19%, as contrasted with Greeley's response of 26%—suggesting that psychological astrologers do not find it especially difficult to describe what they have experienced. This may reflect the high level of education among the group or, due to their involvement with psychological and esoteric thought, an availability of language models to describe the experience. This is supported by the responses to Questions 20 and 21: 'Do you feel that a questionnaire such as this one can communicate your experience with any genuine truthfulness?' This elicited 63% qualified or unqualified affirmative responses, which surprised me, as I had expected greater resistance to the detached style of a questionnaire. This result suggests that, for the majority of this group, mystical experience can be broadly described even in an impersonal format.

With some descriptors, such as Greeley's Descriptor No. 7 (my No. 6), I did not alter Greeley's wording but achieved markedly different results. While Greeley had a 32% response, 54% of my group responded affirmatively. This descriptor, like my Descriptor No. 12, is related to the

59 Rudolph Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, trans. John W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1950); Mircea Eliade, *The Quest: History and Meaning in Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969).

60 James Hillman, *The Soul's Code: In Search of Character and Calling* (London: Bantam, 1996); Plato, *Republic*, 620e–621b. On the *daimon* as identical to God, also see Gilles Quispel, 'Hermes Trismegistus and the Origins of Gnosticism', *Vigiliae Christianae*, No. 46 (1992): p. 1.

idea of gnosis. Greeley's Descriptor No. 8, relating to the sense of interconnectedness described by Jonas as 'cosmic pantheism' and by Faivre as the perception of 'correspondences', received only 29% in his test, but achieved 63% in mine, although I did not alter the wording.⁶¹ Greeley's Descriptor No. 12 also relates to a 'pantheistic' perception of a living universe. Greeley received a 25% response; my group responded with 59%. In my version of this descriptor (No. 4) I added the words 'and interconnected', which might have affected the result.

These discrepancies hint at a predilection among psychological astrologers for a type of mystical experience involving the sense of a living, interconnected cosmos, recollection of lost or forgotten knowledge, and an experience of individual destiny. Further research would be needed to see whether other groups of astrologers replicated these results. It is possible that the kind of temperament attracted to psychological astrology is particularly receptive to this kind of experience, which does not seem to be explored in other research on mystical experiences. This suggests individual psychological bias rather than cultural mediation, since the gnostic dimension of mystical experience belongs primarily to cultural traditions purportedly marginalised since the seventeenth century.⁶² However, Hanegraaff observes that there can be 'no doubt about the historical continuities between "Gnosis and Hermeticism" and the New Age movement'.⁶³ The tendency of 'New Agers' to adopt these currents of thought suggests that current cultural shifts may facilitate the gnostic mystical experience in those who have abandoned conventional forms of religiosity.

61 Jonas, p. 147; Antoine Faivre, 'Introduction I', in Antoine Faivre and Jacob Needleman, eds., *Modern Esoteric Spirituality* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), pp. xi–xxii; p. xv.

62 On psychological types having different mystical experiences, see James, pp. 411–12; See Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London: Penguin, 1971).

63 Wouter J. Hanegraaff, 'The New Age Movement and the Esoteric Tradition', in Van den Broek and Hanegraaff, pp. 359–79; p. 360.

Triggers for mystical experience (Question 7)**Psychological Astrologers 2006**

Triggers of mystical experience	%
Spiritual exercise	49
Nature	49
Meaningful coincidence	45
Important dream	33
Music	30
Psychotherapy or analysis	30
Creative work	30
Personal crisis or loss	22
Drugs	19
Prayer	19
Concentrated study	19
Sexual experience	19
Falling in love	19
Near-death experience	11
Depression	8
Childbirth	0

Greeley 1974

Triggers of mystical experience	%
Listening to music	49
Prayer	48
Beauties of nature such as sunset	45
Moments of quiet reflection	42
Attending church services	41
Listening to sermon	40
Watching little children	34
Reading the Bible	31
Being alone in church	30
Reading a poem or novel	21
Childbirth	20
Sexual lovemaking	18
Your own creative work	17
Looking at a painting	15
Physical exercise	1
Drugs	0

Mystical experiences, although naturally occurring phenomena, may be precipitated by a variety of triggers, and may also be deliberately induced.⁶⁴ Different surveys list different triggers and achieve different results. Greeley and Lewis found that music was the most frequently cited trigger.⁶⁵ Hardy, like Greeley, noted that prayer was an important trigger, but depression and despair also figured strongly in Hardy's results, as well as in a survey by Wilson and Spencer.⁶⁶ Therapeutic

64 See Wuthnow, Robert, 'Peak experiences: some empirical tests', *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, Vol. 18 (1978): pp. 59–75; P. L. Nelson, 'Personality Factors in the frequency of reported spontaneous praeternatural experiences', *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, Vol. 21 (1989): pp. 193–209; R. D. Gordon, 'Dimensions of peak communication experiences: An exploratory study', *Psychological Reports*, Vol. 57 (1985): pp. 824–26; Lanier *et al.*, pp. 781–91; James, pp. 381–94; Maslow 1964, p. 29; Greeley, pp. 91–96; Laski, pp. 488–89.

65 Greeley, p. 141; Lewis, p. 358.

66 Alistair Hardy, *The Spiritual Nature of Man* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979); Wilson and Spencer, p. 567. Also see Seymour Boorstein, 'Anger and the Fear of Death' in *Transpersonal Psychotherapy*, pp. 369–75; John Firman and

experiences are rarely listed as triggers, although they are included by Wilson and Spencer; in their research results, therapeutic catharsis was the least frequent trigger.

My list of triggers is loosely based on Greeley's, although I replaced or reworded most of them. Greeley's Christian orientation is evident in triggers such as 'listening to sermon' and 'being alone in church', which I replaced because I suspected that few if any of my participants attended church or listened to sermons. As there is a long tradition of sorrow and grief as triggers for mystical experience, described by St. John of the Cross as the 'Dark Night of the Soul',⁶⁷ I included the triggers 'depression' and 'personal crisis and loss'. I replaced Greeley's 'physical exercise', 'looking at a painting', and 'reading a poem or novel' with three new triggers: 'meaningful coincidence',⁶⁸ 'important dream', and 'psychotherapy or analysis'. All proved important for my participants. The most significant addition I made was 'spiritual exercise'. This was not included in Greeley (although prayer may be considered a spiritual exercise), but it is related to the deliberate induction of mystical experience through meditation, the theurgic techniques of Neoplatonism, Hermetism, spiritual alchemy and Kabbala, and the use of Jung's 'active imagination' as a theurgic tool.⁶⁹ The strong response (49%) justifies the inclusion of this trigger. My participants were more inspired by meaningful coincidences and important dreams than by music, and 'creative work' was more significant than 'prayer'. 'Drugs' did not feature strongly among my participants, although it achieved a lower

James Vargiu, 'The Perspective of Psychosynthesis', in *Transpersonal Psychotherapy*, pp. 106–8.

67 St. John of the Cross, *Ascent of Mt. Carmel*, 1.13.11, quoted in McNamara, William, 'Psychology and the Christian Mystical Tradition', in Tart, p. 400.

68 On meaningful coincidence, see C. G. Jung, *The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*, CW8 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), pp. 417–519.

69 On active imagination as a theurgic technique, see Merkur, pp. 37–54; Gregory Shaw, 'Containing Ecstasy: The Strategies of Iamblichean Theurgy', *Dionysius*, Vol. 21 (December 2003): pp. 53–87; Jeffrey Raff, *Jung and the Alchemical Imagination* (York Beach, ME: Nicolas-Hays, 2000).

response in Greeley's survey.⁷⁰ 'Personal crisis or loss' did not feature strongly, and 'depression' had few responses. 'Childbirth' had none. 'Concentrated study' replaced Greeley's 'reading the Bible', but yielded a lower result.

The importance of spiritual exercises, meaningful coincidences, psychotherapy, and significant dreams probably reflects the psychological and esoteric orientation of my participants, and may be irrelevant for the general population. The contrast between my and Greeley's results reflects cultural mediation as well as individual predisposition in participants as well as researchers. In describing triggers which were not included in the list, participants listed 'ritual dance', 'healing', and 'guru in ashram'. All three might be considered forms of 'spiritual exercise', but the participants felt they were different enough to merit separate mention. One each listed 'world events', 'swimming', 'festival' (perhaps a New Age equivalent to 'attending a church service'), 'art', and 'looking at young animals or babies'. One participant listed 'ordinary life', an alembic for mystical experience described by various authors including Alice Bailey, one of the most influential Theosophical writers of the 20th century.⁷¹

Questions 5 and 6

I added these questions because of Maslow's emphasis on the moral consequences of mystical experiences, and the intriguing results of research by Christopher, Manaster, Campbell and Weinfeld exploring the relationship between mystical experiences, values, social interest, and moral development.⁷² The researchers note that little work has been done in examining the effects of mystical experiences on values and ethical perspectives. These issues are relevant for astrologers who use their work for counselling or therapeutic purposes. 89% responded affirmatively to

70 See Argyle, pp. 64–66, for a survey of research on drugs as a trigger for mystical experience.

71 Alice A. Bailey, *Autobiography* (New York: Lucis Publishing Co., 1951), p. 163.

72 Maslow 1964, p. 67; John Chambers Christopher, Guy J. Manaster, Robert L. Campbell, and Michael B. Weinfeld, 'Peak Experiences, Social Interest, and Moral Reasoning: An Exploratory Study', *The Journal of Individual Psychology*, Vol. 58, no. 1 (Spring 2002): pp. 35–51.

Question 5, confirming that mystical experiences can profoundly influence values and outlook. 41% responded affirmatively to Question 6, demonstrating that mystical experience can strongly affect moral attitudes.

Questions 8–9 and Questions 14–19

71% of the participants felt there was a relationship between their mystical experience and astrology (Questions 8 and 9). Three participants stated that astrology facilitated an understanding and integration of the experience. Two noted that the meaningful coincidence between the experience and the astrological configurations at the time provided a deeper comprehension of the ‘meaningful patterns’ in their lives. One participant described astrology as a ‘language that gave shape’ to the mystical experience. Four participants used the word ‘interconnection’ to describe both the mystical experience and their feelings about astrology. Three participants felt the experience had given a brief moment of ‘truly understanding’ the basis of astrology. These responses suggest that there is a connection between the gnostic type of mystical experience and the nature of astrology itself, as both seem to involve an experience of interconnectedness and a perception of inherent pattern and meaning.

71% of the participants felt that astrology had influenced their religious or spiritual outlook (Questions 14 and 15). Participants stated that astrology offered a world-view both contrasting with the ‘cosmology of science’ and lessening the need for ‘dependence on conventional religion’. Several stated that astrology confirmed a sense of ‘cosmic order’ and an ‘interconnectedness between inner and outer realities’. One participant stated that it gave a sense of participation in the natural cycles of life. Another stated that it provided a connection with the ‘mechanics of the universe’. The word ‘interconnection’ was used by several participants. These responses do not reflect either the ‘congregational’ attitude of those needing the higher authority of an established religious institution, or the intensely personal and self-centred focus described by Heelas and Woodhead as ‘New Age spirituality’.⁷³ My participants emphasised interconnectedness with a greater whole, while simultaneously recognising the value of individual meaning. This raises questions about whether astrology is appropriately labelled a ‘New Age

⁷³ Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 13–32.

spirituality'. For many of my participants it seems to be a form of connective language providing both collective and personal integrative functions.

82% of the participants felt their mystical experience had influenced their religious or spiritual outlook (Questions 16 and 17), stating that it had connected them with something 'more authentic' than conventional religious doctrines, and freed them from 'bondage to a materially based reality'. Once again, the word 'interconnected' was often used. One participant felt the mystical experience confirmed 'intuitions about life' that had previously been unsupported. Another stated that it deepened her sense of 'belonging to God'. One participant referred to 'inner knowing', and another felt the experience confirmed a belief in reincarnation.

78% of the participants stated that their mystical experience had influenced their perception of astrology (Questions 18 and 19). They felt the experience had deepened their understanding of the 'transformative aspects' of astrology, made it 'less formulaic', and lessened their 'preoccupation' with astrology as character analysis or prediction. It also heightened their trust in astrology's 'map of unfolding processes'.

Conclusion

This research project was intended to generate ideas which might be pursued in depth through further research. Participants' responses to the open questions were extraordinarily revealing, and I felt privileged to be offered glimpses into one of the most moving and meaningful dimensions of their lives. It is difficult to imagine how any researcher, whatever their ontological bias, could approach such profound personal material with anything but respect for the importance of mystical experience to the individual who has experienced it. Problems can arise from both etic and emic perspectives: 'religionist' approaches such as Greeley's can influence results as much as 'anti-religious' approaches such as Thalbourne's. By neglecting the gnostic dimension of mystical experiences, and their important link with spiritual disciplines, psychotherapy, dreams, and meaningful coincidence, current social science research may fail to recognise important features of these experiences. The frequency of mystical experiences among my participants suggests that there may be a particular receptivity in those who are attracted to the serious study of astrology. It is also interesting that 'ineffability' did not live up to its reputation as a core feature. The participants' high level of education, combined with a familiarity with psychological and esoteric concepts, suggests that the apparent

ineffability of mystical experience may reflect the lack of a viable vocabulary.

The frequency of gnostic and pantheistic experiences, different in quality from experiences of self-loss and ‘a universe animated by love’,⁷⁴ highlights the pluralism of mystical experience, already noted by James more than a century ago. Moreover, the content of gnostic experiences may reflect an innate predisposition in those attracted to the ‘traditional sciences’ of high antiquity—astrology, alchemy and magic—and their modern counterparts, including the imaginal techniques of analytical and transpersonal psychology.⁷⁵ This could reflect cultural mediation—the rise of Western esotericism in the ‘New Age’ milieu—as well as innate psychological predisposition. From a Jungian perspective, individual predisposition might be connected with a particular archetypal pattern which is subtly expressed through the personality in everyday life, but is experienced directly and dramatically in the mystical encounter. In a similar way, a world-view such as the Neoplatonism of the late classical period might reflect the same pattern at work on a social level, ebbing and flowing at different historical epochs and in different cultural contexts, and informing the popular religions and philosophies of the time. Demonstrating such a hypothesis quantitatively would, of course, be impossible. But it is well worth exploring through further qualitative and historical research.

74 Greeley, p. 137.

75 Antoine Faivre, ‘Esoteric Currents in Modern and Contemporary Europe’, in *Western Esotericism*, pp. 6–7.

MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear CPA Student,

This questionnaire is designed to explore the extent and nature of mystical experiences among astrologers, as part of a research project I am doing for the MA in Cultural Astronomy and Astrology programme at Bath Spa University. The purpose of the questionnaire is to gain insight into the frequency of such experiences among astrologers/astrological students, the nature of the experience, the possible triggers, how the individual understands or interprets the experience, and whether there is any relationship between the study of astrology and the occurrence of mystical experiences. As CPA students you may have more knowledge of the available literature on mystical experiences than those who are not involved in any spiritual, psychological or esoteric disciplines, and your responses are important.

I hope that you will enjoy answering the questions. **All the information will be treated in absolute confidence, so please express your responses as honestly as possible.** Please feel free to ignore any question you do not wish to answer. Your name, address and e-mail are requested solely so that, if a follow-up interview or further questionnaire seems relevant in the context of the research project, I can contact you. **All such personal information will remain confidential.**

You can hand your questionnaires to me at the end of today's seminar, or post them to me care of: Centre for Psychological Astrology, BCM Box 1815, London WC1N 3XX, United Kingdom.

WHAT TO DO: Please answer each question by placing an X in the selected box or by writing your comments in the space provided. In some cases you can mark more than one box, as indicated.

PART ONE: GENERAL INFORMATION

Name (**not for public use**) _____

Address _____

E-mail _____

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Birth data (optional):

Time am/pm _____ Day _____ Month _____ Year _____

Place _____

Female Male

How many years have you been studying astrology? _____

What is your level of interest in astrology?

Casual Hobby Student Professional

What is your level of education?

(Please tick more than one box if more than one answer applies)

Secondary school University Post-graduate Professional training

PART TWO: INFORMATION ABOUT MYSTICAL OR 'PEAK' EXPERIENCES

1. Have you ever had a mystical experience?

Never Once Two or more times Not sure

2. If more than once, were the experiences different? Yes No

3. How long did the experience last?

(If you have had more than one mystical experience, in this question and the following questions please tick the answers which refer to a single experience you consider to be deeply important and transformative):

Instantaneous (a few minutes or less) Prolonged (hours or days) Not sure

4. Please tick as many of the following as you feel are approximate descriptions of your experience:

A feeling of deep and profound peace

A certainty that all things work out according to a greater plan

A sense of the need to contribute to or help others

A conviction that love is the centre of everything

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A sense of intense joy

An experience of timelessness

A great increase in my understanding and knowledge

A sense of the unity of everything and my own part in it

A sense of a new life and living in a new world

A confidence in my own personal survival

A feeling that I couldn't possibly describe what was happening to me

A sense that all the universe is alive and interconnected

The sense that my personality has dissolved into something much greater than myself

A sense of tremendous personal expansion

A sensation of warmth, fire or light

A sense of my aloneness and uniqueness

A loss of concern about worldly problems

A sense of alienation

A new sense of individual purpose, destiny or meaning

A feeling of remembering or recollecting things I have always really known deep down

A sense of encountering the holy, sacred or divine

Any other aspect that does not appear on the list? (Please describe briefly)

5. Do you feel there have been long-term changes in your view of life due to the experience? Yes No

6. Do you feel your moral perspective changed as a result of your experience?

Yes No

Culture and Cosmos

7. Are you aware of any 'trigger' for the experience? (Please tick as many boxes as are appropriate)

Music Prayer Psychotherapy or analysis Important dream Drugs

Spiritual exercise (e.g. ritual, yoga, meditation, active imagination) Meaningful coincidence

Personal crisis or loss Depression Concentrated study Nature Childbirth

Near-death experience Falling in love Sexual experience Creative work

Other (please describe briefly) _____

8. Do you feel there is any relationship between your experience and your interest in astrology? Yes No

9. If you feel there is a relationship between your experience and your interest in astrology, please describe briefly.

10. Have you ever discussed your experience with others? Yes No

11. If you have not discussed your experience with others, please describe your reasons briefly.

12. How would you describe your religious upbringing?

Protestant Roman Catholic Non-denominational Christian Greek Orthodox

Russian Orthodox Jewish Muslim Buddhist Hindu

Pagan Agnostic Atheist Other _____

13. In terms of religious affiliation, how would you describe yourself now?

Member of an organised religious institution or group

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(If so, which?) _____

Spiritual but not conventionally religious Agnostic Atheist

Other _____

14. Has your religious or spiritual outlook been influenced by your study of astrology?

Yes No

15. If so, how? _____

16. Has your religious or spiritual outlook been influenced by your mystical experience?

Yes No

17. If so, how? _____

18. Has your perception of astrology been influenced by your mystical experience?

Yes No

19. If so, how? _____

20. Do you feel that a questionnaire such as this one can communicate your experience with any genuine truthfulness?

Yes No

21. If not, why not? _____

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS QUESTIONNAIRE!

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