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By

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# A Study of *The Cloud of Unknowing* from the Perspective of the Psychology of Consciousness

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This dissertation analyzes the teachings on contemplative prayer of the anonymous fourteenth century author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* by utilizing recent studies on the psychology of conscious awareness and states of consciousness. The specific source for the psychological side of the comparison is the work of three psychologists, Arthur Deikman, Robert Ornstein and Charles Tart, authors who have written extensively on mystical traditions in relation to the phenomenon of human consciousness. The medieval author's grasp of the working of the human psyche is remarkably consistent with modern psychological theories of our day. Because of this complementarity psychological theories generally serve as particularly useful lenses through which the teachings of *The Cloud* can be accessed by modern sensibilities. When analyzed through the specific lens of the scientific study of the nature of human consciousness, new insights emerge. The author's strong apophaticism and unrelenting insistence upon "unknowing" is particularly elucidated when brought into conversation with these psychological studies of the nature of human consciousness.

This study proceeds as follows. Following a brief introductory chapter chapters 2, 3 and 4 will be presented in three parts. In part 1 and 2 of each chapter presents material representative of the teachings of *The Cloud* author followed by related topics from the perspective of our psychology authors. Part 3 of each chapter turns to the task of analysis

and integration of the two parties' perspectives, utilizing the criteria for analysis consistent with the constructive-relational model for interdisciplinary study set forth by William R. Rogers.

This dissertation by Celeste DiPietra Sanchez fulfills the dissertation requirement for the doctoral degree in Religious Studies approved by Raymond Studzinski, Ph.D. as Director, and by James Wiseman, S.T.D., and William Dinges, Ph.D. as Readers.

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## INTRODUCTION

This study will analyze the teachings on contemplative prayer of the anonymous fourteenth-century author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* by utilizing recent studies on the psychology of conscious awareness and states of consciousness. The specific source for the psychological side of the comparison is the work of three psychologists, Arthur Deikman,<sup>1</sup> Robert Ornstein<sup>2</sup> and Charles Tart,<sup>3</sup> authors who have written extensively on

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Deikman, a Professor of Psychiatry at the University of California, San Francisco and practicing psychotherapist, has written extensively on the topic of mysticism and consciousness and the relationship between mystical experience and psychotherapy. Included among his publications are the following titles bearing greatest relevance to this study: "A Functional Approach to Mysticism," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 7 (2000): 75-91; "Service as a Way of Knowing," in *Transpersonal Knowing: Exploring the Horizon of Consciousness*, ed. Tobin Hart, Peter L. Nelson and Kaisa Puhakka (New York: SUNY Press, 2000): 303-18; "I'=Awareness," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 3 (1999): 350-6; "Intention, Self, and Spiritual Experience: A Functional Model of Consciousness," in *Toward a Science of Consciousness: The First Tucson Discussions and Debates*, ed. Stuart R. Hameroff, Alfred W. Kaszniak and Alwyn C. Scott (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 695-706; *The Observing Self: Mysticism and Psychotherapy* (Boston: Beacon, 1982); "Sufism and Psychiatry," *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 165 (1977): 318-29; "Bimodal Consciousness and the Mystic Experience," in *Symposium on Consciousness*, ed. Philip R. Lee et al. (New York: Viking, 1974), 67-88; "De-Automatization and the Mystic Experience," *Psychiatry* 29 (1966): 324-38; and "Experimental Meditation," *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disorders* 136 (1963): 329-43.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Ornstein received a Ph.D. in psychology from Stanford University in 1968. He is one of the early researchers in right brain/left brain specialization theory in the 1970's. He has published works on related topics, including, the study of the mind and health; psychology of meditation, as well as those most relevant to this study on human consciousness. His work is interdisciplinary, particularly integrating psychology with mystical traditions, an initiative the author characterizes as a synthesis of two approaches to knowledge. Relevant publications include *The Evolution of Consciousness: Of Darwin, Freud and Cranial Fire* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991); *The Psychology of Consciousness* (San Francisco: W.H. Freeman, 1972); and with Claudio Naranjo, *On the Psychology of Meditation* (New York: Viking, 1973).

<sup>3</sup> Charles Tart is currently a Core Faculty member of the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology in Palo Alto and Professor Emeritus of Psychology at the University of California, where he was on the faculty for 28 years. He received a Ph.D. in psychology from the University of North Carolina and postdoctoral training and research in hypnosis under Ernest R. Hilgard of Stanford University. He is predominantly known for his work in altered states of consciousness and transpersonal psychology, work characterized by its interdisciplinary study of psychology and spiritual traditions. Relevant publications include "Discrete States of Consciousness," in *Symposium on Consciousness*, ed. Philip R. Lee et al. (New York: Viking, 1976): 89-175; Tart, ed., *Transpersonal Psychologies* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975); "States of

mystical traditions in relation to the phenomenon of human consciousness. Three important factors have influenced these authors' approach to the study of the psychology of human consciousness. One is their conviction that much of human suffering which originates in mental and emotional dysfunction can be traced back to the processes inherent in the development of individual human consciousness. A second influence stems from their evaluation of mystical traditions as "spiritual psychologies," "esoteric traditions," or "mystical science."<sup>4</sup> Deikman, Ornstein and Tart each make the case separately that these ancient spiritual traditions provide a valuable body of data gained from firsthand experience by individuals who themselves have experienced altered states of consciousness. All three authors assert that these spiritual traditions should be granted the status of "early psychologies." In this each attempts to bring these traditions and the experiential data they provide into the scientific study of human consciousness. This requires of each author the establishment of a rationale for doing so, a constraint which casts their work as at least partly apologetic. Here the discourse is aimed at their own discipline, their colleagues, as they make a case for utilizing data characterized as "subjective" and thus deemed at odds with the accepted and prescribed methods of their scientific discipline. Thus it is clear that these scholars are already engaged in an

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Consciousness and State-Specific Sciences," in *The Nature of Consciousness: A Book of Readings*, Tart, ed., Robert Ornstein (San Francisco: W.H. Freeman, 1973): 41-60; and ed. *Altered States of Consciousness: A Book of Readings* (New York: John Wiley, 1969).

<sup>4</sup> Charles T. Tart, *Transpersonal Psychologies*, ed. Charles T. Tart (New York: Harper & Row, 1975; Harper Colophon, 1977), 4; Robert E. Ornstein, *The Psychology of Consciousness* (San Francisco: W.H. Freeman, 1972), x; Arthur J. Deikman, *The Observing Self: Mysticism and Psychotherapy* (Boston: Beacon, 1982), vi.

interdisciplinary dialogue with spirituality, specifically, mystical spirituality. This study will bring together the teachings of *The Cloud* author on contemplative prayer with these studies on consciousness from a psychological perspective. In doing so, this study extends the authors' interdisciplinary work beyond the ambiguity of a generalized perspective of spiritual disciplines and into the specificity of the Christian apophatic tradition as represented by the fourteenth-century anonymous English mystic.

There have been a number of studies on *The Cloud of Unknowing* throughout much of the last century and into the present one, including monographs, scholarly articles as well as masters' and doctoral theses. In the following survey I will limit my review to dissertations. Dissertations on *The Cloud* conducted in the last twenty-five years or so generally fall into one of three categories: those treating questions of theology or spirituality, literary studies, and interdisciplinary studies from the perspective of psychology. Studies in the first classification include Janet Hildich's study titled "*The Cloud of Unknowing: Its Inheritance and Its Inheritors*."<sup>5</sup> This is a study that places *The Cloud* contextually in Christian mysticism discussing the relative congruence with the Dionysian mystical tradition, but also its more Augustinian version. The work includes an exposition of the author's contemplative theology. It then considers the question of *The Cloud's* influence on later spiritual writers, specifically Walter Hilton and the Puritan movement. Another work on a theological topic is Cheryl Riggs' study, "The Concept of Creation in Four Fourteenth Century English Mystics: A Contextual Study in the History

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<sup>5</sup> Janet Hildich, "*The Cloud of Unknowing: Its Inheritance and Its Inheritors*" (Ph.D. diss., University of St. Andrews, 1987).

of Christian Cosmology.”<sup>6</sup> The work focuses on the topic of the medieval doctrine of creation ex nihilo in comparison to the Neoplatonic philosophy of creation through emanationism. The author contends that although the two are mutually exclusive positions the former did not receive formal definition in the medieval period. Rather, this working out of its precise meaning and attempts to delineate it from its philosophical counterpart can be traced through analysis of medieval texts. The works of *The Cloud* author, and other fourteenth-century spiritual works, are selected for this task. The author asserts that these texts stand as representatives of the larger history of the process by which Christian cosmology was formed, particularly in contradistinction to emanationism. A third study by Maika Will, “The Prayer of Love in *The Cloud of Unknowing* and Related Works,” addresses what the author contends constitutes a misrepresentation of *The Cloud* teaching based upon recent studies that compare *The Cloud* author’s teaching on contemplative prayer to practices and teachings of Eastern religions.<sup>7</sup> According to the author *The Cloud* corpus can only be appropriately and accurately understood when studied within its context of Catholic teaching. Topics addressed are: *The Cloud* and its relative adherence to the Dionysian tradition, correct interpretation of the anonymous author’s use of language, and the question of the appropriateness of comparisons drawn between Eastern traditions and practices with that of *The Cloud*’s teaching on the contemplative life.

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<sup>6</sup> Cheryl Ann Riggs, “The Concept of Creation in Four Fourteenth Century English Mystics: A Contextual Study in the History of Christian Cosmology” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 1990).

<sup>7</sup> Maika J. Will, “The Prayer of Love in *The Cloud of Unknowing* and Related Works” (Ph.D. diss., University of Massachusetts Amherst, 1992).

Katharine Watson's work in spirituality titled, "Friends in God: A Study of the Relationship between Teacher and Disciple in *The Cloud of Unknowing* and Other Medieval English Letters of Spiritual Instruction," examines the medieval practice of spiritual direction conducted specifically through the medium of spiritual letters. The study examines the works of *The Cloud* author along with those of Hilton, Rolle and Aelred of Rievaulx and the author of *Ancrene Wisse*. *The Cloud* is singled out for examination of the author's use of persuasive language; and a comparison is made between *The Cloud* corpus and Hilton's writings regarding their respective disciple/director relationship. Our last review in the category of theological or spiritual topics is the study in spirituality by Robert Englert, titled *Scattering and Oneing: A Study in Conflict in the Works of the Author of "The Cloud of Unknowing."*<sup>8</sup> In this study Englert demonstrates that the theme of conflict is a prominent one in *The Cloud* corpus, a theme that is articulated through the linguistic dialectic of "scattering" and "oneing." The author elucidates the true nature of this theme proposing that it is integral to the dynamic movement towards divine union.

The next category of research on *The Cloud*, linguistic studies, includes Jennifer Ellen Bryan's "'Myself in a Mirour': Envisioning the Private Self in Middle English Devotional Writings."<sup>9</sup> The author focuses on English devotional literature of the fourteenth and sixteenth century to study the burgeoning of the sense of self as an

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<sup>8</sup> Robert William Englert, *Scattering and Oneing: A Study in Conflict in the Works of the Author of "The Cloud of Unknowing"* (Analecta Cartusiana no. 105. Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, 1983).

<sup>9</sup> Jennifer Ellen Bryan, "'Myself in a Mirour': Envisioning the Private Self in Middle English Devotional Writings" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1999).

individual. *The Cloud* is one of six works analyzed in this historical literary study. The author explores the impact of the rise of literate populations and the profusion of devotional texts in the vernacular upon the correlative rise in the practice of individual, solitary reading. Eric Graff's "The Transmission and Reception of *The Cloud of Unknowing* and the Works of the *Cloud*-corpus" studies the history of *The Cloud* corpus' circulation, readership and manuscript copies.<sup>10</sup> The author's thesis is that the work's success is tied to its ability to find a readership with sufficient enthusiasm for its teachings to become the work's spokesperson and advocate in their time. "The 'Unsubstantial Word': Pilgrimage and a Poetics of Desire in Late Medieval England," by Thomas Stone, uses *The Cloud*'s apophaticism as an example of medieval writing that exemplifies the rejection of language itself.<sup>11</sup> The author contrasts this with fifteenth-century texts structured according to pilgrimage in which language as poetry is not only given a vital place as a way of knowing but becomes a means of transcendence into the eternal realm.

In our final category, interdisciplinary studies in psychology, we review three studies. In the first work, David Collin's "Unknowing: Playing Seriously with Contemplative Deconstruction," *The Cloud of Unknowing* is one of four texts examined as representative of the *via negativa* Christian mysticism which are then compared to

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<sup>10</sup> Eric Graff, "The Transmission and Reception of *The Cloud of Unknowing* and the Works of the *Cloud*-corpus" (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 2006).

<sup>11</sup> Thomas McCann Stone, Sr., "The 'Unsubstantial Word': Pilgrimage and a Poetics of Desire in Late Medieval England" (Ph.D. diss., University of Rochester, 2003).

works by Eihei Dogen.<sup>12</sup> The focus of this comparative analysis is the methods used in these two major traditions to foster the sense of unknowing. The author suggests that ultimately these methods lead to what he refers to as “contemplative deconstruction.” Further comparisons are then drawn between the spiritual disciplines and Jacques Derrida’s postmodern deconstructionism, social constructivist and transpersonal psychology. The second study in this category comes from Natasha A. McLennan Tajiri, “Attentiveness to God: Contemplative Presence in Spiritual Direction.”<sup>13</sup> This is an experimental study which combines the data from literary works—*The Cloud*, and works by Teresa of Avila, Jean-Pierre De Caussade and Evelyn Underhill—with results of interviews of 12 spiritual directors with a minimum of 10 years experience. The purpose of the study is to assess the degree to which a directee’s experience of spiritual direction is influenced by a particular quality, orientation or attitude (deemed “attentiveness to God”/“contemplative presence” by the author) which the director intentionally assumes toward the directee when engaging in the practice of spiritual direction. The results were then compared to the practice of psychotherapy whereby the same quality of attentiveness to God is assumed by the psychotherapist.

The final study of note is by Ulrike Wiethaus, “The Reality of Mystical Experience: Self and World in the Work of Mechthild of Magdeburg.”<sup>14</sup> Although this

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<sup>12</sup> David Collins, “Unknowing: Playing Seriously with Contemplative Deconstruction” (PhD diss., California School of Professional Psychology, 1994).

<sup>13</sup> Natasha A. McLennan Tajiri, “Attentiveness to God: Contemplative Presence in Spiritual Direction” (Ph.D. diss., Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, California, 2009).

<sup>14</sup> Ulrike Wiethaus, “The Reality of Mystical Experience: Self and World in the Work of Mechthild of Magdeburg” (Ph.D. diss., Temple University, 1986).



interdisciplinary work in psychology and mystical spirituality is not an example of a *Cloud* study, it is relevant to the present study in that it examines mystical states from the perspective of altered states of consciousness and it relies upon two of the same authors in psychology used in our study—Charles Tart and Arthur Deikman—as sources representative of the psychological perspective on mysticism.

As we can see from this brief survey interest in this anonymous mystical text of the fourteenth century is considerable. Likewise, mystical texts bear a level of affinity with psychological theory and interpretation, as demonstrated by the four studies noted above, which is only a small sampling of similarly focused interdisciplinary research projects on this topic. This study adds yet another *Cloud* inquiry to the growing collection. Yet, it claims a level of uniqueness in that there are no in-depth studies on the anonymous author's teaching on contemplative prayer in relation to his understanding of human consciousness. Secondly, no previous study has brought the insights of modern scientific studies of consciousness into conversation with these specific works.

As my ideas for this particular study began to take shape it occurred to me that both parties were, in effect, telling a story—the human story. Moreover, it seemed to me that their stories were parallel to one another; and that in each case, their stories could be interpreted as responses to the following three lines inquiry: What is the existential human condition? What is the solution for this problem? How do we arrive at the solution? Thus I have chosen to structure this study in terms of a hypothetical dialogue. It is a dialogue in which the two partners present their sides of the story. The dialogue

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partners are more precisely representative of two different perspectives on the phenomenon of human consciousness, one provided from the overall teachings of *The Cloud* author, and the other, the product of the study of the psychology of conscious awareness and altered states of consciousness gleaned from the works by authors Deikman, Ornstein and Tart.

Therefore this study will proceed as follows. Chapter 1 will serve as a brief introduction to *The Cloud of Unknowing* in which the fourteenth-century anonymous English mystic and the seven treatises attributed to him will be placed within their historical context. Following this introductory background, chapters 2, 3 and 4 will take the form of a hypothetical dialogue in which each party tells their story in response to the three questions stated above. In each chapter the material will be presented in three parts. In part 1 and 2 we will present material representative of each dialogue partner, *The Cloud* author's teachings will appear first, followed by related topics from the perspective of our psychology authors. Part 3 of each chapter will turn to the task of analysis and integration of the two parties' perspectives, utilizing the criteria for analysis consistent with the constructive-relational model for interdisciplinary study, set forth by William R. Rogers.<sup>15</sup> The analysis will approach this task with the following line of inquiry: how does the perspective of psychology presented in this chapter elucidate the teachings of

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<sup>15</sup> William F. Rogers, "Interdisciplinary Approaches to Moral and Religious Development: A Critical Overview," in *Toward Moral and Religious Maturity: The First International Conference on Moral and Religious Development*, ed. James Fowler, et al. (Morristown, N.J.: Silver Burdett, 1980). Rogers specifies that the "constructive-relational" model...is one which attempts to remain faithful to the primary phenomena, while encouraging relational attention to multiple disciplines of interpretation—moving toward a more constructive and holistic understanding (that cannot be 'claimed' or reduced by any *one* of the various approaches)," 16-17. See p. 42-45 for a detailed description of the constitutive elements of this analytical model for interdisciplinary study.

*The Cloud* author? Here the underlying goal will align with that of the constructive-relational model for analysis in what William Rogers refers to as a “constructive burgeoning toward novelty, and unity of understanding at a new level.” Following from Rogers’ stipulations for implementation of the constructive-relational model this analysis will seek to maintain the integrity of each discipline, while providing an “integrative” perspective.<sup>16</sup>

The structure of the work consists of two levels of analysis. Part 3 of each chapter constitutes the explicit level, as stated above. A further implicit analysis resides in the overall structure of the study. That is, the arrangement of the material according to the hypothetically posed inquiries infers an underlying thesis by the author of this study. Similarly, within the selectivity of topics, correlative material and particularly their juxtaposition, an element of correlation and comparison emerges precisely in and through their contiguous arrangement.

With the above general structure explained the study will now describe the specific chapter structures with topics to be included. Chapter 1 will situate *The Cloud* corpus in its historical-spiritual context. Following this introductory material the work will turn to the main structure of the study as a hypothetically posed dialogue. Chapter 2 will provide both parties’ response to the question of the existential human condition. Opening with *The Cloud* responses to this question in part 1, a section titled “The Fall and the Faculties of the Mind” will situate the author’s story in the Christian anthropological tradition. Elaborations of this basic thesis will follow in a section titled

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<sup>16</sup> Rogers, “Interdisciplinary Approaches,” 43.

“Scattering of the Mind and Affections,” a reference to the author’s characterization of the current state of the human mind and heart. In the next section, “Incomprehensibility of God to the Intellect,” the discussion will introduce the author’s dichotomous pairing of knowing by the intellect with knowing by love. In Part 2 attention turns to the psychology side of the dialogue. Here we are introduced to the authors’ presentation of the evolutionary perspective on human consciousness in a section titled “Formation of Consciousness.” Following the establishment of this foundational thesis the section titled “Modes of Consciousness” will present Arthur Deikman’s theory of bimodal consciousness, a perspective which postulates the existence of two distinct approaches to the external world. Part 3 will conclude the chapter with the integrative task as we take a fresh look at selected teachings in *The Cloud* through the lens provided by the psychological perspective on human consciousness.

Chapter 3 will move to consider the question of the solution to this existential human problem. Following the same basic chapter structure articulated above the chapter will open with *The Cloud* version of the dialogue, or that aspect of the story which raises the question of what is to be done to resolve this human state of affairs. Part 1 then will look at the phenomenon of divine union in its various aspects in sections titled “Divine Union in Itself,” “Divine Union and the Effects of the Fall,” and “Union by its Fruits.” In part 2 of this chapter the discussion will center on the psychology authors’ articulation of the solution in terms of some form of altered or transformed consciousness. Here we will hear from Deikman and what he terms “Mystic Consciousness.” We will then move on to a section titled, “Conscious Evolution,” for a discussion of Robert Ornstein’s contribution

to this topic. We will close the psychology side of the dialogue in chapter 3 with an introduction to Charles Tart's initiative on what he refers to as "State Specific Sciences." This will bring us to the analysis portion, part 3, where each of these three psychological perspectives is now interfaced with the teachings presented in this chapter by *The Cloud* author, again for the purposes of elucidation of the latter by the former.

Chapter 4 considers the *modus operandi* offered by each author for arriving at the resolution to the human condition as articulated above. Part 1 begins with an explication of *The Cloud* author's extensive teaching on contemplative prayer in the section titled "Prayer Method." Following this overview of the author's explicit teaching on the contemplative prayer method, the next section, titled "Unknowing as a Method," asserts that the essence of his teaching can be reduced to the practice of "methodological unknowing" as the chief disposition of the contemplative way. This discussion touches upon the various aspects of unknowing which receive particular attention throughout the corpus, under the following subsection titles: "Introduction to the Two Clouds: Cloud of 'Unknowing and Cloud of Forgetting,'" "Unknowing of God," "Unknowing of the Self and the Lump of Sin," and finally, "Forgetting One's Own Being." Part 1 will conclude with two "special tips" by the anonymous author for dealing with the more troublesome thought patterns associated with the practice of contemplative prayer. Turning to the psychology authors, part 2 relies mostly upon the work by Charles Tart on the study of altered states of consciousness, turning to Deikman for supplementary material at the end of the section. The explication of Tart's thought begins with requisite foundational material under the subtopics titled "Construction of Stable Consciousness,"

“Attention/Awareness,” “Psychological Structures,” and “Interaction between Attention/Awareness and Psychological Structures.” The study then moves to consider the central topic, in a section titled “Inducing ASC,” whereby Tart’s theory of the method for inducing altered states of consciousness is presented. Part 2 will conclude with the work by Deikman on the “observing self.” This discussion expounds upon Tart’s insights presented in the section titled “Attention/awareness,” providing particularly relevant parallels to key aspects of *The Cloud* teaching on prayer. Part 3 will bring together *The Cloud* method of prayer with Tart’s presentation of the method for inducing altered states of consciousness and Deikman’s work on “observing self.”

One further comment regarding the question of points of congruence between these two dialogue partners is in order. Here I rely upon the astute observation of the eminent scholar of Christian mystical spirituality, Bernard McGinn. In the introduction to *The Foundations of Mysticism*, the first volume of his multi-volume work on Christian mysticism, McGinn says that despite the universal tendency to characterize the mystical experience in terms of its inherent ineffability, nonetheless these same mystics, owing to the breadth of mystic literature, do in fact commit their spiritual journeys to writing. Because of the inherent nature of the experience which “defies conceptualization and verbalization,” observes McGinn, “it can only be presented indirectly, partially, by a series of verbal strategies.” These “verbal strategies” utilized to express the inexpressible take the form of “language...used not so much informationally as *transformationally*,” he explains, “that is, not to convey content but to assist the hearer or reader to hope for or to

achieve the same consciousness.”<sup>17</sup> Thus, their overall effort is invariably one of persuasion, assured that what they have received is meant for all; and moreover, that what they have experienced is the answer to much of human suffering. Thus they are compelled to bring others to this same experience. This characterization of the mystics’ impetus in penning their treatises can also be applied to the overall initiative of each of the three psychologists whose work I have drawn upon in my study. In the sense that these psychologists have told their story of human suffering, offered their assessment of the source of this suffering, and then presented a way out, these three authors have approached their initiatives from a perspective very much like that of the mystical writers as described by Bernard McGinn. This principle will be demonstrated throughout this study in the work of both *The Cloud* author and that of psychologists Arthur Deikman, Robert Ornstein and Charles Tart.

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<sup>17</sup> Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1991), xvii. Emphasis added.

## 1. *THE CLOUD* IN CONTEXT

This chapter will provide a brief overview of *The Cloud* corpus to situate these works within their historical context.<sup>1</sup> The chapter begins with an introductory treatment of the question of authorship, date and place of composition; data which we will see must be gleaned almost exclusively from textual clues peppered throughout the works themselves. Following this, the chapter attempts to situate the author and the corpus contextually in terms of the Church and the socio-historical influences. We will then examine the individual treatises that comprise what is referred to as “*The Cloud* corpus.” Since the question of anonymity has received considerable scholarly attention a section devoted to this issue will follow. Next, the discussion turns to consider the literary sources discernible in the corpus, both explicit and implicit in nature. Since the focus of this project will be upon the author’s teaching on contemplative prayer with special

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<sup>1</sup>The critical editions of texts comprising *The Cloud* corpus include the following Middle English editions from original manuscripts: *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counselling*, edited from the Manuscripts with Introduction, Notes and Glossary by Phyllis Hodgson (Oxford: Early English Text Society, 1944, 1958, 1973); *Deonise Hid Divinite and Other Treatises on Contemplative Prayer Related to “The Cloud of Unknowing....”*, edited by Phyllis Hodgson (Oxford: Early English Text Society, 1955); *The Cloud of Unknowing and Related Treatises on Contemplative Prayer*, edited from the Manuscripts by Phyllis Hodgson (Exeter: Catholic Records, 1982). In addition, there are several modern translations of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, some include partial or full collections of treatises in the corpus. A selective list follows: *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*, edited with an Introduction by William Johnston (New York: Image Books, 1973); *The Cloud of Unknowing and Other Treatises With a Commentary on “The Cloud” by Father Augustine Baker*, edited by Justin McCann (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1974); *The Cloud of Unknowing*. With Introductory Commentary and Translation by Ira Progoff (New York: Julian Press, 1954); *The Cloud of Unknowing*. The Classics of Western Spirituality, edited with an Introduction by James Walsh (New York: Paulist Press, 1981); *The Pursuit of Wisdom and Other Works, by the Author of “The Cloud of Unknowing,”* translated, edited, and annotated by James A. Walsh (New York: Paulist Press, 1988); *The Cloud of Unknowing and Other Works*, translated with an introduction by Clifton Wolters (London: Penguin Books, 1978). All quotations are taken from Walsh’s two volumes unless otherwise noted.



emphasis on its strong apophatic character particular attention will be given to the question of the relative conformity of the corpus to the Dionysian mystical tradition. The chapter will conclude with a survey of the quite varied studies which utilize *The Cloud* texts, exclusively or in combination with other relevant medieval mystical works.

### **Date and Place**

Although there is very little that can be said definitively about the anonymous fourteenth-century English author, what is known to us has been gleaned predominantly from textual references throughout the corpus. The author wrote in the vernacular of his time, Middle English. Some of the works are addressed to a particular individual with whom the author has a teacher-disciple relationship<sup>2</sup>—a young man of twenty-four.<sup>3</sup> The author also discloses that his teaching is intended for those who have entered the “solitary” life of contemplation.<sup>4</sup> This admission comes with a strong warning<sup>5</sup> that the

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<sup>2</sup> See especially *Privy Counselling* whereby the author is most explicit in this regard: “I make no secret, as you see, of the fact that I want to be your spiritual father; indeed I do, and intend to be so.” Walsh, *The Pursuit*, 233.

<sup>3</sup> *The Cloud*, chapter 4.

<sup>4</sup> *The Cloud*, chapter 1.

<sup>5</sup> The prologue, in fact, functions solely as such a warning. This warning is repeated with all the same elements near the end of the work in chapter 74. See Walsh, *The Cloud of Unknowing* (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), 263, n. 467, for a discussion concerning the question of this redundancy. A very different perspective on the warnings issued in *The Cloud* is provided by Lisa Lettau’s work, “Conscious Constructions of Self: Dreams and Visions in the Middle Ages.” Lettau’s study examines *The Cloud* text as an example of medieval texts which exemplify the growing awareness of the self as an individual. Referring to *The Cloud* author’s warning Lettau draws attention to the author’s self-consciously creating written works that would become part of the tradition’s literary collection and the added responsibility that came with this awareness: “This author’s entreaties provide substantial proof of the concern of medieval visionary writers for their words as written documents that would exist on their own long after the possibility of a ‘correct’ interpretation by the author or a skilled orator.” (Ph.D. diss., University of Delaware, 2008), 29.

book should not be distributed indiscriminately, lest readers misunderstand its meaning and be “led into error.”<sup>6</sup> For readers who are predisposed to receive this teaching the author also urges caution. He asks that contemplatives take care that they read the entire book carefully and preferably more than once.<sup>7</sup>

The earliest extant manuscript of *The Cloud* text was written in the first part of the fifteenth century.<sup>8</sup> However, the manuscript collection gives no indication of the date of the original work, requiring other means to arrive at an approximate date of composition of the corpus.<sup>9</sup> Scholars generally date the texts to a period sometime between 1349 and 1395.<sup>10</sup> This information was derived indirectly from textual analysis of the corpus as well as from writings by contemporaries, specifically those of Richard Rolle (d. 1349) and Walter Hilton (d. 1396). There is evidence to suggest that the author was familiar with the works of Rolle, and Hilton’s writings display a familiarity with the works of *The Cloud*. Linguistic analysis provides added support to assign a date to the latter end of this time span.<sup>11</sup> Again relying on language style, the author appears to be writing from north central England,<sup>12</sup> specifically in the region of Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire and

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<sup>6</sup> Walsh, *The Cloud*, 102.

<sup>7</sup> Both warnings in the prologue and again in chapter 74 urge careful reading, while the specific suggestion that the book be read more than once is given in chapter 74.

<sup>8</sup> MS. Harleian 674 (Har<sup>1</sup>).

<sup>9</sup> Hodgson, *The Cloud*, lxxxiv.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. and David Knowles, *The English Mystical Tradition* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961), 70.

<sup>12</sup> Hodgson, *The Cloud*, xlix-l.

bordering areas of Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire.<sup>13</sup>

About the author little personal details emerge from the texts. Several scholars have interpreted the author's repeated blessing that concludes some of his works as an indication that the author was a priest; but others disagree with this conclusion claiming that the blessing could equally have been issued by a lay person.<sup>14</sup> Since the main focus of the author's writings is the teaching of an advanced form of contemplative prayer, it seems likely that the author was living a solitary life, perhaps as a hermit, giving rise to the popular notion that he was a Carthusian.<sup>15</sup> Yet, the question remains open with opinions ranging from secular priesthood, to cloistered order, to a more communal existence.<sup>16</sup> The last idea stems from textual references in *The Cloud* corpus that indicate the author's participation in some type of community living. Since this is at odds with the various claims of the solitary life Hodgson and Knowles suggest the theory that the author was a religious in his earlier life but then retired to a more solitary life in his later years.<sup>17</sup> Walsh has further augmented this argument adding that an early Carthusian experience would have included a communal dimension.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Knowles, *English Mystical Tradition*, 70.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Knowles, *English Mystical Tradition*, 70-71, Hodgson, *The Cloud*, lxxxii, and, McCann, *The Cloud*, ix, with Constantino S. Nieva, *This Transcending God: The Teaching of the Author of "The Cloud of Unknowing"* (London: Mitre Press, 1971), 35.

<sup>15</sup> For substantive historical data on the Carthusian attribution see Walsh, *The Cloud*, 4-9.

<sup>16</sup> See Hodgson, *The Cloud*, lxxxiii-lxxxiv.

<sup>17</sup> Knowles, *English Mystical Tradition*, 71 and Hodgson, *The Cloud*, lxxxiv.

<sup>18</sup> See Walsh, *The Cloud*, 2-9.

### Context: Church and England

The author's world was one of both social and ecclesial unrest. England was ruled by Edward III from 1327 to 1377, a period marked by near continual war with France. The Black Death in the middle of the century and the Peasant's Revolt at its end provided further instability to this period. The Church, too, was in a time of turmoil: the papal captivity in Avignon; the Great Schism of the West in 1378; challenges posed by the heresies of John Wyclif; and the rise of Lollardy. It was also the advent of new forms of spirituality rivaling traditional monasticism and various lay movements.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, the period which one historian dubbed "the end of an era" in reference to the roughly ninety-year period between 1272 and 1384 is summarily described as one which marked "a change in the whole tone and content of the religious life of England," listing the characteristics of the Church in this period as

Showing an overall lack of homogeneity and effectiveness in its pastoral and evangelistic ministry, and as a moral force in the land; with a noticeable lessening of the status and standing of the church in society; with an undermining of confidence within the ranks of the church, both among the laity and, more especially, among the bishops and priests; and with an escalating criticism of the church, of the pope, the bishops and the clergy, and of ecclesiastical functionaries as a body.<sup>20</sup>

W.A. Pantin and others suggest that the above elements of the English Church during this period of the fourteenth century were manifested in a variety of ways. Those having most relevance to the study of *The Cloud* corpus include the emergence of a spirit of anti-

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<sup>19</sup> Conrad Pepler, *The English Religious Heritage* (St. Louis: Herder, 1958), 29-30.

<sup>20</sup> Kenneth Hylson-Smith, *Christianity in England from Roman Times to the Reformation*, vol 2, 1066-1384 (London: SCM, 2000), 201.

intellectualism, a new sense of individualism, the rise of new forms of popular piety, most importantly for our study, what Pantin referred to as “the rise of the devout layman.” There was also new interest in the practice of spiritual direction and the large body of spiritual works now written in vernacular languages.<sup>21</sup>

Regarding the issue of anti-intellectualism Pantin reminds us that this reactive development in Christian history is “a very old tradition,” one that is first seen in the earliest Church Fathers’ antithetical differentiation between the “Gospel simplicity” and the erudition of the pagan philosophers.<sup>22</sup> It resurfaces again in the beginning of the medieval period but now it is “the direct knowledge and experience of the mystic” that is held up as the ideal in opposition to the knowledge of scholars.<sup>23</sup> We see this clearly in the mystics of this “anti-scholastic trend” who in their teachings call upon the authority of scripture to make their points, rather than conform to the traditional use of “scholastic argument.”<sup>24</sup> The next characteristic, which it could be argued bears a relationship to the anti-intellectualism, or rebellious expression, is the new spirit of individualism,<sup>25</sup> with its focus on private and interior spirituality.<sup>26</sup> Pantin specifies that this was a development

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<sup>21</sup> W.A. Pantin, *The English Church in the Fourteenth Century* (Cambridge: University Press, 1955), 253.

<sup>22</sup> Pantin, *The English Church*, 132.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>25</sup> Pepler, *English Religious Heritage*, 31: “It must be recognized that in many ways this spiritual movement bears the marks of the age in which it appeared. It is no sudden, unrehearsed return to an earlier period of Christian living. It shows, particularly perhaps in England, the first traces of individualism, if not subjectivism....”

<sup>26</sup> Knowles, *English Mystical Tradition*, 43

witnessed among the “solitaries” or those choosing the eremitic life and not among the religious orders.<sup>27</sup> He elaborates on the qualities of this individualism saying “we...see fourteenth-century religion in its most intensely personal aspect, in the minute care, integrity and sympathy with which each individual conscience was approached,” qualities which modern people take for granted but which marked a significant departure from traditional understanding.<sup>28</sup>

It also coincided with another important development: the rise of the vernacular languages. Spiritual works, including prayer books, were made more accessible to the laity as they were now translated from the Latin. Soon the vernacular was the language of choice for many English writers for their spiritual works. This change freed spiritual writers from more formal language with its religious categories. By contrast, writings in the vernacular had a particularly personal and earthy quality, giving voice to the experience of the mystics that was not constrained by previous language structures.<sup>29</sup>

One cannot talk about this emerging vehicle of communication without also considering relevant implications regarding the intended audience of these writings. Initially intended as a way to bring information to the “unlearned clerics and religious, including nuns and anchorites,” increasingly these works “were also read by devout lay people,” indicating a coalescence of factors which carry profound significance for this

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<sup>27</sup> Pantin, *The English Church*, 252.

<sup>28</sup> Pantin, *The English Church*, 261.

<sup>29</sup> Pantin notes that in turn these mystical writers had influence upon the development of these languages, here, specifically speaking of the English language: It was important for the English language as well as for literature, for it meant that English was being used for describing the most abstract and intricate spiritual and psychological matters, for which hitherto Latin had been used.” Ibid., 253.

study. Pantin explains that the observation that “the rise of the devout layman” was one of the distinguishing characteristics of this period requires qualification. For he explains, that although “there have been devout laymen in every age” only

...in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries [was it] possible for a devout and literate layman, with the help of all the apparatus of religious instruction, sermons, and devotional literature, to take a more intelligent, educated, active, and, so to speak, professional part in the life of the Church. Thus laymen were enabled and encouraged to attempt the practice of contemplative prayer.<sup>30</sup>

These writings made the solitary life possible as they provided for the non-religious individual the teaching and spiritual direction needed to support the contemplative lifestyle outside of the monastery. Thus this new form of expression evolved in this period in England into the genre of spiritual direction and pastoral letters.<sup>31</sup> These forces together created a body of idiosyncratic literature unlike any other, of which the subject of this study is a preeminent illustration.<sup>32</sup>

*The Cloud* author should also be placed within the context of his contemporaries in the mystical tradition. The anonymous author is one of four English writers of the fourteenth century known collectively as “the English medieval mystics.” They are Richard Rolle (c. 1290-1349), *The Cloud* author, Walter Hilton (c. 1330-1396), and

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<sup>30</sup> Pantin, *The English Church*, 253.

<sup>31</sup> For an interesting literary study of the correlation between the twin forces of the rhetorical device and the rise in vernacular languages in the English mystics of the fourteenth see Toni Jean Morris, “The Development of English Prose Style and the Fourteenth-Century English Mystics,” (Ph.D. dissertation, Kent State University, 1985). See also Kent Emery, “*The Cloud of Unknowing* and *Mystica Theologia*,” in *Spirituality of Western Christendom, II: The Roots of the Modern Christian Tradition*, ed. E. Rozanne Elder (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1984), 47-49, for a discussion of the “epistolary genre” and its particular place among spiritual works of the medieval period.

<sup>32</sup> Knowles, *English Mystical Tradition*, 47; and Pepler, *English Religious Heritage*, 31.

Julian of Norwich (1342-c. 1420).<sup>33</sup> The four are so designated because they stand together as a group distinct both from those who came before them and those who followed them. David Knowles delineates the specific characteristics of these four spiritual writers:

They all wrote in a private capacity and with an intensely individual outlook; they are all in some degree mystical writers, that is to say, they record or prepare for a direct perception of divine action upon the soul outside the limits of ordinary experience; and all wrote at least a part of their works in English.<sup>34</sup>

Their lives however, as well as the writings they left, distinguish them from each other. Richard Rolle lived a hermit's life and left a considerable collection of literary works, written both in English and Latin. His writings are numerous and quite varied, including commentaries on scripture, English and Latin prose, lyrics, poetry and scriptural commentaries.<sup>35</sup> Hilton, an Augustinian canon, is principally known for one major work, *Scale of Perfection*, much like *The Cloud* author. Julian, also known for a single work, *Revelations of Divine Love*, lived most of her life as an anchorite.<sup>36</sup>

In the wider scope of mystic writers of the fourteenth century this English group is contemporary with Eckhardt (d. 1327), Tauler (d. 1361), Suso (d. 1366), Ruysbroeck (d. 1381) and Catherine of Siena (d. 1380),<sup>37</sup> all of whom share with their English

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<sup>33</sup> David Knowles, *The Religious Orders in England* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1955), 120, n. 3.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>35</sup> Pantin, *English Church*, 244-45.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 244.

<sup>37</sup> Knowles, *English Mystical Tradition*, 1.



contemporaries “the same practice of writing mystical works in the vernacular.”<sup>38</sup>

Clearly, this was an age in the Church of unparalleled spiritual writing in the mystical tradition, eclipsed only by the Spanish Mystics of the sixteenth century.<sup>39</sup>

### The Corpus

The entire extant corpus attributed to the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* consists of the following seven works: (1) *The Cloud of Unknowing*, (2) *Hid Divinity*, (3) *Benjamin Minor, The Study of Wisdom*, (4) *The Epistle of Prayer*, (5) *The Epistle of Discretion*, (6) *Of Discerning of Spirits*, and (7) *The Book of Privy Counselling*.<sup>40</sup> The titles are listed in order of composition as proposed by Hodgson, which will be discussed below.<sup>41</sup> *The Cloud* is the longest of the seven and the one in which the author sets forth his major themes and teachings; and, *Privy Counselling* is an elaboration of these key teachings so that the two are traditionally considered to be companion pieces.<sup>42</sup> Three of the seven are translations, each varying in degrees to which

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<sup>38</sup> Pantin, *English Church*, 252-53.

<sup>39</sup> Knowles, *English Mystical Tradition*, 1.

<sup>40</sup> A considerable variation in spelling and wording of the titles of the corpus is adopted by individual authors. Here and throughout this study the titles follow those used by Phyllis Hodgson in her 1982 edition, *The Cloud of Unknowing and Related Treatises on Contemplative Prayer*, which includes all seven treatises. For a chart designating the variety of titles given to the seven works in the manuscript collection see xiv-xvi.

<sup>41</sup> Although Hodgson thoroughly tackles the question of relative dating of the corpus in her earliest translation in 1944, and more explicitly when she presented her edition of the five shorter treatises in 1955, her 1982 edition makes no mention of the question. In fact, her introductory remarks in this later edition are conspicuously more circumspect with regard to the larger question of common authorship of all but *The Cloud*, *Privy Counselling* and *Epistle of Prayer*—those explicitly mentioned by the anonymous author in *Privy Counselling*. Cf. Hodgson, *The Cloud*, lxxvii-lxxxii, and *Hid Diuinite*, xxxv-xxxvii, with Hodgson, *The Cloud and Related Treatises*, xiii-xiv.

<sup>42</sup> Hodgson, *The Cloud*, lxxviii.

they remain true to the original work.<sup>43</sup> *Hid Divinity* is an English translation of Pseudo-Dionysius' *De Mystica Theologia*; *Benjamin Minor*, *The Study of Wisdom* is a rendition of Richard of St. Victor's *Benjamin Minor*; and, *Of Discerning of Spirits* follows two of St. Bernard's sermons.<sup>44</sup> Four of the treatises are addressed to specific unnamed individuals: *The Cloud*, *Privy Counselling*, *Epistle of Prayer* and *Epistle of Discretion*.<sup>45</sup>

Although these seven treatises are typically referred to as "*The Cloud corpus*" indicating their common authorship by the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, the question of their common authorship is not without controversy. In general, Hodgson summarizes the question of common authorship of *The Cloud corpus* and the available resources for determining degree of likelihood that any one treatise of the seven can reasonably stand as a work attributed to the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*:

*The Cloud*, [*Privy Counselling*], and the five minor treatises to some extent complement and elucidate each other. Their resemblances in style and vocabulary are consistent with common authorship. The external evidence for this theory, however, is scanty, and the supposition rests finally on the selection of subject-matter, repeated emphases, distinctive presentation, and the imprint in each of the same personality.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> "These three translations associable with *The Cloud* are markedly different from each other in method as in line of thought. *Hid Diuinite* is a close translation, *Benjamin Minor* a free and greatly abridged paraphrase, *Spirites* (*Of Discerning of Spirits*) a neat dovetailing of parts from two of St. Bernard's *Sermons*, but with its long original interpolation it reads like an independent treatise." Hodgson, *The Cloud and Related Treatises*, xiii-xiv. For a comparison of the three translations in relation to the question of their relationship to their respective sources, see Hodgson, *Hid Diuinite*, xxxix-xlvii.

<sup>44</sup> Sermons 23 and 24 from *Sermons on Various Subjects*, as noted by J.P.H. Clark, "The *Cloud of Unknowing*, in *An Introduction to the Medieval Mystics of Europe*, ed. Paul Szarmach (Albany: SUNY, 1984), 274, n. 3.

<sup>45</sup> "To you, whoever you are, who may have this book in your possession..." in *The Cloud* (Walsh, 101); and "My spiritual friend in God..." in the other three treatises. Walsh, *Pursuit*, 166, 219 and 134.

Based on the above criteria then, four of the works (including *The Cloud*) receive the status of “certainty”: *Hid Divinity*, *Epistle of Prayer* and *Privy Counselling*.<sup>47</sup> This designation is owed in part to specific references in the works themselves. *The Cloud of Unknowing* gives cause to anticipate a sequel of sorts to further explain those more troublesome teachings which may have caused the reader some level of confusion, and scholars find compelling reason to consider *Privy Counselling* to be this work of clarification and further explication.<sup>48</sup> Another textual verification comes in the author’s prologue to *Hid Divinity*. Here the author gives two important bits of information regarding the relationship of the seven treatises. The anonymous author recounts that “[i]t was mentioned in Chapter 70 of a book written before, called *The Cloud of Unknowing*,” and then relates that in this referenced text he had made mention of Dionysius’ *Mystica Theologia*.<sup>49</sup> The author then states that his intent in preparing this translation was specifically to render a version of *Mystica Theologia* that could be utilized to “clarify *The Cloud*’s] difficulties.”<sup>50</sup> In addition, in *Privy Counselling* we are given a list by the author of three of his “other writings,” which indicates *Epistle of Prayer* and *Hid Divinity*

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<sup>46</sup> Hodgson, *The Cloud and Related Treatises*, xii.

<sup>47</sup> Hodgson, *The Cloud*, lxxvii.

<sup>48</sup> Hodgson, *The Cloud*, lxxviii. “If you think that there is any point here that you would wish to have clarified in greater detail than it is, let me know what it is, and what you think about it and I shall amend it to the best of my simple ability.” Walsh, *The Cloud*, 263.

<sup>49</sup> The reference is to the following: “And now whoever cares to examine the works of Denis, he will find that his words clearly corroborate all that I have said or am going to say, from the beginning of this treatise to the end.” Walsh, *The Cloud*, 256.

<sup>50</sup> “Hence in translating it I have given not just the literal meaning of the text, but, in order to clarify its difficulties....” Walsh, *Pursuit*, 74. See also, Hodgson, *The Cloud*, lxxviii.

as well as *The Cloud of Unknowing*.<sup>51</sup>

However, determining common authorship of the other three works, *Benjamin Minor*, *Study of Wisdom*, *Epistle of Discretion* and *Of Discerning of Spirits*, which Hodgson says can be affirmed “with great probability,” requires recourse to other means.<sup>52</sup> Here, much of the evidence must come from an examination of the texts for commonality of themes, language and style, and extant manuscripts, as indicated above in the citation from Hodgson. A discussion of the textual analysis for commonalities will bring us to a related investigation of the relative date of composition and content of the seven treatises, as Hodgson bases her theory of common authorship, at least in part, on the order of composition:

The relationship of the themes of the seven treatises can be easily established by a brief survey of the purpose of the five minor works, set here in order to *The Cloud of Unknowing*.<sup>53</sup>

Here, Hodgson’s mention of the five treatises is indicative of the fact that most scholars consider *The Cloud* to be the anonymous author’s first written work; and, since *Privy Counselling* is said to continue these same themes and teachings at a more advanced level, *Privy Counselling* is thought to be the latest of the author’s works.<sup>54</sup> Thus, the order

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<sup>51</sup> Walsh, *Pursuit*, 74. The reference comes in the context of a discussion by the author of the topic of virtue, which he says, “you will find them discussed in several places in my other writings. For this same work, properly understood, is the reverent affection, the fruit plucked from the tree, of which I wrote in my short letter to you on prayer. It is also the Cloud of Unknowing; it is the hidden love offered in purity of spirit; it is the ark of the Testament. It is the mystical theology of Denys....” Walsh, *Pursuit*, 234.

<sup>52</sup> Hodgson, *The Cloud*, lxxvii.

<sup>53</sup> Hodgson, *Hid Diuinite*, xxxv.

<sup>54</sup> Hodgson, *The Cloud*, lxxviii.

of composition of the other five treatises falls in between these two works. As it has been established above that *Hid Divinity* was rendered with the intent to elucidate teachings in *The Cloud*, Hodgson places the composition of the translation right after that of *The Cloud*.<sup>55</sup> As more will be said about this translation of *Mystica Theologia* later in this chapter in the section on sources used by the anonymous author, we will forgo further discussion presently and turn instead to the next title in the chronological listing, the treatise based on Richard of St. Victor's work of the same title, *Benjamin Minor*, *The Study of Wisdom*. Although this treatise has been characterized in its relationship to the original work by Richard of St. Victor variously as "rendering,"<sup>56</sup> "free and synthetic paraphrase,"<sup>57</sup> as well as the unqualified term "translation,"<sup>58</sup> among other qualifying descriptions, the overall influence of the Victorine upon *The Cloud* author is significant, particularly for several key images and teachings used in *The Cloud*.<sup>59</sup> In fact, large sections of *The Cloud* are said to come directly from Richard's works, including both *Benjamin Minor* and the longer version, *Benjamin Major*, such that Hodgson theorized that the anonymous author turned to this translation following the work in *The Cloud* to render his own version of this allegorical work.

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<sup>55</sup> Hodgson, *The Cloud*, lxxviii.

<sup>56</sup> Clark, "Cloud," 274.

<sup>57</sup> Walsh, *The Cloud*, xxv.

<sup>58</sup> Knowles, *English Mystical Tradition*, 68.

<sup>59</sup> Hodgson, *Hid Diuinite*, xxxv See Hodgson, *The Cloud*, lxxiii-lxxvii.

Continuing with the consideration of Richard's influence upon *The Cloud* author, the work said to follow *Benjamin Minor, The Study of Wisdom* in order of composition because of its strong resemblance to the translation "in the development of its thought, though the resemblance is concealed by the use of different imagery," is *The Epistle of Prayer*.<sup>60</sup> Of the triptych composed of the three works Hodgson proposes to follow *The Cloud* in order of composition, *Hid Divinity, Benjamin Minor, The Study of Wisdom*, and *The Epistle of Prayer*, their interrelationship is explained as follows: "Whereas *Hid Divinity* explains the nature of contemplation," *Benjamin Minor* and *Epistle of Prayer*, "give a psychological explanation of the efforts of the contemplative, and practical advice as to the way of preparation."<sup>61</sup>

Finally, we move to the remaining two treatises: *Epistle of Discretion* and *Of Discerning of Spirits*. Relying once more upon the similarity of themes, teachings as well as literary style, Hodgson asserts that the former treatise appropriately conforms to these criteria in that it "is a monograph on a different and complementary aspect of the same subject—the highest form of contemplative prayer."<sup>62</sup> This assertion constitutes the essence of the nature of the relationship among the seven treatises, for, following *The Cloud* which establishes the author's major themes of the theory and practice of contemplative prayer, each of the other six treatises follows this basic overall subject and in turn, expounds further upon aspects of the topic of the contemplative life and practice.

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<sup>60</sup> Hodgson, *Hid Diuinite*, xxxvi.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Hodgson, *The Cloud*, lxxix. See, Hodgson, Ibid., lxxx, for the author's illustration of this assertion.

The latter work of these two, *Of Discerning of Spirits*, Hodgson admits does not fit so cleanly into this thematic likeness. Although this treatise “is entirely different in theme from the other treatises,”<sup>63</sup> the case for common authorship is made based upon the work’s “use of language, its choice of ornament, and its sentence construction.”<sup>64</sup> They are, it seems, significant, since Hodgson places the treatise alongside of the other three works for which there exists no specific internal evidence of common authorship. Now a brief glimpse at the manuscript tradition of the corpus will conclude this section.<sup>65</sup>

Regarding the extant manuscript collection of *The Cloud* corpus Hodgson states that although they “bring some support for common authorship,” ultimately, “their evidence is insufficient.”<sup>66</sup> Of the seventeen extant medieval manuscripts containing text of *The Cloud of Unknowing* only two contain the seven treatises now attributed to the anonymous author. These are Harleian 674 (Har<sup>1</sup>) and Kk. Vi. 26 (Kk), which are the oldest of the collection (c. early 15<sup>th</sup> century and c. mid-late 15<sup>th</sup> century)<sup>67</sup> Hodgson

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<sup>63</sup> Walsh, in his modern translation of the six other treatises attributed to the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, takes issue with this characterization by Hodgson that *Of Discretion of Spirits* is substantively different from the author’s other works. Clearly referring to these comments by Hodgson, which are somewhat misquoted and lack source citation, Walsh says “[o]n the contrary, it must be affirmed that the English treatise never moves beyond the set themes of the author’s other works and it uses its sources sparingly and with great ingenuity.” *Pursuit*, 106-7.

<sup>64</sup> Hodgson, *The Cloud*, lxxxi. See also, Hodgson, *Hid Diuinite* xxxvi-xxxviii and liv; Walsh, *The Pursuit*, 103-7.

<sup>65</sup> Hodgson lists a total of thirty manuscript collections which include at least one of the treatises of *The Cloud* corpus. She provides the following interesting detail regarding the physical appearance of the extant manuscripts: “Most of the manuscripts examined were obviously intended as manuals of devotion, easy to handle, written neatly and carefully, and with little elaboration.” *The Cloud and Related Treatises*, xvii.

<sup>66</sup> Hodgson, *The Cloud and Related Treatises*, xii.

<sup>67</sup> Hodgson, *The Cloud and Related Treatises*, xvii.

characterizes as the two most reliable of manuscripts.<sup>68</sup> However, ten manuscripts contain both *The Cloud* and *Privy Counselling*, and some of the seven remaining manuscripts which do not, contain various groupings of the five shorter treatises.<sup>69</sup>

Thus, mystery continues to surround these anonymous works. Evidence for specific details regarding authorship, precise dating and verification of common authorship of these seven treatises remain allusive and thus, open to a degree of controversy.

### **Authorship Studies and Anonymity**

The mystery of the author's anonymity has been the source of much conjecture and scholarly inquiry without any resolution of the puzzle to date.<sup>70</sup> Walter Hilton's name is the only specific attribution that was offered and received serious study. The first to put forth this theory was Dom James Greenhalgh in 1500.<sup>71</sup> In modern times M. Noetinger and Justin McCann took up the question of Hilton authorship in separate published articles in 1924.<sup>72</sup> Noetinger argued against Hilton attribution while McCann concluded that it could not be definitely ruled out. McCann nicely summarizes the major elements

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<sup>68</sup> Hodgson, *The Cloud and Related Treatises*, xii.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii.

<sup>70</sup> For an overview of twentieth-century studies proposing the identity of the author of *The Cloud* corpus see, Nike Kocigancic Pokorn, "The Author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* Medieval Anonymity and Barthe's Death of the Author," *English Studies* 80, (1999): 490-495. See also, Eric Graff, "The Transmission and Reception of *The Cloud of Unknowing* and other works of the *Cloud*-corpus" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Toronto, 2006), 42, n. 43.

<sup>71</sup> McCann, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, ix.

<sup>72</sup> See M. Noetinger, "The Authorship of the *Cloud of Unknowing*," *Blackfriars* 4 (1924): 1457-64; and, Justin McCann, "The *Cloud of Unknowing*," *Ampleforth Journal* (1924): 192-97.



of each side of the argument. On the side of Hilton authorship McCann lists the following as elements that speak to Hilton authorship: dating, geographical region and the early tradition traced to Greenhalgh, a scholar of Hilton, *The Cloud* author and Richard Rolle. However, he agrees with many who point out that there is a marked difference in style, word usage and even teaching in the works of Hilton and those attributed to the anonymous author of *The Cloud*.<sup>73</sup>

Yet, the attribution arose and remained a somewhat open question for good reasons. Hodgson points to the “scores of parallel passages on the main themes and in the incidental teaching” of Hilton’s *Scale of Perfection* and *The Cloud of Unknowing* to warrant the initial assumption made by Greenhalgh. There is, says Hodgson, a sense of familiarity one encounters upon “the reading of either the *Cloud* or the *Scale* some time after the other.”<sup>74</sup> Yet, in her 1955 study on the question Hodgson’s careful textual analysis of the seeming parallels and similarities in the two works demonstrates that in the end the congruence cannot hold up to such scrutiny.<sup>75</sup> Her conclusions regarding the textual commonalities are as follows: 1) despite the substantial number of similarities in the two they fail to establish “common authorship;”<sup>76</sup> 2) although it seems clear that the nature of their resemblances indicates the likelihood of “some relationship between the

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<sup>73</sup> McCann, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, ix.

<sup>74</sup> Phyllis Hodgson, “Walter Hilton and *The Cloud of Unknowing*: A Problem of Authorship Reconsidered,” *Modern Language Review* 50 (1955): 396.

<sup>75</sup> Nieva’s own textual analysis brought him to a different conclusion, and in general, he wishes to keep the matter of Hilton authorship open. See Nieva, 32-44.

<sup>76</sup> Hodgson, “Walter Hilton,” 404.

two”<sup>77</sup> authors’ works, the most that can be asserted based on the textual evidence is that “one...possibly knew the works of the other.”<sup>78</sup> It cannot be said, however, that there was “direct borrowing,” nor can one determine the relative dating of the two authors’ works;<sup>79</sup> 3) many of the similarities can be attributed to the authors’ “borrowings from the common background,”<sup>80</sup> that is, mystical texts that would have been accessible and familiar to both authors and to their medieval contemporaries;<sup>81</sup> 4) beneath the textual parallels a fundamental difference in “the processes of thought” is apparent in their respective writings. It is this latter point which Hodgson considers the most compelling factor in dismissing Hilton authorship of *The Cloud*. The differences in literary style, word choice, sentence structure, etc., provide a portrait of two very different personalities behind the two works, such that the nature of their similarities, which at first glance appears quite striking, are shown to be superficial rather than substantive.<sup>82</sup> Most scholars agree with Hodgson’s dismissal<sup>83</sup> of the Hilton authorship theory<sup>84</sup> on similar grounds

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<sup>77</sup> Hodgson, “Walter Hilton,” 404.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 404.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 399.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 397-99.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 404-5.

<sup>83</sup> Nieva takes exception to Hodgson’s assertion here: “The present writer thinks that very much has been made of ‘common background of mystical theology’, and to reduce the similarities of thought and expression between the two groups of writing to this explanation is to oversimplify the matter.” *Transcending God*, 43-44.

<sup>84</sup> Annie Sutherland suggests that Hodgson unwittingly contributed to the obfuscation of the identity of the author in and through the choices made by Hodgson among available manuscripts and her selection of treatises in editing her 1944 and 1949 editions of *The Cloud* corpus. See, Annie Sutherland, “The Dating

and have thus expressed sentiments similar to those of Dom McCann that “the problem of...authorship remains unsolved if not insoluble.”<sup>85</sup>

Interestingly, the fact that the works come to us as anonymous paradoxically provides information about the author.<sup>86</sup> Since there are substantial indications that the author’s works received both “criticism and attention” by contemporaries and later writers, it is apparent that anonymity was intentional by the author.<sup>87</sup> Knowles points out that the secrecy surrounding the author’s identity, despite the circulation<sup>88</sup> of the works during the author’s lifetime and consistently in the intervening centuries to the present day, could only have been accomplished by one who “was in a position which enabled him to secure” the anonymity he sought.<sup>89</sup>

### Sources

#### Pseudo-Dionysius

Once again we look to the text of the author’s writings to answer the question of sources and influence. Although there are references in the texts to several specific

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and Authorship of the *Cloud* Corpus: A Reassessment of the Evidence,” *Medium Ævum* 71 (2002): 82-100.

<sup>85</sup> McCann, *The Cloud*, viii.

<sup>86</sup> For a discussion on the question of anonymity see chapter 1 of Graff, “Transmission and Reception.” The author explores the trope of anonymity by comparison of *The Cloud* author and Ulysses. Utilizing the example of “Ulysses as a narrative model” the author draws a comparison to the author of *The Cloud* corpus who, convinced of the “usefulness of anonymity as an approach to an ineffable subject,” made anonymity an integral element in his writings (ibid., ii).

<sup>87</sup> Knowles, *English Mystical*, 68.

<sup>88</sup> For a study of the circulation and readership of the *The Cloud* corpus see Graff, “Transmission and Reception.”

<sup>89</sup> Knowles, *English Mystical Tradition*, 68; and, Hodgson, *The Cloud*, 1982.

Christian writers, the connection to the Pseudo-Dionysius is one that at first glance appears most significant, prominent and straightforward. There are two explicit textual references by the author indicating his reliance upon the work of Pseudo-Dionysius. Near the end of *The Cloud* in chapter seventy the author makes a statement indicating that his teaching is identical with that of the Areopagite:

And now whoever cares to examine the works of Denis, he will find that his words clearly corroborate all that I have said or am going to say, from the beginning of this treatise to the end.<sup>90</sup>

In his sequel to *The Cloud*, *Privy Counselling*, the second reference the author seems to attribute to Pseudo-Dionysius is the image of ‘the cloud of unknowing’ which the author employed both as a major theme in his writings as well as the title of his longest work:

It is also the Cloud of Unknowing; it is the hidden love offered in purity of spirit...It is the mystical theology of Denys his wisdom and his treasure, his luminous darkness and his secret knowledge.<sup>91</sup>

Although scholars do not question that the author was influenced by the works of Pseudo-Dionysius, the connection is complex; and upon examination, is perhaps more accurately described as the Pseudo-Dionysian mystical tradition of which the anonymous author is a faithful representative.

It is this tradition and its development from the works of the Areopagite that is the basis of *The Cloud* author’s teaching on contemplative prayer. It is at its core fundamentally Dionysian in that it is grounded in the “absolute incomprehensibility of

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<sup>90</sup> Walsh, *The Cloud*, 256.

<sup>91</sup> Walsh, *Pursuit*, 234. For a discussion on the source for the phrase ‘cloud of unknowing’ and the history of its use see Hodgson, *The Cloud*, lxii and lxx-lxxi; and, Clark, “*The Cloud of Unknowing*,” 277-78.

God.” This notion of the incomprehensibility of God is rooted in a belief in God’s absolute otherness in relation to the created world. Yet, as the ground and cause of all that exists God is nonetheless immanent in creation; but God’s transcendence means that any and all qualities attributed to God fall short of God’s essence. Thus, negative theology, or statements of what God is not, acknowledges this basic inadequacy of all human conceptions and qualifications to provide true knowledge of God, and purifies the soul of inferior and ultimately, false, conceptions and images of the Divine. The work of contemplation, then, is the methodological negation of all thought of God—all particular and specific conceptual qualifications of the Divine—as a means of arriving at the knowledge of God’s true being, or as *The Cloud* author repeatedly states, knowledge of “God as he is in himself.”<sup>92</sup>

Although Pseudo-Dionysius provides the basic scaffolding upon which *The Cloud* author fashioned his teaching on contemplative prayer, as mentioned earlier the influence is neither exclusive nor direct. Rather, the author has received, assimilated and now teaches the “traditional teaching of the Church on contemplation,” a tradition which, like Pseudo-Dionysius’ teaching, reflects back to scriptural themes.<sup>93</sup> In the Latin mystical tradition, in contrast to that of the Byzantine Church, the incomprehensibility of God is not understood as an “ontological” reality, as in the Dionysian sense, but rather constitutes the human condition after the sin of Adam.<sup>94</sup> Another major departure from

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<sup>92</sup> Hodgson, *The Cloud*, lix.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., lvii.

<sup>94</sup> Clark, “The *Cloud of Unknowing*,” 277-78.

the thought of Pseudo-Dionysius is the role *The Cloud* author gives to the will and the affect, or to love. The English author teaches that it is through the power of love that the soul is brought to divine union, an important theme that permeates the author's teaching on contemplative prayer. Repeatedly throughout the texts the author insists that the core disposition of the contemplative person lies in this impulse of the will towards God, a movement that flows from love. This marks a departure from the teachings of Pseudo-Dionysius, and the insertion of love into the heart of the contemplative's journey to God pre-dates the English author. This particular emendation of Pseudo-Dionysian thought is attributed to the work of Thomas Gallus, whose Latin version of Pseudo-Dionysius' *Mystical Theology* provided the source for *The Cloud* author's access to the Dionysian corpus.<sup>95</sup> Yet, Gallus was only one link in the process that shaped the tradition as received by the English mystic.

It is significant then, that writers of the Middle Ages did not come into contact with the works of Pseudo-Dionysius, for the most part, in the original Greek text. Most scholars trace the point of contact to two major waves of influence spurred by new translations of *The Mystical Theology*: John Scotus Eriugena in the mid-ninth century and to Thomas Gallus and Robert Grosseteste in the twelfth century.<sup>96</sup> Eriugena translated into Latin the entire Dionysian corpus, and provided extensive commentary as

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<sup>95</sup> Hodgson, *The Cloud*, lxii; Clark, "The *Cloud of Unknowing*," 278-79.

<sup>96</sup> James McEvoy, ed., *Mystical Theology: The Glosses by Thomas Gallus and the Commentary of Robert Grosseteste on "De Mystica Theologia"* (Paris: Peeters, 2003), vii-viii.

well.<sup>97</sup> Although Eriugena's translation provided the point of entry of apophatic theology into the "Latin Middle Ages" it seems that that this body of mystical literature "remained dormant for almost three centuries."<sup>98</sup> It was in the twelfth century that the Victorine, Hugh of St. Victor, picked up the thread of Dionysian thought. Hugh creatively reworked the major themes of Pseudo-Dionysius, integrating his own Augustinian influence in his commentary on *The Celestial Hierarchy*. It was this version of Dionysian thought that was further developed by fellow Victorines, Richard and Thomas Gallus. Richard of St. Victor continued to reflect and comment upon the major Dionysian themes as received from Hugh, constituting a further development of the tradition that then "set the stage for a full-scale Western appropriation of *The Mystical Theology* and the entire Dionysian corpus into the mainstream of medieval mysticism," where it was picked up by Thomas Gallus.<sup>99</sup>

Thomas Gallus makes the final contribution to this long development and significant reworking of the Dionysian corpus. Gallus was steeped in Dionysian theology, and following a period of over twenty years reflecting upon these texts he produced the key Latin texts that eventually became the source for the Dionysian corpus in the Middle Ages: paraphrased editions and commentaries of each of the works of Pseudo-Dionysius, including the "first known commentary on *The Mystical Theology*."<sup>100</sup> Many scholars

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<sup>97</sup> Bernard McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 90.

<sup>98</sup> Paul Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to their Influence* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1993), 215.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 216-18.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

agree that the Gallus corpus on the works of Dionysius cannot be overestimated in their significance to the development of the Dionysian tradition, for it was his work that set off a series of translations, re-translations, commentaries and expositions of the works and thought of Dionysius.<sup>101</sup> It is this version of Dionysian thought that, via the Gallus commentary, is picked up by the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*.

However, perhaps the most significant factor that accounts for the weight of influence that Gallus' contribution exerted upon the shift towards the more affective Dionysian mysticism of this period is to be found in the text of his paraphrase of Pseudo-Dionysius' *The Mystical Theology*. In the beginning of the Pseudo-Dionysian work, the author describes the state of an individual at the moment of divine union or the mystical ascent. Here the experience is described as one in which the individual is “neither oneself nor someone else, one is supremely united to the Unknown by an inactivity of all knowledge, and knows beyond the mind by knowing nothing.”<sup>102</sup> Gallus' paraphrase emends the Dionysian apophatic text to include an affective element which was true to the teaching of the Church tradition, but was absent entirely in the original: Gallus' re-write goes like this:

‘Separated from all things and from oneself, as it were, one is united to the intellectually unknown God *through a uniting of love which effects true knowledge* by means of a knowledge much better than intellectual knowledge, and, because intellectual knowledge is left behind, one knows God above intellect and mind.’<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> McEvoy, *Mystical Theology: The Glosses*, 6-7.

<sup>102</sup> Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1998), 81. Text of Pseudo-Dionysius' *The Mystical Theology* and Thomas Gallus' version from *Extractio* are quoted from McGinn.



Gallus' version both redirects the focus significantly from knowledge to love, and introduces an entirely new theme into the text: the relative role of love to knowledge. Such an understanding of the role of love accords with the tradition received from Augustine, among others. However, through the development by Gallus there arose an emphasis within the Dionysian tradition that privileged love over knowledge, setting them at odds with one another. It was unique to Gallus and was not present in the original Greek text, and it provides the grounding for the antithetical relationship between knowing and loving that is central to *The Cloud* author's teaching on contemplation.

#### Other Sources and Literary Influences

*The Cloud* author makes explicit mention of other influences, specifically Augustine, Bernard, Aquinas, and one can discern evidence of borrowings and assimilations from these and other writers. As mentioned earlier, specific attributions are difficult to separate from the more general influence of the tradition as a whole. *The Cloud* teachings on grace, the effects of the fall particularly regarding the darkness of the intellect, the faculties of the soul, the relationship of love to knowledge, among other traditional teachings, together constitute the received tradition as it developed over time from the Fathers. However, there are instances in *The Cloud* text, generally substantial in volume, which one encounters in reading the work, that signal to the reader that here is a marked departure from the author's usual literary voice. Suddenly the author becomes much more didactic and wavers from his more conversational tone. These sections nonetheless fit well with the subject matter yet at the same time they do take the text in a

different direction. Thus the sense is that the focus has shifted a bit only to return once more to the topic at hand, in some cases, several chapters later. These sections are what scholars refer to as instances of the author's more "direct borrowings."<sup>103</sup> Here, the source is most often Richard of St. Victor.<sup>104</sup> One of these longer borrowings occurs in chapters 63-66 and comes predominantly from Richard of St. Victor's *Benjamin Minor*.<sup>105</sup> This passage is an explication of the five powers of the soul,<sup>106</sup> here based ultimately on the teachings of Augustine.<sup>107</sup> Another long section appears in *The Cloud*, chapters 71-73, in which the author has "borrowed heavily from Richard of St. Victor's spiritual exegesis concerning the Ark of the Covenant."<sup>108</sup> In material drawn from sections of Richard of St. Victor's *Benjamin Major* and *Benjamin Minor*<sup>109</sup> the author draws on the allegorical texts in his discussion on "the different ways by which different people attain to contemplation."<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> See Hodgson, *The Cloud*, lxxiii-lxxvii.

<sup>104</sup> Hodgson, *The Cloud*, lxxiii.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., lxxv.

<sup>106</sup> Walsh notes that in the anonymous author's translation of Richard of St. Victor's, *Benjamin Minor*, the section in the original which deals with the five powers of the soul has been omitted. The "missing" material shows up then, in *The Cloud* as a long insertion in chapters 62-66. (*The Cloud*, 90-91.) Note that Walsh includes chapter 62 of *The Cloud* while Hodgson speaks only of chapters 63-66 and attributes chapter 62 to Richard's influence here but does not make it part of his explication of the powers of the soul. (See, *The Cloud*, lxxv-lxxvi.)

<sup>107</sup> Walsh, *The Cloud*, 173.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>109</sup> Hodgson, *The Cloud*, lxxv-lxxvi.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., lxxiii.

The other sections in this category which, though shorter in length, are still indicative of explicit use of sources, occur in chapters 35 and 53. The former instance is used by the English author to speak of the three “preparatory exercises” practiced by the “contemplative apprentice,” that is, the traditional threesome of “Lesson, Meditation and Orison.”<sup>111</sup> Here the author makes mention of his borrowing as he says “[y]ou will find a much better treatment of these three than I can manage in the book of another author.” The book mentioned by the author, according to scholars, is the *Scala Claustralium* of Guigo II.<sup>112</sup> As Hodgson notes, these are well-established components of spiritual tradition as “the way to contemplation” but textual analysis supports this attribution.<sup>113</sup> In the latter of the two shorter sections indicative of direct use, chapter 53 of *The Cloud*, the anonymous author launches a verbal tirade against behaviors indicative of “hysterical phenomena attaching to false mysticism.”<sup>114</sup> Though specific sources here have been proposed there is less scholarly agreement on both the specific attribution and the question of including this section in the derivative category.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Walsh, *The Cloud*, 187.

<sup>112</sup> Hodgson refers to Justin McCann’s notation of this source in his 1924 modern version of *The Cloud*. (*The Cloud*, lxxvi.) See also Walsh, *The Cloud*, 78-79.

<sup>113</sup> See Hodgson, *The Cloud*, lxxvi.

<sup>114</sup> Walsh, *The Cloud*, 89.

<sup>115</sup> Hodgson relates that both J. McCann and Noetinger propose that the English author relied upon Hugh of St. Victor’s work *De Institutione Novitiorum*, chapter 12. However, Hodgson claims that textual analysis failed to produce substantial appearance of common elements in the two works to suggest the likelihood of borrowing. (*The Cloud*, lxxvii.) Walsh refers to Hugh of St. Victor’s work in relation to this section in *The Cloud of Unknowing* but gives it only as an example of “‘rules of modesty’ which govern the outward behaviour of religious novices” which one might find in *De Institutione Novitiorum* as well as other medieval sources, without specific attribution. (*The Cloud*, 88.)

This concludes our introductory chapter on *The Cloud* corpus. Here we positioned the author according to time and date, a task which must always be characterized as speculative due to the fundamental mystery which surrounds an anonymous text. We were able nonetheless to ascribe a relatively narrow time span to the date of origin which then provided a whole host of correlative historical data, specifically, questions of socio-historical influences. Comparison to contemporary mystical texts helped to delineate those idiosyncratic elements in the corpus thus providing additional characteristics of the author. These characteristics, we saw, became the basis for analysis of the treatises traditionally attributed to *The Cloud* author in our effort to address the question of common authorship. Thus we were able to sketch a surprisingly substantive portrait, at least from a literary perspective, of author and texts, a feat which has much to do with the established nature of what we refer to as the Christian mystical tradition.

## 2. WHAT IS THE EXISTENTIAL HUMAN CONDITION?

The author of *The Cloud* and the three psychologists I have chosen for this study agree that human consciousness, or in the case of *The Cloud* author, human mental faculties, have their problematic aspects. Both parties provide a philosophical foundation in which their beliefs are grounded. In their respective stories they each formulate a theory of the exact nature of this human dilemma based upon initiating factors. In this chapter, I will look at how both parties formulate an answer to the hypothetically posed question of the problematic aspect of human consciousness. Part 1 will look at *The Cloud* author's understanding of the human condition. It is the story of Christian anthropology, of God's plan for creation, particularly human creation in relationship to a loving Creator. This will take us through the story of the fall of Adam and Eve where we will examine the human condition after the fall. Since the Christian story is also a story of salvation history we know that God's plan for us, though frustrated by our own willfulness, remains in place, so this chapter will also take a look at the nature of the path back to God. Always destined to live in unity with our Creator, the way back is now fraught with difficulties, obstacles and pitfalls. Much of the discussion in this chapter will center on *The Cloud* author's characterization of the fallen state, which is now the life circumstances within which the human individual must work out her or his own salvation. Specifically, we will hear the author's assessment of the effects of the fall upon the faculties of the mind. Then, the section titled "Scattering of the Mind and Affections" will explore the ramifications of the fallen state from the perspective of the most basic

aspect of human consciousness—our thought processes.

The discussion will then move to the nature of the human/Divine relationship, specifically in terms of bridging the gap between creature/Creator, so that human beings might find their way back to God and fulfill their divinely ordained destiny. The section “The Intellect and the Incomprehensibility of God” will explore *The Cloud* author’s teaching on the knowledge/love antithesis in relation to this question of the fundamental distance that exists between God and human beings. The discussion will include a look at what the author refers to as “two knowing powers.”

Part 2 of this chapter will present a generalized explanation of the formation of individual human consciousness. Specific sub-topics highlighted in this section are the phenomena of “habituation” and “categorization.” Next we will turn to explore what the authors refer to as “modes of consciousness.” This discussion introduces the concept of two distinct approaches to human consciousness, examining the respective characteristics which differentiate the two modes.

### **Part 1: *The Cloud***

#### **The Fall and the Faculties of the Mind**

The author takes for granted the basic Church teaching that humans were created “in the image and likeness of God”<sup>1</sup> and destined for union with God.<sup>2</sup> Through the disobedience of the first humans “all men were lost in Adam.”<sup>3</sup> As a result of this original

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<sup>1</sup> Walsh, *The Cloud*, 122, 135, and Walsh, *Pursuit*, 225.

<sup>2</sup> Walsh, *The Cloud*, 138.

<sup>3</sup> Walsh, *The Cloud*, 171, and Walsh, *Pursuit*, 225.

sin the human mind is now at odds with the desires of the human spirit for God. Before the fall human beings desired only what was good, and the impulses of their heart and the movement of their will to accomplish these desires were in unison, ordered to the greatest good—God.<sup>4</sup> As a consequence of the fall of Adam humans through original sin must struggle against their disordered passions and desires in order to recover their lost blessedness.

This is the just judgment of God: that man, when he had the sovereignty and lordship over all other creatures, willfully made himself subservient to the desires of his subjects, forsaking the commandment of his God and maker. In the same way, now that he wishes to fulfil the commandment of God, he sees and feels that all the creatures that should be beneath him are proudly pressing above him, between himself and his God.<sup>5</sup>

Here the author expresses that it is fitting that human beings should now experience great difficulty in achieving the goal of union with God since they willingly looked for their fulfillment not in God alone, which was the purpose for which God had created them, but sought fulfillment in and through the works of creation. Thus God has allowed the natural consequences of their actions to become the normal state of affairs in which they now must fight against the imposition of the created world when seeking to love God above all things.

The author gives a detailed teaching on the effects of the fall upon the faculties of

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<sup>4</sup> Walsh, *The Cloud*, 138.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 177.

the soul, which he lists as *mind, reason, will, imagination* and *sensuality*.<sup>6</sup> The mind is the overarching structure within which all of the other four operate.<sup>7</sup> Though he recognizes that these functions are not separate and distinct and that they often operate in tandem, their main operations can be delineated for purposes of understanding the workings of the mind. Of the natural power of reason, the author says that prior to the fall reason was the faculty by which our first parents could discern the relative good or evil of things. However, now he says that this function is “so blinded with original sin that it can do this work only if it is illumined by grace.”<sup>8</sup> The power of the will has also been sorely compromised by original sin. As created by God, humans in their original blessed state relied upon the power of their will to act in accord with what was determined by the use of reason to be good. The will, thus acting in accordance with God’s intent, always had perfect efficacy in bringing about the good as determined by the power of reason. After the fall the power of the will is now in a derelict state such that the things it desires and moves towards in search of the good are often in reality, evil. The inference here is that the will is duped in some way by the appearance of the thing and is unable to recognize

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<sup>6</sup> Walsh, *The Cloud*, 242. The author’s discussion on the faculties of the soul appears in *The Cloud* text in chapters 63-66. This section indicates clear reliance upon Richard of St. Victor’s treatment of the same topic in his *Benjamin Minor*. Hodgson, *The Cloud*, lxxv; Walsh, *The Cloud*, 90-91. However, as Hodgson and others affirm *The Cloud* author, as with other Medieval spiritual writers, was the recipient of a rich Christian tradition, developed over time in and through the accumulation and accrual of the teachings of the Church Fathers. This established tradition was received and transmitted often without reference to specific sources. Thus, as Hodgson says, especially in her 1982 revised edition of *The Cloud*, “with the exception of the obvious translations, it is usually impossible to be sure of any immediate source.” Hodgson, *The Cloud and Related Treatises*, xxix. For a thorough treatment of discernible sources in *The Cloud* see J.P.H. Clark, “Sources and theology in *The Cloud of Unknowing*,” *Downside Review* 98 (1980): 83-109.

<sup>7</sup> Walsh, *The Cloud*, 243.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 245.



its true nature.<sup>9</sup>

The power of imagination further impedes the power of reason and the will to know and choose the good. Prior to the fall, the imagination which naturally provided “all our images of things, whether they are absent or present,” did so in accordance with the discernment of reason. That is, imagination under the influence of reason was in effect unable to provide images that were anything other than true representations, producing only those images which were compatible with the overall goal for human fulfillment in God. In the post-fallen state the faculty of imagination is no longer obedient to reason, such that it now produces unwanted images incessantly; and it can no longer be relied upon to provide reliable information about the reality of the material or spiritual world.<sup>10</sup>

Similarly has the power of sensuality been seriously compromised from its original intended functions which are two-fold: the satisfaction of our physical needs and the enjoyment of our physical senses. Like the other powers of the soul, sensuality was originally under the control of reason and the will, such that it was not possible to desire things inordinately. Again, as with the other powers of the soul, sensuality was ordered towards the good so that the body’s physical needs and the enjoyment of sensual pleasures were both in accord with the highest good; thus, neither was sought for its own sake. As a result of the fall human beings have become slaves to their passions and desires, now seeking after the things of the world as ends in themselves. In their current state, they are apt to behave in ways that are degrading, stooping to the level more in line

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<sup>9</sup> Walsh, *The Cloud*, 244-45.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 246-47.

with their animal and carnal, rather than their human and spiritual natures.<sup>11</sup> All of this moves the author to cry out:

You can see then, my friend, into what a wretched state we are fallen because of original sin. It is hardly surprising that we should be like blind men and be easily deceived in our understandings of spiritual words and spiritual activities, particularly those of us who are ignorant of the powers of the soul and the way in which these powers operate.<sup>12</sup>

This summary statement of the author's articulation of the human condition in its post-fallen state is combined with what the author thinks would be a further exacerbation of an already desperate situation. To be "ignorant of the powers of the soul and the way in which these powers operate" legitimates the author's devoting much space in his works to just this topic—elucidating the nature of human consciousness in light of the effects of original sin upon the faculties of the mind.

#### Scattering of the Mind and Affections

One of the ways that the author expresses his beliefs concerning the state of the human mind in its fallen condition is in his characterization of the mind as "scattered."<sup>13</sup> The author speaks of two aspects of this condition: a scattering of "either the affections

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<sup>11</sup> Walsh, *The Cloud*, 247-48.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 248.

<sup>13</sup> For an excellent study of *The Cloud* as a work centered on the conflict between the mind's natural tendency towards dissipation and the contemplative goal of union, see R. W. Englert, *Scattering and Oneing*.

or of the *witte*, mind.”<sup>14</sup> In both cases the author states that these are the effects of original sin.<sup>15</sup> As with most of the author’s teachings, his teaching on the workings of the mind is tied to his teaching on contemplative prayer. He spends a good deal of time reinforcing his instructions to put down even good thoughts about God in ways that demonstrate his keen awareness of the workings of the mind. Chapter 7 of *The Cloud* contains one of these key teachings on the scattering of the mind. Here the author rhetorically poses the question of what one is to focus upon during prayer in light of the directive to avoid thinking about anything at all, including specific thoughts of God’s qualities. Entering into a hypothetical dialogue with thoughts, the author anticipates that his instructions on imageless prayer will prompt the mind to question “what do you seek and what would you have?” In other words, the starved mind will no doubt inquire, “what is the point of this and what do you hope to gain?” The author advocates that one say to this thought “that it is God whom you would have.” To this the restless mind is likely to engage the pray-er further, inquiring about this God and wondering what God is like. If the pray-er passively entertains this line of questioning the mind will provide answers in the form of suggestions of God’s qualities, ideas and images that appear holy and useful in seeking knowledge of God. This might invoke a response of concern over one’s sinfulness in contrast to the goodness of God, which will then lead to further thoughts,

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<sup>14</sup> Robert K. Forman, “Mystical Experience in the *Cloud* Literature,” in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England*, ed. Marion Glascoe (Cambridge, England: D.S. Brewer, 1987), 179. Although Forman says that *The Cloud* author “typically” speaks of scattering in these two categories, Englert, whose work focuses on this topic further delineates the author’s categories into “scattering of the impulse and unconscious scattering.” Englert also classifies the scattering of the affections as “the scattering of concupiscence.” See Englert, *Scattering and Oneing*, 87-118.

<sup>15</sup> Walsh, *The Cloud*, 141.

memories and imaginings. Very soon the mind is “scattered about you know not where,” he says, and “the cause of this dissipation is that in the beginning you deliberately listened to the thought, answered it, took it to yourself and let it continue unheeded.”<sup>16</sup> This sorry state, says the author, is the result of having entertained that one innocent thought of a particular quality of God rather than rejecting it outright.

In chapter 10 of *The Cloud* the author illustrates a similar effect that this condition of scattering has upon the affections:

If this sudden impulse or thought is not beaten down straight away, your fleshly heart, because of its frailty, will be immediately affected with some kind of pleasure if the thing pleases you, or has pleased you before or with some kind of resentment if it is a thing which you imagine upsets you, or has upset you before.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Walsh, *The Cloud*, 132-33. Englert delineates the author’s sense of “scattering” further to include the categorization of “the scattering of concupiscence.” See *Scattering and Oneing*, 35. Interestingly, etymology of the word “concupiscence” reveals a Middle English origin from the Latin “*concupescentia*.” The above description taken from *The Cloud* author’s anecdotal teaching captures the essence of the word’s meaning. Cf. the following definition: “In its widest acceptance, concupiscence is any yearning of the soul for good; in its strict and specific acceptance, a desire of the lower appetite contrary to reason. To understand how the sensuous and the rational appetite can be opposed, it should be borne in mind that their natural objects are altogether different. The object of the former is the gratification of the senses; the object of the latter is the good of the entire human nature and consists in the subordination of reason to appetite, its supreme good and ultimate end. But the lower appetite is of itself unrestrained, so as to pursue sensuous gratifications independently of the understanding and without regard to the good of the higher faculties. Hence desires contrary to the real good and order of reason may, and often do, rise in it, previous to the attention of the mind, and once risen, dispose the bodily organs to the pursuit and solicit the will to consent, while they more or less hinder reason from considering their lawfulness or unlawfulness. This is concupiscence in its strict and specific sense. As long, however, as deliberation is not completely impeded, the rational will is able to resist such desires and withhold consent, though it be not capable of crushing the effects they produce in the body, and though its freedom and dominion be to some extent diminished. If, in fact, the will resists, a struggle ensues, the sensuous appetite rebelliously demanding its gratification, reason, on the contrary, clinging to its own spiritual interests and asserting its control. ‘The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh.’” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04208a.htm> (accessed July 23, 2009).

<sup>17</sup> Walsh, *The Cloud*, 142.

This leads into a detailed elaboration of this scattering of the heart in which the author gives examples of the specific nature of the pleasure and/or resentment arising in the affections in relation to the “deadly sins,” providing examples of each. His primary focus is not, however, the subject of specific sins but to demonstrate the state of the mind which is our human condition. Robert Englert, commenting on this text, elucidates three important distinctions that *The Cloud* author is making here concerning the nature of mental processes. First, there is the impulse which inserts itself into our consciousness against our will and immediately, without conscious choice, draws some sort of emotional response. In addition, this activates any memory of past experiences with this current impulse, which in itself generates further mental activity, again outside of our conscious intention. And finally, the emotional response or responses consequently triggered by the impulse becomes a source of personal identification for us. Englert quotes from the following text in *The Cloud* to illustrate his point:

If it is a thing that pleases you, or has pleased you before, there rises up in you a keen delight in thinking about it whatever it is, so much so that you take your rest in that thought, and finally fasten your heart and will to it and feed your carnal love upon it. During that time you think that you covet no other wealth except always to live in this peace and rest with the thing that you are thinking about.<sup>18</sup>

Regarding the tendency towards identification Englert highlights the powerful influence exerted by our emotions. Once aroused, there is a strong tendency to identify with these feelings: “[o]ne becomes what one contemplates; i.e., it becomes angry or lustful.”<sup>19</sup> It is

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<sup>18</sup> Walsh, *The Cloud*, 143, quoted in Englert, *Scattering and Oneing*, 39.

<sup>19</sup> Englert, *Scattering and Oneing*, 40.

a familiar chain of events and one that more often than not happens outside of our conscious and intentional willing.

### God's Incomprehensibility to the Intellect and the Two Knowing Powers

Fundamental to the teaching of *The Cloud* is that of the incomprehensibility of God to the human intellect. Throughout the corpus the author returns to this theme, explicitly indicating several times in various ways that God cannot be known with our intellect. In nearly every instance when the author returns to this theme, he pairs this negative statement of the incomprehensibility of God to the intellect with a positive statement that God can be known through love.<sup>20</sup> Thus, throughout the author's works we see a recurring antithesis between the knowing of the mind and knowing by love. Early in *The Cloud* text the author introduces this theme in the context of a discussion of what he refers to as "knowing powers":

Now all rational creatures, angels and men alike, have in them each one individually, one chief working power, which is called a knowing power, and another chief working power called a loving power; and of these two powers, God, who is the maker of them, is incomprehensible to the first, the knowing power. But to the second, which is the loving power, he is entirely comprehensible in each one individually; in so much that one loving soul of itself, because of love would be able to comprehend him who is entirely sufficient, and much more so, without limit, to fill all souls of men and angels that could ever exist.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Bernard McGinn tells us that here *The Cloud* author follows the way of many mystics who "spent much time analyzing the respective roles of love and knowledge in the path to mystical union, as well as the ways in which affection and intellection may or may not be present within union itself." "Love, Knowledge, and Mystical Union in Western Christianity: Twelfth to Sixteenth Centuries," *Church History* 56 (1987): 7.

<sup>21</sup> Walsh, *The Cloud*, 123. Here, Walsh's note which quotes from Gallus' thoughts on this topic illuminates this text considerably: "We are convinced that the affection is ineffably more profoundly and more

We see from this passage in *The Cloud*, that the author, in pairing the incomprehensibility of God to the intellect with God's accessibility through love, has created an antithesis between knowing and loving, or between the intellect and the affective element.

Although we may be familiar with the head/heart approach to spirituality such that the author's discussion is intelligible to us, what is not self-evident is the notion of love as a way of knowing. Knowing by love, as the author puts it, is at the very least, ambiguous, but without further explanation can be completely baffling.

Although part 1 of this chapter is dedicated to presenting *The Cloud* author's view of the problem of human consciousness, the notion that God can be known by love does not immediately appear relevant, or pertinent. But according to our author they are simply two sides of the same coin, a "coin" which presents obstacles for the individual to find her/his way back to God. Together they bring to light the nature of the dilemma that is the human condition. On the one hand, our natural approach to seeking knowledge is to think our way to it. The author is teaching that this won't do and explains why this is so. Our normal reliance upon the intellect is futile in this search, but the author also wants to assure his reader that nonetheless one can come to know God; the way to that knowledge, he says, is through love. While on the surface this may sound more like a solution than a problem, I see it as part of the problem. The author does not anticipate that his teaching

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sublimely drawn to God by God himself than is the intellect, because men and angels love more than they have the power to reason or understand. For it seems a little thing to the faithful soul—even of a mortal man—to enclose in his affection all men and angels, even were they as numerous as the grains of sand on the sea-shore. And what is there in God that is not loved by the affections? It is as if the whole of him is clasped by the affection and rejected by the understanding.” n. 43 quoted from Gallus’ *Commentary on Isaiah 6:1-4*.

on the accessibility of God to love will be problematic to his readers, anymore than it is for modern readers. So although it may sound positive in that it does give us an assurance that God can be known and even tells us how, it is actually more like a riddle than a directive. It is a riddle in the sense that the notion that, although God is incomprehensible to our intellect, God can be known through love is something that itself cannot be grasped by the intellect. How does one reason herself/himself through this notion that the human individual “is wholly enabled to comprehend by love the whole of him who is incomprehensible to every created knowing power”?<sup>22</sup>

The following discussion attempts to ameliorate some of the difficulty that this notion of love as a way of knowing presents. This section will take a look at three different aspects of this idea in general and specifically as it applies to the teachings of *The Cloud* author. The first area of investigation is related to the author’s anthropology, which continues the subject of the faculties of the soul. The author’s notion of love and knowledge is in part influenced by his convictions concerning human teleology. Next, the discussion will turn to the nature of the love/knowledge dichotomy to examine the characteristics of each part of the contrasting pair. How does the author understand each of these concepts, and what qualities and capacities does he assign to each? Finally, this section will look to one scholar’s interpretive understanding of “the illuminative power of love” to help in conceptualizing a connection between the affective and cognitive powers.

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<sup>22</sup> Walsh, *The Cloud*, 123.



*A Human Affinity for God*

Any discussion on the relative difficulty inherent in the human search for true knowledge of God is irrelevant without the assurance that the search is indeed a reasonable endeavor. The works of this fourteenth-century English mystic are grounded in this fundamental Church teaching. In the longer works of *The Cloud* and *Privy Counselling* this teaching is explicitly dealt with. It takes the form of traditional Church teaching that human beings were made for union with God, created out of God's love and desire to be in relationship with creation and that human beings represent the epitome of God's creative work in that they alone were created in God's "image and likeness." *The Cloud* author's teaching here is also consistent with the Dionysian tradition that holds in tension the paradoxical affirmations that "God is immanent in all things as well as transcendent above them." The belief that God is the underlying "Unity embracing all things" and the source by which all things are held in being, grounds the human search for God.<sup>23</sup> *The Cloud* author expresses this thought in numerous references throughout the corpus but pays particular attention to this topic in *Privy Counselling*.<sup>24</sup> In chapter eight of this treatise the author states that

it is my wish, and it was my intention from the beginning,  
that you should forget the feeling of the being of yourself in  
exchange for the feeling of the being of God. That is why I  
proved to you at the beginning that God is your being.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Hodgson, *The Cloud*, lix-lx.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., lv and lx.

<sup>25</sup> Walsh, *Pursuit*, 235.

Along with this explicit demonstration of the human affinity for God in a general sense, *The Cloud* author's teaching is grounded in another important aspect of the tradition which understands that this affinity is constitutive of all God's creation. There is an essential aspect to our search for God despite the difficulties we must navigate through and beyond as a consequence of original sin, nonetheless we can be confident that "our natural powers will help us toward our supernatural destination precisely in being allowed to fulfill their own functions."<sup>26</sup> This affinity for God is the glue that holds together all elements of *The Cloud* author's teachings.

*The Author's Characterization of Intellect and Love*

It is important to understand what meaning the author attaches to the two terms in this antithetical pairing. Regarding the intellect the author utilizes the comparison of creature/Creator to talk about the intellect's natural inability to comprehend God. He says:

For a man may, by grace, have the fullness of knowledge of all other creatures and of their works, yes, and of the works of God's own self, and he is well able to reflect on them. But no man can think of God himself.<sup>27</sup>

The powers of the mind to reflect and reason do a good job of bringing the individual to useful knowledge about the material creation. The author implies that the intellect does the work for which it was intended. The implication is then extended to the uncreated reality, or to God, and concludes that for this kind of knowledge, the intellect is not

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<sup>26</sup> Simon Tugwell, introduction to Walsh, *The Cloud*, 77.

<sup>27</sup> Walsh, *The Cloud*, 130.

useful precisely because it is beyond its natural capabilities to do so. The absolute transcendence of God beyond all the works of creation means that the normal powers of knowing must be transcended if one is to arrive at knowledge of God. In this the author is in line with the Dionysian tradition which teaches that God's incomprehensibility to human beings has its foundation in the belief that God's nature is essentially different from human beings.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, language about God, which is based on the conceptual categories provided by the intellect, when applied to God inevitably distorts the truth of God's essence. Although there is a place for such knowledge and language in the spiritual journey, its usefulness is understood as predominantly in its negative function: the affirmation of what God is not. Otherwise, in relying upon conceptualizations such communication often breaks down and results in "erroneous anthropomorphism."<sup>29</sup> It is here that language provides a measure of efficacy in its negating function.<sup>30</sup> Talk of God thus continues, despite the inherent inadequacy of human thought and communication, to arrive at the truth of God's pure being.

Thus when *The Cloud* author contrasts the intellect with love in relation to knowing God he has in mind the mental capacities of human beings, which are entirely adequate in accessing knowledge of created beings and all material aspects of the natural world. Yet, these mental powers will always be limited to this finite realm. In contrast,

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<sup>28</sup> Hodgson, *The Cloud*, lx; also, see lii.

<sup>29</sup> William Johnston, *The Mysticism of "The Cloud of Unknowing": A Modern Interpretation*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Declee, 1967; St. Meinrad, IN: Abbey, 1975), 89. Citations are to the Abbey edition.

<sup>30</sup> For an excellent work on the role of the via negativa on theological discourse see Seely J. Beggiani, "Theology at the Service of Mysticism: Method in Pseudo-Dionysius," *Theological Studies* 57 (1996): 201-22.

knowledge of the infinite and uncreated, which is the domain of God, will always remain inaccessible to human intellectual powers. In a sense, this understanding of what meaning the author intends when using “intellect” in the love/intellect dichotomy is fairly straight forward, in that the author has in mind the ordinary, human rational powers.

However, whenever one is talking about love, inevitably the need arises for delineation and specificity, for few words have been called upon to designate such a diversity and variety of meanings. In the case of *The Cloud* author’s use of the word “love,” in general and specifically when speaking of love as a faculty of knowing, explanation is called for. Although the main focus of this discussion is on what the author has in mind when he speaks of love in relation to knowledge, this section will include an investigation of the meaning that the author gives to the word “love” in a wider context, which we will then draw upon to work out a sketch of his more specific use of the concept in relation to its illuminative function. The author speaks of love often and early in *The Cloud*, using a variety of synonyms to do so. In the opening chapter the author speaks of the contemplative’s experience of desire and longing, indicating that this is a sign that God is calling one to enter into the contemplative life: “and so with his great grace he kindled your desire, and fastened to it a leash of longing and with this led you into a more special state and degree of life...”<sup>31</sup> Indeed, this pull of love and desire that compels the contemplative towards deeper union with God will exert a prominent influence upon the contemplative during this stage of the spiritual journey. The author tells the contemplative that “now you have to stand in desire, all your lifelong if you are

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<sup>31</sup> Walsh, *The Cloud*, 116.

to make progress in the way of perfection.”<sup>32</sup> He continues this discussion about the kind of love and desire he has in mind as he clarifies that it is not merely an affective disposition, but includes the work of the will: “This desire must always be at work in your will, by the power of Almighty God and by your own consent.”<sup>33</sup> Hodgson states that particularly in the two main treatises, *The Cloud* and *Privy Counselling*, “the will and love are so closely akin that in many passages the words are interchangeable.”<sup>34</sup> The author captures this dual aspect of affect and volition in his often repeated phrase “naked intent.”<sup>35</sup> Similar phrases the author uses throughout the corpus which convey the same meaning include “blind impulse of love,” “sharp dart of longing love,” “meek stirring of love,” and “blind stirring of love.”<sup>36</sup> In each case, he strives to communicate this dual movement of the will and affection.

Another element of the kind of love that our author has in mind can also be gleaned from these characteristic phrases that are peppered throughout the author’s works, particularly the image that is imparted through the use of the words “blind” and “naked.” Speaking specifically about his use of the image of blindness the author

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<sup>32</sup> Walsh, *The Cloud*, 118.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Hodgson, *The Cloud of Unknowing and Related Treatises*, xxxix.

<sup>35</sup> Hodgson says the meaning phrase “signifies an elevation of the will towards the being of God.” Then referring specifically to the author’s use of “naked” to qualify the reference to the will, she says that in many instances the phrase “implies a purified action of the will, freed from all discursive thought, directed to God solely by faith, believing that God is, but not straining to understand what God is.” Hodgson, *The Cloud*, 185-86, n. 17/2.

<sup>36</sup> The following examples provide a glimpse of the variant phrasing the author uses to convey the same fundamental meaning: *The Cloud* chapters 3, 6, 16, 17, 24, 25, 34, 48, 49, 50; *Privy Counselling*, chapters 1, 4, 6 and 12.

elaborates:

During this time be blind, and cut away all desire of knowing; for this will hinder you more than it will help you. It is enough for you that you feel moved in love by something, though you do not know what it is; so that in this affection you have no thought of anything particular under God and that your reaching out is simply directed to God.<sup>37</sup>

This characterization speaks to the author's insistence that the love that he intends is a pure love that seeks the very being of God, that is, apart from any of God's gifts and consolations. "Lift up your heart to God with a humble impulse of love; and have himself as your aim, not any of his goods," counsels the author early in his teaching in *The Cloud*.<sup>38</sup> Later in the text the author treats the topic in depth in a chapter dedicated to the exposition of what he means by "chaste love."<sup>39</sup> In this chapter the author is careful to distinguish his notion of love, here referred to as "chaste love," from a pseudo-love so characterized in that it has as its motivating force the acquisition of spiritual consolations. Here and in other instances the author minimizes the usefulness of consolations in the life of a contemplative, and warns of the dangers they pose, contrasting them with the only disposition worthy of the name "love," that which intends God's pure being. We see then that the author has been very clear about the meaning he intends when he talks about love, something the author does often throughout the entire corpus. Whether he does so by using one of his favorite phrases about love listed above, or in the oft-repeated

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<sup>37</sup> Walsh, *The Cloud*, 186.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 216-17.

designation of “God as God is in himself” or variants of this image, or specifically in referring to the need for chaste love; or, finally through his frequent pairing of love with an act of the will, the author does not leave us in doubt about the kind of love he intends.

*The Illuminative Power of Love*

The theme of the illuminative power of love represents the second half of the author’s teaching on the incomprehensibility of God. Along with the text quoted above as the author introduces the topic of the two faculties of knowing, the following three citations demonstrate that the author has left no doubt that he considers this to be an important teaching. The author asserts that “[God] can certainly be loved but not thought. He can be taken and held by love but not by thought”; and that “it is love alone that can reach God in this life, and not knowing.”<sup>40</sup> Finally, from the *Epistle of Discretion of Stirrings* we read that God “cannot be known by reason,” and “cannot be thought, grasped, or searched out by the understanding. But he can be loved and chosen by the true and loving desire of your heart.”<sup>41</sup>

Johnston tells us that one way to understand the author’s intention as expressed in the above quotations is that the author is expressing the “superiority of love.” This is in line with the author’s general approach to the contemplative life, which gives love a dominant role in one’s journey to God. Johnston explains that *The Cloud* author is following the thought of Thomas Aquinas, who privileges love over reason by claiming that “while conceptual knowledge brings God down, as it were, to our level, imposing on

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<sup>40</sup> Walsh, *The Cloud*, 139.

<sup>41</sup> Walsh, *Pursuit*, 140.

[God] the concepts we take from the surrounding world, love goes out to its object; it goes to the essence of God Himself, as He is in Himself.”<sup>42</sup> This notion of love as a dynamic force that reaches out to the beloved resonates with another theme of *The Cloud* author mentioned earlier in this section, and that has to do with love as an experience of desire. Here love in the form of desire is seen particularly in its power to compel and to draw the individual towards God. It is the force by which one “blindly” is led towards an ambiguous target. The impetus is powerful but indistinct, yet the author tells his disciple that desire will characterize the entire path to God.

In a similar way Johnston also speaks of the love/knowledge duality in terms of “the guidance of love.” Through the cultivation of this love that might first present itself as a “stirring” the author teaches that this love, again understood as an active and intentional disposition of the heart towards God, will lead the disciple through a process by which this love grows deeper and stronger. In this journey love slowly develops into an experiential force that while still indistinct and ineffable to the powers of reason, nonetheless begins to exert increasingly more influence upon the contemplative. Johnston describes it like this:

Now the blind stirring of love has become a bright flame,  
guiding the contemplative’s every choice. It stirs him softly  
and sweetly to act; but it also impels him to do God’s will  
with a certain inevitability against which it is useless to  
struggle...<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Johnston, *Mysticism*, 117. On Aquinas’ thought as reflected in this teaching of *The Cloud* author, Walsh quotes from the *Summa*: “The contemplative life belongs to the knowing power (*intellectus*), as far as the essence of the act is concerned; but insofar as what moves the knowing power to carry out the operation, this belongs to the loving power (*voluntas*), which moves all the other powers, including the knowing power, to their acts.” Quoted in *Pursuit*, 153, n. 55.

<sup>43</sup> Johnston, *Mysticism*, 123.



And most helpful for the context of this discussion as we wrestle with understanding the concept of the illuminative power of love, Johnston adds: “this guidance of God Himself, says the author, is the true discretion and the true wisdom.”<sup>44</sup> In this statement Johnston brings the discussion into the realm of knowing, speaking in terms of “discretion” and “wisdom.” It is in this sense then that he says we should interpret this teaching of *The Cloud* author on love as a faculty of knowledge. Johnston says that we should not assign a literal interpretation but think more in terms of love’s illuminative power in the sense that “in its intensity it enlightens the intelligence which is then filled with a wisdom not coming ‘from without’ through the senses but from within from ‘abundance of love.’”<sup>45</sup>

This concludes the contribution to this question from *The Cloud* author. In the next section we will consider the same question from the perspective of psychology according to the sources examined in this study.

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<sup>44</sup> Johnston, *Mysticism*, 123.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 124.

## Part 2: Psychology

Just as *The Cloud* author's theses concerning the state of human consciousness are grounded in a set of assumptions and beliefs, the authors representative of the psychology of consciousness ground their story similarly. Both accounts can be distilled down to their originating cause and consequent effects. While the overarching framework *The Cloud* author operates under is the traditional Church teaching on the teleology of human creation and the ways in which the fall of Adam and Eve have circumvented the divine purposes for human creation, the originating event for the psychology side of this study is localized in the evolutionary formation of consciousness. In this, it can be said that their version of the story that answers the question, "what is the problem with human consciousness?" like *The Cloud* author's version, originates in the beginning of human history, in this case, the beginning of human consciousness.

### Formation of Consciousness

The basic foundation that grounds the story of human consciousness according to each of the three authors represented in this study is the Darwinian theory of human evolution. Seen from this perspective Robert Ornstein says that "[l]ike the rest of biological evolution, the human mind is a collage of adaptations...to different situations."<sup>46</sup> From this perspective the primary function of human consciousness is the

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<sup>46</sup> Robert Ornstein, *The Evolution of Consciousness: Of Darwin, Freud and Cranial Fire* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 2. Imbedded in Ornstein's fundamental perspective on human consciousness is an important contradistinction which in most of his work is not specifically addressed, and that is the paradigm Darwin's theory displaced: the notion that "all knowledge comes from experience." Ornstein takes this point up in *The Evolution of Consciousness* and contrasts Darwin's view with "British empiricists," like Hume and Locke, who saw the mind as essentially the product of associations made

survival of the species. It is this aspect of human consciousness, its functional role as guarantor of the survival of the species, that informs the authors' work in the area of human consciousness. Ornstein provides a simplified summary of Darwin's theory of natural selection which he proposed to account for the long, complex processes that combine over enormous stretches of time to produce the variations of species that exist at any given time.

The process works in this way: Certain individuals are born with characteristics that enable them to better adapt to their circumstances, and thus they survive longer, to reproduce more successfully. They therefore pass on these characteristics to their progeny. The greater the fitness, the more surviving offspring.<sup>47</sup>

For the purposes of this study those aspects of the phenomenon of the evolution of consciousness which will be discussed will be limited to an investigation which begins at the point that human consciousness is a given. The focus then, is not on the evolutionary forces that brought us to this point but, rather, the ongoing maintenance of the species which to some degree is the province of human consciousness.<sup>48</sup> Topically, our entry point will be that of the dynamics of personal or individual human consciousness.

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through experience, opening the consideration of the environment upon human learning as well as the view of the human mind as a blank slate. An evolutionary perspective, shared by the three psychologists in the present study, in some sense holds quite the opposite view, whereby evolutionary forces deem the human individual a network of adaptive and reactive influences which, when pressed to the extreme, borders on determinism. (I am indebted to Charles Swencionis here whose book review touched upon Ornstein's discussion on Locke and the prevailing empiricist perspective. Review of *The Evolution of Consciousness: Of Darwin, Freud, and Cranial Fire: The Origins of the Way we Think*, by Robert Ornstein, *PsycCRITIQUES*, 38, n. 4 [April 1993], 2.)

<sup>47</sup> Ornstein, *Evolution of Consciousness*, 25.

<sup>48</sup> This mirrors the treatment of the topic Ornstein takes in his earlier work, *The Psychology of Consciousness*, published in 1972. His later work, *The Evolution of Consciousness* (1991), takes up the wider topic of evolutionary development of human consciousness.

In this regard it is not an overstatement to claim that personal consciousness creates for us “our world.”<sup>49</sup> It gives us what we need to know about our personal environment that will allow us to function and interact with the objects of our reality. How do we construct this world then? A large part of how individual human consciousness forms and operates has to do with a process of filtering. This filtering process is itself a survival tactic in that humans could not endure the flood of stimuli that regularly present themselves to each of us at any given time. As the notion of “filtering” suggests, the formation of a personal consciousness is a process that limits, narrows and selects from the nearly unlimited data presented.<sup>50</sup>

Our first contact with external data is through our senses. Human sense organs, which provide us with information about the outside world, are themselves equipped to receive and transmit only selective data from the range available. Thus the eye, for example, is restricted to receiving only an infinitesimal proportion of the entire expanse of “electromagnetic spectrum.”<sup>51</sup> Similarly, the ear is capable of receiving only a fraction of sound waves that exist. In general, though our senses provide for us an enormous amount of information—too much for us to handle—they are not sufficient to receive

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<sup>49</sup> Ornstein, *Psychology of Consciousness*, 16. The emphasis here is on the phenomenological aspects of consciousness and its conditioning by individual perceptual and conceptual processes. However, in *The Evolution of Consciousness*, a stronger formative role is given to “the world” in relation to the specific forms that individual consciousness takes. For example in a chapter titled “How the World Develops the Mind,” the author’s fundamental thesis of the constructed nature of individual consciousness is assumed but his emphasis changes. One view says the mind gives us our world and the other says the world determines the contents of the mind. See chapter 11 of *Evolution of Consciousness*.

<sup>50</sup> Ornstein, *Psychology of Consciousness*, 17.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

most of the actual data in the physical world. That is, “if we do not possess a ‘sense’ for a given energy-form, we do not experience its existence.” Ironically though we think of the senses as our window to the world, which in a limited way they are, yet we are generally not aware of an equally important function from a survival perspective—“data reduction.”

Our obliviousness to the workings of human consciousness, particularly in its limiting operations, give rise to a host of problems, particularly in that we generally mistake the constructed, limited, and selective process of world building—our personal consciousness—for a true picture of the world. That is, we regularly unconsciously assign to the contents of our personal consciousness the status of reality, generally receiving the data unquestioningly. This phenomenon operates in the microcosmic sense but gains its real power and efficacy on the macrocosmic level—the development and transmission of human cultures. From the perspective of the survival function of human consciousness, in both its individual and the communal manifestations, human culture has an important role to play in the validation of individual, personal human consciousness. Human beings are alike in their reliance on the same sensory systems, thus they form a potent unanimity in their mutually reinforcing verification of the “reality” of the world as perceived.<sup>52</sup>

Ornstein explains,

It is important to realize that this kind of ‘validation’ is limited to the con-sensual—with the senses. Our ‘agreement’ on reality is subject to common shared limitations that evolved to ensure the biological survival of

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<sup>52</sup> Here are resonances of Peter Berger’s ground-breaking insights presented in his work *The Sacred Canopy*, though presented from a complementary sociological perspective.

the race. All humans may agree on certain events only because we are all similarly limited in our very structure as well as limited in our culture.<sup>53</sup>

Our personal consciousness is verified then in the collective agreement of like-minded members of the species. It is a system that works at every level.

An important aspect of cultural verification of personal consciousness is its use of language. Language provides a culture with its collective categories which in turn provide the basis for perception and conception. There is a way in which language both contributes to the contents of experience and at the same time sets limits on experiences. Language provides for the individual and the culture as a whole to articulate and conceive of concepts which through the mechanism of cultural validation assume a status of “givenness.” That they may, in fact, be purely arbitrary categories rarely comes to light. These concepts profoundly shape how the world is perceived and, in turn to a very large degree, determine the quality of our most fundamental experiences of the external world. Ornstein demonstrates this point when he says:

To use a language is to use a set of ready-made categories that must help shape individual consciousness... Within a linguistic community, the common language provides an almost unconsciously agreed-on set of categories for experience, and allows the speakers of that language to ignore experiences excluded by the common category system....<sup>54</sup>

This interplay between individual personal consciousness and the creation of human culture is an essential aspect of human consciousness that has enormous repercussions on

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<sup>53</sup> Ornstein, *Psychology of Consciousness*, 24.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 40-41.

both sides. Now we will turn from this broad and general sketch of human consciousness, to examine two specific aspects of the phenomenon that are particularly relevant to the topic of this study: processes referred to as “habituation” and “categorization.”

### *Habituation*

The fact that the sense organs are at least partially designed for screening and limiting of data gives rise to some of their specific functions. One such important function is to furnish the individual with information on the relative safety or danger in one’s external environment. To this end, the senses and the cells of our nervous system in general have evolved such that they respond to or perceive only *changes* in the field of stimuli. This means that the eye and the ear become familiar with a range of visual and audio stimuli over time and thus react to any given stimulus only up to a certain point after which the phenomenon referred to as “habituation” is operative. Once habituated to a particular sensual stimulus it is effectively screened out of awareness, such that we would say we no longer “notice it.” The stimulus is still there, but it is essentially non-existent from a sensory perspective. At this point only a change in the visual or audio field will be detected. There are numerous practical examples that each of us can produce from our own experiences to verify the existence of this phenomenon of consciousness. A well-known and fascinating example proving a striking illustration of the phenomenon of “habituation” is illustrated well by what is referred to as the “‘Bowery El’ effect.” The Bowery El refers to the stretch of railroad in New York City that rose to fame when its destruction created quite a stir among residents habituated to its nighttime run through their neighborhood. Shortly after the train stopped running local police departments

received a number of similar calls reporting unusual and ominous, though varied and vague, occurrences. After investigating these reports the police department realized that the reported events coincided with the nightly run of the Bowery El. Curiously, these New Yorkers responded to something that they *did not* hear. It is a dramatic demonstration of the process of habituation that constitutes a fundamental aspect of human conscious awareness.<sup>55</sup>

### *Experience our Categories*

Our discussion so far suggests the arbitrariness of the formation of individual human consciousness. The question then arises, if we don't experience the world as it is then what do we experience? Our categories psychologists tell us. In and through our sensory contact with the world, the necessity from a survival perspective, to determine the nature of the data impinging upon our sensory system, results in a process of sorting, filtering and screening of information about the data. The process is an empirical one as previous experience with similar data has created for us a naming device designed to facilitate this process. Over repeated experience with a given stimulus a category is formed with its constituent characteristics. Later similar (though, not necessarily, identical) experiences are then conveniently dropped into the general category. The more data that reaffirm the characteristics established in the category such that it can successfully be applied to new similar data, the stronger the category. This categorization means that our response to new stimuli is not the actual experience-in-time but a memory

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<sup>55</sup> Ornstein, *Psychology of Consciousness*, 30.



or association made between the object and our stored categories.<sup>56</sup> We don't really see a tree, rather, the visual stimulus coming from our contact with a tree triggers the category we have labeled "tree." The tree we then see is a conglomerate conception of what a tree is. As a result of this process our actual contact with the outside world is minimal. This process is an efficient one which as seen from a survival perspective efficaciously achieves its end. Categorization is a valuable trait that allows individuals to recognize immediate danger and increase the likelihood of a quick (and life-saving) response. It comes at a price however, since the likelihood that our new experiences will dislodge old categories that in themselves might not coincide precisely with reality is significantly reduced.

Another aspect of this process of categorization might not be immediately apparent. The naming function referred to as "categorization," it seems, not only determines how we will name or classify any given stimulus that enters our sensory field; research indicates that it can also determine the nature of the sensory experience itself. This is to say that often "we see what we expect to see." The reference here is to the phenomenon whereby the brain which provides the conceptual framework for processing incoming stimuli simultaneously affects the way the object is apprehended by our sensory systems. Researchers differ in opinions regarding the degree to which the brain influences or determines what is actually perceived by the senses, but there is general consensus concerning the "active role of the brain in determining the contents of

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<sup>56</sup> Ornstein, *Psychology of Consciousness*, 31-32.

awareness.”<sup>57</sup> Thus, to some extent at least, it can be said that we experience that which we anticipate. The personal world that each of us lives in is constructed out of complex processes and interactions between and among the brain, the sensory organs and muscular systems of the body, all working with unimaginable complexity to provide a living environment that is both stable, yet surprisingly adaptable. The price, as suggested earlier, is insularity and loss of real contact with reality.

This conflict between the goal of stability as a survival strategy, and the ever-changing environment that is the “real world” creates a challenge for the human individual and the species as a whole. Moreover, as each individual develops throughout their lifespan a certain level of instability is inevitable, as old categories are challenged by new experiences, formal and informal. Through specific and particular educational experiences, exposure to new data compels the individual to reconsider established categories. This necessitates a reorganization of previously stored input, a process that reverberates outwardly to affect categories in place. Thus it seems that a basic instability is inevitable. How, then, does the organism achieve this goal of relative stability of consciousness so critical to its psychological and physical survival? That is, how does the human organism achieve this pressing goal for psychological security in the face of an ever changing and unpredictable outside world? The answer to the question according to Robert Ornstein is “through our thoughts.” “[m]ore than any other factor, thoughts are the foundation of normal consciousness. We maintain and refresh our personal

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<sup>57</sup> Ornstein, *Psychology of Consciousness*, 36.

construction through continued thoughts.”<sup>58</sup> The stabilizing function is specifically provided in the way in which each of us experiences consciousness as a consistent and persistent flow of thoughts. The now familiar phrase “stream of consciousness” was coined by William James, to describe this phenomenon of human consciousness:

Consciousness then does not appear to itself chopped up in bits. Such words as ‘chain’ or ‘train’ do not describe it fitly, as it presents itself in the first instant. It is nothing jointed, it flows. A ‘river’ or a ‘stream’ are the metaphors by which it is naturally described. *In talking of it thereafter, let us call it the stream of thought, of consciousness, or of subjective life.*<sup>59</sup>

This incessant flow of thoughts which forms the psychic background to our lives provides for us the maintenance of the world that our consciousness has constructed. In a very real sense our “stream of consciousness” is the rudder that stabilizes our sense of ourselves and the world around us. Its significance cannot be underestimated.

### Modes of Consciousness

In this next section the discussion will turn to a related topic within the study of the operations of human consciousness, the notion of variant “modes” of consciousness. Once more the authors communicate their insights into the phenomenon of conscious awareness in broad strokes. Here we will rely on the work by Arthur Deikman for our investigation of this topic.

Deikman defines his concept of what he refers to as “bimodal” nature of human

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<sup>58</sup> Ornstein, *Psychology of Consciousness*, 38.

<sup>59</sup> From William James, *Principles of Psychology*, I, 239. Quoted from Ornstein, *Psychology of Consciousness*, 38.

consciousness as a

model in which psychological and physiological variations are viewed as manifestations of two basic organismic states or modes that are coordinated to a particular function.<sup>60</sup>

This definition captures the three fundamental aspects of his formulation of bimodal consciousness: that each mode is discernible empirically as well as experientially, in and through the measurable psychological and physiological changes; that attributes and qualities which together characterize each of the two modes of consciousness differ from each other to the degree that their respective operations can properly be classified as fundamentally different modes of operation; and finally, while these modes manifest distinct and separate clusters of psychological and physiological attributes, their actual operation in the human individual is characterized by an overall interrelatedness and interdependence. We will now look closely at Deikman's articulation of bimodal consciousness.

The two modes of consciousness are designated as the "action"<sup>61</sup> and "receptive" modes. The action mode is that which we are perhaps most familiar with and which we associate most with perceptual and conceptual learning. It is the action mode that allows human individuals to act on their environment, essentially, to survive. From a "physiological" perspective this mode involves the "striate muscle" and "sympathetic nervous" systems. Correlative "psychological manifestations" include "focal attention,

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<sup>60</sup> Arthur Deikman, "Bimodal Consciousness," *Archives of General Psychiatry* 25 (1971): 481.

<sup>61</sup> The author uses interchangeably two words to designate this mode of consciousness: action and active. The former is used in "Bimodal Consciousness and the Mystic Experience" and "Bimodal Consciousness" and the latter is used in "'Intention, Self and Spiritual Experience.'"

object-based logic, heightened boundary perception, and the dominance of formal characteristics over the sensory....”<sup>62</sup> These physiological and psychological operations provide the optimum conditions for the individual to interact with objects encountered in the environment. In this mode then, the individual is focused on physical or psychological survival. Thus, the approach to the world when operating under the action mode utilizes those functions which allow us to accomplish this goal. Since survival and safety is relative to real or imagined threats from the external environment, operating in this mode means that one’s approach to the environment is objective in relation to oneself. In fact, this aspect of the action mode, its objectivity in relation to the encountered stimuli along with other characteristics specific to sensory apprehension, provides essential functions particularly during periods of development and when encountering new and yet indeterminate objects in the environment.<sup>63</sup>

Thus, seen from an evolutionary perspective as a survival trait the functions associated with the action mode of consciousness are highly effective. However, these same characteristics from a different perspective contain within themselves the seeds of some of the most pressing human dysfunctions and sources of human suffering. The act of objectifying the environment means that the self is necessarily perceived as “object-like, discrete from its environment, vulnerable to isolation.”<sup>64</sup> Thus the individual feels

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<sup>62</sup> Deikman, “Bimodal Consciousness,” 481.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Arthur Deikman, “Intention, Self, and Spiritual Experience: A Functional Model of Consciousness,” in *Toward a Science of Consciousness: The First Tucson Discussions and Debates*, ed. Stuart R. Hameroff, Alfred W. Kaszniak and Alwyn C. Scott (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 701.

distanced from the natural world, from other human persons, and even from the self, which is also perceived objectively.

By contrast, the receptive mode approaches the environment with the goal of receiving or “taking in” the world. Here the major physiological activity is under the sway of the “sensory-perceptual” rather than the “muscle system,” as is the case in the action mode.<sup>65</sup> From a psychological perspective attributes characteristic of the receptive mode are “diffuse attending, paralogical thought processes, decreased boundary perception, and the dominance of the sensory over the formal.”<sup>66</sup> Here there is not the intention to establish cause and effect, thus logical thought is not employed; nor is there a need to create distance, separation and difference. Thus the experience of the self is “relatively undifferentiated, nonlocalized, not distinct from the environment.”<sup>67</sup> The linearity of action experienced according to a specific time/space continuum gives way in the receptive mode to living in the present moment in which the world and its elements converge and coalesce in a dynamic, organic process.<sup>68</sup> The receptive mode is the primary mode associated with the earliest stages of the human development. As the individual moves beyond the infancy stage of development the main focus for the organism is upon “biological survival,” an end most readily secured through the

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<sup>65</sup> Deikman, “Bimodal Consciousness,” 481.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Deikman, “Intention,” 698.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

characteristics intrinsic to the action mode.<sup>69</sup> It is then that the action mode assumes priority as the individual's customary approach to the environment.

However, although for purposes of explanation in this discussion, the two modes have been treated as separate and distinct from one another, when encountered in a living organism "the attributes or components are interrelated to form a system" neither functioning exclusively and/or distinct from the other. Therefore it is most accurate to speak in terms of "dominance" of one mode over the other. The receptive mode, as stated earlier, is characterized by the intention of receiving or taking in that which is being apprehended. Thus there are many ways that this mode is utilized in everyday life: aesthetic experiences, encounters of love, meditation and other religious practices, and a variety of sensual, pleasurable activities, to name a few. In these instances, the receptive mode is that which dominates conscious awareness.

Again, developmentally the action mode dominates when the basic approach to the environment is that of manipulation, acquisition and control. The individual objectifies the self in relation to the external objects encountered. It is a necessary stage in the learning process and vital for the psychological and physical survival of the organism. But it comes with its difficulties and limitations. According to our authors the problem in relation to these two modes of consciousness occurs in cultures that validate and privilege the action mode. These two modes are actually complementary approaches to conscious awareness, each providing their specific set of operations which together provide a fuller, richer and more accurate apprehension of the world, knowledge and

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<sup>69</sup> Deikman, "Bimodal Consciousness," 481.

human experience. Their complementarity is aptly illustrated in relation to the two modes and the acquisition of knowledge, specifically, what Deikman refers to as “creative intuition.”<sup>70</sup> He describes a scenario in which the active and direct pursuit to resolve a particular problem is initially unsuccessful. After considerable time and effort the solution remains elusive, leaving one with a sense of futility at ever reaching resolution. The quest is abandoned and attention is diverted to other things. It is often the experience at this point that the solution presents itself unbidden and quite “out of the blue.” This not unfamiliar scenario is an excellent demonstration of the complementarity of these two modes. Deikman explains the phenomenon “in terms of the modal model” of consciousness:

...the process begins with the use of the action mode during the preliminary or preparatory stage. When progress is blocked, a shift takes place to the receptive mode. In that mode, our capacity for creative synthesis is able to function and the intuitive leap to a new configuration takes place. Then, we shift back to the action mode in order to integrate the new formulation with our previous knowledge and to communicate it to others.<sup>71</sup>

Though not entirely unfamiliar to most of us, most likely we are generally much more comfortable with an approach to problem solving and acquisition of knowledge in which the action mode is dominant if not exclusive. Influenced by the rational approach to knowledge, which is the ideal of the scientific method, other forms of knowing, such as

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<sup>70</sup> Arthur Deikman, “Bimodal Consciousness and the Mystic Experience,” in *Symposium on Consciousness*, ed. Philip Lee, et al. (New York: Viking, 1974), 83. Deikman devotes an entire chapter to a discussion of “intuition,” in his book, *Observing Self* (43-62) whereby he provides a historical development of the concept in the Western intellectual tradition. In a general sense he defines intuition as the acquisition of knowledge which is “direct...not mediated by reason or sensory organs,” 44-45.

<sup>71</sup> Deikman, “Bimodal Consciousness and the Mystic Experience,” 84.



intuitive, are ignored, considered too “subjective,” “unscientific” and even “pathological.”<sup>72</sup> Here lies the problem, says Deikman, claiming that

“[w]e gain nothing by restricting our functions to one mode or the other. Rather, we need the capacity to function in both modes, as the occasion demands... Without knowing it, under the banner of the scientific method, our thinking has been constricted. It is time that we made the receptive mode, and the experience which it engenders, a legitimate option for ourselves and for science.”<sup>73</sup>

It is a pressing problem, according to Deikman, one which threatens the “biological survival” of the world as we know it. Ironically, the mode of consciousness which does such a good job for the survival of the human species, the action mode, when its functions are not allowed to coalesce with the complementary functions of the receptive mode, actually threatens the very survival it so efficaciously secured. We will now turn to the task of integration and analysis as we bring together these two views on the state of human consciousness.

### Summary

In this chapter each party in the dialogue of this study presented their answer to the question “what is the problem with human consciousness?” The story that *The Cloud* author presents is situated within the context of Christian anthropology which teaches that the goal of human life—its perfection—is union with God. Human beings were created to live in full communion with God and enjoyed this union before Adam and Eve’s fall from grace. This fall of humanity marks a separation and distance from God in

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<sup>72</sup> Deikman, “Bimodal Consciousness and the Mystic Experience,” 87.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 86-87.

which the soul longs for this union but cannot achieve it without great difficulty and long effort. The faculties of the soul, designed to facilitate our union with God, have been severely weakened and compromised in their integrity such that their operations are counterproductive to this end. We often experience this fallen state as a scattering of the mind and the affections, a condition characterized by a vulnerability to the suggestions of the mind through random and unwanted thoughts. Once entertained these rogue thoughts incite the memory, imagination and emotions from which further thoughts are generated and entertained, resulting in a state of dissipation and confusion, frustrating our best efforts to seek God. Yet, the author implies that the distance that exists between God and God's creation has an ontological basis that is not easily overcome. A central teaching of *The Cloud* author, in the Dionysian tradition in which he stands, is that God is incomprehensible to the intellect. The intellect is unable to provide the human soul with the direct knowledge of God that is sought. But the author maintains that a kind of knowledge of God is possible for human individuals to attain, even in this fallen state—knowledge through love. Yet it is a difficult teaching to grasp, one that remains beyond the facility of the intellect to penetrate. This is the human condition, according to *The Cloud* author, “a wretched state.”

Part 2 of this chapter provided an introduction to the work of the two authors representative of the psychological side of the dialogue, presenting relevant selections from their writings which provide a snapshot of the authors' story, or, their analysis of the problem with human consciousness. Their story is situated in the context of evolutionary biology, particularly Darwin's theory of the evolution of the human species

and the theory of natural selection. The authors present a view of the formation of human consciousness which highlights the arbitrary and constructed nature of ordinary human consciousness. Here the role of human culture on the formation and maintenance of individual personal human consciousness was established. Within this presentation special attention was paid to the topic of habituation and categorization, two general mechanisms that underscore the authors' theses concerning one of the primary roles of human consciousness in relation to its predominant function as a survival trait. Then the discussion turned to the exploration of the bimodal nature of human consciousness, an explanation of how these modes function in human consciousness, and how the imbalance of the one over the other creates many problems for individuals and the societies they create.

### Part 3: Integration and Analysis

#### The Human Condition

We begin this comparative examination with the topic that opened this chapter—the human condition. I will start with the general reflection that both parties articulate their stories in terms of a trajectory which orients and propels the human species. For *The Cloud* author the human condition is seen in terms of what was lost. Things are not as they once were for the human race. Presently, they are oriented towards a recovery of what was lost, a return back to a blessed state of perfection and wholeness. In the perspective presented by our psychology authors the human species is, in a sense, on a path towards transcendence. That is, the evolutionary development that culminated in human consciousness represents an unparalleled advance among living species, one that has advanced human beings exponentially beyond that of their nearest biological cousin. In both cases the specific direction of the trajectory that is the human journey and the circumstances which launched them upon this path determine to various degrees the nature of the human existential condition. For *The Cloud* author, situated in traditional Christian anthropology, the punishment fits the crime. Humans encounter difficulties now in their path back to God that correspond to the choice they made in the fall of their first parents. Human beings in their likeness to God were created for the fulfillment of their natures in and through union with God. They rejected this relationship and through their disobedience chose independence from God. This ultimately moved them away from God and towards lower forms of the created world. So basically, *The Cloud* sees the human species as having moved from more to less, while the evolutionary perspective shared by

the psychology authors orients human beings in the other direction.

#### Faculties of the Mind

As already stated, *The Cloud* author ties his teaching on the faculties of the mind to original sin. In this exposition the author describes each faculty first in its pre-fall state and then contrasts it to its current corresponding corrupted version. The portrait that emerges is one of inner struggle, conflict and unrest. The individual is now in an adversarial relationship to the powers of the mind. One can no longer rely upon them to act according to her/his best interest. There is also the sense that the mind cannot be trusted to provide accurate information about the world, specifically, that it can no longer provide sound guidance in moral choices. In short, at every level our mental powers are now at odds with the attainment of our prior blessedness, of the ultimate goal and potential for human beings.

In the evolutionary perspective on human consciousness as interpreted by the psychology authors it is the ultimate end—survival of the species—that exerts the major influence upon the specific structure that human consciousness has taken. At first glance that aspect of human consciousness that predominates in the evolutionary model as presented by the two authors is its relationship to the real world. The authors characterize the perceptual and conceptual processes as one of expediency, navigating through the external world quickly and efficiently providing for the individual that picture of the world that is designed to assure their physical and psychological survival. Seen from this perspective the system is extremely efficient and efficacious of its goal. However, seen from other perspectives these processes present challenges for the human species,

problems which originate in the development of consciousness itself.

Specifically, in this chapter we have looked at the authors' discussion of habituation, the process by which human beings become habituated to regularly experienced stimuli over time. It provides a short cut for processing information and means that once habituation characterizes one's response to external data she/he no longer notices the stimulus. Since much of human learning falls into this category, one's individual contact with the real world, the world as it is will always be significantly compromised. Related to habituation is the phenomenon of categorization. This again is an efficient system by which the organism can respond to stimuli in the environment quickly, thus assuring their safety. Categorization is the mind's filing system whereby data is sorted according to characteristics and qualities known from previously encountered data. This process whereby data is selectively categorized is influenced by information already stored in the individual consciousness. In fact, these influences affect the way in which one perceives the new stimuli, distorting, in a sense, the actual encounter with the outside environment. The ultimate effect of categorization is that one is insulated from real contact with the external world. It has made direct contact unnecessary as the organism now relies upon stored categories for information about the outside world, exchanging stored associations, memory and imagination to determine the nature of objects encountered in the environment. Much of human experience consists of this interchange between the actual stimulus and the mind's filing system. The experience itself is predominantly cognitive and only minimally informed by the actual contact with data. This is compounded by the fact that this process of categorization influences how

we will perceive new stimuli. That is, based on pre-formed categories, what we “see,” “hear,” “taste,” etc., is determined to some degree by what we have learned to expect in similar experiences. Our perceptions or experiences of the external world do not always match reality.

To summarize, then, it can be said that there are many common elements in the two perspectives on the condition of the human mind. In each version there is a sense that the mind is easily duped or at least that what one assumes to be true of reality is not entirely accurate, or at least, that it is not the whole story, the whole of reality. They both have in common the belief that the powers of the mind do not always operate in ways that are in accord with our best interests. They are in agreement that the system is counterproductive to the realization of goals related to human fulfillment, peace and well-being. Both express the notion of the intransigency of mental functions, that is, that they appear to have a life of their own, subject to their own agenda and resistant to conscious control and change. They both describe the human condition in terms of estrangement, though each attributes this to different causes. For *The Cloud* author human beings, once enjoying perfect union with God, through rebellion are now separated and trying to find their way back. Though less formalized in the evolutionary perspective the psychology authors’ version suggests that through the processes of learning intended to provide for the safety and survival of the organism, human consciousness operates in ways that objectify the external world. Processes such as habituation and categorization are extremely efficient from the survival perspective. Yet they diminish authentic human contact and interaction with the environment, in favor of reliance upon mental operations,

stored information and memory.

### Knowing by Intellect vs. Knowing by Love

One area in which the psychology authors' perspective of human consciousness provides a particularly useful vehicle for understanding *The Cloud* author's more esoteric teachings is in their exposition of two modes of consciousness. I have in mind here the fourteenth-century author's dichotomous relationship between knowing of the intellect and knowing by love. In *The Cloud* teaching the relationship between the two kinds of knowing, after the author establishes the existence of these two ways of knowing, is that there exists a fundamental and even ontological distinction between the two. That is, knowledge of the material world—all that is known to exist as part of the world created by God—is the province of the powers of the intellect, and its domain of knowing is limited to this realm. As God's being is ontologically other than all God's created world, knowledge of God requires a radically distinct faculty which the author refers to as "knowing by love" or the "knowing power of love."

Deikman's discussion of the two modes of consciousness speaks in terms of two distinct approaches to external data or stimuli, or, as the author often says, two different approaches to the world. These differences are categorized as both physiological and psychological in nature. Each mode of operation is accompanied by correlative intentions or dispositions which one brings to the external world. In the action mode the intent is to act upon the world, to manipulate, control or retreat from a given stimulus according to the overall aim of securing one's safety and survival. Intentions when operating according to the characteristics of the receptive mode call forth different physiological



and psychological responses. The overall intention of the receptive mode is to receive or take in the world. While the action mode is characterized by an objective stance towards the external stimuli, the position one takes towards the external world when the receptive mode is operative is that of subjectivity or even unity. The action mode requires that one's separateness be upheld while in the receptive mode one's sense of boundaries and otherness is diminished and even dissolved.

A look at the *way* that Deikman presented the material to explain his thesis that there are two distinct modes of consciousness provides a helpful analogy for understanding *The Cloud* author's theme of the love/knowledge dichotomy. Although Deikman concludes his presentation of this theme with the observation that in the human individual these two modes are interactive and interdependent such that it is more accurate to speak in terms of dominance of one mode over the other, his first task was to establish their distinctiveness. Thus, each is introduced with an emphasis on their antithetical relationship, accomplished through the author's list of contrasting pairs in establishing the respective qualities of each mode. Deikman first highlighted their differences to argue for their distinctiveness, to isolate their activity, and to expose their inherently separate functions. Once his argument for their separate domains was sufficiently presented the author tempered these assertions with the caveat that when encountered in real, everyday experiences and conditions, the two modes function in a relationship of varying dominance and influence. Perhaps something very similar is operative in *The Cloud* author's teaching on knowing by the intellect in contrast to knowing by love. Here the author is heavily influenced by the Dionysian insistence upon

the otherness of God in comparison to all the created world. The author then engages in the hyperbolic play of contrast and comparison<sup>74</sup> of knowing and loving, a knowing which like the comparison between the creature and creator is distinct and absolute.

### Love as a Faculty of Knowing

The other aspect of *The Cloud* author's teaching on the intellect versus love dichotomy is his acknowledging of each as a faculty of knowing; this discussion culminates in the claim that the knowing of the latter is far superior to that of the former. Earlier in chapter 2 within the context of *The Cloud* section, we explored the topic of the "illuminative power of love," a notion that is not self-evident and required interpretive analysis. Here, relying upon William Johnston's insights on the topic we spoke in terms of love's transformative power which over time becomes a guiding force, a force which increasingly impels the contemplative to follow a divinely ordained path, one which experientially remains indistinct and obscure, yet, one which becomes ever more intense and influential. Though the contemplative's experience remains one characterized more as a "blind stirring of love," in essence, there is in this powerful experience of love a "true discretion and the true wisdom"<sup>75</sup> of God's guidance. Although this discussion is one more amenable to experiential validation than through logical discourse, here I think Deikman's discussion on "creative intuition" can be called upon to facilitate the accessibility of this *Cloud* teaching.

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<sup>74</sup> According to Hodgson, it is also characteristic of *The Cloud* author's style: "...the author of the *Cloud* group proceeds by distinction, he affirms through antitheses, his discrimination is appropriately expressed in paradox and epigram." "Walter Hilton and *The Cloud of Unknowing*," *Modern Language Review* 50 (1955): 404.

<sup>75</sup> Johnston, *Mysticism*, 123.

Recall that we introduced the concept of “creative intuition” within the context of Deikman’s exposition of the two modes of consciousness. Here, he utilized a familiar anecdotal occurrence to illustrate the interplay between these two modes engaged in the task of problem solving. In Deikman’s illustration the powers of logical and rational inquiry fail to culminate in a resolution despite a prolonged and systematic attempt, at which point the enterprise is abandoned. Later, a solution springs forth into consciousness unbidden. Deikman made use of this example to demonstrate the interplay between the two modes of consciousness—the active and receptive. What Deikman refers to here as “creative intuition” is tied to a shift in one’s disposition towards the problem at hand. It is however tied to the previous work of conscious, logical and rational mental processes, in that these constitute its foundational basis. Thus, this illustration demonstrates the interdependence of the two modes. It also underscores their fundamentally distinct intentional dispositions: that of active and receptive approaches to knowing.

This insight by Deikman provides a means of further understanding *The Cloud* author’s thesis regarding the antithesis between knowing of the intellect and knowing by love, specifically, his teaching that love is a faculty of knowledge. *The Cloud* author associates knowing of the intellect with a disposition that seeks knowledge of God for the sake of the gifts God gives, in contrast to knowing God as God is in Himself—the pure being of God—apart from consolations and other gifts, spiritual and material. In the latter disposition, surrender and thus, receptivity, are qualities that characterize the contemplative search for God. It is, of course, the disposition of the lover who surrenders the self to another, whose intent is to receive, who sees her/himself not objectively

separate and distinct but subjectively and in relation to the other. The qualities described by Deikman in the receptive mode and the application of the bimodal system to the acquisition of knowledge provide a link for bridging the divide between *The Cloud's* sharp dichotomy between knowing by the intellect and knowing by love. It can also move us a bit further towards understanding the author's teaching on love in its illuminative function.

### 3. WHAT IS THE SOLUTION TO THE EXISTENTIAL HUMAN CONDITION?

In this chapter we will shift from the problem to the solution as we entertain the response of each party to the question: What is the solution? Part 1 on *The Cloud* author will focus on the author's descriptions of the transformed state, articulated in terms of divine union. Part 2 will explore the psychology authors' contribution to this topic. In both cases the parties have placed their hope in a new humanity: a way of being in relationship to the self, the external world and fellow human beings that is marked by extraordinary qualities and characteristics. Similarly, their portrait of the transformed person was inspired by some level of encounter with actual, specific individuals or groups of individuals whose behaviors and demeanors diverge radically from those ordinarily encountered in the course of human interactions. It is this encounter that has shaped their understanding of the human potential.

#### **Part 1: *The Cloud***

*The Cloud* author, following in the Christian mystical tradition, speaks of this transformation in the context of divine union. The full title of the author's central treatise, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, states specifically that divine union is at the center of the work: "Here beginneth a book of contemplation, the which is called the cloud of unknowing, in the which a soul is oned with God."<sup>1</sup> We also see from the author's title that he has used

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<sup>1</sup> Title of MS. Harleian 674 (Har<sup>1</sup>) here quoted from McCann's modern translation. Other variant titles include "The Divine Cloud of Unknowing," and "The Cloud of Contemplation." See Hodgson, *The Cloud*

the word “contemplation” as a synonym for divine union. Hodgson explains that here the author reflects the Medieval usage and connotations attached to the word “contemplation”:

Medieval mysticism was not vague. The medieval name for the mystical experience was “contemplation”, and many of the accounts of it are technical, describing a definite system, an accepted discipline, a steady and ordered progress towards a recognized goal.<sup>2</sup>

So it is that the author uses the word to designate both divine union and the set of disciplines that are intended to bring one to this union. Part 1 of this chapter will examine three specific ways that the author speaks of the experience of divine union: of the experience itself; divine union in relation to the effects of original sin; and, the fruits of divine union evidenced in and through descriptions of transformed persons.

#### Divine Union in Itself

Despite the clear and consistent theme throughout the corpus that the goal of contemplation is union with God, of the experience itself the author offers little specific information. Furthermore, when the author does speak of it, he often does so in the context of its ineffability. The following text from chapter seven of *Privy Counselling* is a good example:

...I tell you truly that if a soul which is occupied in it had a form of speech and a vocabulary to describe its experience, all the theologians in Christendom would be amazed at its

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*and Related Treatises*, xiv-xv for list of variant titles of treatises within the different manuscripts. Nieva makes a similar observation in his work. See *Transcending God*, 242.

<sup>2</sup> Phyllis Hodgson, *Three 14<sup>th</sup>-Century English Mystics* (London: Longmans, Green, 1967), 9.

wisdom. Yes, indeed; and in comparison to this wisdom, all their profound theological learning would appear plain foolishness. No wonder, then, if I cannot describe the excellence of this exercise in my crude and earthly speech. God forbid that it should be contaminated by the distortion which earthly language would give it.<sup>3</sup>

In this text the author makes two separate comparisons. First he states that in the event that one could actually succeed at describing the experience, the quality of the description would exceed all known “theological learning.” In this, and through his reference to such a hypothetical description as “this wisdom,” the author implies that the experience is one that imbues the recipient with a superior knowing; specifically he states that it is a knowledge that makes “their profound theological learning...appear [as] plain foolishness.” The second comparison is that between the experience itself and any attempts to describe it. *The Cloud* author here refers to divine union as “the excellence of this exercise” which by comparison any attempts to describe it must rely upon “crude and earthly speech.” The author contrasts the experience itself and any language employed to communicate its superior reality, concluding that the experience is not only incommunicable but attempts to do so will inevitably result in a contamination and distortion of the experience.

Despite all of the author’s stated aversion to subjecting the naturally ineffable experience of divine union to descriptive analysis, the author does indeed have more to say about it than he has led us to expect. The following passages appearing in the final chapters of *Privy Counselling* are a good example. The context of the description is the author’s discussion of that stage in the spiritual journey “when the soul alternates

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<sup>3</sup> Walsh, *Pursuit*, 233-34.

between sharp consciousness of grace and a feeling of emptiness and abandonment,” which Hodgson says characterizes “the condition of the contemplative on the very verge of the Unitive life.”<sup>4</sup> The author talks about the waning and waxing of spiritual consolations experienced in the earlier stages. These consolations that were part of the journey in its early stages, he says, are only the “tokens of grace,” distinct from the constancy of God’s grace. It is a distinction that contrasts the earlier spiritual sensations which come and go, with the more permanent state of divine union. What follows below is the author’s description of this unitive state.

Now it is that you see your God and your love of him, both together; and you also experience him directly, as he is in himself, in the highest point of your spirit, by being made spiritually one with his love. This experience is, however, a blind one; it cannot be otherwise here on earth. ...He can be perceived and felt, truly and perfectly as he is in himself, only in purity of spirit—which is very different from any imaginative picture or false notion such as may come to us in this life.<sup>5</sup>

The sensible consolations of earlier times are now gone yet clearly something is “felt” in some inexplicable way. In fact, the author specifically says that the experience is a direct one, implying that the earlier felt consolations are inferior to the experience of God in divine union. He also continues to stress the ineffability, first by qualifying the encounter as a “blind one,” and then by contrasting it to other conceptual and perceptual experiences produced by the imagination or other “false notion, such as may come to us in this life.”

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<sup>4</sup> Hodgson, *The Cloud*, lv.

<sup>5</sup> Walsh, *Pursuit*, 245.



The author continues in this section of the treatise to expound further on the quality of this “direct” experience of God in divine union, in an attempt to communicate with more precision the specific experience that gives rise to the descriptive term “union.”

This sight and this feeling of God as he is in himself cannot be separated, in the mind of the person who sees and feels like this, from the being of God himself, any more than God himself can be separated from his own being: for God’s self and his existence are one, both in substance and in nature. For just as God cannot be separated from his existence because of natural union, so the soul who sees and feels in the way described cannot be separated from what he sees and feels, because of union in grace.<sup>6</sup>

This is a difficult passage and one that demonstrates the author’s theses regarding both the ineffability of the experience of divine union and the limits of ordinary language to convey the fullness of this most extraordinary occurrence. Here the author conveys a different, non-dualistic phenomenon, one in which the experience itself, or *that* which the individual “sees and feels...cannot be separated from *what* he sees and feels.”<sup>7</sup>

Overall, descriptions of divine union itself are not plentiful in the author’s corpus. Yet from the scanty texts dedicated to the topic some important information is provided. We learn that the state that is referred to as divine union is a radically different experience that defies descriptions using ordinary linguistic categories. The quality of the encounter with God, we learn, is qualified as a “direct” experience and is contrasted with other sensations commonly described as spiritual consolations. Finally, the author

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<sup>6</sup> Walsh, *Pursuit*, 245-46. See also *The Cloud*, chapters 12, 28, 29; and, *Privy Counselling*, chapter 5.

<sup>7</sup> Emphasis added.

attempts to communicate the phenomenon of divine union in terms that characterize it as non-dualistic and non-reflective in contrast to ordinary modes of conception and perception.

### Divine Union and the Effects of the Fall

The author makes bold claims for the contemplative life and one of these is his metaphysical declaration that “this [work] alone, of itself, destroys the root and ground of sin.”<sup>8</sup> He explains that here he is not speaking about personal, individual sins, but of the “whole root and ground of sin which always remains in a soul after confession, no matter how earnest it has been.” It is the practice of contemplation, he claims, that “withers away...the painful results of original sin.”<sup>9</sup> It is clear that the author thinks in terms of an undoing of the fall and this aspect of the discipline of contemplative prayer is integral to the author’s story. He counsels his reader that

...whoever desires to come to the purity which he lost because of sin, and arrive at that well-being where all sorrow passes away, must persevere in the labour of this exercise and endure the pain of it, whoever he be; whether he has been an habitual sinner or not.<sup>10</sup>

The fate that is the inheritance of every human being, original sin, remains in its effects despite the reception of the sacrament of Penance, and it is beyond our ability to control or extricate ourselves from its effects. Contemplation, however, provides a way out of

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<sup>8</sup> Walsh, *The Cloud*, 145. See also *The Cloud*, chapters 28, 29; *Privy Counselling*, chapter 5. As previously stated, *The Cloud* teaching here is not unique to mystical or traditional theology on this point: “This is the same teaching that we find in all the great writing mystics, and indeed in the New Testament, which, while it recognizes that Christians can sin, and therefore need forgiveness, also holds that ‘whosoever abideth in him (i.e. Christ) sinneth not’ (1John 3:6, 9; 5:18).” Wolters, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, 44-45.

<sup>9</sup> Walsh, *The Cloud*, 176.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

this existential condition and a way into a new life. The author says that since “all men were lost in Adam because he fell from this unitive affection”—that state of perfect contemplation of God enjoyed prior to the fall—now through contemplation, which is the way back to this unitive state, one can hope to experience a reversal of the ill effects suffered as a consequence of the fall. The author is clear that the ultimate source of this transformation is Christ’s perfect self-offering on our behalf, but the realization of it in each individual’s experience comes through the practice of contemplation.<sup>11</sup>

However, more than its negative function as a reversal of the effects of the fall the author gives to this exercise a most exalted positive, substantive role: the path to the perfection of all virtues. The author explains:

Not only does [contemplation] destroy the root and ground of sin, as far as that is possible here below, but it also acquires the virtues. For when it is truly implanted, all the virtues will be perfectly and delicately implanted, experienced and contained in it, without any mixture of motive. And no matter how many virtues a man may have, without this they will all be mixed with some crooked motive, and therefore they will be imperfect.<sup>12</sup>

As the author continues the discussion in this section, he elaborates upon the distinction he has made between virtue acquired on one’s own effort and virtue that comes from the gift of contemplation. Since God alone “is the pure cause of all virtues” only those whose virtues are the result of one’s having been perfectly united to God can be said to possess

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<sup>11</sup> Walsh, *Pursuit*, 225.

<sup>12</sup> Walsh, *The Cloud*, 146-47.

true virtue.<sup>13</sup> Walsh notes that the author's comparison here is based on the distinction in the Christian mystical tradition between "active and passive purification in the contemplative ascent." Through the progressive advance in the virtuous life of the earlier stages of the spiritual journey—its active pursuit—the contemplative achieves a level of freedom from vices and acquisition of virtue. Yet it isn't until the contemplative is touched through the passive purification that comes in divine union that the transformation reaches perfection. It is this passive purification that the author has in mind here in this passage, and it is the subject of the next section. Here the author provides several specific descriptions of this transformed state throughout *The Cloud* corpus which concretize this abstract discussion on virtue. The following section gives us a clear indication of what this notion of the perfection of virtue embodies.

#### Divine Union by its Fruits

There are a number of references throughout *The Cloud* corpus to divine union in the context of its visible effects on the one who has experienced it.<sup>14</sup> These references may be in the form of examples of some extraordinary display of virtue or absence of vice which one might enjoy as a result of having reached a state of perfection in the contemplative life. At other times the author will demonstrate these fruits by describing a hypothetical person who exhibits the qualities that are clearly extraordinary in nature.

The following is a good example of both types:

...it would give him true decorum both of body and soul,

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<sup>13</sup> Walsh, *The Cloud*, 147.

<sup>14</sup> See for example *The Cloud*, chapters 4, 25, 54, 61, 69.

and would make him truly attractive to all men and women who looked upon him. So much so that the most ill-favoured man or woman alive, if they could come by grace to work in this exercise, would suddenly be changed in appearance to such graciousness that all good people who saw them would wish and rejoice to have them in their company, and would be convinced that they had found spiritual peace and were strengthened in God's grace through their presence.<sup>15</sup>

The author then continues to relate how the gift of divine union would affect one's behavior, their everyday decision-making, and their effectiveness in ministry to others—all imbued with an ease and naturalness that suggests an inner freedom, profound love and uncanny powers of intuition:

Whoever truly possesses it will know how to govern himself and all that belongs to him by its power. He would be able to discern properly, at need, every kind of natural behaviour and disposition. He would know how to make himself all things to all men who lived with him, whether habitual sinners or not, without any sin on his own part. He would be the wonder of all who saw him, and would draw others by the help of grace to the work of that same spirit in which he himself is exercised. His looks and his words would be full of spiritual wisdom, full of fire and of fruitfulness, spoken with truth and soberness, without any falsehood, far removed from any hypocritical showing-off or pretence.<sup>16</sup>

This describes a quality of virtue and level of transparent goodness that radiates through to one's countenance casting a quality of physical attractiveness and mysterious allure

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<sup>15</sup> Walsh, *The Cloud*, 224.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 224-25.

that transcends any of the normal standards of physical attractiveness and beauty.<sup>17</sup>

The author also describes this person in terms of the individual's social interactions drawing an equally compelling portrait of the transformed person. The person described is the one who possesses a "love of God for himself above all creatures" and who has reached a state of perfection:

For the perfect [contemplative] here has no special regard for any individual, whether he is kinsman or stranger, friend or foe. For he considers all men alike as his kinsmen, and no man a stranger to him. He considers all men his friends and none his foes. So much so that he considers all those that cause him pain and do him mischief in this life to be his very special friends, and he considers that he is being moved to wish them as much good as he would to the dearest friend he has.<sup>18</sup>

Seen from the perspective of its social interactions this section speaks of inclusiveness, universal love and utter disregard for self-interest the likes of which most of us can scarcely imagine. This passage resounds with the sentiments of contemporary voices that see in this transformed state the only hope for the future of humankind. It is what Justin McCann had in mind in his introduction to *The Cloud* when he says of the author's descriptions of divine union that he claims "for this high life of contemplation a *great social efficacy* and a more perfect charity than is contained in the busy activity of

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<sup>17</sup> Simon Tugwell, in the Preface to Walsh's modern translation of *The Cloud*, gives a noteworthy reflection on the nature of divine union and the extraordinary effects upon the individual: "It is the union of our naked being with the naked being of God that anchors our whole life. Apart from such union there is bound to be something slightly contrived and artificial about all our behavior. Even our piety, even our virtues, will be slightly strained and unconvincing. But if we are enabled by God to approach him with the depth of ourselves in the mystery of his own transcendence, then our lives will become natural and well ordered." Walsh, *The Cloud*, xx.

<sup>18</sup> Walsh, *The Cloud*, 170.

others.”<sup>19</sup>

Thus the solution as seen through the eyes of *The Cloud* author is that we would return to the state from which we have fallen—life in union with God. Hampered by the radical nature of the experience which he claims renders it ineffable, the author expresses a reluctance to say too much about the experience itself. However, he says enough to make it clear that contemplation or union with God is a goal that is not only possible but is in a sense, natural, since it was our original state prior to the sin of our first parents. Divine union brings the story full circle as it wonderfully reverses the ill effects suffered by all through original sin. The author has demonstrated through descriptions of individuals who have reached this state of perfection that indeed the effects of original sin do appear to have been reversed as evidenced in these depictions of the transformed individuals’ behavior, demeanor and extraordinary acts of virtue.

## **Part 2: Psychology**

In light of the perspective that the two authors have taken on the nature of human consciousness as discussed in chapter two, in general we can say that their formulation of the solution to the human condition includes a conviction that the solution lies in our ability to transcend the limitations of ordinary consciousness into states of higher consciousness. However, they each bring their own unique perspective, emphasis and approach to this solution which they have in common. In part two of this chapter we will consider aspects of each of the three authors’ contribution to this topic. It will open with a look at Arthur Deikman’s understanding of “mystic consciousness.” We will then look at

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<sup>19</sup> McCann, *The Cloud*, xix. Emphasis added.

Robert Ornstein's contribution to the topic as we examine his work on "conscious evolution." Though influenced by Ornstein's study of mystical traditions the solution he offers is articulated according to the language and structure that is consonant with the principles of biological evolutionary forces. Finally, in section three we are introduced to Charles Tart's contribution to the solution which focuses on the scientific study of altered states of consciousness. In this initiative Tart calls for a new openness in the scientific community to consider a fuller range of experiential data and expand the current notion of what constitutes a valid "science."

#### Deikman and Mystic Consciousness

For Arthur Deikman the solution to the problems posed by human consciousness, as seen in light of its development in response to the evolutionary goal of the physical and psychological survival of the organism, lies in what mystical traditions have demonstrated to be the qualities of "spiritual consciousness."<sup>20</sup> This section will present three aspects of Deikman's presentation of spiritual consciousness. One aspect of his treatment of this topic is that Deikman sees in mystic consciousness an amelioration of human mental and emotional sufferings that have proved resistant to treatment through various customary psychological and psychiatric means. Deikman contends that "[t]he mystical tradition has been concerned with the very problems that modern psychotherapy

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<sup>20</sup> Deikman uses this term throughout his article, "Intention, Self, and Spiritual Experience: A Functional Model of Consciousness" (and other writings as well) in reference to the "higher consciousness" described variously in the literature of mystical traditions. Generally, this term is employed by Deikman when making reference to the spiritual traditions themselves as distinct from his analysis of the phenomenon from a psychological perspective.



has been unable to resolve.”<sup>21</sup> His experience as a practicing psychiatrist and his study of mystical traditions brought him to the following conclusions regarding the solution to the human existential condition:

The sages describe a Way that leads to a higher level of existence, one infinitely more desirable than the level on which most people conduct their lives. The mystical tradition does not offer therapy in the usual sense of that word, but achieving the goal of mysticism—experiencing the Real Self—is said to cure human suffering because its very basis is thereby removed.<sup>22</sup>

Drawn by mystical traditions’ accounts of spiritual consciousness and frustration over the intractable nature of many of the mental and emotional illnesses encountered in his practice, Deikman concludes that only such a radical restructuring of the human mind, as evidenced in mystic consciousness, will bring about any real and permanent remedy.

Related to this notion that spiritual traditions provide data that point to alternative solutions to the intractable mental, emotional and psychological ailments, is Deikman’s evaluation of the spiritual disciplines employed by these traditions to engender mystic consciousness. Deikman’s psychological study of meditation led him to the conclusion that these techniques which constitute the spiritual practices of these traditions were efficacious precisely because they function as a “reversal of the normal developmental process” of the structures of ordinary human consciousness.<sup>23</sup> Referring here specifically to the nature of mystic experience in relation to the physiological and psychological

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<sup>21</sup> Deikman, *Observing Self*, 4.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>23</sup> Arthur Deikman, “A Functional Approach to Mysticism,” *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 7 (2000): 77.

structures that give rise to ordinary consciousness, Deikman speaks of mystical transformation as stemming from such techniques which are, in part, a suspension of these operations. Here he refers to some of the processes studied in chapter two, specifically, “habituation” and “categorization,” to explain mystic consciousness:

[u]nder special conditions...as exist in religious mystics, the pragmatic systems of automatic selection are set aside or break down, in favor of alternate modes of consciousness whose stimulus processing may be less efficient from a biological point of view but whose very inefficiency may permit the experience of aspects of the real world formerly excluded or ignored.<sup>24</sup>

Here Deikman sees an antidote to those aspects of human consciousness which serve to narrow, limit and screen out the actual stimuli impinging upon the individual at any given time. Since the capacity of the senses to receive information in proportion to the full spectrum of existing reality is limited, the human perspective on the world results in a significantly diminished, circumscribed and even distorted perception of the world in relation to its reality. However, through a comprehensive set of spiritual disciplines practiced in spiritual traditions, these operations are circumvented and over time the structures gradually break down and their effects are neutralized.

The third component of Deikman’s presentation of spiritual consciousness is his conviction that one of the constituent aspects of mystical consciousness is that it brings with it a higher knowledge, one which Deikman claims transcends that of ordinary human intellection. The following quote from the author is indicative of this conviction.

According to mystics, the fundamental reality underlying appearances is not accessible to the senses. It cannot be

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<sup>24</sup> Arthur Deikman, “De-Automatization and the Mystic Experience,” *Psychiatry* 29 (1966): 327-8.

described in terms derived from the ordinary world, but it is accessible to mystical intuition. The perception of that underlying reality gives meaning to individual existence and does away with the fear of death and the self-centered desires that direct the lives of most people.<sup>25</sup>

From this quote and elsewhere in his writings Deikman claims that this higher knowledge that is inherent in “mystic intuition” is such that it appears to resolve for the individual matters relating to ultimate meaning and purpose of life. Mystics, he says, have tapped into experiences that enhance and broaden perceptual capacities, producing observable salutary effects, namely, an expanded access to reality the specific nature of which imbues the recipient with knowledge of the world which is ordinarily neither self-evident nor accessible .

This section quoted above hints at another component of the mystical experience that Deikman highlights from mystical literature—its “direct knowledge of basic reality.”<sup>26</sup> Significantly, nature of this superior mode of knowing is in part due to the means through which mystics receive it—directly. Thus, for Deikman, like mystics themselves, the quality of the mystic experience carries with it an enhanced capacity for perceiving the essence of reality. Here he speaks of it negatively, or in terms that characterize it as ineffable, stating that this knowledge of the mystics is “not accessible to the sense” and that “it cannot be described” using everyday language. Yet, the knowing to which he refers carries with it a profound sense of reality which transcends that of all other knowledge. Deikman explains it as a “shift from a consciousness focused on the

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<sup>25</sup> Deikman, *Observing Self*, 42.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

disconnected aspect of reality to a mode of consciousness responsive to its connected aspects.” The nature of the experience which is characterized as “direct” sets it apart from all other means of perception. Deikman underscores the significance of this aspect when he asserts that “although we may be intellectually persuaded that a unified world exists, the difficulty is to experience that world, not just to believe it.”<sup>27</sup>

Deikman presents a solution that fits the problem. Mystical traditions document a radical new way of being in the world, a state reached by some following a long period of adherence to specific spiritual disciplines. In this spiritual consciousness we see that the “very basis” of “human suffering” is extinguished. These spiritual disciplines, in part at least, initiate forces that ultimately break down those elements of ordinary human consciousness that give rise to varying degrees of human suffering and dysfunction. Most importantly mystic consciousness is the result of a direct experience of reality as a connected and unified whole. It is a higher knowledge, directly imparted, which has radically transformative effects for the individual who experiences it.

### Conscious Evolution

Robert Ornstein’s work is particularly tied to the study of human consciousness as a phenomenon which takes its structures from the forces of biological evolution. Although this development is assumed by each of the three authors it takes center stage in much of Ornstein’s writings. This is particularly evident in the specific articulation of the solution that he offers. The author claims that the human species has arrived at a stage in its evolutionary history that calls for a new perspective on the mechanisms that have

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<sup>27</sup> Deikman, “Functional Approach to Mysticism,” 89.

combined to produce the particular characteristics of human consciousness with its inherent ill effects. The new perspective he calls for is that we begin to take an active role in these evolutionary adaptations and transformations, or what he refers to as “conscious evolution.” “it is so urgent that we take a new and conscious role in our own mental evolution.”<sup>28</sup> This discussion of Ornstein’s work on “conscious evolution” will focus on three significant factors that have influenced his particular articulation of this topic.

The first important influence comes from his investigation of mystical traditions. For Ornstein mystic consciousness serves as the prototype upon which his hypothesis rests. Specifically, their data on mystic consciousness speaks of possibilities, of latent human potential. Referring to these spiritual traditions as “traditional psychologies,” Ornstein says that they “inform us that we have been too low in our estimation of ourselves.”<sup>29</sup> These traditions, which document a path to higher consciousness with its concomitant transformation in behavior, mental processes and view of reality, give substance to an otherwise vague and ambiguous ideal state. They document a radically different way of being in the world including a profound level of well being and freedom from the mental, emotional and interpersonal dysfunction that characterizes much of human experience. Taking these accounts seriously means that there is reasonable cause for raising the bar on what we can expect for human potential. Specifically, spiritual traditions trace a journey that began just like every human journey, with ordinary human

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<sup>28</sup> Ornstein, *Evolution of Consciousness*, 253. George Mandler challenges Ornstein’s assumptions expressed here as a “highly arguable conclusion that the amelioration of current human problems is to be found in individual changes in consciousness.” Review of *The Psychology of Consciousness* by Robert Ornstein,” *PsycCRITIQUES* 32, no. 4 (April 1987).

<sup>29</sup> Ornstein, *Psychology of Consciousness*, 181.

consciousness, yet, through specific disciplined techniques, concerted and persistent effort, these inherent limitations, obstacles and sufferings associated with normal consciousness have been overcome and surmounted.

A second aspect of Ornstein's ideas on conscious evolution has to do with recognition that despite the more problematic features of human consciousness which his work highlights, nonetheless human consciousness in its present state "is an exquisitely evolved" trait that in its own right speaks of marvels beyond our capacity to fully comprehend. Thus, its mere existence as an evolved trait and its specific constitutive functions and processes "provides a secure basis for the development of another mode of consciousness."<sup>30</sup> In light of the evolutionary forces which produced this marvel it is not unrealistic to anticipate conditions in which this mechanism might be harnessed and manipulated towards a target goal. Ornstein says that this is entirely in the realm of what is possible for the human species evidenced in and through the processes that initially brought us to this point in the evolution of human consciousness. It is a process that not only has equipped the species to adapt in response to a changing environment, but more relevant to Ornstein's thesis, humans are unique as a species in that they have learned "to change the world for [their] own benefit."<sup>31</sup> Ornstein cites examples that illustrate his point, namely, alterations we have made to plant and animal species; our successful adaptation of previously uninhabitable areas through development of suitable housing; and in our regular use of technology to manipulate the environment in unprecedented

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<sup>30</sup> Ornstein, *Psychology of Consciousness*, 182.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 267.

ways.<sup>32</sup>

The third influential element in Ornstein's articulation of his solution lies in his assessment of the radical disparity between the challenges posed by the modern world and the capacity of the human community in its present state to meet these challenges. He claims that "biological evolution is, for all practical purposes, at its end." He explains that

[t]here will be no further biological evolution without conscious evolution. We have to take command of our evolution now and begin a massive program for conscious changes in the way we think, the way we relate to others, the way we identify with the rest of humanity. The pace of change is far too great for us to try to adapt unconsciously. We have to take our very evolution into our own hands and do for ourselves what biological evolution has done for all life: adapt to an unprecedented new world.<sup>33</sup>

Human beings have reached the stage in their evolutionary development where they can no longer count on those very mechanisms that have allowed them both to survive and to thrive. Seen from an evolutionary perspective the developmental process of the human species is a rallying success story, having successfully survived to thrive biologically, while adapting to life in nearly every corner of the planet. However, from Ornstein's point of view the current developmental stage of the human organism marks a terminal point.

Therefore, taking into consideration the three assertions above—that mystical traditions point to a higher potential for human beings through a higher consciousness; that the evolutionary forces that have come together in the phenomenon of ordinary

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<sup>32</sup> Ornstein, *Evolution of Consciousness*, 267.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 267.

human consciousness will provide a stable spring board from which higher consciousness can be cultivated and ultimately emerge; that the human species has not only adapted to a changing environment but has learned to change the environment to its own advantage—Ornstein presents a schema designed to overcome the problematic aspects of human consciousness, one that involves purposefully and systematically manipulating evolutionary forces that up to this point have resulted in “accidental evolution” of the species. This is to say, that it has reached a stage in its biological evolution where the species is threatened by its own choices and behaviors.<sup>34</sup>

#### Tart and State Specific Sciences

Of the three authors by far the one who has written most extensively on altered states of consciousness is Charles Tart. Tart’s work on this aspect of human consciousness was influenced by several elements that were part of the cultural landscape during the period when he developed his major theses about the study of human consciousness—the late 1960’s. This period witnessed the rise of drug exploration, especially LSD and the ensuing psychic experiences, a growing interest in and exploration of Eastern religious traditions and meditative practices, and the general openness to discussion of “altered consciousness,” in part a direct result of the first two developments.<sup>35</sup> Tart’s interest in these experiences as a psychologist, he says, “was

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<sup>34</sup> Ornstein, *Evolution of Consciousness*, 267.

<sup>35</sup> See Charles Tart, *Altered States of Consciousness*, ed. Charles Tart, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: John Wiley, 1969; Garden City, NY, Anchor Books, 1972), esp. 3-5 and 7-8. Citations are to the Anchor Books edition. An interesting perspective upon this period of social history comes from George A. Maloney in his preface to James Walsh’s translation of the six shorter treatises attributed to *The Cloud* author: Maloney reflects: “What we see in contemporary society, magnified by the communications media, is a burst of consciousness development. In the sixties a great social and political concern erupted, especially among the



motivated by anxiety that one of the most vital areas of human concern was being almost totally ignored by orthodox science.” For Tart this had implications for the study of not only these isolated extraordinary experiences but more importantly perhaps, for the psychological study of human consciousness in general.<sup>36</sup> In his field of study and in the culture as a whole, altered states of consciousness were considered to be deviations from normal consciousness and were treated as mental illnesses. Thus it became Tart’s mission to “show that it is possible to investigate and work with the important phenomena of [altered states of consciousness] in a manner which is perfectly compatible with the essence of scientific method.”<sup>37</sup>

In order to make this point—that altered states of consciousness can be studied utilizing scientific methodology—Tart establishes that they can be characterized as “sciences.” Tart says that what is commonly thought of as a valid “branch of science” can be characterized as one “centered on interest in some particular subject matter,” in which “a number of highly selected, talented, and rigorously educated people spend

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young. Americans marched, demonstrated, and lay down in the streets for peace, racial equality, the right to life. They also tripped on ‘acid’ or played in the Dionysian hills of sexual freedom. Behind all this turmoil, we find a frenetic thirst for expanded consciousness.... The seventies rolled in with a powerful *Drang am Osten* with the journey inward and eastward. The Far-Eastern religions, Yoga, Zen, the Tibetan Book of the Dead, Gurdjieff, occultism, Edgar Cayce, were common bits of conversation. Not merely students, but middle-class businessmen, housewives and professional women, Catholic nuns, priests and ministers, were into meditation and ‘blowing the mind’ out of stagnation by TM, Silva Mind Control, hypnosis, Arica, EST, process meditation, and transactional analysis.” *Pursuit of Wisdom*, 5.

<sup>36</sup> Tart, *Altered States of Consciousness*, 7.

<sup>37</sup> Charles Tart, “States of Consciousness and State-Specific Sciences,” in *The Nature of Human Consciousness: A Book of Readings*, ed. Robert E. Ornstein (San Francisco: W. H. Freeman, 1973), 42.

considerable time making detailed observations on the subject matter of interest.”<sup>38</sup> These specialists in their field of knowledge generally develop and communicate according to a distinct vocabulary through which they “confirm and extend each other’s knowledge of certain data basic to the field. They theorize about their basic data and construct elaborate systems.” They then refine and corroborate their findings through repeated observation, adjusting their theories accordingly. In general, such specialized processes and the knowledge secured through the practice of particular “sciences” are “frequently incomprehensible to” those outside their area of expertise.<sup>39</sup> Thus, Tart concludes that this “general description is equally applicable to a variety of sciences or areas that could become sciences,” citing the “understanding of mystical states, or drug-induced enhancement of cognitive processes” as those that fit the latter type. Though these two categories of “sciences” differ widely in the “particulars of research,” Tart asserts that still “the basic scientific method running through all is the same.”<sup>40</sup>

Tart then strives to extend the consensus of that which constitutes valid “scientific method” to include the methods employed by non-traditional “sciences.” He describes the objective of the scientific method as

[a] determined effort to systematize the process of acquiring knowledge and refining knowledge in such a way as to minimize the various pitfalls of observation and reasoning, and produce a steady, if erratic, movement

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<sup>38</sup> Charles Tart, “Science, States of Consciousness, and Spiritual Experiences: The Need for State-Specific Sciences,” in *Transpersonal Psychologies*, ed. Charles Tart (New York: Harper & Row, 1975; Harper Colophon Books, 1977), 39. Citations are to the Colophon edition.

<sup>39</sup> Tart, “States of Consciousness and State-Specific Sciences,” 50-51.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 51

toward truth in the long run.<sup>41</sup>

He explains that in everyday situations as well as in more controlled and systematic instances, “all knowledge is basically experiential.” In each case the search for knowledge begins with an experience on the sensory level followed by an explanation to account for the experience. However, we often find that the immediate (or otherwise) explanation doesn’t hold upon further examination or over time, especially in the face of additional similar, but not identical, experiences. The procedure specified in scientific method, however, enhances the likelihood that one’s conclusions will lead to reliable knowledge. Its specific principles for achieving this end, according to Tart, are: “(i) good observation; (ii) the public nature of observation; (iii) the necessity to theorize logically; and (iv) the testing of theory by observable consequences.”<sup>42</sup> Thus Tart has laid out his argument to substantiate his thesis stated above that “it is possible to investigate and work with the important phenomena of [altered states of consciousness] in a manner which is perfectly compatible with the essence of scientific method.”<sup>43</sup>

However, Tart’s initiative is more specific and extensive than this comparatively generalized claim. In his own words Tart says, “I now propose the creation of various state-specific sciences.” What he envisioned in this proposal is the establishment of sciences specific to distinct states of consciousness, each “state-specific science” consisting of “a group of highly skilled, dedicated, and trained practitioners able to

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<sup>41</sup> Tart, “Science, States of Consciousness, and Spiritual Experiences,” 21

<sup>42</sup> Tart, “States of Consciousness and State-Specific Sciences,” 46.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.,” 42

achieve certain [states of consciousness], and able to agree with one another that they have attained a common state.” Tart’s rationale for calling for the creation of state-specific sciences to appropriately study altered states of consciousness is interesting. He says that the human individual “is a theorizing and conceptualizing animal and does not accept experience in and of itself” but rather “develops beliefs and theories about [that] experience.” Simply stated, the experience of altered states of consciousness, like every other noteworthy experience, inevitably gives rise to “theorizing and conceptualizing” by those interested parties having either direct or indirect contact with the phenomenon. However, those unsystematic and undisciplined investigations—that is, those outside of “state-specific sciences”—“run as much risk of systematizing our delusions as of discovering ‘truth.’”<sup>44</sup> Tart’s proposal would elevate these investigations to the status of “state-specific science” which would accomplish two important objectives. On the one hand, the substantial data on the experience of altered states of consciousness readily available in the spiritual traditions would now be available for scientific study. In turn it would bring to these spiritual traditions a mechanism for dealing with what he refers to as “the problems and pitfalls associated with” these extraordinary religious experiences.

We see in Charles Tart’s contribution to the solution as defined by this study an effort to incorporate the study of altered states of consciousness into the ongoing study of human consciousness. His unique contribution to the field is his initiative to develop what he refers to as “state-specific sciences.” It is an initiative that envisioned the cultivation of a new openness in the scientific community to examine and consider non-traditional

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<sup>44</sup> Tart, *Altered States of Consciousness*, 5.

forms of knowledge—a prerequisite for utilizing the rich deposit of data on altered states of consciousness available within the spiritual traditions. Robert Ornstein’s perspective on his colleague’s proposal provides added clarity on the scope of the effort: it “is one of the very first contemporary attempts to synthesize the two modes of knowledge-seeking; the concrete workings of his new approach will take a while to emerge.”<sup>45</sup>

### **Part 3: Integration and Analysis**

#### **Mystic Consciousness**

As we begin our integrative analysis of each party’s presentation of the solution to the problem we see several points of symmetry between the two versions. In both cases there is an assertion that the more pressing problems of the human condition have now been reversed. For *The Cloud* author divine union has reversed those effects of the fall and reinstituted the state that humans enjoyed prior to original sin, whereby the blissful state of union with God constituted the existential human condition. In Deikman’s version of mystic consciousness he speaks similarly of a reversal. Here the reversal is of those problematic structures of human consciousness which give rise to individual and global human suffering and dis-ease. Deikman says that this transformation is the result of a new form of consciousness which serves as an antidote to the limiting and screening functions of normal consciousness structures. In this new mode greater access to reality is now available, specifically, a glimpse at the “fundamental reality underlying

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<sup>45</sup> Ornstein, *Nature of Human Consciousness*, 5.

appearances.”<sup>46</sup> Deikman says that this altered mode of consciousness imbues one with the conviction that “a unified world exists”<sup>47</sup> and it is this experience that brings the transformative effects upon those who receive it.

By contrast Deikman points to the processes of ordinary human consciousness that give rise to an experience of separation and alienation from the external world, other human beings and even the self. Although from the perspective of the evolutionary goals of survival this stance in relation to encountered stimulus is necessary, the overall effect of this operational pattern is to provide a view of the world that reflects these processes. In mystic consciousness, this view of the world and of the self in relation to it is radically transformed. What we know about this mystic view of the world is predominantly inferred through the effects that such a view of reality has upon those who have experienced this transformed state. We know of it, then, through its effects. Just as *The Cloud* author’s descriptions of individuals who have received the gift of divine union were much more specific and descriptive than when he discusses the state of divine union itself, Deikman’s discussions also focus upon the changes that altered consciousness brings into the lives of those who have experienced it. Therefore Deikman’s discussion maintains a similar assessment of ineffability regarding the state of mystic consciousness. Both agree that, judging from the behaviors exhibited by those fortunate enough to have reached this new mode of consciousness, clearly these individuals are privy to a superior level of knowledge of existence. The exact or specific nature of this reality they both are

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<sup>46</sup> Deikman, *Observing Self*, 42

<sup>47</sup> Deikman, “A Functional Approach to Mysticism,” 89.

unable to articulate in any concrete way. Both claim, in fact, that the experience itself transcends the categories of ordinary language to describe.<sup>48</sup>

Another point of congruence between these two versions lies in the way in which they speak about these changes that are evidenced in the lives of these individuals. In both cases, the new behaviors are understood as natural consequences of the state which is now “ordinary” for the transformed person. In the case of *The Cloud*, virtue is natural for one who has received divine union because it was the natural condition of the pre-fall human being. Deikman speaks of this state in terms related to the field of psychotherapy and says that the experience of mystic consciousness, while not overtly involved in the practice of psychotherapy, nonetheless “is said to cure human suffering because its very basis is thereby removed.”<sup>49</sup> Thus, in both cases we see the focus shift from efforts to deal with the problematic behaviors per se to a seeming indirect initiative aimed at the eradication of their underlying fundamental cause. Related to this insight present in both authors’ thoughts on the phenomenon is the observation that herein lies a potential for

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<sup>48</sup> A marvelous insight on the limits of language to communicate aspects of reality that have transcended the categories available in this particular vernacular comes from Robert W. Funk in *Language, Hermeneutic, and the Word of God*. “Language and understanding arise together, are reciprocal. The common reality to which they refer both precedes and follows. It makes them possible and yet the common reality does not become audible without language and understanding. Language and understanding both arise out of and invoke shared reality.” Funk says that when there is a breakdown between these two—when the reality that is known and communicable no longer fits the existing linguistic categories—then “language and understanding are divorced.” He explains that “a divorce of this order follows upon the disintegration of the reality to which understanding refers, while conventional language lags behind experience. ‘Understanding’ in that case is a kind of *not-knowing* and not-having what language promises. Language goes dead when it forecloses rather than discloses understanding. On the other hand, understanding remains a *not-knowing* until language comes to its rescue. And both of them linger in limbo until the ‘real’ breaks through the limitations set by the reciprocal dependence of language and understanding.” (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 4, 6. Emphasis added.

<sup>49</sup> Deikman, *Observing Self*, 3.

what Justin McCann spoke of as having “great social efficacy.”<sup>50</sup> This new state of consciousness with its inherently salutary effects upon human behavior trumps all and every other means of achieving the same positive goals.

### Conscious Evolution

This aspect of mystic consciousness, its social efficacy, is the main focus of Robert Ornstein’s discussion of “conscious evolution.” Ornstein explicitly advocates the cultivation of mystic consciousness as a solution to the current dilemma faced by the human community owing to the problematic aspects of ordinary human consciousness. As the term suggests Ornstein here calls for a direct, purposeful and comprehensive program designed to manipulate cultural forces which will foster and support the kinds of behaviors and attitudes that will serve as the foundation for large scale transformation of human consciousness, which will then affect the human family at the global level. We may be tempted to protest that here the psychologist’s goals and motivations for his initiative of conscious evolution differ markedly from those foundational to spiritual traditions. Specifically, those dispositions of the spiritual life which speak of surrender of self-serving goals are at the very center of these disciplines. Therefore, it seems that the two could not be further apart in their motivation for the end goal of transformation. Yet, I would maintain that despite the appearances, Ornstein’s perspective as illustrated in his work on “conscious evolution” provides insight into *The Cloud* teaching that might otherwise not be evident. Specifically, this juxtaposition illuminates the degree to which *The Cloud* author does in fact purposefully, systematically and intentionally set out to

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<sup>50</sup> McCann, *The Cloud*, xix



achieve the goal of transformation, with all its salutary effects. The teachings on contemplative prayer have only one goal in mind: divine union. In this regard the author's motivations that are at the foundation of his teachings are much like Ornstein's. The author recognizes, as does Ornstein, that something quite radical has taken place in specific individuals said to have reached this goal of divine union. It is the recognition of this fact that sets in motion the practice that is at the heart of *The Cloud* corpus, that is, the phenomenon of spiritual disciplines and the mentoring relationship that is the subject of these works. The experience is articulated very differently, of course, but there are parallels that specifically bring to light important aspects of *The Cloud* teaching. One such parallel is illustrated in and through the following path that led to Ornstein's thesis regarding conscious evolution. As stated earlier, the author's evaluation of mystic consciousness was based upon his study of mystic traditions. Here he found in these traditions documented historical evidence pointing to the extraordinary human potential realized in select individuals, indicative of new possibilities for human functioning and a level of human potential that theoretically is possible for the human species as a whole. Ornstein, we said, points to these cases as prototypes of what can be. This recognition then led him to take seriously the path that precipitated this outcome, to inquire of its methods and reflect upon their causal relationship. The next step was to interpret these findings in light of his understanding of human beings and to reevaluate his prior beliefs in light of this new information. His formulation of "conscious evolution" is the product of this process.

In a sense we can see the mystical tradition as a whole engaged in a similar set of

circumstances, experiences, evaluations and initiatives. At the core of the entire tradition lies experience—the radical experience which has been variously termed, but is consistently referred to as divine union in the Christian tradition. The experience and its extraordinary manifestations stand at the center of these mystical traditions. The methods adopted by those inclined to enter the same spiritual journey were followed precisely because they were thought to facilitate movement along this path towards the ultimate goal. Again, at each stage and in all aspects of the tradition, the means of expression are different from the language Ornstein uses. Yet, in our juxtaposition of Ornstein's work on conscious evolution and *The Cloud* teachings on contemplative prayer the differences become less marked. In each case the experience itself, whether encountered personally or via trusted second-hand accounts, became the catalyst which propelled both parties onto a path expressly designed to lead to a similar goal.

#### Tart and State Specific Sciences

Tart's interdisciplinary study of science and mysticism is more specifically aimed at the scientific community. As with both Ornstein and Deikman, his initiative is influenced by his study of the mystical traditions and his conviction that they have much to offer in the scientific study of human consciousness. In order to make this a reality Tart laid the groundwork through his discussion of these traditions from the perspective of the scientific method. Here he brought together the methods employed by individuals within the spiritual traditions which he sees as corresponding to those employed by the sciences. He argued for the validity of the knowledge which these traditions provided and which were only available in these traditions. This had the effect of elevating mystical

studies by bringing the discussion into mainstream scientific discourse. However, this same argument might be utilized similarly from an *intra-* disciplinary perspective, that is, within the religious communities in which they stand. As mystical traditions' relationship to the mainstream religious expressions has varied considerably throughout history, they often find themselves on the fringe of their respective traditions. Frequently they are tolerated but misunderstood, held in suspicion and even contempt. Tart's work particularly speaks to this concern. He voices some level of caution regarding what he refers to as the "problems and pitfalls" that present very real and potentially serious consequences associated with powerful religious experiences. His caution that a naïve understanding of altered states of consciousness "run as much risk of systematizing our delusions as of discovering 'truth,'" <sup>51</sup> suggests that this kind of rigorous examination when applied to the study of their traditions could bring a level of critical investigation to their body of experiential traditions which they would not have otherwise.

### Summary

This chapter provided a glimpse of each partner's contribution to solving the human dilemma as outlined in chapter two. For *The Cloud* author the solution is really a return to the beginning when human beings, in a state of innocence, enjoyed full union with God. This primordial state was lost through sin and can now only be recovered through the practice of contemplation which gradually purges sin's effects and works a marvelous transformation, effectively returning us to this pre-fall state. The three psychology authors each include in varying degrees altered states of consciousness in

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<sup>51</sup> Tart, *Altered States of Consciousness*, 5.

their formulation of the way out of the human condition. They have all been influenced by their contact with spiritual traditions of which *The Cloud* corpus is representative. Each was also influenced by their respective and differing professional backgrounds and their particular interests and concerns. In the integration portion of the chapter it was established that both parties speak of the transformed state in terms of a reversal or an undoing in relation to those problematic qualities and characteristics of the human condition as articulated in chapter 2. They each maintain that this radical state of being is mostly ineffable, that it defies description according to existing linguistic categories. Thus, they both rely upon descriptions of the effects of this state of being as evidenced in the lives of individuals who have reached this state of being. The qualities and characteristics they list, in both cases, are understood as flowing naturally and effortlessly from this transformed existence. Then we proposed that by bringing together Ornstein's initiative for "conscious evolution" with that of *The Cloud* author's exposition of the effects of divine union, the degree to which *The Cloud* author's work was similarly motivated was brought into relief. Finally, we suggested that Tart's interdisciplinary initiative might serve as a fitting model for *intra*-disciplinary utilization by mystical traditions, providing a measure of critical analysis to supplement their predominantly experientially based body of knowledge of mystical states. In chapter four we will explore both partners' directives concerning the next step, or how we are to move from the problem to the solution.

## 4. HOW DO WE ARRIVE AT THE SOLUTION?

### **Part 1: *The Cloud***

At the opening pages of the first treatise, *The Cloud*, the author's directee is given some very simple instructions on contemplative prayer, instructions that have more to do with one's disposition and mental processes than with activities or rituals. Throughout the text the author elaborates upon these simple themes set forth in the beginning, not systematically, but repetitively and consistently. A pattern is discernible in one particular aspect and that is in the author's teaching on unknowing. What first is a command to put aside all thoughts during the time of prayer becomes a teaching to refuse to allow any images that particularize God in any way. God's simple being or essence alone is to be sought and increasingly stripped of mental and emotional images and associations. In tandem to this thread that runs throughout the corpus is the theme of unknowing, or no thoughts, towards the self. Here the author too leads the directee increasingly towards greater simplification of images and thoughts of the self. Eventually, the two come together as the author draws the correlation between the two. That is, the truth that the way that one thinks about God affects the way that one thinks about oneself. The simplification of each advances one towards the ultimate simplification that is unification.

This chapter will take this journey. The first section will take a look at the author's prayer method, his explicit teaching on how to do contemplative prayer. Following the author's penchant for simplification we will move from here to excise

from this teaching its essence. Here we will consider the question of what lies at the foundation of the author's teachings and ties all of the treatises together. Under the titles of unknowing we will study the two areas that receive particular attention by the author as specific elements of thought targeted for simplification: Unknowing of God and the Unknowing of Self. Within this discussion we will meet with the author's favorite idiosyncratic phrases: the cloud of unknowing, cloud of forgetting, God as God is in Himself, naked being and simple being, and lump of sin.

### Prayer Method

The Cloud and its related treatises all share the same dominant theme of the practice of contemplative prayer. It is a theme that is introduced in *The Cloud* and receives further treatment along with related themes in each of the other treatises. With such a concerted focus on contemplative prayer one might expect to encounter systematic treatment of and instruction in the actual method of prayer. Yet, this kind of step-by-step teaching is not what we find in *The Cloud* corpus. The author begins his presentation of the method of prayer in the conclusion of the second chapter of *The Cloud of Unknowing*. Here he sets up his presentation by posing a rhetorical question regarding the method that one is to follow at the outset of this contemplative journey. Thus the reader is led to expect that the subsequent chapter will provide direct and substantive instruction.

However, this is the "method" given:

Lift up your heart to God<sup>1</sup> with a humble impulse of love,  
and have himself as your aim, not any of his goods. Take

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<sup>1</sup> Walsh notes here that the author later (chapter 58-60) "deals at length with the contemplative implications of 'Lift up' .... *The Cloud*, 119, n. 28.

care that you avoid thinking of anything but himself, so that there is nothing for your reason or your will to work on, except himself. Do all that in you lies to forget all the creatures that God ever made, and their works, so that neither your thought nor your desire be directed or extended to any of them, neither in general nor in particular. Let them alone and pay no attention to them.<sup>2</sup>

He then concludes this brief and generalized instruction on prayer with the affirmation that “this is the work of the soul that pleases God most.”<sup>3</sup> Here the author has used his characteristic designation for contemplative prayer, “work,”<sup>4</sup> a term he uses often to designate the exercise of prayer throughout his treatises, making it clear that the above description was intended by the author to serve as a “how-to” of contemplative prayer.

Conrad Pepler takes notice of this seeming lack of substantive teaching on prayer methodology as a fitting approach for a work of mystical theology. Pepler says that “the higher reaches of the spiritual [*sic*] life are characterized by a method in prayer of praying without a method,” acknowledging that while the idea of a systematic methodology might be more satisfying for the reader it also speaks of “human methods” and “human activities.”<sup>5</sup> He suggests that the general approach to mysticism which leaves behind human communication and human thought is reflected in *The Cloud* in this absence of

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<sup>2</sup> Walsh, *The Cloud*, 119-120.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 120

<sup>4</sup> See for example *The Cloud*, chapters 3, 4, 7, 14, 31, 41, 43-44; *Privy Counselling*, chapters 1-3, and 5-6. Hodgson refers to the author’s use of the Middle English term, “*werk*” as his “favourite term” which appears in varied forms in the corpus “some hundred and fifty” times. In the larger sense the term encapsulates the contemplative experience in its entirety, which Hodgson has tagged “love without knowing,” which she claims, expresses the “gist of his author’s counsel.” *The Cloud and Related Treatises*, xxiv. For an extended treatment of the topic of “love without knowing” in its origination in the Dionysian tradition and its subsequent historical development see xli-xlix.

<sup>5</sup> Pepler, *English Religious Heritage*, 269.

systematic and comprehensive teaching on methodology. For modern readers familiar with an abundance of how-to manuals on every conceivable topic, including prayer and the spiritual life, the teaching on how to pray that we find in *The Cloud* appears at first glance, sorely unsatisfying in its brevity.

Upon closer examination of these instructions we find that what the author is doing in this section is the introduction of his principal themes. The first instruction, “lift up your heart to God with a humble impulse of love and have God himself as your aim” puts this important teaching up front and center. The author’s admonition that the heart’s desire for God must be purified and distinct from desires for God’s gifts and consolations runs like a thread throughout the corpus. The following line, “take care that you avoid thinking of anything but himself, so that there is nothing for your reason or your will to work on, except himself” makes it clear that the prayer of contemplation is an imageless, silent prayer in which the heart and the mind alike are to be stripped bare. The final directive is a restatement of the call to prayer without thoughts, here now specified in terms of “forgetting” of specific aspects of our thoughts and desires. Seen from a closer light, then, the initial set of instructions the author lists as an introduction to the topic of contemplative prayer can be reduced to two separate elements: desire God’s pure being and forsake all and every thought. It is an exceedingly simple practice. However, the fact that the author’s entire corpus is devoted to the elaboration of this teaching affirms that though it is a simple method it is not an easy one.



## Unknowing as a Method

The author's prayer method, brief as it is, can be further distilled into one word that both grounds and permeates his teachings throughout the entire corpus, and that is "unknowing." Beginning with a brief teaching on prayer method in *The Cloud* which we examined above, the author's teaching of methodological unknowing develops from the silencing of thought, sensation and imagination—his earliest teaching—to its final directive to forget even the awareness of one's own being. Unknowing is the hub upon which the author develops his teaching on contemplative prayer focusing on two major facets: unknowing of God and unknowing of one's own being.

### *Introduction to the Two Clouds: Cloud of Unknowing and Cloud of Forgetting*

Early in the author's teaching on unknowing, the author introduces the images of the two clouds, the "cloud of unknowing"<sup>6</sup> and the "cloud of forgetting,"<sup>7</sup> as techniques for dealing with unwanted thoughts that inevitably arise during the time of prayer. Although the author's use of this imagery is multifaceted, especially that of the cloud of unknowing, in a general sense he is equating the image of "cloud" with "darkness." In this sense the cloud as darkness applies to the mind's "privation of knowing," the author explains, in which "whatever you do not know or have forgotten is dark to you."<sup>8</sup> It is at

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<sup>6</sup> The first reference to the 'cloud of unknowing' in the text appears in chapter 3 in which the author first introduces the image to describe the experience of imageless prayer: "For when you first begin to undertake it, all that you find is a darkness, a sort of cloud of unknowing... This darkness and cloud is always between you and your God, no matter what you do, and it prevents you from seeing him clearly by the light of understanding in your reason and from experiencing him in sweetness of love in your affection." Walsh, *The Cloud*, 120-21.

<sup>7</sup> The image of the "cloud of forgetting" first appears in the text in chapter 5 of *The Cloud*.

<sup>8</sup> Walsh, *The Cloud*, 128.

this point that the author first makes a spatial reference to the cloud of unknowing, as that which “is always between you and your God.”<sup>9</sup> The author, continuing the spatial references employed when introducing the cloud of unknowing now directs his disciple to put a “cloud of forgetting between you and all the creatures that have ever been made.” Here the author talks about putting all one’s thoughts aside and placing them in the “cloud of forgetting.” This practice extends to every kind of thought, even those thoughts which formed part of one’s devotional life in earlier stages of the spiritual journey, e.g., thoughts of God’s goodness, mercy, or specific thoughts of Christ’s life. This situates the contemplative, then, with a cloud of unknowing above him, which is between himself and God, and a cloud of forgetting below him which separates him from the things of the world.<sup>10</sup>

The cloud of forgetting is also to contain all these unwanted thoughts as follows:

Whenever I say ‘all the creatures that have ever been made,’ I mean not only the creatures themselves, but also all their works and circumstances. I make no exceptions, whether they are bodily creatures or spiritual, nor for the state or activity of any creature, whether these be good or evil. In short, I say that all should be hid under the cloud of forgetting.<sup>11</sup>

Apparently the author anticipates that his inclusion of thoughts of a spiritual nature among those distractions that are to be put into the cloud of forgetting might need further reinforcement, so he turns to this topic with more specificity. He proclaims that thoughts

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<sup>9</sup> Walsh, *The Cloud*, 120-21.

<sup>10</sup> Hodgson, *The Cloud*, lv.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 128.

of “God, or our Lady or the saints,” or any other spiritual subject, when one is engaged in the work of contemplation are “of little or no profit.”<sup>12</sup> Each and every thought, because it is a thought, he teaches, has no place during the time of contemplation.

Thus in a general sense the author teaches that thoughts are now to be seen as obstacles to the contemplative goal of union with God. Thoughts will inevitably create a separation between God and the individual during the exercise of prayer. In the following quote the author draws a sharply visual image of the contemplative’s position in relation to God, the cloud of unknowing, the cloud of forgetting and the presence or absence of thoughts about God:

If ever you come to this cloud, and live and work in it as I bid you, just as this cloud of unknowing is above you, between you and your God, in the same way you must put beneath you a cloud of forgetting, between you and all the creatures that have ever been made. It seems to you, perhaps, that you are very far from him, because this cloud of unknowing is between you and your God. However, if you give it proper thought, you are certainly much further away from him when you do not have the cloud of forgetting between you and all the creatures that have ever been made.<sup>13</sup>

According to the above configuration the author has curiously drawn an image in which the cloud of forgetting is seen as a means of bringing God closer to the individual. He

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>13</sup> Walsh, *The Cloud*, 128. Walsh provides a reference here to Richard of St. Victor, *Benjamin major*: “To enter the Cloud of Unknowing is to rise above mind, and by means of the cloud of forgetfulness, to hide from the mind the awareness of whatever lies at hand.” n. 60. Hodgson also makes reference to Richard of St. Victor as the likely source of the image of the cloud of forgetting in *The Cloud* corpus. However, the use of cloud imagery abounds in mystical literature. The precise point of origination in *The Cloud* is a reference in Pseudo-Dionysius’ *Mystical Theology* to the “darkness of unknowing,” used in the context of Moses’ ascent in Exodus 19, and was a common image used by St. Gregory. *The Cloud*, lxll.

illustrates this claim by drawing an analogy from everyday life. Whenever we think about anything, he says, it draws the mind towards this object, “like the eye of the bowman upon the eye of the target that he is shooting at.”<sup>14</sup> Here the mind’s “eye” focused in prayer on God alone will shift its gaze away from God when thoughts enter his mind. However, using the author’s imagery, once we have put the cloud of forgetting between ourselves and the endless variety of thoughts that press upon us, our “eye” can remain focused on its intended target—God. Thus the author makes a direct connection between the directee’s mental activity and the relative proximity to God, claiming that thoughts, whatever form they may take, inevitably distance us from God specifically during the time of contemplation.<sup>15</sup>

### *Unknowing of God*

The author teaches that contemplatives must learn to put aside each and every conceptual image of God as preparation for God’s self-disclosure: “think upon his simple being” he counsels, and learn “to love him and praise him for himself.”<sup>16</sup> As we saw earlier when we examined the author’s prayer method, when the author tells his directee, “lift up your heart to God with a humble impulse of love,” as the initial step in

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<sup>14</sup> Walsh, *The Cloud*, 129. Walsh tells us that the source here for the allusions to archery is Guiges du Pont. n. 64. The author returns to this analogy in *The Discretion of Stirrings*, in a similar analogy of the mind as the eye on the target, which is the desire for God’s pure being: “For if God is your love and your intent, the choice and the ground of your heart, this is enough for you in this life; even though you never see more of him with the eye of reason all your life long. Such a blind shot with the sharp arrow of a love that longs can never miss the bull’s-eye, which is God.” *Pursuit*, 140. Moreover, the archery theme surfaces in *The Cloud* in the phrase “sharp dart of longing love” See for example chapters 6 and 12.

<sup>15</sup> Walsh, *The Cloud*, 141.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

his prayer instruction he qualifies this “humble impulse” with the cautionary phrase to “have himself as your aim.” This often repeated phrase, “God himself” and other similarly worded versions, take on several different meanings. In some cases the author uses this phrase to describe a love for God that is pure and not conditioned by God’s gifts and consolations. He says that “the perfect apprentice does not ask to be released from pain or for his reward to be increased”; rather, “he asks for nothing but God himself; so much so that he takes no account or regard of whether he is in pain or in joy.”<sup>17</sup>

Frequently as we have seen, the author will speak of this idea of unknowing of God as a means of simplifying thought down to its barest essentials when one comes to the work of contemplation. In the following quote we see this notion discussed in the context of a comparison between contemplative prayer and more cognitive meditation practices. Here the author will distinguish between what one knows about God or what can be thought about God and God’s true essence. The following quote comes from such a discussion in *The Cloud*:

...It would be very inappropriate and a great hindrance to a man who ought to be working in this darkness and in this cloud of unknowing, with an affective impulse of love to God for himself alone, to permit any thought or any meditation on God’s wonderful gifts, kindness or his work in any of his creatures, bodily or spiritual, to rise up in his mind so as to press between him and his God, even if they should be very holy thoughts, and give him great happiness and consolation.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Walsh, *The Cloud*, 169.

<sup>18</sup> Walsh, *The Cloud*, 138.

Here the author's rationale for unknowing of God is that particular thoughts *of* God only serve to separate us *from* God. He refers specifically to such thoughts as being a "hindrance" to the work of contemplation, contrasting them with a simple and imageless "affective impulse."

Another important aspect of the author's counsel towards unknowing of God has to do with the underlying assumption mentioned in chapter two of the utter incomprehensibility of God to the intellect. We see a particularly good example of this in chapter six of *The Cloud*. The discussion begins with a rhetorical question, a device frequently used by the author to develop his teachings. Here the question is posed following the repeated counsel "to think upon [God's] simple being and to love him and praise him for himself." The author anticipates the directee's inquiry. "But now you put me a question and say: 'How might I think of him in himself, and what is he?'" His response, "I have no idea," is the lead-in to talk about the notion that God cannot be known by the human intellect.

For a man may, by grace, have the fullness of knowledge of all other creatures and their works, yes, and of the works of God's own self, and he is well able to reflect on them. But no man can think of God himself. Therefore it is my wish to leave everything that I can think of and choose for love the thing I cannot think.<sup>19</sup>

The above counsel illustrates well what the author frequently refers to as the perfect disposition the contemplative should have during this time of prayer. In this cognitive darkness the contemplative rests eschewing each and every thought in exchange for only a "blind loving impulse" which focuses upon God with the will and the affections, but not

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<sup>19</sup> Walsh, *The Cloud*, 130.

the mind.

*Unknowing of Self and the Lump of Sin*

Another key focus for the author's theme of unknowing which receives special attention is that of the unknowing of the self. One aspect of this theme is the notion of the self in relation to sin. In traditional Christian thought, the teaching that human beings are separated from God is a foundational tenet. Yet, in this formulation it is sin, both original sin and individual personal sins, that is blamed for this existential human condition. Thus a large part of Christian teachings regarding the way back to God has to do with the recognition of and avoidance of sin. In *The Cloud* the perspective towards both of these elements—recognition and avoidance—is quite different.

When *The Cloud* author constructs his teaching on the topic of sin he enlists the help of a unique metaphor, *lump of sin*, to do so. Keeping in mind that the perspective which frames the author's immediate context for the following teaching is specifically the practice of contemplative prayer, the author says that although meditations on one's sins formed a part of the spiritual practices in earlier stages of the spiritual journey, now the author teaches that one's attitude towards sin must be very different:

[b]y 'sin' you must mean some sort of undefined lump:  
nothing else, in fact, than yourself. It is my belief that...  
this obscure looking at sin, as a congealed mass...is none  
other than yourself....<sup>20</sup>

This sense of the self as a *lump of sin* is to be a constituent part of one's beholding of the self before God. It is an abiding sense of the self as this lump of sin that on the one hand

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<sup>20</sup> Walsh, *The Cloud*, 190-91.

indicates an appropriate and realistic self-appraisal before the utter goodness of God yet at the same time indicates some level of indifference toward “particular” sins.

This indifference is more explicit in a later chapter when the author takes up the topic of the lump of sin once more. Returning to simplifying the notion of one’s inherent sinfulness to its essence he justifies this with the following rhetorical comment:

What does it matter to a contemplative what sin it is, or how great a sin it is? For it seems to him, during the time of this exercise, that every sin is as great as another, since the smallest sin separates him from God and is an obstacle to his inward peace. So feel sin as a lump, never mind what it is, it is nothing else but yourself.<sup>21</sup>

The author qualifies his indifference to the particularity of the sin with the proviso that this is only during the time of contemplation. Again, all is reduced to and is made subservient to the goal of methodological unknowing.

### *Forgetting One’s Own Being*<sup>22</sup>

Eventually, this teaching of indifference towards one’s failings and weaknesses, which is part of the author’s wider reach of the concept of unknowing in the life of the contemplative, expands to his teaching on the forgetting of one’s own being. As we have seen throughout, the author relies upon characteristic catch phrases to assist him in addressing his more difficult teachings. In this instance, the author moves from his counsel on indifference towards individual sins and sinful tendencies to call for a

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<sup>21</sup> Walsh, *The Cloud*, 197.

<sup>22</sup> This section is derived from the author’s teaching contained in chapter 43-44 of *The Cloud*, teaching says Walsh, in which “the author appears to come to the Dionysian heart of the matter—the strict anti-intellectualism of negative or dark contemplation, the prayer which corresponds to the *via negativa*, the apophatic or mystical theology taught by the Areopagite...,” 82.



complete forgetting of the self. Here, he directs the contemplative to relinquish all thoughts and considerations of particular qualities of one's own self and retain only the bare and simplified notion *that* one exists:

So you must destroy all knowing and feeling of every kind of creature, but most especially of yourself. For on the knowledge and experience of yourself depends the knowledge and experience of all other creatures; compared with the self, all other creatures can be easily forgotten.<sup>23</sup>

Forgetting self will not be an easy task but on the other hand it is a more direct path to the unknowing of everything else that presses against us. The author wisely points to the root of one's incessant thoughts, images and emotions: the self. Thus the blanket prescription to forget the self attacks the problem at its source.

The author suggests here that this fact—that the self is at the root of all other thoughts—can be born out quite easily if one desired to put it to the test, and he challenges his directee to do just that, when he says:

If you are willing to make serious trial of this, you will find, after you have forgotten all other creatures and all their works, yes indeed your own works as well, what remains between you and your God is a simple knowing and feeling of your own being.<sup>24</sup>

We see here that the author has distinguished between thoughts one might have about the self in relation to one's activities and interactions with the world, and something more existential—the feeling of one's own being. The latter experience, according to the author's descriptions, is an abiding self-awareness which remains after one has

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<sup>23</sup> Walsh, *The Cloud*, 202

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

successfully simplified thoughts and images. In this state of quiet contemplation there remains a persistent something that separates us from the experience of God's presence. It is in the author's words "a simple knowing and feeling of your own being," which must somehow be forgotten or "unknown."

This stage in the contemplative journey is a painful one according to the author. He describes the dilemma for the contemplative who has reached this point in the journey:

Next you will ask me how you can destroy this simple awareness and experience of your own being. For doubtless it seems to you that once it is destroyed, all other hindrances will be destroyed as well....My answer to you is that without a very special grace which God gives out of his absolute bounty, and along with it a corresponding capacity on your part for receiving this grace, this simple awareness and experience of your being can in no way be destroyed.<sup>25</sup>

The contemplative now can go no further on his own, it appears. The prayer he has faithfully practiced has done its work of purification over time, simplifying thoughts and images to pave the way for knowing God as God is in himself. Now it seems that no more is to be done but to wait upon God's "very special grace." According to the author, this grace "alone takes away all a man's awareness and experience of his own being;" and, it is this experience of his own being that stands in the way of the contemplative's

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<sup>25</sup> Walsh, *The Cloud*, 203. The above quote continues, "This capacity is nothing else but a strong and profound spiritual sorrow," a clear reference says Walsh, to St. Gregory's teaching on the "two faces of compunction: the longing for the love of God for himself alone, and the self-forgetfulness, the mortification involved in the contemplative effort." Ibid., 83.

greatest desire, to have “a true awareness and experience of God.”<sup>26</sup>

We see in the above discussion that the contemplative has come to a point in the spiritual journey which is characterized by a state of abiding in a simple awareness of the self and of God. At this point the author directs him to remain in this dual beholding. Later, however, the author urges the contemplative towards a more radical stage of apophaticism. In the text quoted below the author will now instruct his directee to move from this imageless awareness of the self to a complete forgetting of self:

You must take it as certain that, although I direct you to forget everything but the feeling of the being of yourself, yet it is my wish, and it was my intention from the beginning, that you should forget the feeling of the being of yourself in exchange for the feeling of the being of God.<sup>27</sup>

Interestingly, the author suggests that he found it necessary to alter his intended teaching because his directee was not ready to receive it. Thus his earlier teaching—that the directee remain in quiet contemplation of his own and God’s simple being—appears to have been an interim practice. Now, the author deems him ready and issues this more advanced directive: he is to forget the self altogether in exchange for the feeling of God. The author explains his new teaching:

For your purpose and desire in this exercise must always be to feel God. For though at the beginning, because of your coarseness and lack of spiritual experience, I bade you to wrap up and clothe the feeling of your God in the feeling of your own self; later on, when through perseverance you are become wiser in purity of spirit, you must strip, despoil, and utterly divest yourself of every kind of feeling of

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<sup>26</sup> Walsh, *The Cloud*, 204.

<sup>27</sup> Walsh, *Pursuit*, 235.

yourself, so that you can be clothed in the grace-giving feeling of God's own self.<sup>28</sup>

Here, the simplification of thought processes which has been the subject of *The Cloud* author's teaching is shown to have reached its most radical point. We see the expectation that the purgation of thought will progressively clear away the incidentals to allow essences to emerge: essences of the self, then of God. In the above discussion we followed the author's teaching on contemplative unknowing, focusing on the two key facets of this theme: unknowing of God and unknowing of the self. We leave this teaching where the author does, at the threshold of divine union. Here the contemplative waits for the "very special grace" as he continues in his blind beholding of God's simple being. In the next section of this chapter we will look at some additional devices the author gives as an aid in dealing with thoughts.

### Special Tips

As was mentioned above, the author acknowledges that the work he teaches while a simple exercise is in no way an easy exercise. His use of the term "work" as another designation for the practice of contemplative prayer, says as much. Furthermore, he often speaks of it as the hard and difficult work that it is. The difficulty, he will always say, lies in the wrestling with unwanted thoughts: "[t]he work consists in the treading down of the awareness of all the creatures that God ever made, and in keeping them under the cloud of forgetting."<sup>29</sup> Although this image of the cloud of forgetting might provide a useful function for the contemplative to remain vigilant about the putting down of thoughts of

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 236.

<sup>29</sup> Walsh, *The Cloud*, 173-74.

every kind as they arise, the author is aware that this may not be enough in certain instances. So he provides further techniques to deal with thoughts, which he refers to as “tricks and devices and secret subtleties or spiritual tactics, by which you can put them away.”<sup>30</sup> They serve as more practical examples of themes and teachings already thoroughly discussed throughout the corpus.

One of these special tips has to do specifically with the cultivation of indifference.

[D]o all that in you lies to act as though you did not know that they are pressing very hard upon you and coming between you and your God. Try to look over their shoulders, as it were, as though you were looking for something else: that something else is God, surrounded on all sides by the cloud of unknowing.<sup>31</sup>

Here the disciple is told to ignore thoughts rather than to fight them or the usual directive to “put them down.” In particular circumstances, perhaps when they are especially intransigent, this technique has a disarming effect as one’s attention is moved away from the turmoil altogether. The clever image of movement that is brought to mind in the image of glancing over the shoulder as if to a distant place that takes one away from the proximate trouble, and the familiar darkness of the cloud of unknowing could well help to break through and out of the cycle of a churning mind.<sup>32</sup>

Another trick for dealing with thoughts comes in the form of surrender:

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<sup>30</sup> Walsh, *The Cloud*, 180.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 180-81.

<sup>32</sup> Robert Englert’s article on the element of play in *The Cloud* describes this exercise in these terms: “such a game of pretending is for the author nothing else but that purity which relieves vain struggles. It gains relief because it is free of self...Relief comes about when one tricks oneself into playful forgetting.” “Of Another Mind: Ludic Imagery and Spiritual Doctrine in the *Cloud of Unknowing*,” *Studia Mystica* 8 (Spring 1985): 7.

When you feel that you can in no way put down these thoughts, cower down under them like a poor wretch and a coward overcome in battle, and reckon it to be a waste of time for you to strive any longer against them. In this way, though you are in the hands of your enemies, you give yourself up to God; feel as though you were hopelessly defeated.<sup>33</sup>

The author here continues to describe the appropriate sentiments one should have in this trick emphasizing both the degree of surrender and the sense of oneself as a “poor wretch and a coward”<sup>34</sup> which will call forth God’s merciful response in coming to his rescue. Clearly in this the one who as an act of will accepts so thoroughly the pressures and tribulations coming against him in a real sense does so with a certain indifference, a measure of power and authority over the offending forces. All is put into the service of the goal to keep before one the desire to have God alone.

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<sup>33</sup> Walsh, *The Cloud*, 181. From Englert’s “playful” perspective we hear, “one is struck by the paradoxical nature of the author’s advice. To rid oneself of the memories of past sin, one must yield to these same memories; to empty oneself of sin, one must allow sin to be present,” “Of Another Mind,” 8.

<sup>34</sup> Walsh, *The Cloud*, 181.

## Part 2: Psychology

We now turn to the psychology part of the discussion concerning the question of the means to arrive at the goal—here articulated as altered state of consciousness.<sup>35</sup> Our first section will investigate Tart’s detailed description of the process by which an altered state of consciousness is induced. Although Tart presents this complex material in a way that renders it accessible to the non-scientist, it does require the establishment of several key concepts, particularly those related to the construction of consciousness. Therefore we will preface the discussion on the inducement of altered states of consciousness with a section that sets out these foundational principles. We will then turn to a related topic in Deikman’s contribution in the interdisciplinary study of psychotherapy and mystical studies, his articulation of the “observing self.”

### Tart and Altered States of Consciousness

Charles Tart has developed his theories on ordinary consciousness from the perspective of drug-induced states of consciousness, or altered forms of consciousness. The concept of different states of consciousness then is always a relative one: altered consciousness is conceived of relative to other states, usually, ordinary consciousness. Tart developed terminology and abbreviations for these states that provide precision of meaning and convenience in discussion. One important term that requires specification of meaning is that of *discrete state of consciousness* (d-SoC),<sup>36</sup> which he defines as a

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<sup>35</sup> Tart particularly uses this terminology. Deikman more often speaks in terms of “mystic consciousness.”

<sup>36</sup> Herein designated as d-SoC.

“unique *configuration* or *system* of psychological structures or subsystems.”<sup>37</sup>

Within any given d-SoC its respective “structures” and “subsystems” are both characteristic of the specific state and they remain fairly constant. Tart explains:

The structures operative within a d-SoC comprise a *system* where the parts, the psychological structures, interact with each other and stabilize each other’s functioning by means of feedback control, so that the *system*, the d-SoC, maintains its overall patterning of functioning within a varying environment.<sup>38</sup>

Thus, for example, what we think of as ordinary waking consciousness, though demonstrating considerable variation among individuals, remains consistent in its basic defining operations and overall determinative characteristics.<sup>39</sup> Tart describes *ordinary* consciousness as a state of consciousness “characterized by a high degree of rationality, and a relatively low degree of imaging ability.”<sup>40</sup> Types of d-SoCs other than ordinary consciousness that we would all be familiar with, either personally or theoretically, are sleep state without dreams, sleep state with dreams, alcohol intoxication, hypnosis, drug-induced states and meditative states.<sup>41</sup> The ordinary waking state is the assumed starting point so that any other state is characterized relative to this base state. Thus, any state that is considered to be a movement from ordinary consciousness into a different d-SoC is

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<sup>37</sup> Charles Tart, “Discrete States of Consciousness,” in *Symposium on Consciousness*, ed. Philip R. Lee, et al. (New York: Viking), 116. See also, 170.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 116-17.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.



designated as a *discrete altered state of consciousness* (d-ASC).<sup>42</sup>

### *Construction of Stable Consciousness*

The discussion in this section builds upon that which was presented in chapter two in which we established the authors' general thesis that consciousness is a construction; and further, that this constructed consciousness we refer to as "ordinary consciousness" is an arbitrary construction. Tart clarifies his meaning below:

Insofar as any particular d-SoC, whether a culture calls it "normal" or not, is a semiarbitrary way of structuring consciousness, a way that loses some human potentials while developing others....

Simply put, there could have been other quite different systems than the one we are familiar with as ordinary waking consciousness. Furthermore, as we learned in the discussion in chapter two, one important function of consciousness is to provide information about the external world in the most efficient way, maintaining at the same time the overall sense that this picture of the world is both a reliable and stable one. This becomes much clearer when we take a look at how this complex system that provides the stable structure upon which we operate in the world is formed. I will preface this discussion with a brief explanation of two important related concepts which will facilitate the understanding of our discussion of the construction of ordinary consciousness, "attention/awareness" and "psychological structures," followed by an explanation of how these two elements come together to form the components of a particular discrete state of consciousness.

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<sup>42</sup> Tart, "Discrete States," 171.

### *Attention/Awareness*

The first and definitive concept in the discussion of consciousness is that of “awareness.” At its most elementary level this concept refers to the notion that we *can* know, or that we have a faculty for knowing. Beyond this simple knowing we are also able to “know that we know” or to experience ourselves as knowers—to be self-aware. This self-awareness implies a level of distinction or separation from that which is known. Another important aspect of awareness is that it is to some degree “volitional,”<sup>43</sup> in that we have some power or control over this awareness. It is in consideration of this aspect of the concept of awareness, its connection to volition, that Tart prefers to qualify the notion of “awareness” to reflect this integral aspect he has in mind, hence, his designation of “attention/awareness.”

This attention/awareness constitutes the chief activity of the mind such that it can be thought of as *psychological energy*<sup>44</sup> or work, Tart says.

Attention/awareness constitutes the major phenomenal energy of the consciously experienced mind. ‘Energy’ is here used in the most abstract sense of the term, ie., the ability to do work, the ability to make something happen. Attention/awareness is, then, an energy in the sense that structures having no effect on consciousness at a given time can be activated if given attention, or structures may draw attention/awareness energy automatically, habitually, as a function of personality structure, thus keeping a kind of low-level, automated attention in them all the time...or attention energy may inhibit particular structures from functioning.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Tart, “Discrete States,” 95.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 95.

Also important when thinking about attention/awareness as energy is the notion that as energy, psychological energy is limited, so that it is subject to both varying levels of intensity and complete depletion under particular circumstances in specific individuals.<sup>46</sup>

### *Psychological Structures*

A second foundational concept for understanding Tart's work on discrete states of consciousness is that of "structure" and the specific meaning of the term in this discussion on consciousness. Tart's definition is as follows: "A psychological *structure* refers to a relatively stable organization of component parts which performs one or more related psychological functions."<sup>47</sup> Here a structure is a component part of any particular state of consciousness. One example would be the structure that together provides the function for solving mathematical problems. Using math functions as our example then, with such a structure we expect that a particular type of "information reliably results in a certain kind of transformed output information under typical conditions." Importantly, structures are either permanent, in which they can be likened to computer hardware, while others are programmable, analogous to computer software. Structures that can be changed then are those that are of the constructed variety, part of the network of developmental and cultural influences. They can be thought of as "programmable structures."<sup>48</sup> The permanent structures, though resistant to change from external factors,

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<sup>46</sup> Tart, "Discrete States, 92-95.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 98.

necessarily affect the form and content of the programmable type.<sup>49</sup>

*Interaction between Attention/Awareness and Psychological Structures*

A third relevant concept that needs some explanation relates to the interaction between the previous two concepts: attention/awareness and that of individual structures. Some structures operate independently of attention/awareness, analogous to the voluntary organs of the body. These structures of consciousness are not affected in any way by attention/awareness or the lack of it. Other structures, however, require some level of attention/awareness for some or all of the following activities: for their initial development, for their ongoing function; for any change to their operation; for their deconstruction. Tart refers to this classification of structure—those that are dependent upon the energy from attention/awareness for any or all of these operations—as “*psychological structures*.”<sup>50</sup> Returning to our example of the mathematical structure we know that initially a good deal of attention/awareness energy is necessary to learn mathematical operations. However, when

the knowledge or structure we call arithmetical skills is formed, it is usually present only in inactive, latent form. When an arithmetical question is asked, attention/awareness is put into that particular structure, and we exhibit, experience, arithmetical skills....Once the structure has become highly automated and overlearned, only a small amount of attention/awareness energy is experienced as being needed to activate and run the structure; we solve basic arithmetic problems with little awareness of the process involved in so doing.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Tart, “Discrete States,” 96-98.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 90.

Therefore, while not all structures are dependent upon the energy from attention/awareness for their functioning and/or deconstruction, they are the structures that are the focus of Tart's study, and are relevant to our study of consciousness as it pertains to the topic of change or alteration associated with mystic consciousness.

This capacity for modification, inhibition and reorganization through the energy of attention/awareness of particular types of structures, of course, has particular relevance to the topic of inducing d-ASCs, which we will discuss below. However, it is important to note that though theoretically possible, alterations to these established structures generally meet with strong resistance and relatively moderate success. This is not all that surprising for a system whose chief function is to provide for the organism an overriding sense of stability and permanence about the known external world. Therefore, notions of change will generally encounter some level of resistance. Anyone who has ever struggled with unwanted thoughts, random or persistent, can attest to the accuracy of this observation, but what accounts for the particularly entrenched quality of such established structures? Tart offers two possible causes.

The first possibility has to do with the fact that the particular structure, which may initially have been established through attention/awareness energy, may now be influenced and/or sustained by other systems, for example, of a "physiological" origin. In such cases, Tart says, "it may no longer be possible to deactivate the structure with the amount of attention/awareness energy we are able to focus on it."<sup>52</sup> Perhaps more easily

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<sup>52</sup> Tart, "Discrete States," 100.

grasped, because we can relate to it in our own experiences, is the second reason Tart suggests. He describes situations that most of us have encountered with some frequency:

...because automatization is so thorough and overlearned and/or because the structure has very vital connections with the reward and punishment system of the personality, such that there are secondary gains from the operation of the structure in spite of our apparent complaints, the amount of attention/awareness energy we can use to try to alter the structure's functioning is not sufficient.<sup>53</sup>

Therefore, while the theoretical possibility that an individual, through the investment of attention/awareness, might eventually dislodge and restructure a particularly troublesome learned behavior which is now part of the personality structure, the degree of effort this requires presents seemingly insurmountable obstacles to doing so.<sup>54</sup>

In addition, the system requires for its regular ongoing basis an enormous amount of energy. Tart describes this process:

There is a fluctuating but generally large drain on attention/awareness energy at all times by the multitude of automated, interacting structures whose operation constitutes our personality, our 'normal' state of consciousness, our perception of and interaction with consensus reality. Because the basic structures comprising this are activated most of our waking life, we do not perceive this activation as a drain on attention/awareness energy but simply as the 'natural' state of things. *We have become habituated to it.*<sup>55</sup>

In other words, though we are not normally aware of it on a regular basis, sustaining what we refer to as ordinary consciousness is a demanding task. Moreover, the effort required

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<sup>53</sup> Tart, "Discrete States," 100.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. 101. Emphasis added.

to make any modifications to particular aspects of this complex system will necessarily be experienced as a threat. Here in terms of available energy but according to our discussion throughout this study, one that endangers the fundamental goal of ordinary consciousness. Now, informed by these basic concepts we will move forward to examine Tart's thesis regarding the inducing of a d-ASC.

#### Inducing an Altered State of Consciousness

In understanding the process for inducing an d-ASC we recall from previous discussions that the designation of "altered state of consciousness" is understood in relative terms to a baseline state of consciousness, here termed, "ordinary consciousness." Therefore, when speaking of the induction of a d-ASC, we intend the designation "altered" relative to this baseline state of consciousness. As we begin this discussion we recall then Tart's definition of d-SoC as an "active, stable, over-all patterning of psychological functions which, via multiple (feedback) stabilization relationships among the parts making it up, maintains its identity in spite of environmental changes."<sup>56</sup> Thus beginning with normal consciousness as the baseline state Tart speaks in terms of two distinct "induction operations" which together are intended to induce a d-ASC: "*disrupting forces*," and "*patterning forces*." Operations aimed at deconstructing structures of the baseline state of consciousness are called disrupting forces; while, those designed to bring about the construction of the altered state of consciousness are called patterning forces.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Tart, "Discrete States," 139.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

These two basic actions proceed in three stages. The first stage marks the beginning of the process designed to move one from their baseline d-SoC to a d-ASC. Here the goal is to “disrupt enough of the multiple stabilization processes to a large enough extent that the base-line pattern of consciousness can no longer hold together.”<sup>58</sup> What are these “disrupting forces” and how do they act upon the structures that constitute the baseline state of consciousness? Generally the disruptive force is designed to “[push] some psychological functions to and beyond their limits of functioning.” Tart lists several forms that these disrupting forces may take:

One may disrupt particular subsystems, e.g., by overloading them with stimuli, depriving them of stimuli, or giving them anomalous stimuli which can’t be processed in habitual ways. Or one may disrupt the functioning of a subsystem by withdrawing attention/awareness energy from it, a gentle kind of disruption.<sup>59</sup>

Over time the disruptive forces begin to destabilize the psychological structures so that the stable baseline state of consciousness can no longer be maintained. At this point the first period of induction is complete. That is, “particular psychological structures and subsystems have varied as far as they can while still maintaining the overall system.”<sup>60</sup> The system is strained to the point of collapse. The second stage is entered at the point when the “disrupting” and “patterning” “forces” have taken hold and effectively unraveled structures of the baseline consciousness state; at which point “a transitional

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<sup>58</sup> Tart, “Discrete States,” 140.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 141-42.



period occurs.” Thus stage two marks the point at which the old structures which constitute the baseline state of consciousness have disintegrated, but no new stable “construction” has developed.<sup>61</sup> If inducement proceeds the patterning forces “must now push the isolate psychological structures into a new construction.”<sup>62</sup> Under the influence of continued disrupting and patterning forces over time the induction method will proceed to the third stage. Thus if induction has yielded its intended purpose, “a new, self-stabilized structure, the d-ASC, forms.”<sup>63</sup>

### The Observing Self

According to Arthur Deikman, the spiritual practices and disciplines of mystical traditions intended to foster their ultimate goal, which is the direct experience of reality, inadvertently achieve the subsidiary goal of heightened self-knowledge. He claims that the disciplines taught by the mystical traditions are predominantly designed to develop in the individual an increasing experience of the “observing center of human experience,”<sup>64</sup> or what he refers to as the “observing self.”<sup>65</sup> Deikman’s teaching on the observing self assumes a particular understanding of what constitutes the “self.” The author explains that “the phenomenological basis of the word *self*...derives from four domains of experience: (1) thought, (2) feeling, (3) functional capacity, and (4) the observing

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<sup>61</sup> Tart, “Discrete States,” 142.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Deikman, *Observing Self*, 91.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

center.”<sup>66</sup> Of that which he terms “the thinking self,” Deikman says it is that “self with which we are most concerned.” Experientially, the author says that it is the self that “seems to be in charge” and that we perceive to be “responsible for what we do and do not do.” Furthermore, it embodies both our “private” and “public conceptual self.” That is, the thinking self refers to our sense of ourselves derived both from our own self-identification as well as the person we are in relation to other people,<sup>67</sup> or what we might think of in terms of the roles we fulfill in relation to family, community, etc. The second domain, our feeling self, is by comparison “a self more vivid and compelling than the self of thought.” What Deikman calls the functional self refers to our acting selves, which at its basic level refers to the fact that we can and do act upon the external world.<sup>68</sup> These three aspects of the self form what Deikman refers to as the “object self.”<sup>69</sup>

By contrast to the object self, the fourth domain, the observing self, “is incapable of being objectified.”<sup>70</sup> It is this characteristic that sets the observing self apart, says Deikman. The observing self is distinct from the contents of consciousness and “is not part of the object world formed by our thoughts and sensory perception.”<sup>71</sup> Classifying it as “a phenomenon of a different order” Deikman says that the “observing self is the

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<sup>66</sup> Deikman, *Observing Self*, 92.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 95.

transparent center, that which is aware.”<sup>72</sup> Thus he identifies the observing self with “awareness” and speaks of the two interchangeably. These two aspects of the observing self—that it is incapable of being objectified and its connection to awareness—are interrelated and constitute its primary characteristics. He explains:

The reader is invited to try to locate that self to establish its boundaries. The task is impossible; whatever we can notice or conceptualize is already an object of awareness, not awareness itself, which seems to jump a step back when we experience an object. Unlike every other aspect of experience—thoughts, emotions, desires, and functions—the observing self can be known but not located, not ‘seen.’<sup>73</sup>

As that which cannot be observed, awareness he says is “featureless, lacking form, texture, colour, spatial dimensions.”<sup>74</sup> He goes on to further delineate awareness from all aspects of consciousness as he says that “it is of a different nature” and “is prior to contents, more fundamental” having “no intrinsic content, no form, no surface characteristics.”<sup>75</sup> It is in this regard that Deikman speaks of awareness as “*transcendent*,” in light of its radical dissimilarity to all other contents of consciousness. It is a designation he says that is “justified” because “it is likely to be of a different order from everything else.”<sup>76</sup>

This understanding of awareness with its connection to the observing self (here

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<sup>72</sup> Deikman, *Observing Self*, 94.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 94-95.

<sup>74</sup> Arthur Deikman, “‘I’ = Awareness,” *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 3 (1996): 351.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> Deikman, *Observing Self*, 95.

referred to as “the essential self”), leads Deikman to transfer the qualities attributed to the former onto the latter. Thus he will say that:

Once we grant the identity of “I” and awareness we are compelled to extend to the core subjective self whatever ontological propositions seem appropriate for awareness. If awareness is non-local, so is the essential self. If awareness transcends material reality so does the “I.” If awareness is declared to be non-existent then that same conclusion must apply to the “I.” No matter what one’s ontological bias, recognition that “I”=awareness has profound implications for our theoretical and personal perspective.<sup>77</sup>

This thesis concerning the merging of these two concepts—that of awareness and the observing self—moves Deikman to a related assertion regarding the nature of one’s experience of the observing self. Though its fundamentally subjective nature rules out the ability to have knowledge of one’s observing self through the same means by which we know the contents of consciousness, Deikman insists that knowledge of one’s observing self is possible. However, the knowing is of a different kind altogether: “we know the internal observer not by observing it but by being it.” It is, he says, a knowing that is “ontologically different from perceptual knowledge.”<sup>78</sup> Thus he uses the phrase “knowing by being that which is known” to express the essential aspects of the observing self—that it transcends ordinary objective reality but can be accessed subjectively, here characterized in terms that speak of becoming one with that which is known. Thus, Deikman’s theory of the “observing self” establishes a fundamental “duality” of human consciousness—that of the radical distinction between the “objects of awareness” and

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<sup>77</sup> Deikman, “I=Awareness,” 355.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

awareness itself.<sup>79</sup> He then goes on to demonstrate that the act of awareness, or the phenomenon we refer to as awareness is identical with this non-object self. That is, he shows that all objects of consciousness—*what* one knows—are fundamentally distinct from the existential *knower*, who cannot be objectified but can nonetheless be known. Of the latter, he says that the knowing is of a subjective quality, constituted in and through the act of “being that which is known.”<sup>80</sup>

### Summary

*The Cloud* author’s teaching on contemplative prayer, as we have seen, centers upon the simplification of the mind, heart and imagination. In the earlier teachings the initiate is directed to an imageless prayer which includes a blind affective disposition to know God’s pure essence apart from any specific qualities, gifts or consolations of God. In the later stages of prayer the teaching becomes increasingly more restrictive of thought and images. Here the author makes a distinction between the forgetting of self in terms of one’s particular, qualified being and a more existential awareness that one has being. It is here that the contemplative must remain for an unknown period, in this silent imageless attentiveness that includes the barest awareness of one’s being and the blind desire to know God not in any intellectual way but directly, essentially. The development is subtle but the distinctions form the critical elements of the prayer method—ones that are understood only in the doing and experiencing of the contemplative life of prayer.

In section two of this chapter we looked at the work of Charles Tart which

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<sup>79</sup> Deikman, “‘I’=Awareness,” 351.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 355.

described the processes and structures that constitute a discrete state of consciousness as background for his theory on inducing an altered state of consciousness. In the latter study we saw that this method consisted of a two-fold application of psychic forces: those designed to disrupt the present d-SoC and those designed to pattern or construct the new d-SoC. We concluded the section with Deikman's theories regarding the "observing self." Here we were introduced to a greatly expanded discussion on the concept of "attention/awareness" touched upon in Tart's discussion.

### Part 3: Integration and Analysis

#### Why This Method?

As we turn to the integrative part of this chapter we will structure the analysis by putting the following question to the psychology material presented here: How does the exercise of “unknowing” as taught in the Christian apophatic mystical tradition (of which *The Cloud* author is representative) relate to the ultimate goal of the exercise—Divine Union? Or, in other words, why this method? In fact, one undercurrent present in *The Cloud* literature is the author’s argument *for* the method of unknowing. Since that logical connection between the method of prayer and its intended goal of divine union are anything but self-evident, the author often assumes an apologetic stance in his teachings. It is this disjunction between the method and the goal that requires the author to expend much effort in justifying the method. However, the task of justifying the contemplative exercise as a way of life is fraught with many difficulties, not the least of which is the extended period of time one most likely will need to spend working away without any discernible correlation between the apophatic exercise and the goal of Divine Union. The author offers several specific arguments which take the form of counter-intuitive theses. I would like to focus on two of these claims made by *The Cloud* author. The first claim the author makes is that direct knowing of God (or the knowing of divine union) necessitates the purification of all prior knowing of God and self. The second thesis which will be discussed in the second section of part 3 is that a kind of union already takes place, though not an experientially known one, in and through the act of this unknowing. That is, the author claims that thoughts distance us from God and that correlatively, the

silencing of thoughts draws us near to God. We will engage Tart's work on inducing a d-ASC in the conversation regarding the apparent disjunction between the method and the goal in the contemplative way.

Tart's systematic presentation of the structures of consciousness and the method by which they are weakened and eventually dismantled to allow new structures to form can be utilized to make sense of the method of unknowing. This discussion will focus on the twin catalytic forces operative in Tart's schema for inducing a d-ASC: disruptive and patterning. Of particular relevance here are the authors' characterizations of ordinary consciousness as the product of complex processes designed to provide the maximum amount of beneficial information with the minimum expenditure of limited psychic energy. Here the processes of habituation and categorization accomplish this goal. In a general sense these associative learning patterns have the effect of insulating us from real contact with the environment. Only new stimuli get our attention since repeated contact with any particular stimulus will result in habituation and categorization such that all subsequent encounters with a habituated stimulus will require the activation of our stored category substituting for real-time experience. Contemplative meditation interferes with these operations by bringing them to a halt.

How so? Does the disruptive force consist in the cessation of thought? Yes and no. Were it that simple and theoretically possible to flip the switch on our thoughts, the answer might be a categorical "yes." But this is neither the instructions of *The Cloud* author, nor does it describe the essence of the exercise. Recall that *The Cloud* author's favorite term for the practice of prayer was "work," and that it was deemed an apt



designation. In the contemplative exercise there is indeed work to be done. *The Cloud* author's simple two-fold directions—desire God's pure being and forsake all and every thought—will require significant effort and even, surprisingly perhaps, mental activity. The elements which constitute “work” are as follows. The disposition and intention to seek God's pure being stands as the contemplative's imageless focus and centralizing stronghold. However, the naturally restless and inquisitive mind wars against this one central intention to produce no images, to entertain no memories, allow no emotions to be expressed in order to remain fixed upon this “naked intent.” The mind is continually being brought back, returning to this center of purposeful non-categorization. The incessant stream of random thoughts necessitates this activity of return. The thoughts come but one doesn't join them, instead, allows them to pass. Inevitably though a particular thought will prove too strong, especially in the early stages of the contemplative life though even advanced contemplatives have their “off days,” and the mind will take the bait, so to speak. The instruction in this instance is to return once more to one's simple intention. The point here is that there is activity of the mind—that of holding steady and that of return as necessitated by the particular circumstances. Calling upon *The Cloud's* designations of “scattering” and “oneing” we see that the naturally scattered mind is constantly moving in its “scattering” while the mind of contemplation is busy “oneing” it back to the contemplative exercise. Thus psychologically, contemplative prayer disrupts the normal activity of the mind on the one hand and it engages in a different activity on the other. Determined to exert control over the natural inclination to wander and produce images involuntarily means that one ceases this

production of images thus retraining the mind to respond in a new way to stimuli.

Also of significance is Tart's observation regarding the nature of what he referred to as the phenomenon of "attention/awareness." I have in mind two relevant aspects of this topic: first, the association of volition, intent or the will with the act of awareness; and second, the assertion that the process for inducing a d-ASC necessitates the imposition of this function of attention/awareness in both the disruptive and constructive aspects of this process. That is, we learned that psychological structures of consciousness are formed initially in response to some level of energy from "attention/awareness" in response to a given stimulus. Over time responses become automatized such that less energy is required for the same operation to occur. The reverse process—the disrupting of the same structures—also requires a degree of energy from "attention/awareness." Within our discussion of the prayer method we saw that the simple method had two distinct movements or aspects: one negative function which was related to the silencing of thoughts and images; and the second positive aspect in that it involved an act of the will or intention to seek God's pure being. The author's "blind outreaching of love," "sharp dart of longing love," "meek stirring of love," and "blind stirring of love," referred to in chapter two of our study encapsulate this disposition of purposeful, imageless attention that is the hallmark disposition of contemplative prayer. With the added perspective of Tart's theoretical formulation for inducing a d-ASC regarding the volitional element of attention/awareness, this integral part of *The Cloud* prayer method receives a physiological rationale.

Thus we find that in both authors the role of the will in the formation and

restructuring of mental processes has an important role to play. Thoughts need to be brought under willful and purposeful control which forms the essence of both methods for achieving the desired goal. In the next section we will continue to focus on the general topic of awareness as we examine Deikman's contribution to this chapter.

#### Object Self vs. Observing Self

The second argument *The Cloud* author offers as justification for his method of unknowing is his claim that we are actually closer to God when we have no thoughts than when we have thoughts of God. Here I will rely upon Deikman's work on the observing self to provide insight into this paradoxical and esoteric teaching. We have seen throughout this study that the three psychology authors utilize the contrasting language of objectivity versus subjectivity in their generalized explication of the formation of ordinary human consciousness. Thus they describe a process which necessitates that the individual assume an objective stance towards stimuli encountered in the external world. From the perspective of assuring one's physical or psychological safety, objectivity provides the distance necessary for determining the basic nature of that which is encountered. These authors tell us that we characteristically experience reality as separate from ourselves. We know it in its parts, its distinctiveness, from ourselves and from all other objects. Hence, objectivity describes the relationship we assume to the world, including other human beings and even, ourselves. The authors' theses regarding mystic consciousness utilize the language of subjectivity to distinguish between ordinary knowing and that of the mystics. Here, in the words of Arthur Deikman, "the distinction"

is “between the self as object and the self of pure subjectivity.”<sup>81</sup> Paradoxically, the author says that it is only as we develop the capacity to observe ourselves in the regular course of our lives—achieve greater objectivity—that we enhance the possibility of transcending the confining and delimiting functions of ordinary consciousness. It is a purposeful dualism by which we recognize and learn to distinguish between the *object self* and the *observing self* of “pure subjectivity.”<sup>82</sup> The domain of the object self is the contents of consciousness: our thoughts, emotions, imaginings and memories. By contrast, the observing self is radically different and is “incapable of being objectified,”<sup>83</sup> which Deikman asserts is its most significant quality.

This leads the author to ascribe to the observing self the attribute of “transcendence,” that is, in relation to the contents of consciousness which are constitutive of the object self. In his presentation of the observing self in relation to the object self Deikman utilizes this notion of “transcendence” to underscore the radical otherness of the observing self in relation to all “contents of consciousness.”<sup>84</sup> It is, he says, “of a different order from everything else,” it “is featureless” and “it cannot be affected by the world.”<sup>85</sup> Yet, for all its esoteric sounding vocabulary, Deikman points out that this observing self, as the defining center of human consciousness, is in this sense

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<sup>81</sup> Deikman, *Observing Self*, 10.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>85</sup> Deikman, *Observing Self*, 95.

quite ordinary or natural. Thus, he says, “transcendence” is a constitutive part of human mental operations. It is the “ground of conscious life.” Although its characteristic transcendent relationship to objects means that “we cannot observe it,” he maintains that we, nonetheless, can know it. However, this knowledge comes subjectively, he says, in that “we must experience it directly,” and that “we know the internal observer not by observing it but *by being it*.”<sup>86</sup> This brings us to the point in the discussion where we can juxtapose the author’s insight with *The Cloud* teaching.

Deikman speaks of the debt we owe to mystics in that they have introduced us to techniques designed to cultivate our recognition of the observing self as distinct from the contents of the mind. In this cultivation there are several distinct aspects, each of central importance for the goal of mystic consciousness. *The Cloud* author’s method of prayer, which we said could be reduced to its essential operation, unknowing, calls for an increasingly radical simplification of thought. In light of Deikman’s teaching on the observing self it is apparent that to arrive at the point where one recognizes a distinction between that which is thought, whether it is a memory, image or emotion, as distinct from the one who observes the thought already assumes a degree of sophistication in the processes of self-reflection and introspection. It appears unlikely that such a perspective is accessible without an experiential component. This component, it seems, is the stilling of the mind’s activity such that its operations can be discerned. Arising from this methodological observation, over time one learns to create a distance between that which is thought and the thinker. Inserting this wedge between the two inserts a further

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 11; and, Deikman, “‘I’=Awareness,” 355.

distancing of the self from the processes of the mind. Yet, again, this only seems possible when the self has taken some kind of centralizing initiative over the processes that if left to their own devices would assume their normal operation, which is to say, their independence of conscious control.

*The Cloud's* method of unknowing, purposefully and willfully entering into an exercise of quieting the mind with the intent to seek God's simple being, is a powerful force brought to bear upon these mental operations. *The Cloud* indicates a path of development which correlates with an increasingly greater sensitivity to this observing center over time. In the more advanced stages of contemplative life we saw that the directee enters a period of suffering in which despite having successfully learned to drop all particular and cognitive images of his own being he arrives at a state by which this blind awareness of his own being is all that remains as he contemplates God. It remains and it is experienced as a final obstacle to the experience of God. The author speaks of it in terms of the awareness "that you are," which he distinguishes from "what you are," or the qualified sense of the self. Here this sense of the self's own existence, one's "thatness," is presented as the final obstruction to divine union. Could this be, in Deikman's terms, that one is still assuming an objective posture towards the self, despite the absence of any and all particular aspects or qualities? Is the next movement one of surrendering objectivity itself to allow the "pure subjectivity" of awareness to be experienced, known and/or manifested? If we answer in the affirmative have we really gained anything in terms of understanding? Does it bring us closer to knowing what *The Cloud* author is telling us here? Or does it bring us full circle and back to the domain of apophaticism

whereby we are able to speak of what a thing is only in terms of what it is not. The observing self, Deikman tells us, is not any object; it cannot be observed; it cannot be known by the normal processes of conceptualization and perception. Have we gained any ground with Deikman's interpretation?

According to this scenario the object self with its myriad qualities supplied by and maintained through the ongoing stream of consciousness is the most salient aspect of the self. That is, experientially, most of us identify the object self with the self. In contemplative prayer of unknowing *The Cloud* author's teachings on prayer method are intended to inject some distance between what one is and what one thinks, feels or knows. Thus, over time we can begin to entertain the existence of a different self, a more fundamental, enduring, immutable self. *The Cloud* author explicitly draws the connection between this awareness of the self and the capacity to know God's pure being. Deikman's work here, again, gives us the language that speaks to us now. As we saw, however, this bridging of the gap with accessible language has its limits. In a sense Deikman resorts to the language of apophaticism. I would maintain, however, that it moves us forward nonetheless because it is at least the negative language of today. The terms of negation are those we are familiar with.

Thus, it seems that here what we gain is a level of intelligibility. As Deikman and the other two authors regularly assert, mystic consciousness, as with any altered mode of consciousness, will most likely suffer in the translation from one mode of consciousness to the next. Its ineffability is relative to the state of consciousness that one is in when attempting to understand processes, modes of operation, etc., which are structures of an

altered form of consciousness. For the most part the difficulty lies in the medium of communication, in language. The language appropriate to one mode might be entirely inadequate for expression in an altered mode of consciousness. Deikman's work here in the observing self particularly does seem to narrow the language deficiency to some extent. That is, utilizing linguistic categories of modern psychology, for example, the notion of objectivity vs. subjectivity; distinctions between contents of consciousness vs. the self who observes the content; his discussion on the transcendence of the observing self and its connection to the reality of an "essential self," are all components of the mystical tradition represented in *The Cloud* teachings. Therefore, while the obstacle to understanding divine union which *The Cloud* author points to as ineffable is not resolved entirely, the discussion moves forward in that a rational explanation is given for its inevitable ineffable characterization.



## 5. CONCLUSION

It was the intent of this interdisciplinary project to utilize the insights of the psychology of consciousness to elucidate the teachings on contemplative prayer of the fourteenth-century anonymous author of the *The Cloud of Unknowing*, specifically with respect to the overarching goal of contemporizing the author's writings. Our study took the form of a hypothetical dialogue, a structure that was integral to the study's overall orientation and perspective. That is, it was this author's thesis that a basic complementarity was evident in each party's respective approach to the presentation of their work as parallel versions of the human existential condition. Their stories were brought into a conversation illustrating the integrative task set forth according to the constructive-relational approach to interdisciplinarity. We inquire of our study, then, what specific elements of complementarity emerged? Considering the intent to contemporize these spiritual works the question posed of our study is, in what ways have the teachings on contemplative prayer been elucidated in and through their engagement with these particular psychological perspectives on human consciousness?

Regarding the question of elements of complementarity several appear evident. There is a common assumption about the state of the human species as inherently problematic. Though they differ in how they account for the source of the problem, in regard to the nature of the problem they are in agreement. This point of intersection is two-fold. The first lies in the basic assumption that human suffering is universal. The corollary to this supposition is that it is not necessarily inevitable.

Another major point of congruence lies in a shared belief that this state of human dis-ease originates or, at least, resides within the normal human mental operations, or human consciousness. At some level, the processes which constitute that which is unique about the human species also contain the seeds of its demise. Another point of congruence lies in their conviction that these mental processes, functions, and operations, can be harnessed, manipulated and redirected through specific techniques and/or disciplines. Such disciplines are specifically designed to retrain, redirect and restructure the normal human mental functions which over time produce cumulative effects in the mind, eventually culminating in a significantly transformed mode of human mental functioning. Beyond the above observed points of congruence, the question arises, why bring them together at all? That is, what benefit, new knowledge, new insights are gained in and through the task of juxtaposing these two views? How does the establishment of their complementarity move the study of *The Cloud* forward? What unanticipated insight, if any, emerged?

I will first address the final question before returning to the larger inquiry related to the relative significance of drawing these two perspectives together: What unanticipated insight emerged? The answer to this question lies at the very heart of the contemplative experience of divine union and springs out of the specific nature of this project, in its interdisciplinary character in general, and in the selectivity and specificity of these two perspectives. The radical transformation that is wrought in those said to have reached the contemplative goal of divine union establishes within those who experience it, among other things, an overriding sense of the overall unity of all of existence in the

one God who is the source and substance of all reality. Thus, while preserving the integrity of a mystical text such as *The Cloud*, incumbent upon us in adherence to the dictates imposed by the relational-constructive method of this study, our work proceeds upon the assumptions implicit in this *Cloud* teaching on divine union. This requires of us, it seems, the task of allowing this fundamental characteristic of the mystic's transformed state—of the existence of a fundamental unity of all reality—to inform the way in which we understand the very task of integration. That is, methodologically, taking this mystical perspective at face value it is clear that whatever we designate as knowledge or truth must also be “one.” This invalidates, then, qualifications we are prone to aver, namely, attributions indicative of a divided truth, implicit in designations such as “psychological truth,” or “spiritual truth,” or “religious truth.” The oneness of being that is affirmed in the phenomenon of divine union requires that we chip away at these (false) categories. Though we may need to refer to them and maintain them for the purposes of specificity in academic study and language, the fundamental reality that divine union establishes invalidates any and all imposition of *real* distinctions and *actual* separation that is implied by linguistic categories. Although such a perspective resides in the attribution of complementarity in general, when it is brought to bear upon this specific mystical teaching, a higher level of complementarity is suggested.

We are now ready to address those questions pertaining to the relative usefulness of our study in relation to the conclusions that can be drawn from this work. That is, beyond the above observed points of congruence, the question arises, why bring them together at all? Moreover, what new knowledge and insights are gained in and through

the task of juxtaposing these two views? How does the establishment of their complementarity move the study of *The Cloud* corpus forward? In this we have singled out one particular aspect of the contemplative journey for elucidation. It is one which holds particular sway for the author of this study—the often protracted period of spiritual dryness characteristic of the contemplative experience which frequently moves one to abandon the path altogether. *The Cloud* author captures the essence of this experience in the following description of the dilemma of the contemplative path:

It seems to him, sometimes, in this labour, that to look upon it is like looking upon hell. He despairs of ever winning, out of that pain, to the perfection of spiritual rest. Many arrive so far inwardly, but because of the great pains that they experience, and because of the absence of consolation they go back to behold bodily things, to seek fleshly comforts without, because of the absence of spiritual consolation that they have not yet deserved, and which they would have deserved if they had endured a while.<sup>1</sup>

It is this aspect of the means to the desired end that creates a nearly insurmountable obstacle to reaching the desired goal, despite its potential for ultimate relief and transcendence of the current painful condition. Whether we are speaking of “conscious evolution” of Ornstein, altered state of consciousness of Tart or “mystic consciousness” of Deikman, or divine union of *The Cloud*, the means to the end often proves to be beyond the threshold of human suffering, thus it becomes an insurmountable obstacle to overcome. Therefore, with this in mind, and influenced by this study both in structure and content, we offer a story of our own which emerges at the conclusion of this project.

*The Cloud* author teaches that the contemplative life is a calling from God. Those called to contemplation recognize the calling through several signs. One is that they find

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<sup>1</sup> Walsh, *The Cloud*, 253-254.

the practice of meditation and verbal prayers distasteful. They can no longer engage in these practices without distraction and they no longer find consolation in them. They are now drawn to talk about contemplation and this alone draws them and fills them with any consolation or interest. They have a longing and desire to enter into this kind of silent prayer despite the lack of sensible consolations from it. Yet there is some measure of consolation or satisfaction though at a supra-sensible level, not recognized nor expressed. The basic sense is one of intellectual darkness and dryness. Still the pray-er is unable to enter into any sensible, verbal and mental prayer with satisfaction, even finding such prayers distasteful and being repulsed by the thoughts of them. Such prayers seem insincere and feel as if they are less in their interest than silent ones. All the while, though, the contemplative is plagued by desire and longing that is without satisfaction in any of the practices, either silent or otherwise.

Suddenly, God breaks through this and some sense of God's presence is experienced.<sup>2</sup> Generally, the old dryness returns until the next visitation.<sup>3</sup> For some, a permanent state of presence is given and this is the transformed state the author intends in his descriptions of transformed individuals recounted earlier.<sup>4</sup> What are we to make of

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<sup>2</sup> "...it is nothing else than a sudden impulse, one that comes without warning, speedily flying up to God as the spark flies up from the burning coal." Walsh, *The Cloud*, 126; "for the perfection of this exercise is so pure and so spiritual in itself that when it is well and truly understood, it shall be seen to have nothing to do with any movement or any place. It could reasonably be called a sudden change rather than a local movement." Ibid., 237.

<sup>3</sup> *The Cloud* author describes such an experience, here in the context of a discussion of the gift of perfect humility as the fruit of such a divine revelation: "...a soul living in this mortal flesh may suddenly lose and forget all awareness and experience of its own being, so that it takes no account of its holiness or its wretchedness. But whether this experience happens often or seldom to a soul so disposed by God, my belief is that the experience lasts only a very short while." Walsh, *The Cloud*, 148-149.

<sup>4</sup>See the discussion on "Divine Union by its Fruits" in chapter 3, part 1 above, especially 99-102.

these comings and goings of God? Are we to understand them to mean that God is *now* present and was absent before? We are much more likely now to speak in terms of changes in human awareness. The sudden changes here refer to a new capacity to perceive elements of reality which, though present, were not accessible to the individual. The focus is upon the spiritual developmental process that culminates in the transformed perception, understood as a fruit of this long and often strenuous process.

But could it be understood in still a different way? When one is drawn to contemplation could it be that they have reached this point of presence of God as the new reality? Or, in Tart's perspective on inducing a d-ASC, could it be that already structures have begun to break down and are felt in some way but the new structures are not fully constructed? In the old reality there is duality and God can be known in an object/subject relationship. However in union there is no duality, thus the way of knowing as subject/object is no longer the mode of knowing. To move back into this is to regress. This is what the contemplative now experiences, dissatisfaction with duality. Through the long period of contemplative prayer and existential unknowing the contemplative is learning how to live in this presence, how to know God without duality, about, from and outside of duality.

From a theological perspective the individual has made progress in the spiritual journey, through consistent purging of old patterns and forming of new ones, up to the point that ordinary consciousness has been supportive of such change and growth. Duality is still the chief mode of operation and the spiritual life is characterized by its objective stance towards the divine. However, at the point that one enters upon the

contemplative way, drawn to this path mysteriously and blindly it seems, profound changes in the individual's mental life are experienced. Often at this stage the contemplative is actually repulsed by dualistic prayer and devotional practices. God is too near for such interactions. Duality feels inauthentic, misses the mark and fails to accord with the state of the relationship to God. The pray-er is drawn to a kind of relating that is unknown—non-dualistic knowing and being. But the mental functioning of the individual does not support these changes and there is immense dis-ease—sufferings as described by many, such as the dark nights of the sense/spirit/soul. The individual has outgrown her/his own mental skin. The spiritual reality of God's presence has settled into the state of affairs long before the physiological reality has had time to catch up. Contemplation facilitates this transition that is in line with the spiritual reality. Here the mind then does interfere, does block and prevent the experienced reality. A new mind must be formed to recognize what the spiritual self knows at some level but cannot yet know at the experiential level.

Applying this perspective to the contemplative journey provides a valuable emotional rationale for the period of suffering that nearly always accompanies the path to spiritual perfection. It appeals to the human cognitive need for understanding to make sense of these baffling experiences. One seeks to both understand its cause and to assign meaning to this ambiguous anguish. Thus, this indeterminate transitional period is assigned a functional role; and, seen from this perspective it is imbued with a heightened sense of divine presence and activity in the life of the individual, thus transforming it profoundly. In this sense, the contemplative's burdens indeed become easy and one's

yoke is made considerably lighter.<sup>5</sup>

It seems that the most salient insight that emerges in this juxtaposition of *The Cloud's* teaching on methodological unknowing and the psychology of the formation of human consciousness have to do with the ability to distinguish between the self and the contents of consciousness. It is certainly the goal of *The Cloud* author to bring his directees to a heightened level of indifference towards one's thoughts. The image of the lump of sin is only one technique the anonymous author employs in his teaching in this regard. We might say that *The Cloud* author teaches that the acquisition of this skill constitutes the extent of the human effort, an effort which brings one to the threshold of divine union. Our discussions in psychology sharpen this distinction between the thinker and the thought. Through their contribution to the topic, we are led to consider this aspect of human consciousness as vestigial, analogous perhaps to the human appendix—an unnecessary holdover from our evolutionary development, one that now has no essential biological function. By comparison of *The Cloud's* lump of sin with the psychology author's articulation of the mind under the sway of the vicissitudes of the survival self, we have rendered a measure of enhanced accessibility to these teachings for modern use.

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<sup>5</sup> The allusion here is to Mt. 11:30.



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